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*So let us also,  
gathered together  
by the Holy Spirit,  
proceed to the house  
of God  
to encounter Christ.  
There we shall find him  
and recognize him  
in the breaking  
of the bread,  
until he comes again,  
revealed in glory.*

*(Invitation to celebrate the  
Solemnity of the Presentation  
of the Lord in the Temple)*

**From The Editor's Desk**

**A CHRISTIAN ADULT**

**W**hat I became aware of, now that I am here at the Salesian Catechetical Centre in Poona, is that the youngsters frequenting the centre for a retreat in preparation for their Confirmation, are not toddlers or kids, they are practically young adults in the throes of their adolescence and yet we have no watershed moment to separate childhood from maturity. Confirmation however, can be a significant step in that direction.

In days of yore while preparing an exercise for these Confirmation youngsters I would ask them to work on a list of all the jobs – twenty or more – that are needed to keep a household running, such as buying and planning and cooking and cleaning, etc. They were to look at a typical week and work out how much time was spent on each of these tasks by a mother, a father, each of the children, and anyone else in the house. Often, they found that mother did three quarters or more of the work, and this was taken for granted by the family.

When the students begin to realize this, it will depend on the ability of the parents to organize and involve them in the affairs of the family.

Confirmation marks not just a social change, but a religious event: the coming of the Holy Spirit, the completion of Baptism. This is harder to grasp than household chores. There is an unbroken stream of love and communication binding us to the Father and that stream, that bond, is the Holy Spirit.

It does not seem much like that. Much of the time we do not feel like temples of the Holy Spirit. As we grow older, we realize the importance of tuning in to the Spirit of Jesus who is always linking us to our heavenly Father who is very involved in our day to day lives.

Most of the time, especially in active children, there is too much static and noise to allow them to tune in to the Spirit. Their lives on their media 'platforms' are their priorities, not the Spirit, sorry!

In the days when I used to take those sessions here, some twenty-five years ago, I was inclined to teach them how to pray silently, to hold their body still, their eyes half-shut, their tongues quiet. We start with sixty seconds of quiet and gradually lengthen it. There is power in the fact that they do it in a group, sitting together: even hyperactive children can develop a taste for it and ask to extend the time. Once they have learned to centre on a quiet body, and turn from their normal chatter and activity, they are ready for prayer, using simple phrases like Come Holy Spirit, or Jesus, remember me.

None of us can really say that we are done with the fruits of Confirmation, all of us at home need to still insert these two practices into our families: praying in silence, and growing up. We're never too sophisticated to take on these 'disciplines.' They are a start, and believe me, they make more sense even to twelve-year-olds, than the fripperies of clothes and hand-outs. Try it, you'll notice how the tenor of the house and the family starts to change...

*Fr. Ian Douulton, sdb*

## YES, YOUR TRUST IS ALSO TAINTED BY DOUBT

by Bishop Gianpaolo Dianin

**T**o believe in God, is to trust and rely on him. The believer surrenders himself/herself into the hands of God whom the believer recognizes as Creator, as the One from whom we come and who awaits us at the end of life. Marriage too, is an experience of trust and commitment to the beloved; that chosen person. It is not easy to trust and entrust oneself to God; it is just as difficult to trust and entrust oneself to a human being, however beloved is the chosen life partner.

Trust primarily reckons with doubt. How can we fail to recall the experience of the apostle Thomas who, when confronted with the words of his friends? He makes clear his doubt: "I want to see, to touch." Thomas trusts neither God nor his friends. We know how this will end: "Stretch out your hand, doubt no longer, but believe" (Jn 20:19-29). Thomas, through his doubting has given us a great gift, another beatitude that we feel is our own: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

Who has not had doubts about their partner? Who has not thought, at least sometimes, that they have gotten the wrong person? Who has not harboured questions and anxieties in their heart? Who has not experienced the struggle to trust? If then we've had a difficult relationship followed by a break-up, it is even harder to trust the other person. Trust then has the face of a struggle and one of the most

beautiful icons of the struggle between man and God is that of Jacob fighting with the angel (Gen 32:23-32). Jacob experiences a painful conflict with his brother Esau, jealous for the birth-right his father has given him.

In this tense and anguished atmosphere, weariness and despondency reach a climax; all Jacob's whys and wherefores and anger turn into a physical struggle with a character that tradition will interpret in so many ways, even alluding to God himself. The struggle goes on until dawn, but in the end, Jacob demands an answer from God or at least a sign of his presence. Jacob emerges utterly changed from this struggle, and perceives God's presence.

Every love relationship is also a struggle made up of confrontation, exchange of ideas, search for reasons, struggle to accept the diversity of the other, his way of thinking, his peculiarities. The encounter between a man and a woman is also a struggle, because we are two wholes walking together and not two halves, as is usually said, that have to fit together. We have two heads and two ways of being and acting. In this 'spousal struggle' it is not clear in the end who wins, but the confrontation is vital and it is the relationship which comes out truest and most real, that wins.

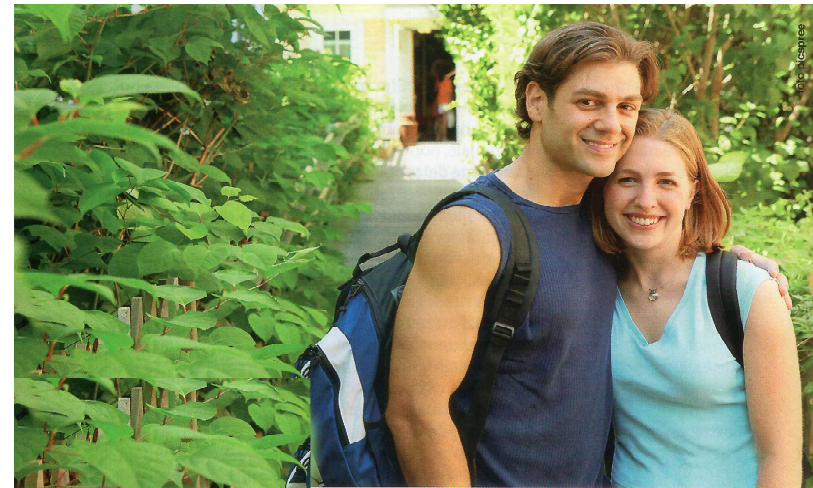
All believers experience such moments of struggle, weariness, anger and tears. When one

reaches the peak of endurance and can no longer go any further, in those moments many say: 'I can no longer trust or I no longer have the strength to trust'. In reality, those moments are only one face of faith, which is also a struggle and a combat. A third face of faith is mistrust. My memory goes to the ambivalent relationship between Saul and David (1Sam 18:6-16). Sometimes Saul recognises David's devotion, at other times he is jealous and wants to eliminate him.

He experiences all the ambivalence of the relationship between trust and mistrust. The believer knows that God deserves trust. He knows that God wants our good, that he is on our side, but often the believer fails to trust. The story of Saul and David is also the story that of every couple. The more the relationship grows, the more it seems to us that being together, alongside the infinite joys and emotions that it brings, is also a limitation to our freedom and autonomy.

Sometimes we feel cramped, even suffocated by the presence of the other. Notice here distrustful faith: on the one hand, I think that in order to be myself, God must not feature, because he does not let me be myself, he steals my place, he limits my freedom; on the other hand, just like Saul, I see that he really loves me, that he is my ally, that that relationship is a path to happiness. Trust, finally, is also an experience of fragility. During the storm in the lake of Galilee, Jesus, who is awakened by the disciples, rebukes them: "Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?" (Mt 8:23-26).

It was they who set out in the boat and accepted the risk, but then fear seized them and they could not go through with it. How can we not recognise the ambivalence of our faith: we believe, we want to trust, but deep down we realise that we are unbelieving; that we are doubt-ful. It is human, that is understandable; it is our difficult journey as fragile believers. Trust is one of the characteristics of a



couple's life. Engaged and married couples are two people who trust each other.

To trust means I believe that you are there, that you love me, that you love me even though you see my limitations, that you forgive me, that you will stand by me in good times and in bad. To believe in the God of Jesus Christ

is first of all to trust, but it is a trust that comes from love and from knowing that God truly deserves that trust. But fragility makes us doubt, slows the way, insinuates doubts and questions. Those who live the experience of marriage can also understand what it means to trust and rely on God. □

## FEAST OF THE MONTH

### ISRAEL'S WAITING IS OVER

by Chino Biscontin

*Mary and Joseph fulfil what the law prescribed, bringing their first-born son to the temple; and in Simeon and Anna, God fulfils his promise*

Dear Brothers, forty days have passed since the solemnity of Christmas. Today too the Church is celebrating the day when Mary and Joseph presented Jesus to the temple. With that rite, the Lord subjected himself to the prescriptions of the ancient law, but in reality, he came to meet his people who awaited him in faith." With these words, which introduce the procession with lit candles, the celebration of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (2 February) begins. In the Book of Exodus, we read: "The Lord said to Moses: "Consecrate to me every firstborn among the Israelites who first come out of the womb: every firstborn of man or of beast belongs to me" (Ex 13:12). Mary and Joseph fulfilled what the law prescribed.

It may have seemed like one of many similar rites in the Temple, but the Holy Spirit had enlightened two elders, Simeon and Anna who understood what was happening. Israel's long wait, nourished over the centuries by the promises of the prophets, had



come to an end. The Messiah, the Saviour of all nations, was making his entrance into history and among men. The law stipulated, that two accredited thespians were needed to certify an event. Simeon and Anna were there on behalf of all Israel to attest that God did not forget his promises; that he was infallibly faithful. Simeon and Anna represented the long wait that was fulfilled, the baby Jesus represents the newness given by God; a new beginning.

In all this there was much joy. But there was not only joy; Simeon addressing Mary exclaimed: "Behold, he is here for the fall and the resurrection of many in Israel and as a sign of contradiction and a sword will pierce your heart too so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

The gift of God, which is Jesus, is like a great light that can penetrate and unveil the depths of the people it reaches. There's no possibility of evading it, it is not possible to remain neutral: a decision is required. Salvation or perdition will depend on it. Salvation as a gift received, perdition is a dark void in those who have rejected the light. We read in the Gospel according to John: "I have come into the world as light, that whosoever believes in me should not remain in darkness. If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not condemn him; for I did not come to condemn the world, but to save the world. Whoever rejects me and does not keep my words, is condemned already: the word that I have spoken will condemn him on the last day" (Jn

*Lead kindly light,  
amidst the encircling gloom.  
The night is dark and I am  
far from home;  
guide thou my feet.  
Lead kindly light, lead thou me  
St. John Henry Newman  
(1801-1890)*

12:4648).

Jesus will be dramatically rejected, accused of being a sower of darkness, of false doctrines about God (blasphemer) and of misleading the people. And the Son's drama will inevitably be acute suffering for the Mother. Nails will pierce Jesus' hands and feet, securing him to the cross; the spear will pierce his heart and beneath the cross a sword will pierce Mary's soul too.

This celebration involves us honouring Jesus with lit candles. Jesus, who said that he was the light, also said: "You are the light of the world; a city built on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp to put it under a bushel, but they put it on the lampstand so that it can give light to all who are in the house. So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5:14-16).

How true and urgent are the words of Pope Francis, who invites Christians to be missionaries: "Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the "peripheries" in need of the light of the Gospel." (*Evangelii gaudium*, 20). □

## THE GIFT OF THE PRESENT

by Anastasia Dias

The rice is on the stove; the meat is almost tender; the lentils should be ready by now. The salad is ready. What about the dessert? Martha kept making a note of the dishes that were ready and what remained to be done. The maid had done the cleaning. "The table hadn't yet been laid. What cutlery should I use? Are the dogs fed? No, I don't think so," In her notebook, Martha was striking out the tasks already done.

She was missing something, of this she was sure. She poked a fork into the meat and suddenly remembered something.

"Mary... where is Mary?" she wondered.

"The girl always disappeared when there was work. She never helps out. Especially today, when she knows there's so much to do and all she does is go missing."

She asked her maid to look for Mary. The maid went to the hall and saw Mary sitting with the guest.

She was deeply engrossed, listening to Him.

"The guest has arrived! Mary is keeping him company," the maid told Martha.

She was angry but didn't want to lose her cool in the presence of

their guest.

"The food is ready. So is the newest cutlery. The only thing remaining is to lay the table."

Martha took the plates, spoons and forks and placed them on the table. Then she brought in the water followed by the food; one by one, the dishes came out created by the loving and laborious hands of Martha.

Once again, Martha looked out for Mary. She was still captivated by their guest's stories, so much so that she hadn't even noticed Martha. Martha was infuriated. She glanced at Mary angrily and went back to the kitchen.

She sent her maid to call Mary and tell her to keep the dessert ready. When the maid spoke to Mary, Mary replied that the dessert could be brought after the meal.

Martha couldn't believe her ears. "How could Mary be so thoughtless." She hadn't bothered to help Martha prepare the dishes, she hadn't bothered to even ask if she needed help. The only thing she had to do was to bring the dessert and that too she didn't seem interested in doing."

Martha barged out of the kitchen and told their guest: "Sir, I'm sure you can see that I've been working here all alone.

Please ask my sister to get up and help me."

Their guest smiled and replied "Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed – no, indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her".

Mary was astounded by His answer. He was telling the truth. She had been slaving here, the entire day. She could have taken some time off and listened to Him speak. Everyone in the town wanted to hear Him speak and here He was, right in front of her eyes and she was concerned about the not-so-important things.

You and I can relate to Martha, at some point, right?

There are times in life where we carry the weight of the world on our shoulders. There's so much work. There's so much left to do. There's so much we haven't done yet. What do we do?

We get tired, frustrated and sometimes even demotivated.

"I'm not going to try again. I'm tired," we hear ourselves whisper.

There's so much to accomplish

in the days, week, months and years ahead, that we forget to concentrate on the present

There's so much left to do tomorrow that we forget what needs to be done today.

There's so much coming up in the next moment, that we forget to breathe in and enjoy the beauty of this moment.

Had Martha just kept everything aside for a while and simply basked in her Master's presence for a while, she would feel her stress, pressure and anger fade away.

If we allow ourselves to see the light, hear the sounds and feel the love that is ever-present in this life even when it is dark, the noise and hatred seem to overpower it. We need to be joyful right now. We shouldn't wait for another person or another time to feel the happiness we could feel just now. We shouldn't be slaves to our work but we should feel happiness in doing what needs to be done 'NOW'

Imagine the Saviour coming home and all we do is toil in the kitchen or stare into our laptops or check our Facebook and Instagram

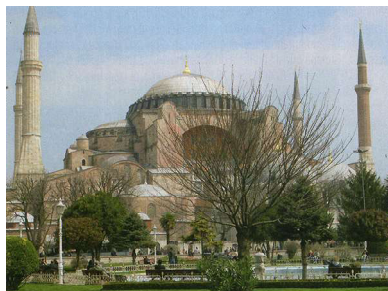
accounts. No, let us celebrate the love and grace that is present in this moment. Like Martha, let us not miss the entire point of this lifetime.

This year, as we embark on new journeys to new places, let us decide to feel the beauty of 'RIGHT NOW'. Only then will we know true joy – the joy that no one can take away. □



## DON BOSCO IN ISTANBUL

*The Salesian Presence in Turkey*



*Santa Sofia, the symbol of Turkey*

**T**here are cities with such strong personalities that walking through their streets one gets the feeling there's nowhere else like this place in the world. Istanbul, the ancient Constantinople and later Byzantium, is one of the most fascinating cities; with a bridge that becomes the geographical link between Europe and Asia, rich in history, religion, culture and art.

The Christian presence in this city is a singular and essential part of the history and life of the Church. In modern sprawling Istanbul, signs of the old Constantinople, although often not very visible or obscured by the majesty of the Mosques, are eloquent. The Church of St. Saviour in Chora has some beautiful mosaics and, interestingly, inside the Palace of Topkapi, the residence of the Ottomans, there is a small church dedicated to St. Irene, famous for being the church of the Niceo-Constantinopolitan Creed. Furthermore, two suburbs of modern and present-day Istanbul are

ancient Chalcedon and Nicaea!

### **An insignificant little door**

Today, the Salesian presence in Istanbul is linked to the Latin Cathedral of 'Saint-Esprit,' administered by the Diocesan Clergy of the Vicariate until 1989 and was entrusted to the Salesians since 1989. The church, consecrated and elevated to the rank of a cathedral in 1975, was declared a Minor Basilica in 1909. To reach it, one enters through an insignificant little door in the Notre Dame de Sion High School building, overlooking one of the major arteries linking central Taksim Square with the Sisli and Nisantasi districts.

### **What is the significance of being the parish priest of the Latin Catholic Cathedral in Istanbul?**

This place is loaded with significance both in relation to the figure of certain popes and for the ecumenical dialogue with the Orthodox world. In front of the church stands a statue of Pope Benedict XV, Pope from 1914 to 1922. During his pontificate, tragic massacres of Christian citizens took place in the Ottoman Empire and this pontiff tried to support these persecuted people in every way he could, by word, charity and diplomacy. In 1919, a seven-metre statue was erected to him, even though he was still alive, with the inscription 'To the great Pontiff at the time of an



*The statue of Pope Benedict XV opposite the Salesian Church*

International tragedy, Benedict XV, benefactor of peoples, without distinction of nationality or religion, in gratitude: the East." The Sultan also personally contributed 500 lira to the expenditure. Furthermore, from 1934 until 1944, Monsignor Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII, was the Apostolic Administrator of the Vicariate. Finally, this church had the honour of having been visited by three Popes and three Ecumenical Patriarchs: Paul VI, who met H.H. Athenagoras here (25 July 1967), John Paul II, who met H.H. Dimitrios I here (29 November 1979) and Benedict XVI, who met H.H. Bartholomew I here (1 December 2006).

It is worth remembering that the Patron Saint of the Latin Vicariate of Istanbul is St John Chrysostom (344-407), Bishop and Doctor of the Church,

together with Saint John XXIII. We remember them on the occasion of their commemorations by our Greek Orthodox brothers, around mid-November.

### **Who are the faithful attending your church?**

The parish has a multicultural, multi-ethnic and multilingual face. Two Masses are celebrated on Sundays, one in English and the other in French. The Mass in English is attended mainly by Filipino women, American families, Indians, English-speaking Africans and pilgrim groups. Mass in French is attended by a smaller number than in the past by 'Levantine,' who are descendants of Genoese, Venetians and the French. Many, because of the Greek-Turkish war over Cyprus, were forced to leave the country. The Africans, on the third Sunday of the month, participate in the animation of the Mass with songs of their own.

### **Do you have other pastoral activities in the city?**

The Salesians have also been entrusted with the shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes, a church founded by Georgian men and women religious from now extinct religious congregations. There we celebrate the liturgy in Turkish. There is no lack of formative and spiritual animation by a small group of Salesian Cooperators and a thriving ADMA group, as well as the Legion of Mary. We also have the pastoral care of the Latin parish in Bursa, which is regularly served by a Salesian.

### **From an educational point of view what are the ministries**

### the Salesians involved in?

We have a school, called "Evrin," which used to be an Italian school with a boarding, but which was turned into a private Turkish school in the late 1980s. Currently, there are about 300 pupils in the kindergarten and 8 primary classes (the 8<sup>th</sup> class corresponds to the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade). The Evrim School is increasingly recognised as a Catholic and Salesian school. The education on offer is good; it is characterised by the study of Italian and English, and the number of pupils is increasing. The Salesians also founded and still run a school for Iraqi girls and boys, refugees waiting to emigrate. English is taught to especially prepare them to acclimatise in their destination countries: the United States, Australia... Thanks to the commitment of Salesians, lay people and the support of the Italian Episcopal Conference, many activities are carried out. English, Maths, Science, Art, Music and Computer Science are taught. Sports and dance are practised. There is a periodic distribution of clothes, a meal and economic support for families. Feasts, picnics and summer holidays are organised. Procedures for obtaining refugee status or a visa to emigrate are followed up.

Above all, they are helped to grow, to overcome the traumas they have suffered, to build their future starting with education, human development, a quest for peace and coexistence. They are offered a family atmosphere, of warmth and compassion, trying to make them feel loved as Don Bosco would have loved them. For the

African emigrants, one of our confreres has opened a "cultural centre" financed by VIS and the Salesian Mission Office in Bonn. The study of Turkish and Bible study courses is held. Material aid is also provided in cases of need. We provide daily religious care at the 'La Paix' hospital run by the Daughters of Charity, and weekly religious care at the 'L'Artigiana' hospice. At Buyukada we have a house for holidays and spiritual retreats. We are involved in parish pastoral care for the Latin parish of Bursa. All our activities are a sign of our inclusion in the local Church by offering the Salesian charismatic contribution.

### What are the challenges and new frontiers?

Our focus is on poor young people, we feel the urgent need to involve ourselves in a family apostolate. One of our new frontiers concerns eclesial and ecumenical dialogue with Catholics of different rites and with other Christians. It is also important to explore ways to understand secularism in schools, to gradually overcome it and how to fully apply the preventive system. Finally, we are studying to initiate interreligious dialogue with Islam which is very necessary. □



Salesians with some young Cooperators

# Witnesses in & for Our Times



## ST JEANNE DE LESTONNAC (February 2)

One of the most important things each of us has to do in life is to discover the purpose of our life. This is one of the highest pursuits in my reckoning. Once we discover our purpose, we will live differently; our life will have new vigour, we will not count so much on external factors to motivate us or to deter us from unwanted things, instead we will let our purpose act as a compass to guide us on our journey and to help us make choices.

Finding one's purpose is not tantamount to discovering one's vocation in life, even though the latter is closely linked to the former. One's vocation is a response to the manner God is calling us to live but our purpose is the reason for living as we are called to live. This might seem convoluted but bear with me. I say this in order to come to the point that our purpose in life is bigger than our vocation. Our choice of life helps us fulfil our purpose in big or small ways, and hence it is vital to choose the right way of life. The life of St. Jeanne is a good example of how purpose exceeds vocational choice.



### THE ROLE OF FAMILY

Jeanne was born in Bordeaux, France in 1556 to Richard de Lestonnac, a politician, and Jeanne Eyquem, the sister of the notable philosopher, Michel de Montaigne. Both her parents came from affluent families and so Jeanne, was brought up in luxury. Not much is known about her early years but it is safe to say that she had a comfortable childhood while being brought up in keeping with the Aristo-

cratic culture of the times. She probably received some elementary education and was trained in the art of homemaking.

She could not have studied very much as she was married at the age of 17. She went on to have seven children but three of them died very young. After 24 years of marriage, Jeanne lost her husband and became a widow. She had plenty of land, wealth and servants but she had suffered painful losses, and there were more to come. Within a year of her husband's passing, she lost her father, her uncle and her eldest son!

When Jeanne's husband died, he left her with a castle and lands, and their children to care for. Jeanne was heartbroken but she knew she had to be strong for the sake of her children. Like any good mother, she gave her best to educate her children and bring them up well. Despite her lack of education, she proved to be an able administrator. She organized the workers and saw to the upkeep of the castle and its grounds, while caring for her children's needs.

### FAITH JOURNEY

Jeanne was born at a time when there was intense conflict between the Protestant reformers and the Catholic church. Her own mother was a convert to Protestantism while her father was a well-known Catholic soldier and politician. It is left to the imagination whether the struggle between the faith ideologies outside found their way into the Eyquem home as there is no mention made in the few brief biographies consulted by the author. Defini-



tely, Jeanne would have seen the tensions brew and even flare up in society. She would also have been exposed to her mother's beliefs and religious practices. The Eyquem children however, were all brought up in the Catholic faith. The Catholic Church requires in cases of mixed marriages either between a Catholic and a non-Catholic Christian, or a Catholic and a non-Christian, that the children be brought up in the Catholic faith.

Jeanne underwent a trying phase when people close to her began to die. In these moments, she did not lose hope but trusted in the promises of Christ. She shared her faith with her children and brought them up to be honest and God-fearing persons. Once they had grown and were independent, she decided to dedicate her life to God and live a contemplative life as a religious nun. Accordingly, she joined the Cis-

tercian Monastery at Toulouse.

### RELIGIOUS VOCATION

Jeanne adjusted quite well to contemplative life. At first it probably was very hard since she had to go from being a mother and a landlady to being a poor, chaste and obedient nun with little responsibilities except prayer and meditation. She submitted to the demands of the religious order and bravely fought her private spiritual battle against her pride, ego, desire for power, recognition and wealth, besides the temptations to flout the rules of the convent. She claimed to have found great peace at the convent.

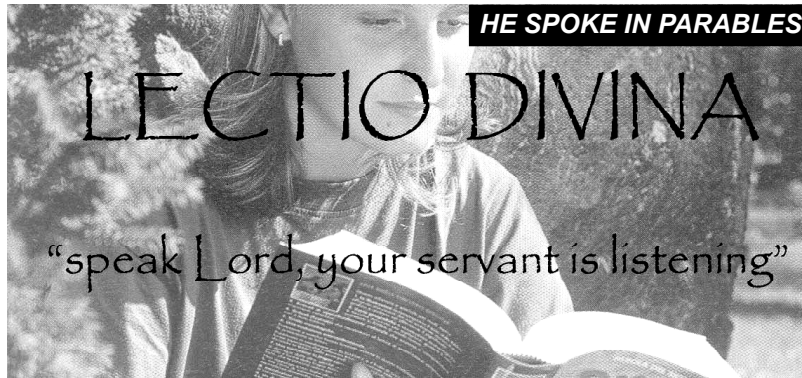
Her serene life was upset after just 6 months when she became seriously ill. She thought that it was her time to go to the Lord since she had lived out her vocations but she had not yet fully discovered and fulfilled her purpose. Her superiors noticed that her condition was not improving and advised her to leave the convent. She returned to her estate. While she recuperated, she spent her time and wealth performing works of charity like distributing food to the poor. She organized a prayer group for rich young women. They gathered regularly to pray and to discuss the faith. In this way, she continued to nurture her own faith and those of others, while at the same time exploring her purpose of life. As she grew in faith and knowledge, she took saints Claire of Assisi, Catherine of Siena and Teresa of Avila as her models. Mind you, Jeanne was only in her late forties at this point!

A couple of years later, plague

broke out in France and Jeanne enthusiastically set out to minister to victims. She put aside all airs and even visited the city slums to attend to the sick. The young ladies of her prayer group also joined her in this work of charity. The Jesuits took notice of her work and approached her to found a congregation to educate girls, while they took care of boys. She accepted the proposal and decided to form a religious community based on the Benedictine Rule. A few years later, the society was approved by Pope Paul V and was called the *Compagnie de Notre-Dame* (The Sisters of the Company of Our Lady).

The new, young society slowly began to establish schools for girls alongside the Jesuits while continuing to reach out to victims of plague. They were the first female congregation with the charism of education to be approved in France. Despite being cloistered nuns in keeping with the Benedictine rule, they were granted an exception which allowed them to be educators. This congregation is still in existence today. They number close to 1500 sisters, working in over 400 institutions across 26 countries!

Jeanne died at the age of 84, having lived multiple vocations and finally fulfilling her purpose in life. By the time of her death, her congregation had already expanded across France and beyond. She was beatified by Pope Leo XIII in 1900 and canonized a saint by Pope Pius XII in 1949. She was declared the patron saint of abuse victims, people rejected by religious orders and widows. □



## THE TEN GOLD COINS

by Carlo Broccardo

*This parable gives us an insight into how Jesus lived the paschal mystery: it was a journey of trust and love; it was a journey in which he invested his entire life without the fear of losing it*

**W**e have all heard the parable of the talents, the one in which there is a master who, before leaving on a journey, calls three of his servants and entrusts them with all his wealth: to the first he gives five talents, to the second two, to the third one. Then, as we know, the first one earns another five, the second another two, the third one hides the talent he received and so earns nothing.

The evangelist Luke recounts a very similar parable, but not exactly the same. Here the master gives each of his servants a gold coin; now a gold coin was worth about a hundred denarii, while a talent was worth between six and ten thousand denarii: there's quite a difference! Moreover, the master in Luke's parable calls ten servants (not just three) and gives each one the same amount: one coin each, no more; only the first

servant manages to earn ten, the second five, the third not even one (and of the other seven, we do not know what happened to them).

If a gold coin is worth a hundred denarii, it is not a huge sum; it's more or less four months' wages. For goodness' sake, it's not small change for a worker; but it's just pocket money for the master in our parable, who will say to the hardworking servants, "you have shown yourself faithful in little things." By giving each servant a coin, then, he did not make a risky investment; for him it was only a test: he wanted to see which of his servants was trustworthy. If one of them squandered the coin, patience; it's not a great loss. But if someone succeeded in making it pay off, then the master had discovered a servant whom he could trust. The one who was able to manage his master's money well was put in charge of his

cities.

In Luke's parable, the master was not just dealing with servants, but also with some of his fellow citizens who did not particularly like him. At first it was said that he was about to be proclaimed king, but while some of his future subjects proved to be trustworthy (the servants who would be put in charge of the cities), others proved to be untrustworthy (the evil servants) and still others even enemies: they did not want him, and so plotted against him. The latter, as was to be expected in the ancient world; they were eliminated without mercy.

Jesus told this parable "Because he was near Jerusalem, and they thought that the kingdom of God would manifest itself at any moment." Who were "those," represented by the pronoun

"they"? Our passage comes immediately after that of Zacchaeus, indeed it was set in Zacchaeus' house, with Jesus telling the parable "While they were listening to these things," that is, while he was saying: "the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost." Jesus was about to enter Jerusalem, where he would be proclaimed king; but not everyone wanted such a king, because he went to the house of sinners and people murmured at that. We do not want someone like that, we do not share his ideas.

This parable acts as a key to what was about to happen in Jerusalem: Jesus would be proclaimed king (though in a way you don't expect: on the cross). There would be those who were with him (the 'good thief') and those who would not be with him (the disciples, who had

disappeared) and those who stood against him (the leaders and the other thief). But there would be surprises, because those who did not want him to be king would seem to win; especially because in the end Jesus would not eliminate them - as the king in the parable had done - he would say: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (23:34). □





# Quiet Spaces

## FIVE MINUTES FOR AN EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

*Pope Francis' homily (edited) at Domus Sanctae Marthae on Thursday, February 28, 2019*

*Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone gives you a cup of water to drink just because you belong to Christ, then I tell you solemnly, he will most certainly not lose his reward. 'But anyone who is an obstacle to bring down one of these little ones who have faith, would be better thrown into the sea with a great millstone round his neck. And if your hand should cause you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter into life crippled, than to have two hands and go to hell, into the fire that cannot be put out. And if your foot should cause you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter into life lame, than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye should cause you to sin, tear it out; it is better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell where their worm does not die nor their fire go out. For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is a good thing, but if salt has become insipid, how can you season it again? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.'* (Mk 9: 41-50)

**I**n the whirlwind of everyday life, in which people may tend to rely on health, wealth and power, they may recklessly go about just doing as they please. Pope Francis cautioned against this, during Mass on Thursday morning, 28 February 2019, and explained that setting aside five minutes each day for an examination of conscience can help us take stock of our failures and weaknesses.

The Pontiff's reflection drew from the day's passage from the Gospel of Mark (9:41-50), in which Jesus offers words of "advice", including: "have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another". The Pope

explained that "to have salt in yourselves" means "to have wisdom, that your life is wise".

Turning to the first reading from the Book of Sirach (5:1-10), which advises against desiring "wealth" and following our own "inclination



and strength", the Pope called for a change of heart and conversion to the Lord.

He pointed out that wisdom is achieved each and every day by reflecting on our lives and taking time to carefully consider our actions. "Do not follow your instincts, your strength, indulging in the passions of your heart", the Holy Father stressed. Everyone has desires, he acknowledged, but we "must be careful and dominate these passions" or they will end up "dominating you".

The Pope advised the faithful to "stop, think: you are not eternal". We cannot continue to do just whatever we please, he said, trusting in God's infinite mercy. We cannot be rash and reckless, believing we will get away with whatever we have been doing. And while we may have gotten away with something once, we do not know when the end will come.

"Do not say, 'God's compassion is great, he'll forgive me my many sins, and so I continue doing what I want'", the Pontiff urged. A father or grandfather's advice might be: "Do not delay to convert to the Lord, do not postpone it from day to day, for suddenly the wrath of the Lord will burst forth", he warned.

Recalling that no one knows when life will end, the Holy Father urged that we take five minutes at the end of each day to examine our conscience, to convert to the Lord, that we not put it off to tomorrow. If we submit to one of our passions, we must try to avoid succumbing to it

again. By dominating ourselves – rather than by being controlled by our desires – we will become "responsible" for our "actions". Taking five minutes at the end of each day, the Pope reiterated, "will help us consider a change of heart and conversion to the Lord". □



## EVEN CLOSER

By Arianna Prevedello, Tr. Ian Douulton, sdb  
Illustration by Siloia Boaretto

"We're having guests for dinner tonight," I tell her. I believe sending out invitations is a waste of time. I like to run after life before it slips through my fingers with the myriad commitments of work that drag me on. "Who's coming?" she asks me rushing out of her room. She loves having guests. If it were up to her, we would have to buy more tables and send out invitations all day long. I tell her: "Beatrice and Simona are coming with their children." I see that this makes her happy. Mum is back and the house is overrun with people: it must seem too grand a bash for a midweek evening. It will be a drama the following morning to get them all out of bed ready for their respective schools. My friends prefer not to wait until the weekend to see each other. This is usually the case when their hearts are "sold out." This is what we say when we've reached saturation point - the limit.

Beatrice has two little girls, Giovanna and Alice. She belongs to that group of women who got married to solve her problems but she didn't succeed. In the meantime, she's got two children; she works in a parish and holds a job that is not fulfilling because her colleagues at the editorial office are not supportive of her.

Her husband is a good man, he should definitely be promoted. Yet now that she's grown up, she's beginning to realize that she got married to forget her father.

This new realisation is killing her because now she finds it hard to love him as she once did. And it's a tragedy for her, first of all because Beatrice has never thought of herself being with another man. Stefan was the only man in her life.

Simona, on the other hand, has two boys, Victor and Jimmy, who will make the evening very lively. They are still small, 3 and 4 years old. There will be a lot of kinetic energy to manage but they are very likeable. Apart from some more-than-natural messiness, they bring a lot of enthusiasm to the atmosphere. In every way they resemble their father, Carlo, a swaggerer of the highest order. Simona is a teacher and catechist and even she isn't doing so well. Behind this veneer of great confidence Carlo hides several unresolved issues. He is still trying to become an adult. Simona would do anything to have a husband like Beatrice's. With two sons she has a lot to do but Carlo is of no help at all. Rather, he demands to go out several evenings a week to play sports, see friends and cultivate his passion for the movies. If by chance even a fourth free evening escapes, he happily dedicates it to a party, a vice of his youth. Simona has always allowed him a parallel life at the expense of the family. Now after a few years without resp

ite she is starting to get upset and feels ready to dump him for a more pleasant man. Yet, up to

now she has never thought of herself in another life; but the justification (as long as she does not lose him) with which she has always granted him everything he wanted, is starting to fall apart.

And then there is me, who found another life on my hands without having wanted it. The first one, however imperfect, was, all of a sudden, completely razed to the ground. I think my friends often come over, much more than they used to, also

because of this. Because at a widow's place they always find what we say in code form: 'free zone;' which means, at my place one can say anything without being ashamed. But at my place they also find someone who makes them reflect on all the good they still have ahead of them and which they can try to wrestle with the same ingredients as before. In a widow's house, they come face to face with the benevolent gaze of someone who reminds them that they still have



a marriage and that it is worth doing everything possible to make it work, first of all recalling that wonderful 'yes' they exchanged in the presence of each other on their wedding day, which has been somewhat obscured by the thousand tasks of life, but which only needs to be 'dusted off.'

They've arrived. I open the door and without even greeting Simona I blurt out: "Only one bottle of wine?" I joke about the cheerful evening ahead of us. She confesses that she stole it from Carlo's excellent wine cellar. Beatrice adds: "Well, then you could have at least taken one more. When we women turn sour, there is cause for concern. It will not be easy to put us right." I promised myself precisely for this reason not to overdo it, as I already feel them very charged on their own. I want to listen to them, share thoughts with them, try to put them in order, but I cannot replace my friends. Advice is already very difficult to come by and it does not always come with all sincerity; from the heart.

Tonight, I would like to try to dodge all their frustrations. I leave them on the doorstep and walk towards their children, calling them to form circle. The guest of honour is a new picture book that they certainly have not yet read. They all sit around; our ritual has begun. The mothers stand on two small chairs behind them.

"What is the name of tonight's book?" shouts Victor, who with Jimmy cannot contain himself. For them, sitting down means at

least an exercise session. Giovanna and Alice are always very protective of them, but by the third page I am sure they will propose to tie the two little brothers to Beatrice's armchair. Unveiling the title of the book is my daughter who has already been loving it for a few days. "That monster of a neighbour! and that's the title!" she says in her unmistakable little voice as she sneaks between my legs to reiterate that I am her mummy.

Tonight, I would like to be the mother of those two friends of mine sitting in the second row. I would like to offer them a safe space for a few minutes in which to imagine a better future without losing all the life they have lived so far. But rather to put it to good use without seeing it merely as a set of difficulties to be overcome, as happens to the book's protagonists, who are looking for a good way to come to terms with the annoyance they feel for each other. Instead of walking away from each other, they end up staying closer than before, as only the beautiful madness of love and marriage can allow. "Sorry," "thank you" and "please": these are still the words that act as powerful magnets and make living as a couple every day as if it were the first day. Perhaps it is to highlight this truth that I chose this story: more for the two of them than for their children. I look at Beatrice and Simona's faces as I continue reading. They are in-volved like two little girls. I am lucky because their children like the book very much and so we read it again.

The evening takes its usual

course, but I am happy because there between those pages we've secretly told each other a truth that we were not always able to exchange in the midst of the chatter of simply venting our feelings. Before they leave, my daughter proudly hands a wrapped copy to both of them. "You must read it," she says, "at

least once a day, because loving those close to us is important." All three of us look at each other. We are aware that it is not always as easy as she says but we know that we also need the simplicity of children.

With this assurance a beautiful day ends...and a new path opens! □

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## FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 37

by Michele Molineris

### 181. All but one (1869)

Rubella is not a worrisome disease; but it is troublesome both for those who suffer from it, because of the care one must take to come out of it without its aftereffects, and for those who are immune to it, in order to avoid contagion, since it is epidemic.

It predominantly affects children who are of school age; it irritates their mucous membranes, makes their glands swell, and spots their skin with rounded, even, barely noticeable, red eruptions the size of a lentil. Apart from the incubation, the rash with febrile manifestations lasts barely a few days; but the swelling of the mastoid glands may last a couple of weeks or even longer.

At Lanzo, in the Salesian boarding school opened by Don Bosco a few years earlier, on 29 May 1869 seven young boarders were in the infirmary infected with rubella. The order was not to expose them to others, they were to keep to their beds as much as possible and not to leave quarantine, so as not to expose the community to the danger of being infected. It was an

order, but it was also a remedy, one still proposed today so that patients might come out in a short period of time, without any aftereffects

The seven young men had soon resigned themselves to their situation, also because, being so, they did not need to look for ways to pass the time; they were a merry bunch. But they were no longer resigned when they learned that, to conclude the Marian month, Don Bosco himself was coming from Turin, with so much to say and so much advice to give.

The opportunity was unique, just as unique was the man who was the cause of it, and the ones who would miss it should not be them. They were to have the advantage over their companions, being in a position to take advantage of the presence, and the benefits that Don Bosco's presence would bring.

So, all of them in unison earnestly desired to be present at the solemn feast and if a miracle was needed to bring it about, Don Bosco was the one to perform it. They therefore said to each other:

When Don Bosco arrives, the rector will bring him to the infirmary, he will see us and we, in defiance of all prohibitions would be able to go down with the

others to enjoy the feast.

So, they called the rector who, having been informed of their plans, formally promised to bring Don Bosco to the infirmary to bless them as soon as he arrived. But on Don Bosco's arrival, there was so much confusion and the rector's worries so numerous, that it was not easy for him to immediately divert the illustrious guest to where he had promised. It was only later, and with a little more urging on their part, that the rector was able to keep to his promise, to get Don Bosco up to the infirmary.

"Oh, Don Bosco!" the sick boys cried out to him in chorus as soon as they saw him appear wrapped in their torn blankets; "Don Bosco, bless and heal us!"

Don Bosco smiled at that plea, but played along and asked:

"Do you have faith in Our Lady?"

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"Then let us recite the Hail Mary together." They recited it and then he blessed them.

They were all lying down in their pyjamas, as they asked: "Can we get up?"

"But do you really have faith in Our Lady?"

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"Then get up."

In an instant they were all on their feet, and a few moments later the rector, to make sure of their state of health, was already looking for them in the courtyard, among the restless crowd of celebrating companions.

I said 'all,' but I said it wrong; there were only six who had been cured of rubella in the courtyards, the ones who had said their "yes" of trust. The seventh, who a few days earlier had committed an imprudent act to

the detriment of the regular development of the disease, held back because of the fear of making his situation even worse, so he had hesitated. That moment of hesitation had been enough to prevent him from being allowed to enjoy those benefits.

The others did not even feel the cold, damp air that had enveloped them as they left the infirmary. The next day they enjoyed the whole feast, with one more reason to be glad and grateful to Our Lady. That day, the distribution of good conduct awards was also part of the programme. They were awarded periodically by the pupils themselves, with the unscrupulousness and perplexity of their age. The first to be called up was Giuseppe De Magistris, later a teacher in the high schools of Turin, but then among those who were healed.

"Sick," the doctor, who had attended the ceremony, spoke for him.

"Present!" replied the supposedly infirm boy, advancing with triumphant step towards the authorities' dais to collect the award.

While the astonished doctor listened with disappointment to the explanations given to him by the rector, the second was called.

"Carlo Passerini!" He was another of those healed.

"Sick!" replied the doctor.

"Present!" retorted the sick boy.

Then the doctor did not linger any longer, he wanted to see them and with them the other four that Don Bosco's blessing had suddenly returned to the community, without his permission. At that juncture, he spoke in a resentful tone of their imprudence; and genuine

imprudence it would have been, with not easily foreseeable consequences, if everything had not taken place with Our Lady's complicity, on the thread of a faith that could well have had the prize, promised once and for all by the Gospel.

## V. THE SEVENTIES (1870-79)

### 182. Lodging Arrangements

One day in 1870 Fr Sala, a member of the Salesian Superior Council, was travelling on a train from Milan to Turin. He was not alone in the compartment; there was also a distinguished lady with two pretty little girls, who later turned out to be her nieces. They had come from abroad and were on their way to Rome and to visit the rest of Italy. But, being distinguished and wanting to arrive incognito, they had provided themselves with a voluminous sheaf of recommendations. On hearing of their intentions, Fr Sala insisted that they should not miss the opportunity to visit Valdocco and Don Bosco, perhaps setting aside some other appointments.

The lady reluctantly gave in and was almost about to tell him to mind his own business and let her dispose of the time as she pleased. In fact, the next morning she was with her nieces at Don Sala's Mass and then in Don Bosco's antechamber. The sight of so many people, waiting to be received, was about to make her give up her visit, when the door to Don Bosco's room opened and Don Sala appeared on the threshold and, with a smile, invited her, giving her precedence over the others.

The sight of Don Bosco, whom she had never met before and of whom she had heard for the first time on the train from Milan, impressed and moved her, as she fell on her knees. Don Bosco graciously inquired about her itinerary and, realising that Rome was also on the cards, offered to make a recommendation for her stay. Here, the lady went on the counter-attack, telling Don Bosco that her suitcase was full of recommendations and that there would be no need for him to add his own.

In any case, Don Bosco, with the calmness that distinguished him and the kindness that was so natural to him, wrote her another recommendation, assuring her, against all appearances, that it would be useful. Indeed, it was, and beyond all her expectations. The hotel that had been booked for her by a priest returning from Rome, turned out to be unsuitable even for the servants, who waited on her day and night. The other letters of recommendation were all for bishops and council fathers who had much more to do during those hot summer days of the council than to think about accommodating a spinster, travelling the peninsula with her nieces. She then remembered Don Bosco's note at that point and armed with it she made his way up the *Corso* to *Via dei Coronari*. Here, a friend of Don Bosco's went out of his way to accommodate them so well and with such short notice that they could not stop thanking the providence "of the angel who had blessed them in Turin" and provided them with such effective safe-conduct, even for visits to the Vatican. (cf. M.B., IX, 776). □



MARIAN DEVOTION FROM DON BOSCO'S PERSPECTIVE

## THE MARIAN PEDAGOGY OF DON BOSCO

by Aldo Girauda

### Apostle of Mary

In 1868, on the occasion of the dedication of the Shrine of Mary Help of Christians (before it was nominated a basilica it was just a shrine), Don Bosco wrote and circulated a booklet entitled *The Miracles of the Mother of God invoked under the title of Mary Help of Christians*.<sup>1</sup> The Saint emphasized his educational and missionary concerns from an ecclesiastical dimension.

The titles Immaculate Conception and the Help of Christians in the ecclesial context of the time evoked the 'great confrontation' between the Church and liberal society. A religious reading of political and social events was made, along the lines of the Catholic reaction to unbelief, anti-clerical liberalism and de-Christianisation.

Within the walls of the Oratory, however, devotion to the Immaculate Conception and Mary Help of Christians did not have these undertones, even though it opened up to an ecclesial and missionary consciousness: "The

need felt today to invoke Mary is not particular, but general. There are no longer lukewarm people to be aroused, sinners to be converted or innocents to be protected. These things are always useful everywhere and with everyone. But it is the Catholic Church itself that is assailed. It is assailed in its functions, in its sacred institutions, in its Head, in its doctrine, in its discipline; it is assailed as the Catholic Church, as the centre of truth, as the teacher of all the faithful."<sup>2</sup>

It was in this direction that Don Bosco addressed Marian prayer and invocation, even though, for his boys and for the people in general, he continued to emphasise mainly the spiritual and apostolic dimension of Marian piety. In fact, the practice of the Marian month of May and the various Marian devotions was presented by him with these objectives:

- to bring about a resolve in young people to be more committed to their duty
- in the exercise of the virtues

- in ascetic ardour (mortifications in honour of Mary),
- in an action-oriented charity
- and in a generous apostolate among their companions.

### Evangelising education

Don Bosco tended, therefore, to assign to Mary Immaculate and Help of Christians a decisive role in the educational and formative work of hearts and minds and to emphasise, in the climate of the great Marian fervour of his time, virtuous and fervent practises and to lead a life of purity from sin and affections and to strive gift oneself to God.

Already earlier, in *The Companion of Youth* (1847), the saint presented the invocation to Mary as an effective means of overcoming temptation: "My sons, a great support for you is devotion to Mary Most Holy...You must promptly ask for three graces in particular which are absolutely necessary for everyone, but especially for you who are in your youth.

The first is that of never committing mortal sin in your life. I want you to claim this grace at any cost through Mary's intercession. Do you know what it means to fall into mortal sin?

The second grace you must ask for is to preserve the holy and precious virtue of purity.

Then arises the necessity of the third grace and it is precisely that of fleeing from bad companions. Happy are you, O my children, if you flee the company of the wicked."<sup>3</sup>

In the 1868 booklet (*Miracles of the Great Mother of God invoked under the title of Help of Christians*), as we said, Don Bosco's

sights also broaden to other aspects of the Christian life: Mary, is presented:

- as the model of perfect union with God in the Annunciation;<sup>4</sup>
  - as an example of sanctifying action towards one's neighbour in the Visit to Elizabeth (sanctifying in service);<sup>5</sup>
  - as the teacher of tender, merciful, solicitous, diligent attention to the needs of the brethren at the Marriage at Cana;<sup>6</sup>
  - and as mother of believers amidst the grief of Calvary.<sup>7</sup>
- But the emphasis is above all on the fact that Mary favours those who work for the faith.<sup>8</sup>

So: do battle against sin and strive towards God, the sanctification of self and the neighbour, the service of charity and the strength in carrying the cross and the missionary commitment in the Church and the world. These are the salient traits of a Marian devotion that has very little in the way of devotionalism or sentimentality, despite the climate of the time and popular tastes that Don Bosco nonetheless valued.

### God at the centre of life

Let us now reflect on the spiritual meaning of this perspective. Don Bosco knew that the precept of "Loving God above all things" means, first of all, being converted in depth and giving oneself totally to Him (he frequently used expressions such as: it is necessary to "give oneself to God in time"; "give oneself totally and unreservedly to God").

He taught that one must live the day of one's Baptism, day by day, constantly and profoundly eradicating selfishness, dying to one's pride, purifying the intentions that guide our actions, in a

love of charity that joyfully means that life is truly 'devout' when transfigured by charity, and he had assimilated this from his favourite saint, Francis de Sales, a master of joyful charity: who taught total surrender to God.

He had learnt this by doing the spiritual exercises in the spirit of Saint Ignatius who suggested that he does everything with joy, with ardour, with freedom of spirit, with generosity and ease, with loving-kindness and enthusiastically.

As we can see, this is a perspective that requires decisive conversion, constantly repeated: a radical 'yes' said to God, in conformity to the obedient and crucified Christ, capable of reversing the 'no' said one day by our forefathers in the Garden of Eden.

A heart that reiterates existentially and vibrantly, the same response as Mary's: "Here I am. I am the handmaid of the Lord: let it be done to me according to your word." The same response of Christ to the Father: "I said: here I am, send me."

We see this generous attitude of offering in Don Bosco, we grasp it in the young people he trained in holiness, like Dominic Savio, but it is the foundational attitude of every form of Christian holiness in history.

The true believers, the saints - by making this conversion of mentality, by placing their centre of inner (spiritual and psychological) unification in God - are regenerated by charity and see everything from a different and new point of view: they are new people in Christ and in Mary. In them, on closer inspection, Marian 'devotion', even in the

nuances of nineteenth-century sensibilities - affectionate, romantic, fervent and zealous - has this root and leads to this effect of total conversion, of Baptism made their own, down to the last consequences.

Therefore, in Don Bosco's life and spirituality, Mary is a presence that stimulates a journey of holiness. A presence he perceived in faith, an operative presence: she who accompanied, supported, guided, and encouraged him on his path of being conformed to Jesus; she who sustains the Church in its mission and who accompanies, consoles, comforts and heals believers who strives to live a devotion not separated from conversion of heart and commitment to the Christian life.

And it is a presence that stimulates one to live consciously under the gaze of God, in a great tendency of total gift. This is how Don Bosco proposed it to his young people, co-workers and friends, as we also see from this short invocation, he wrote below a photograph he sent to his friends in 1878:

*To the thought of God's presence  
Let the lips, the heart and the mind,  
Follow the virtuous path  
Of the Great Virgin Mary  
Fr. John Bosco* □

<sup>1</sup> G. Bosco, *Maraviglie della Madre di Dio invocata sotto il titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice*, Torino, Tip. dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales 1868.

<sup>2</sup> Ivi, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, pp. 51-54.

<sup>4</sup> G. Bosco, *Maraviglie*, pp. 20-25.

<sup>5</sup> Ivi, pp. 25-26.

<sup>6</sup> Ivi, pp. 31-37.

<sup>7</sup> Ivi, pp. 37-41.

<sup>8</sup> Ivi, pp. 55-61.



## DON GIANNI CAPUTA HAPPY IN THE LAND OF JESUS *O. Pori Mecoi*

I had grandparents and parents who were hardworking and godly. I was born in 1947 into a family of 10 brothers and sisters in Bono, a small village in the diocese of Ozieri. In 1941, the bishop had decreed that an oratory dedicated to Don Bosco should be opened in every parish.

A year earlier, Carlo Carretto had arrived in the village as the director of education, who left an impact on the clergy and laity that is still felt today. Family and Catholic Action were the soil in which my vocation blossomed. When I was twelve and a half years old (considered 'late in life' in those days) I was taken in by the Salesians of the Mirabello aspirantate, as one of those 'rascals' of whom Fr Albera said they were Don Bosco's favourites. Many of my fellow villagers had predicted that I would not last long!

On 6 October 1963 I received the missionary crucifix at "Mary Help of Christians" (the basilica in Turin) and left for the novitiate in Lebanon. Inculturation was a strategic priority, for language learning and "exposure" to local cultures and liturgies. In El-Hussun from 1957, there was the study house of philosophy where those who would be the pillars of the Salesian works in Iran, Egypt and the Holy Land were forged, till today.



*Don Gianni Caputa with the gold medal from the UPS*

In 1967 I began studying philosophy in Rome: these were the years of Paul VI who won me over with his intellectual stature and firmness in guiding the renewal of the post-conciliar Church. It was the era of contestation and disbandment, but at UPS we had excellent professors and spiritual directors of the calibre of Fr Albino Ronco and Fr Pietro Brocardo.

### Beirut

Fresh out of university, in 1972 I was packed and ready to leave for Bethlehem where as a trainee



*Bethlehem 23 March 2000 at the conclusion of the Diocesan Synod, John Paul II gives Fr Gianni a copy of the Pastoral Plan*

I was to teach neo-scholastic philosophy to my fellow clerics, but at the last hour the provincial sent me to Beirut. Here we ran a school with three sections (Franco-Lebanese, Anglo-American and Italian) and an oratory, with about 1,000 boys and girls, 42 nationalities and 16 different religious affiliations, plus the young Salesians of the post-novitiate: a small UN (United Nations) where dialogue and respect were the air one breathed. Those young people helped me discover the beauty of the Salesian vocation as educator and friend; I like to say that was my second baptism.

Reluctantly I left Beirut to begin theology studies in Cremisan, which I continued in Turin-Crocetta. In 1978 I chose to be ordained a priest in Bono, where the celebrations lasted three days; in addition to relatives and family members, half the village was there, including some sceptics from 20 years earlier; there were fine wines and succulent meats for everyone!

As a lecturer and headmaster at Cremisan and then at

Jerusalem-Ratisbonne (1980-2018), I taught a bit of everything, but especially fundamental theology, liturgy and sacraments, to a few hundred clerics from four continents. Every year I was encouraged and learned new things from them, as well as from colleagues and lay brothers who were an integral part of the formation community. Cremisan maintained fruitful relations with the Seminary of the Patriarchate in

Betgiala, the Franciscan, Dominican and Benedictine study centres in Jerusalem, and the ecumenical centre in Tantur. This allowed us to organise together in 1997, '98 and '99 three study weeks for professors and students, but open to religious and lay people also non-Catholics and non-Christians, in preparation for the Great Jubilee of the year 2000. It seems to me that nowhere else in the world was something similar done, not even in Rome.

From 1992 to 2000, under the leadership of Patriarch Michel Sabbah, assisted by the Theological Commission and the Priests' Council, the Diocesan Synod of the Catholic Churches in TS (Latin, Maronite, Armenian, Melkite, Syriac, Jewish) was held on the theme "believers in Christ, co-responsible in the Church, witnesses in society". In March 2000, John Paul II delivered the General Pastoral Plan to representatives of the various categories of the faithful. In that synodal dynamic, commissions, offices,

and joint committees were established that gave impetus to the renewal of the Christian communities of Jordan, Israel, Palestine, and Cyprus. Recently, after some years of stagnation, the path had reopened.

All these have been rewarding experiences for me and a school of lifelong learning. Slightly less so was my service as secretary of the Vatican delegation in negotiations with Israel, which I asked to be relieved of after six years, noting that it is easier to save economics than ... to see to the salvation of political economy!

### Present and future

I am currently a member of the community of 'young pensioners' in Betgamal, a home for groups of Christians (parishes and ecclesial movements, schools, scouts, alumni), a 'gateway' into the Christian world for Jews who are open religiously (apostolate of the good literature, memory of St. Stephen the Protomartyr...), culturally (art, music). Last year we too, like everyone else, were punished by the restrictions imposed by Covid, but now here in Israel we can already see the light at the end of the tunnel.

I continue to act as coordinator of the group of Lebanese alumni and alumnae (about 200) through the website we created after the historic 2007 meeting at the Sacred Heart in Rome.

Life has taught us to favour personal and informal relationships. In fact, in 1988 we had started a formal Union, christened by the confederal president and the world secretary. When the young people (among others

scattered throughout the EU, North and South America and Africa) saw that we insisted on membership cards, membership fees, badges..., they began to withdraw and within a year the Union disappeared. These alumni have shown concrete solidarity for the construction of a vocational school in Abaetetuba in Brazil, diocese of Bishop Flavio Giovenale (also an alumnus of Beirut); adoption of girls from the Lebanese association 'Auxilia'; reconstruction of two Salesian works in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake; periodic support for the bakery in Bethlehem; scholarships for DBT students from Fidar-Jbeil; and other micro-initiatives.

In the autumn of 2019, I visited our works in Lebanon and Damascus, and since then I have been cherishing a dream: as soon as the borders reopen, after having 'energised' myself in Sardinia (a swim in the sea at Stintino, a snack with Cannonau, 'pane e casu' in Bono...) I would like to return to work with the young people in those centres, to rediscover the roots of the original Salesian experience, the 'presence' among disadvantaged young people. But I fear that the dream will have to wait, because my superiors are asking me to continue working on Simone Sruigi (research, publications, museum...) until his beatification. So, I am intensifying my prayers, so that it will come soon! □



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# IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

## Right Place

"Aren't you afraid your creditors might see you in this expensive restaurant?"

"No, it's the safest place. They can't afford to come here."

## Short-sighted

An elderly man, with thick glasses, was strolling on a windy day. Suddenly his top-hat was blown away by the breeze. So he began to run after it.

An old lady came out of the house fuming at the old man. "What are you doing there, you fool?" yelled the woman.

"Oh, my hat! I was just trying to get it."

"But you are chasing my black hen," shouted the owner.

## Quick remedy

Prof. Pinch walked painfully into the consulting room and sat gingerly in the vacant chair.

"Doctor," he said, "my shoulders seem dreadfully stiff this morning. Can you suggest a cure?"

"A rapid one, Professor," smiled the doctor. "Remove your coat-hanger."

## Well-bred

1<sup>st</sup> farmer: Well, Tom has a college degree, can you see any change in the way he ploughs?

2<sup>nd</sup> farmer: Now, he ploughs the same. It's the way he talks.

1<sup>st</sup> farmer: Yeah, how do you mean?

2<sup>nd</sup> farmer: Well, when he gets to the end of the row, instead of

saying, "Whoa" or "Gee," he says, "Halt, Rebecca! pivot and proceed."

## A Complaint

"Madam, is that your boy who is burying my coat in the sand?"

"No that's my sister's son. Mine is the one sitting on your hat and filling your shoes with mud and water."

## Poor Chap

A man was passing a pub, when a figure hurtled out of the door and landed in the gutter.

A small fellow picked himself up and said to the passer-by: "They think they can get away with that. I'll throw everyone of them out. You stay here and count."

In went the little man. A moment later a body landed in the gutter.

"One," counted the passer-by.

"No, it's me again," said the little man.

## Missing foreman

A contractor saw a group of his men digging in a trench some distance from the place they were supposed to be working. He stooped the car and strode over to them: "What's going on here?" he demanded angrily.

"Trench caved in," one of the men replied, without stopping his digging.

"Does the foreman know about it?"

"Well," said the workman, "If he doesn't, we'll tell him as soon as we dign him out." □

## ONE LAST THOUGHT

### ROUND THE BEND

Gabriele Pedrina

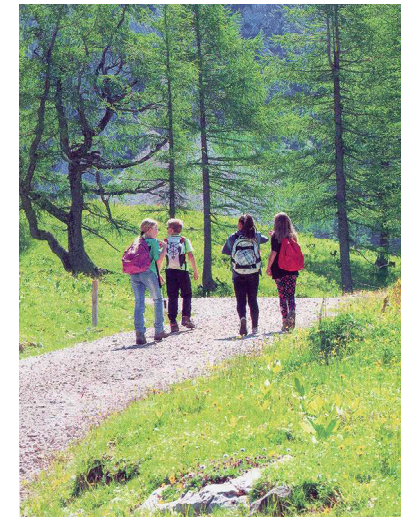
**H**ow much hope is there in that statement "it's just around the bend!" As children, we were told this every time we walked into the mountains. When we asked: "Is it far?" The answer was more or less always the same: "There, we've got to get there... around that bend." When we reached there, they didn't say: "We've arrived!" We knew very well that the climb didn't end there. But we hoped that at least, we would be able to see the end.

Even when I grew up, the anticipation of getting *around the bend* to find things were better was always intense. Especially if it was a 'steep climb.' That was when you went up another steep incline and looked up, you saw, between the trees nothing but sky and the higher you went all you saw was more sky. So then you started saying to yourself "Come on, we're at the top, the climb is over!" Except that when you got there the level ground lasted just a couple of metres after which you turned right and another endless climb started.

The bends, the curves and the excitement of anyone taking the road; even straight roads concealed bends, because one doesn't see them especially on flats. You don't know where they lead... and suddenly...bam! The road turns and suddenly the direction changes. And if we have not arrived, sometimes we wish we were. We hoped that things would change and the road would take us somewhere

else.

I'm talking to you about bends, because these days 'my' two boys, who had not had a family of their own for three years, are finally leaving with a couple who were willing to be their forever-parents. They had lived for three years without knowing the path on which they had found themselves; without knowing where it would take them; they watched fellow travellers suddenly turn and take their separate ways. Three years of trying to figure out what they really wanted; waiting in terror and hope for their crossroads to finally arrive, for the straight stretches of road, made up of up and downs, green meadows and thorny bushes, leading to a turn at the end. And when they finally saw it, their hearts began to pound and a ques-





tion surfaced: "What will I find when I get there?"

"And what would they find?" you may ask. I don't know; I hope: only good things, because they have already had their fair share of the bad. But they have left me with a lesson; it is how you get to the bend that makes the difference. If there is a parenthesis before the bend in the road, what comes next will soon disappoint and make you long for the next turn. If, on the other hand, as you walk, you discover that things *can* be different from the way you inclined your head, if you learnt to battle with the road, accepting that sometimes it is OK to lose because there is more to win, if you keep your head held high (not haughtily) and your feet on the ground, if you come to know how to wait, to stop and, when necessary, to run and keep up... well, if you arrive at the bend in the road like this,

what lies ahead is just a new landscape full of new challenges and opportunities.

Those kids found adults who made a pathway for them and they walked on it. Painful especially if more than walking it was trampling, but beautiful to see them at the end of the road, facing the bend, uncertain yet eager, daring and insecure as only those at that age knew how to be. The only way to go through life. I remember Jesus once saying: "I am the way." I had always imagined it to be straight, hard, but smooth and without surprises. I thought that being the Way meant being the signpost pointing the way. Instead, the way is the ground on which you put your feet, where you sit when you're tired; it breaks your falls; it is the beaten and the levelled ground which is safe so that you don't get lost. On a road like this, every bend is a miracle. □

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## TOO FRIVOLOUS

I start with a news story that at the end of 2019 that shook people to their core. I am referring to the images we all carry in our hearts of three young people whose destinies tragically collided on a rainy night in Rome. Gaia, Camilla and Pietro could have had our faces. Their story did not leave us indifferent.

Even on the social media chats of teenagers, who had no 'official' voice in that story, those three names echoed for days. The drama of those events affected, disturbed and prompted reflection. What has come of this tragedy? Is it possible to hope that the beautiful, fresh faces of Gaia and Camillo, taken from life, can per-

haps turn out to be a warning to so many of their peers? The story of the three boys has been told with many variations. It is difficult to establish precisely how the facts unfolded. What emerges, however, in all the versions reported is, the misunderstanding that lies at the heart of the age we all went or go through and which makes us, at various times, victims and perpetrators of ourselves. It is a horrible misunderstanding that constantly leads to confusing levity with superficiality. Superficiality seems harmless. The philosophy of "what do you want it to be." The indulgence of "who cares." Instead, superficiality kills and

devastates, and on that terrible night we had yet another proof of this.

So, with only a few weeks to go before the end of the school year, as if it were a good resolution, it is a good idea to return to the question of the difference between frivolity and superficiality in the knowledge that the fault does not lie with the younger generations: the fault, in fact, lies with the educated adults.

Italo Calvino spoke about frivolity in the late 1980s in his American Lectures, intended for Harvard University: "Take life frivolously. That lightness is not superficiality, but gliding over things from above, not having millstones on your heart," he wrote.

The writer's reflection has been readily iconised in the 21st century. But the quotation by no means summarises all the depths that the original writing immerses the reader. In the 'lesson', Calvino speaks of 'subtracting weight' from reality, not so that it vanishes and loses its meaning, but precisely to give it the opportunity to remain authentically 'afloat' in the magnum sea of human living. In his writing, Calvino quotes Paul Valéry: 'One must be as light as the bird that flies, and not as a feather.' The writer's reflection had been readily iconized in the 21<sup>st</sup>

century. In the "lesson," Calvino spoke of extracting the "essence" from the reality, not so that it vanishes and loses its meaning, but precisely to give it the opportunity to remain genuinely "afloat" in the great sea of human living. We 21<sup>st</sup> century people, on the other hand, have invoked lightness and emptied it of meaning to play the game of the ostrich. The fascination of nothingness as a counter-balance to the substance of living; to the decisions to be taken, the responsibilities to be assumed.... In short, to everything that puts us in crisis because it asks us to locate on our path the 'truth' that concerns us.

Returning to the broken lives of the two youngsters and the trauma of the young man driving the SUV, it will not be enough to tell their story to our children to prevent them from committing similar blunders, such as speeding along road at night in the rain despite a red light or driving after an evening of excess. This will not be enough, unless we understand that the fatality lies in the lack of attentiveness to ourselves first and foremost, the absence of a sense of proper perspective. Our actions always have a direction and consequences. The serious fault is when we fail to assess them responsibly, because no one has had the strength to teach us this. □

*Silvia Rossetti*

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### **EVERYTHING IN GOD'S HANDS**

Dear Children, I invite you to totally surrender yourselves to God. Let everything you possess be in God's hands; only in this way will you have joy in your heart. My Children, rejoice in everything you have, give thanks to God because everything is a gift from God to you. Thus, in life, you will be able to give thanks for everything and discover God in everything even in the smallest flower. You will discover great joy, you will discover God. Thank you for responding to my call.

*Our Lady's message at Medjugorje*  
25. 4. 1989

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