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*O God, who were pleased
 to give us
 the shining example
 of the Holy Family,
 graciously grant
 that we may imitate them
 in practicing the virtues
 of family life
 and the bonds of charity,
 and so, in the joy of your
 house, delight one day in
 eternal rewards.*

*(From the Proper of the Solemnity
 of the Holy Family)*

From The Editor's Desk

A MASS TO REMEMBER

About a decade or so ago I had one the great experiences of my life. I was on holiday in 'good old Lonavla' and I went to visit an old friend. I'll call him Eric. Although otherwise in good health, Eric had difficulty walking and so was unable to go to the church. I offered to say Mass for him. He was delighted, and we found ourselves - just the two of us - at the kitchen table for a very simple Mass. After the gospel I asked Eric if he would like to make some prayers. He would. He did. He did indeed!

He prayed for twenty-five minutes almost without repeating himself I was shaken-faced with a world I thought had almost disappeared. Even on the level of human achievement. Eric's prayer was an extraordinary performance.

Eric prayed for family and relatives first. Then he worked his way methodically through those who lived around there, mentioning by name the living and the dead, up and down the road from end to end.

He prayed for all those who had been good to him. When he prayed for those he knew to be alive, he asked that God 'prosper them'. For the dead, he prayed that God 'would forgive them their sins and save them.' When he wasn't sure, he put the necessary 'ifs'.

On a few occasions I caught a mischievous glint in Eric's eye as he mentioned and mimicked the people in the locality.

After twenty-five minutes Eric stopped. He said, "I think, that's enough, anyway I forget some names now. But every night when I get into bed, I pray for everyone I can remember. It takes me an hour, and sometimes I fall asleep before I'm finished."

Why do I say that the Mass in Eric's kitchen was one of the great experiences of my life? Well, that morning I met a man who believed in the goodness of life, here and hereafter. He had no hesitation in asking for prosperity on behalf of his friends, relatives and neighbours. He had no problem about a dance and a drink in good company.

But, Eric also accepted, as a matter of course, that we are sinful people who need God's forgiveness and aid to reach our goal with him in Heaven. I listened to a man who had no difficulty in accepting the interplay of the human and the divine in daily life. It didn't cost him a moment's reflection. He moved easily in two worlds. Rather there was only one world for him.

I was reminded of our way of life and a community which depended almost totally on neighbours for home-made relaxation and enjoyment.

Perhaps the very limitations of those days, intimacy with God and one's neighbours were essential strands in the fabric of life. Can such intimacy and sense of belonging be suitably replaced in a world of high mobility, high expectations and overwhelming technical abundance? We still need to feel important and loved. We still need to laugh and have our legs pulled, even in a world where most of our material desires are satisfied.

Fr. Ian Douulton, sdb

ENGAGEMENT: A TIME OF DISCERNMENT AND GRACE

by Bishop Giampaolo Dianin

The engagement then becomes a placing oneself in the school of the Lord and his way of loving.

We cannot ignore the period of the engagement; it is precious. Even if today, many take the path of cohabitation, we believe that the potential of this period, which does not anticipate a life already in some way spousal, is important. We spoke, earlier of engagement as a time of wonder and knowledge. Now we see two other essential aspects, which are discernment and searching.

Engagement is not only a gift that lets the two young people who experience it and the people who look at them be amazed, nor is it only a serious journey of getting to know each other more and more deeply. It is also and above all a time of searching, a period of vocational discernment to understand what the Lord wants from and for the two of them. It is a search made together that has as a condition that mutual trust that the very term engagement

evokes.

A discernment made with courage, in the willingness to go deeper, trying to expose oneself to the other and asking him to do the same. External help in the form of training courses or the presence of a guide may also be useful and important. Discernment calls for the virtue of patience, which we can define as the ability to combine values with time, without expecting everything immediately. Discernment asks for time and asks that this time be valued, lived, verified, -celebrated.

Attitudes to be cultivated are acceptance, as the ability to make room for the other; dialogue and communication, as privileged paths for confrontation. It is not just a matter of talking, which two people in love certainly do not lack, but of communicating in depth, bringing into play intelligence, will, affection and also serious content, including uncomfortable and difficult content. Research also demands appropriate language. For there to be a true search, there needs to be a certain distance and free-

dom between the two, that freedom that allows one to search seriously and possibly also to back off. Distance means respecting each other's boundaries; true love always recognises them, whereas falling in love, by its very nature, eliminates them.

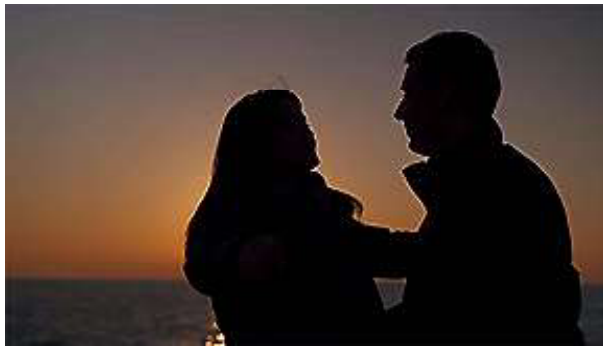
A few banal examples: if the engaged couple already buys a flat together, if there is already a very close relationship between the two respective families, this can create conditions that do not help the search, but rather imprudently anticipates its outcome, with the difficulty of backing out if discernment leads down a different path. We can speak of a search that also concerns the Christian life. There are questions that any pastor could ask engaged couples, especially those who are believers: "What does it mean to be a Christian now that I love you?"; "What changes in our engagement due to the fact that I am a believer?" Answering these questions is a gesture of honesty. In that project and those choices that the two are making, what place will faith and the Christian life have? If they marry in the Lord, they will be asking for God to be the protagonist in their experience of love.

The engagement then becomes a placing oneself in the school of the Lord and his way of loving. Engagement thus becomes a time of grace, a unique opportunity to know and rediscover God. A discovery that must be made together and that leads engaged couples to listen to his word that guides them, judges them, enlightens them. It is a time to start praying together, to invoke God's help and support. Even when the partner does not share the same

experience of faith, these questions should not be evaded because the search also concerns this important dimension of life. Mutual respect, which also concerns the faith or non-faith of one's partner, does not mean that this topic should not be discussed.

Not believing in the God of Jesus Christ does not mean not having a spirituality of values and ideals. Confrontation can be enriching and an opportunity for each person to account for their faith and also to verify the reasons for their distance from God and the Church. The search and discernment is a difficult itinerary. In Christian terms, we can recognise the logic of Easter. The culmination of Christ's love is his death, the gesture of his extreme faithfulness to that Kingdom that he had announced everywhere and to everyone. He had said: 'Greater love has no one than this that he lays down his life for his friends' (Jn 15:13) and now he lives it himself. Love is joy, enthusiasm, ecstasy, but also sacrifice, renunciation, toil, patience.

Death and resurrection are the logic of every day, especially when dialogue is difficult, when we do not understand each other, when after years of searching we have to recognise that this story has to stop, or one of us decides to. But it is also death and resurrection when selfishness enters in, the desire to use the other, the claim to make him in one's own image, the wanting everything and everything now! Love is patient, kind, it is not proud, it does not disrespect, it rejoices and always seeks the truth. Love excuses everything, believes, hopes, endures all things (1 Cor 13:4-7). □



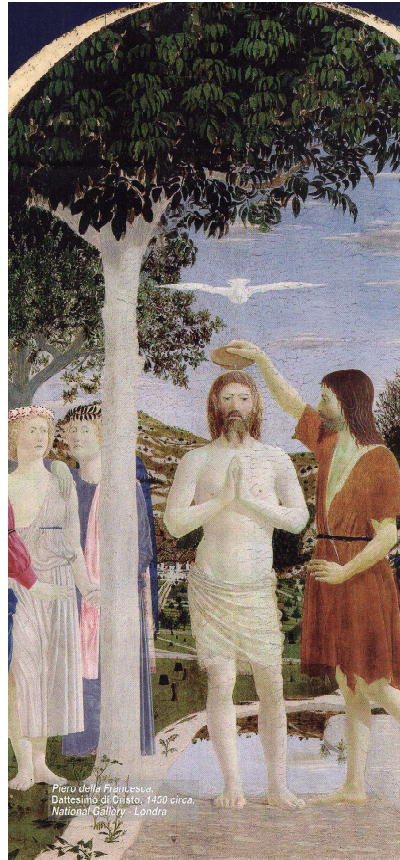
IMMERSED IN THE WATERS OF THE JORDAN

by Chino Biscontin

Through baptism we have taken upon ourselves the responsibility to follow Jesus the obedient Servant, and to reproduce in ourselves his features of goodness.

The feast of the Baptism of the Lord belongs to the celebration of his birth, and helps us to grasp more deeply the value and meaning of the human birth of the Son of God. Rising as a man in the midst of humankind, he immersed himself in the river of our history, which came forth limpid from the hands of the Creator, but was polluted by the immensity of sins committed over the millennia. Pollution that could have led humanity to its ultimate ruin, as the account of the universal Flood suggests. By the will of the Father, the Son who became man, came to be our salvation.

But in order to be our salvation, it was necessary for him to be in full solidarity with us, despite his innocence and our guilt. The Baptism that John invited him to receive was intended for sinners in need of purification and conversion. After an attempted resistance on the part of the Baptist, Jesus asks to receive that very Baptism and does so as a choice of full union with us, well realising that it would entail a dramatic price for him, the innocent one. And he does so because this is the mission that the Father entrusted to him. For Jesus, entering the waters of the Jordan meant immersing himself totally in the Father's love for mankind, and this because he loved the Father infinitely. In a dramatic phrase,



Piero della Francesca, *The Baptism of Jesus*, circa 1450, National Gallery, London

St Paul wrote: "He who knew no sin, God treated him as sin for our sake" (2 Cor 5:21).

In this twofold, total love towards the Father and towards his brothers, Jesus fully realises

in his humanity his being the Son of God. Above him, the heavens open wide, the Spirit of God descended in the form of a dove, and a voice from heaven proclaimed: "This is my Son, the Beloved: in him I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17). The prophecy of Isaiah, which is proclaimed as the first reading in the Mass of the feast, helps us to understand what that sentence means: "This is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am well pleased. I have put my Spirit upon him; he shall bring forth the law to the nations. I, the Lord, have called you for righteousness and taken you by the hand; I have formed you and established you as the covenant of the people and the light of the nations, that you may open the eyes of the blind and bring out from prison captives and from their captivity those who dwell in darkness" (Is 42:1, 6-7).

That solidarity with sinners which demanded a very high price was shown by the fact that, right after his Baptism, Jesus suffered harsh temptations during forty days and forty nights of fasting and solitude in the desert. The tempter, who brings to himself in his power the whole dark mass of evil in the world (he is the prince of darkness), will try in every way to break Jesus' bond of trust with the Father, to make him hijack his being a Son to his own advantage and thus make him abandon his solidarity with his brothers. He will not suc-

Everything has been done so that you may become like suns, that is, a life force for other men. Be perfect lights before that immense light. You will be bathed in its supernatural splendour.

Gregory of Nazianzus (329-390 A.D.)

eed: Jesus will remain adamant in his total abandonment of love to the Father, in his understanding with Him concerning the salvation of men.

Jesus was aware that this first Baptism would result in a second one. During his ministry he would exclaim: "There is a Baptism that I must receive, and how distressed I am, until it is accomplished" (Lk 12:50). It will not be a Baptism of water, but of blood: when the anguish becomes mortal, during his agony in the Garden of Olives, his body will be bathed in a sweat of blood, waiting to pour out, from his heart pierced by the lance, blood and water. The evangelist John interprets that water and blood as the gift given to us of Baptism in the Holy Spirit and the Eucharist. The Baptism we receive in the Holy Spirit is immersion in the Lord Jesus; the Eucharist we receive is sharing in his life as the Son of God. The words that the Father spoke about Jesus he speaks about us: "You are my beloved son! You are my beloved daughter!" □

WAITING ON GOD'S GOOD TIME

by Anastasia Dias

"How young are you today, Anna?" a woman asked, curiously. "I am 84," Anna replied grinning. "And, you've been here your entire life?" "Yes, shortly after my husband died", Anna responded. "And, what have you been doing here all these years, right from your youth?" "I've been waiting for someone; someone who I was assured would see me before I leave this world. I was assured that I won't die before I lay my eyes on him."

On the same day, a couple entered the temple with their new born child. They brought with them an offering of two turtle-doves, the only offering they could afford. Anna glanced at the mother. She squinted her eyes and looked at the babe in her arms, He was one of the most beautiful babies she had ever seen. At one glance, she knew this was him: He was the one!

As quickly as her aging feet could ferry her, she rushed to the mother of the baby, who seemed surprised. At each point, the mother was meeting new people who told her so

many things about her son. It amazed her but also frightened her at times.

Anna told her that it was for her new born son that she had been waiting her entire life, praying earnestly. Her husband had died a few years after their marriage and while she was still young, she dedicated herself to a life of prayer in the temple. And, she had been promised that she would be rewarded for her devotion. The only thing she had to do was to wait.

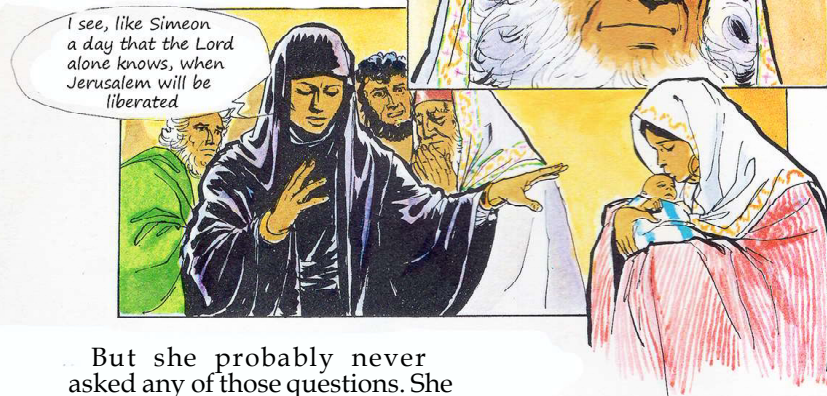
And, Anna waited. She waited for over 60 years of her life to see the baby who would bring redemption to humanity. She waited so that she could lay eyes on him and then breathe her last.

Imagine this story from the perspective of Anna. Her husband had died while she was so young. She may have been heartbroken at the time. But she chose to take refuge in prayer, thus finding her strength in God. And for her faithfulness, God promised her something. But she had to wait. And, she had waited for so long, devoutly.

Surely, there must have been

times when she may have thought of asking, "I'm tired of waiting for so long. Can I see him?" or "Lord, I've been promised but the promise hasn't yet been fulfilled. My health is failing. When will I see him?" or "Lord, are you still there?"

But beware, this child will be the cause of the fall and the rising of many in Israel...and a sword will pierce your own soul... the thoughts of many hearts will be laid bare



But she probably never asked any of those questions. She just went on waiting, faithfully.

This is what Anna, one among the few women prophets mentioned in the New Testament, teaches us, particularly after Jesus' birth.

All of us have periods in our life when we're supposed to wait: before we enter college, before we start working or before we get married. Sometimes, the wait is too long. We tend to get restless and frustrated. "When will I get into college?" or "When will I get my degree?" or "When will I get the job that's right for me?" or "When will I find the right person for me?"

None of the answers to these questions can be found by rushing around, they can only be found in the waiting. The wait

may seem unending and we may get angry. But, like Anna, we need to find hope in the waiting; hope that we will enter a new period in our lives soon. This is the most beautiful thing about the waiting period, for Anna, you and I, there is hope to be found even on the darkest of nights. That hope for Anna was the new born baby Jesus. That hope for you and I may be what we've been dreaming of our entire lives. The only thing you and I can do is wait, wait patiently. And after the waiting is over, we will find something more beautiful than we've ever dreamed of or imagined. For Anna, it was holding baby Jesus in her arms. For you and I, well let's wait long enough and we'll know. □



**FORGOTTEN BY MANY
BUT NOT BY THE SALESIANS**

In the Argentinean Chaco, in the city of Resistencia, a courageous community of educators brings hope and energy

With the confidence and courage of one who knows he has support ‘from on high’, eighty years ago, Father Horacio Ióvine placed a sign in the small room that until then was all the space available for the work in Resistencia, Chaco. It read: ‘*Dirección del Colegio Don Bosco Provisoria*’ (Director of Don Bosco Provisional School).

Together with the Salesians Rolando and Marossi, he began the Salesian presence here with an oratory, catechesis and the Eucharist. Then came the primary school, the boarding school for boys from the interior of the province, the secondary school...

Today, the Salesian work is a religious and educational reference point in the town, where generations of alumni do not hesitate to entrust the education of their sons and daughters to the Salesians. And it is the lay people who run this house, accompanied by the religious community that resides in the nearby village of Fontana.

With the same trust and care, this large community of educators, families and Salesian

Cooperators Salesians run the school, animate the various oratories, engage in vocational training for young people and adults from the neighbourhoods that are further afield, and seek to build bridges of interculturality with the people of Qom. And on 8 December 2021, it celebrated its 80th anniversary.

Qom language workshops

Micaela Romero is 27 years old. She was born in the Qom community of Castelli, in the interior of the province, and came to Resistencia to study and work. She is a teacher of bilingual intercultural indigenous education who got to know the Salesian work through the oratory in her neighbourhood, and since 2019 has been teaching Qom language



Young animators preparing for a Catechetical Programme



Bakery Classes at the centre for professional training

workshops here: “Students work in public enterprises and are in constant contact with people from the community. The courses allow them to interact, to inquire about them, how they feel and to understand the culture a little bit.”

After five years, the secondary school student centre was reopened in 2021. The president is Sebastin Enelli, who greatly appreciates the education received at the school and, although many projects could not be realised because of the pandemic, he is happy with what the centre has achieved: “We were only three students and today we are 100. We planted trees around the school, we organised tournaments to help set up the school laboratory, we helped to improve the canteen. And we have many other projects.”

A new building for the Intercultural Vocational Training Centre was recently opened so that more young people can learn a useful trade for their future, build valuable relationships and improve their quality of life.

The new centre today responds

to a growing need in the country for work and training for work. It is estimated that there are more than a million young people in the country who are neither studying nor working. And of this group, 700,000 young people are not only not studying or working, but not even looking for a job.

The modern structure of the Salesian Intercultural Vocational Training Centre (CFPIS) in Resistencia, built thanks to the contribution of the Swiss “*Papalin*” Foundation and the NGO “*Don Bosco Jugendhilfe Weltweit*,” also Swiss, was inaugurated and blessed on 6 April, and will allow five vocational courses to be offered.

The courses, which will last four months, will be led by members of the Qom community, one of the country’s aboriginal ethnic groups, and will include workshops in ceramics, basket making, and learning wind, string and other musical instruments.

Four Oratories

The Salesian work animates four oratories located at different



kids at a handball session



Il Chaco is a province of Argentina whose capital is Resistencia. In the North West of the region is a zone called El Impenetrable (Impenetrable)

'ends' of the city. There, young people and adults work together every Saturday to provide a space for education and



Scouts standing at a flag hoisting ceremony before their games in the afternoon

catechesis for hundreds of children. "One is in the Don Bosco neighbourhood. In 2009, after a youth mission, the oratory was born in the La Rubita neighbourhood, where today the chapel of San Juan Pablo II is located. In 2014, we started going to the Toba neighbourhood, to the school run by indigenous people, and another oratory was born there. And the latest one is Ceferino, in the settlement of Zampa, where the Salesian Cooperators are promoting the construction of a chapel, and have already obtained a piece of land," explains the general director of the work, Antonio Pedone. The Cooperators are a very important support for this work, which became even more important during the solidarity activities they carried out during the pandemic period.

Every Saturday afternoon, a group of boys and girls meet in the Don Bosco courtyard to try to pass on to other boys and girls some of the love and faith they have learnt here. One of them is Morena, 16, from the Vida group: "Here I can meet with my friends and feel at home and protected, with people who can advise and accompany me. And that is what has happened to many young people who have passed through this playground, who were trained here and managed to grow in their faith. They grew up here, it was their home, it was their school. They spent their lives here. And now they have spread their wings. □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST. WILLIAM OF BOURGES (January 10)

SPIRITUAL NATURE OF PERSONS

Money can buy a lot of things in this world but it cannot buy any of the things that really matter. You could spend a huge sum and purchase a dream car or a dream house but you cannot buy happiness. Your dream car or dream house will make you happy but only for so long. Then what? You are left unfulfilled. A newer, better version comes on the market, and suddenly, you're so called 'dream' house or car changes, and you begin to desire the newer one.

Money is something wonderful and yet so addictive. You can never seem to have enough of it. The more you have the more you want. The less you have, the more you desire it. This is the malaise of our society. Money is so important to all of us that consciously or unconsciously, it is somehow on our mind. But this is not a malaise that is afflicting us today; it has been in effect ever since the birth of economics. Nevertheless, there are so many people, past and present, who manage to live with such disinterest towards money that it amazes us. Such people are often idolized because



of their detachment and they tend to, depending on how they choose to market themselves, attract people to them and get people to follow their lifestyle.

This reveals something interesting about human nature – though we are so caught up with worldly affairs, we look forward to transcending them. This desire to transcend beyond the things of this world arises from the reason for our creation – we are created "to serve and love God and to offer all creation back to him" (CCC 358). This is the theological

goal of our very existence. In basic catechism, we were told that we exist to know God, love God and serve God. This is our fundamental purpose. Just as the fundamental purpose of a thing, say for example, a hammer, is to accomplish a task for which it is made, in this case, hammer nails or break up something solid like a wall or some wood, so also we are called to perform spiritual functions in relation to God. A hammer can be used for other things as well but its reason for existing is to fulfil its designated task. Similarly, we are multifaceted persons but above all, we are called to an intimate relationship with God that requires us to relate well with others around us including nature.

Very often, when we think of spirituality, we assume that it is merely a two-channel river – it flows between God and us and between other human beings and us. We forget another very important channel – Nature. Ever since, Pope Francis wrote the encyclical *Laudato si* there has been a shift in the focus of spirituality. We have become more aware that true spirituality encompasses all creation. This is not something new in Catholic faith. It has been a part of tradition but over the years, its importance has steadily decreased.

SPIRITUAL LIFE OF WILLIAM

William was born into a wealthy, aristocratic family near Nevers, France in the year 1140. He was one of 8 children. His father wanted him to take up arms and become an honourable commander but William felt that the military was not his place. His

maternal uncle, Pierre, served as the Archdeacon of Soissons and he took an interest in William's education.

In those years, the best education was given by monks and priests. They were sought after as educators especially for the rich. Hence, many saints of those times discovered their vocation while receiving education from priests. Even till today, priests and religious are engaged in the field of education. However, the system has become very formal and a lot of secular influence has crept into it so much so that education has become something of a business. Within Catholic schools, it is sometimes difficult to find a sizable number of Catholics. Even if there are a number, very few from among them go on to discover a vocation to the priesthood or to religious life.

As William grew up, he realized that money did not fascinate him. He felt attracted to a life of solitude. Hence, upon finishing his education, he decided to join the monastery of Grandmont. He lived a life of great austerity and self-abnegation. These sacrifices helped him focus his spiritual energies and develop a stronger relationship with God. After a few years, a conflict arose in the monastery, among the monks, and William was disturbed. He couldn't understand how people who were devoted to a spiritual way of living could argue over petty, worldly matters. Hence, he left them and went to join the Cistercian monks, who were known to be very austere and who spent their lives mostly in silence.

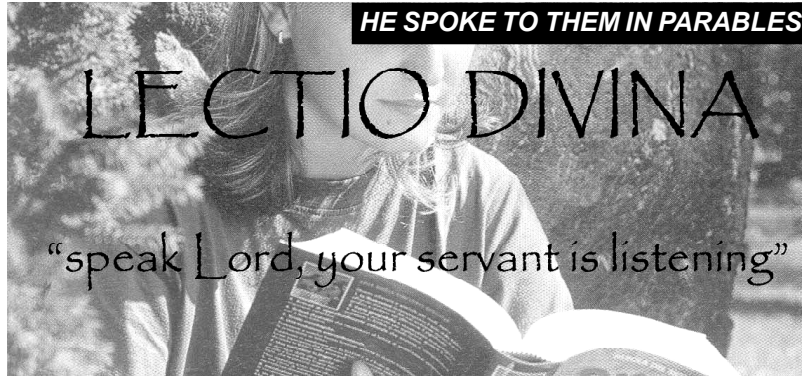
The Cistercian lifestyle suited William well and he made great progress in spirituality. After a few years, he was appointed Prior of the monastery. William had developed a habit of spending hours before the Blessed Sacrament. He would often be found kneeling before the Lord, contemplating the Divine Presence in that little white host. News of his holiness spread around the town and the priests of the diocese elected him as their bishop. While most people would rejoice at being appointed Bishop, William was distraught. The life of a Bishop required him to be in public often and to carry out many administrative duties. This would mean less time for prayer and contemplation before the Blessed Sacrament and no possibility of silence. It was not until he was forced by his superiors, including Pope Innocent III, that he took up the bishopric. Even after being consecrated a bishop, William continued to live frugally and practice austerity. He ate no meat and always wore a hair shirt under his clothes.

Being a bishop brings a certain amount of dignity and honour but William had none of it. He chose to continue living, as far as possible, like a monk. His preoccupation as a bishop was to serve the people especially the poor. It is said that poor and sick people would often come to see him and he would counsel them and help them in whatever way he could. He set aside time to visit prisons and work with the jailors, bringing to them the Good News of Christ. He was also very protective of the priests of his diocese. Whenever they were in

distress or faced problems, he was there to assist and support them. Sometimes, there would be clashes with the government, when attempts were made to impose certain things or demand certain services from the priests. William would boldly side with the priests and reason with the King. All these things contributed to developing the cult of William. He came to be seen as a saint.

Till the end of his life, he was committed to the Christian mission. He always and everywhere tried to evangelize and spread the Good News. While he was preparing to preach a mission against the Albigensians – a heretical sect, he died while kneeling at the altar in prayer. In his will, he mentioned that he wanted to be buried with his hair shirt and with ashes. William's humility and self-abnegation were noticeable not just in life but in death as well. He showed no interest at all in wealth even when he became bishop. All the money was directed to helping the poor, sick and needy and building up Churches so that people could gather and pray. For William, spiritual things had far greater value than worldly things. He was convinced of this in life and gave witness to it in death as well. Pope Honorius III canonized him on 17 May 1218.

Legends say that he performed 18 miracles while he was alive and another 18 when people invoked his intercession after death. It is not surprising that William was canonized so soon after his death – it took barely 10 years. □ (Cl. Ian Pinto, sdb)



THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

by Carlo Broccardo

It seems that it is not enough to pray a lot, it depends on the heart from which the prayer is initiated. The prayer that despises others is heard by no one.

Sometime ago, we read the parable of the widow and the judge, the one who finally granted her request because he could no longer stand her insistent prayer. Immediately afterwards, in the gospel according to Luke, there is the parable of the Pharisee and the publican in the temple. This too, like the previous one, has a sentence at the beginning that decisively orients its interpretation: “He told this parable for some who had the intimate presumption of being righteous and despised others.” The character of the Pharisee, as Jesus describes it, fits this description perfectly.

From a historical point of view, we know that the Pharisees were a kind of religious movement within ancient Jewish society; their most important characteristic was that they were not content to live the faith more or less; today we would say that

they were committed laymen to whom it was not enough to attend the liturgy in the synagogue every Saturday. They strove to live all the precepts of God’s law to which they added many traditions such as fasting, daily prayer and generous charity. The Pharisee in the parable, for example, pays the tithe of everything he earns (here it is 10%) and fasts twice a week. Let us not judge him badly! These are positive, good deeds.

Before proceeding, I only open a parenthesis that I will immediately close. Perhaps we should translate the first verse of our passage differently; the Greek verb used by Luke does not so much mean ‘to have intimate conceit,’ but rather ‘to have the intimate conviction.’ Our Pharisee, in other words, is neither conceited nor hypocritical; he is one who really does what he says. He is truly pious and generous. Except

that he has a very serious problem: he exalts himself (and this is already not the best attitude) in an exaggerated way (honestly, who among us would dare to make such a prayer?); and then, alongside the words with which he exalts himself, there are those with which he despises others. And this is serious.

When he speaks of the publican, for example, he is not wrong in saying that he is a sinner. We know historically that publicans, who were tax collectors, normally demanded more than their due and kept the rest for themselves. What is more, the publican in the parable admits it: I am a sinner! Even his demeanor says so: he stands at a distance (like Peter, when he says to Jesus: “Get away from me, for I am a sinner”, in Lk 5:8), he does not even dare to raise his eyes, he beats his breast in repentance and invokes God’s help.

This last statement is interesting, because it highlights a major difference between the two characters: the Pharisee declared himself righteous (self-forgiveness), the publican on the other hand invoked God’s forgiveness, asked for his help (‘have mercy on me’).



When we hear this parable, it is usually associated with a page from the book of Sirach that says: “The prayer of the poor man traverses the clouds, nor is quiet until it has come; it does not cease until the Most High has intervened” (Sir 35:32). The prayer of the humble, says our parable, goes straight to the heart of God: the repentant publican returns home forgiven. Whereas the prayer of those who despise others goes nowhere, so much so that the Pharisee returns home still a sinner. Apparently, it is not enough to pray a lot to be heard; it also depends on the heart from which the prayer that is directed to God commences. □

Quiet Spaces

THE MOTHER WHO TREASURES AND PONDERERS

Pope Francis' homily (edited) on the Solemnity of the Mother of God and the World day of Peace, on Saturday, January 1, 2022

The shepherds found “Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger” (Lk 2:16). For the shepherds, the manger was a joyful sign: it was the confirmation of the message they had heard from the angel (cf. v. 12), the place where they found the Saviour. It is also the proof of God’s closeness to them, for he was born in a manger, an object they know well, as a sign of his closeness and familiarity. The manger is also a joyful sign for us. Jesus touches our hearts by being born in littleness and poverty; he fills us with love, not fear. For that is how God comes: not on a fast track, and lacking even a cradle! That is what is beautiful about seeing him there, laid in a manger.

She had to endure “the scandal of the manger”. She too, long before the shepherds, had received the message of an angel, who spoke to her solemnly about the throne of David: “You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David” (Lk 1:31-32). And now, Mary has to lay him in a trough for animals. How can she hold together the throne of a king and the lowly manger? What can be more painful for a mother than to see her child suffering poverty? She does not complain, but keeps silent. Rather than complain: *For her part*, the Gospel tells us, Mary “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (cf. Lk 2:19).

That is not what the shepherds and the people do. The shepherds tell everyone about what they had seen: the angel that appeared in the heart of the night, and his words concerning the Child. And the people, upon hearing these things, are amazed (cf. v. 18). Words and amazement. Mary, instead, is pensive; she keeps all these things, pondering them in her heart. From the quiet of Nazareth and from the triumphant promises received by the Angel – the beginnings – Mary now finds herself in the dark stable of Bethlehem.

Let us learn from the Mother of God how to have that same attitude: to *keep* and to *ponder*. Because we may well have to endure certain “scandals of the manger”. We hope that everything will be all right and then, like a bolt from the blue, an unexpected problem arises. Our expectations clash painfully with reality. That can also happen in the life of faith, when the joy of the Gospel is put to the test in troubling situations. Today the Mother of God teaches us to draw profit from this clash. She shows us that it is necessary: it is the narrow path to achieve the goal, the cross, without which there can be no resurrection. Like the pangs of childbirth, it begets a more mature faith.

I ask, brothers and sisters, how do we make this passage, how do we surmount this clash between the ideal and the real? By doing exactly what Mary did: by keeping and by pondering. First, Mary “keeps”, that

is she holds on to what happens; she does not forget or reject it. She keeps in her heart everything that she saw and heard. That is what Mary does. She does not pick and choose; she *keeps*. She accepts life as it comes, without trying to camouflage or embellish it; she keeps those things in her heart.

Then, Mary’s second attitude is about how she *keeps*: she keeps and she *ponders*. The Gospel speaks of Mary “bringing together”, comparing, her different experiences and finding the hidden threads that connect them. In her heart, in her prayer, she does exactly that: she binds together the beautiful things and the unpleasant things. She does not keep them apart, but brings them together. She sees the divine Child frail and shivering, and she accepts the wondrous divine interplay between grandeur and littleness. Mary *keeps* and *ponders*.

This inclusive way of seeing things, which transcends tensions by “keeping” and “pondering”, is the way of mothers, who, in moments of tension, do not divide, they *keep*, and in this way enable life to grow. It is the way so many mothers embrace the problems of their children. Even amid their tears, they are able to inspire hope. Theirs is a gaze that is conscious and realistic, but at the same time offering, beyond the pain and the problems, a bigger picture, one of care and love that gives birth to new hope. That is what mothers do: they know how to overcome obstacles and disagreements, and to instill peace. We need such people, capable of weaving the threads of communion in place of the barbed wire of conflict and division. Mothers know how to do this.

The New Year begins under the sign of the Holy Mother of God, under the sign of the Mother. A mother’s gaze is the path to rebirth and growth. We need mothers, women who look at the world not to exploit it, but so that it can have life. And the Church is a Mother, this is what makes the Church feminine. For this reason, we cannot find a place for women in the Church without allowing the heart of the Woman and Mother to shine. This is the place of women in the Church, the great place, from which other places, more concrete and less important, are derived.

At the beginning of the New Year, then, let us place ourselves under the protection of this woman, the Mother of God, who is also our mother. May she help us to keep and ponder all things, unafraid of trials and with the joyful certainty that the Lord is faithful and can transform every cross into a resurrection. Today too, let us call upon her as did the People of God at Ephesus. Let us stand and, facing Our Lady as did the people of God in Ephesus, let us together repeat three times her title of Mother of God: “Holy Mother of God, Holy Mother of God, Holy Mother of God”! Amen. □

THE LAST WAIT

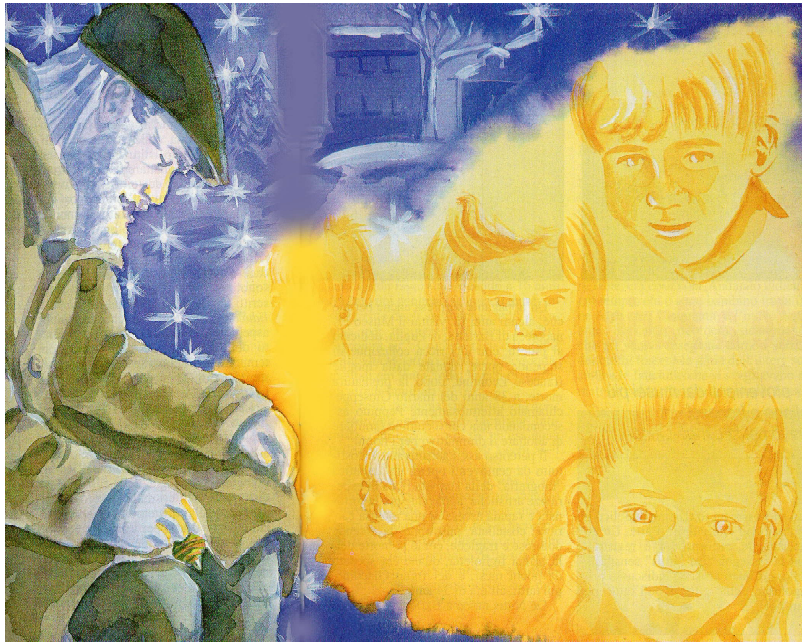
By Pierluigi Menato, Tr. Ian Douulton, sdb

The old man begging for alms sat, as usual, on a small kerbstone, clutching the lapel of his tattered coat around his neck, for although the sun shone, drawing shimmers and gleams from the last of the fallen snow, he felt himself shivering like an autumn leaf about to fall off the branch.

There was absolutely no one on the high street, the only one that had been cleared of snow. The village rested in that somnolent stillness. The only things alive: birds in search of food and him, a poor old man, waiting for the cheerful swarm of children to come out of the school, and bring him some bread and some

money, but like bread and money, a tiny ray of light and a smile just enough to get him through the day.

He had become especially fond of a small group of them, so much so that by now he knew how to distinguish from the other footsteps that pattered by; that of Mirella, a slight little girl, her eyes so big they looked like two pearls of clear light. He knew Peter's red shorts, Franco's sweet voice, Juliana's impertinent nose and Gisella's blond tresses (of fine gold, perhaps); he knew everyone's cascading laughter, but more than all this he was captivated by the tenderness of their hearts.



The heart of children is the sunshine of the day, which can always be seen and does not leave behind the shadow of dark thoughts like the hearts of men, who walk fast, without glancing your way, or seeing you, unaware that you might be suffering, or if you're crying, or hungry, and of course, they never have anything to give you.

But the children! Oh, they always had a smile for him. They would show him their fresh faces; they looked out for him, calling him 'grandpa' and stopping on the high street, to tell him something, to ask him for something, maybe a fairy tale, maybe one of those tiny spinning tops, white or red and green striped, that he made for them, out of bits of wood he got as alms. He made it for them in exchange for their gifts of bread, a little money and a lot of cheer.

He loved them very much: they were the only light in his melancholic days, that melancholy that comes at sunset stirring up that vivid feeling of something that would soon be gone forever. He often thought of them, and kept in his big pockets, many little things for his favourites: coloured figurines, shiny buttons, some old nibs, and he was happy when he could satisfy their requests.

He had become their great friend, and even their mothers would not reproach them for lingering so long on the road because of him. He had, for some time, got into the habit of accompanying them until each had reached his or her own home, and the mothers were grateful to him, rewarding him generously

for his kindness.

So, that day he waited! But that day the hours seemed eternal! He tried to say the Rosary. One by one, the "Hail Marys" came out, all scented with joy, but his mind was far away. He reproached himself; he wanted to concentrate as usual; he could not. They just weren't coming!

And yes, he had invented, as only poets can, a story for Giuliana, who had asked him for so long: a wonderful story in which every flower had a gem in its heart, and the animals sang, and a little foundling, who had suffered for so many years, suddenly found himself in the king's house, with a soft blue velvet mantle on his shoulders all decked with silver embroidery woven with threads of moonshine.

They weren't coming, how come?

Ah! Perhaps that brat Pete had been in some real mischief and had been detained, and the little sisters and Franco, who loved him so much, had been waiting for him!

Of course, it had to be like that! "Ah! Pete! Pete! You must listen to me!"

"I had brought you a whistle to make that nightingale sound again; look how beautiful it is! I polished it so much, before I went out, so that that shines so brightly and pleases you; but now, I won't give it to you!"

He would be relentless.

He spoke loudly as if the children were there listening to him.

"Punish them, you must, these naughty kids!"

Words! He knew it would be

impossible. It would have been enough for the child to stand up close at his knees and say to him between two hugs:

"You're the most handsome old man I know. You do not have a dirty beard like the other poor people. Yours is so white and soft, it resembles my grandfather's. Tell me, Francesco, are you a grandfather?"

"I was, Pete, I was. Now, unfortunately, I am not anymore! But I will be yours, I will be yours, if you want."

"Of course, we want!"

That, they would have said; and it would have been enough for every reproach to fall away, and for him to feel all softened up and as if he still had his grandson between at knees, as he once did.

He stopped talking to himself.

Their delay worried him, made him anxious, and he felt something bitter surging up, rising to his throat, to take away the serenity of that daily waiting.

Poor Francesco! You're so old now (how old? eighty?) that you don't know how to count the years that weigh on your shoulders, nor the days of the week, and because you've been sick for a few days, you've lost track of time, so you don't know that today is a holiday, and although the beautiful day has invited you to go out (not very wise! Don't you feel that the breathlessness has not yet left you?) they will not pass by today, and you will not feel the warmth of their little hands, which you often playfully held in the brown, wrinkled hollow of your own, giving you the sensation of feeling, trembling in them, a little life, a rosy clump of azalea in a

clod of damp, black earth.

The white-capped pines of "Villa Teresa" next door shake their plumes and seem to say: "No, no, you won't see them today!"

The cold of the oncoming twilight chilled his limbs; soon it would be night. He should really get home. He should get back to the old attic where there would be no one waiting for him and where, this time, he had nothing to offer.

He tried to get up.

He could not!

Something held him back and he didn't know which house it was!

A slight numbness in his legs gives him the sensation of a breath that refreshed him, and so he hardly felt the cold as before, as the tepid wave swirled around him.

His ears buzzed; it seemed to him like the buzzing of butterfly wings and he closed his eyes.

His head nodded.

He fell asleep!

It had turned evening and there were only twinkling stars in the sky: all those enclosed in the story of Giuliana and many others, and he waited even in his sleep for the love of those little hearts which seemed to him like the colours of the day, and he did not know that the coats of his little friends were now only those in his dreams.

He murmured, "A penny for the love of God!"

Above gusts of wind, twined by invisible threads (those of the miracle) descended from the sky, on his coat shimmered like all those stars.

"How beautiful! Thank you,

my God!" He counted them, he divided them up. With them he will not be hungry, he would not be cold any more.

The light wind now smelt of April, and April is joyful, and full of song as soft as Franco's little voice, as bright as Mirella's large eyes.

How beautiful it all is!

His heart beat slowly, slowly' he had finished fretting anxiously about tomorrow.

Listen: in his sleep he heard a tiny footstep coming to him on

the great silent road.

The footstep stopped.

He wanted to open his eyes to see: it can only be a child! But the eyes refused, and when, after a supreme effort, they finally opened... he was in the King's palace, and he had on his shoulders the mantle of blue velvet with silver embroidery, like the little derelict in his story.

Angels came singing towards him: they, who in the night had poured all the light of Heaven into his little kind heart. □

The Holy Tramp

Andrea Panont

Our church was located in a very busy area of the city. With the usual frequenters of the parish, there also lingered people more or less faithful and more or less aware of the sacredness of the place.

In any case, they found, if nothing else, a bench to lie down on and pass the hangover or the drug-induced stupor.

One day a smelly tramp entered the church and sat in the last pew. The sacristan, passing by, smelt the bad odour and politely invited the bum to leave; in response, the tramp was silent.

Using harsher vocabulary, the sacristan invited him out:

"Get out," he whispered loudly: "Don't you see, you can't hang around here? You're stinking! Get out!"

And he, in response, he stood up quietly and silently, as if he had not heard a thing.

For the third time the sacristan, raised his voice and peremptorily ordered him: "Get out! You stink! This is a sacred place!"

The tramp, with a faraway look on his face calmly replied:

"I too am sacred!"

Jesus could easily have smelt the true humility of those who thought they had to be among the first. □



FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 36

by Michele Molineris

178. Don Bosco's sacristan (1869)

In 1869, Don Bosco was riding in a second-class railroad coach. Soon, a well-dressed fellow passenger began to talk disparagingly of the archbishop of Turin, of Marquis Fassati, and of many charitable institutions, singling out the Cottolengo Institute. Finally, he also spoke most abusively of Don Bosco, alleging that he had squandered vast amounts of money on a church instead of giving it to the poor. Don Bosco kept quiet throughout, but a lady who had her little son with her said to that man: "I imagine that you must have given Don Bosco a great deal of money to be so indignant at his wasting it on a church."

"What!" the man replied. "Me give money to Don Bosco? I'd sooner throw it away."

"Then why complain?" the lady retorted. A Jew not personally acquainted with Don Bosco, but known by him, took up his defence, declaring that Don Bosco was an honest man and that he too had personally contributed fifty lire toward his church.

Nettled by such opposition, the slanderer turned against the Oratory itself in such shameless language that the good woman covered her child's head with her shawl, shielding his ears with her hands.

"What are you doing?" the man exclaimed. "Aren't you afraid of smothering him?"

"It's better than letting him hear such talk as yours!" the woman

replied.

"So, that's it!" the main exclaimed, exploding into coarse laughter. "People educated by priests are afraid of everything! Why are you so finicky? After all, these words are commonplace."

And he kept up his guffaws and coarseness, pitying the lady's ingenuousness, as he called it.

The good woman turned red with embarrassment. Don Bosco, who had kept silent till then, came to her defence.

"Sir," he said, "it is time to put an end to all this." "Whom are you talking to?" "To you. Watch your language, especially in the presence of ladies." "I don't intend to take lessons from you!" "Like it or not, what I said stands." "Do you think I can't make you swallow your words?" "I am not afraid of you or a hundred like you!" "You're not, eh?" "Right! I am not afraid because you are neither a scoundrel nor a good-for-nothing. You come from a good family, have a place in society, and are well-educated. I know we can settle this matter peacefully."

The man's jaw fell at such an unexpected answer. "So, you know me?" he asked less aggressively.

"I certainly do. You are Commendatore B..."

He was a business agent of Marquis Fassati of whom he had just spoken most disparagingly.

Knowing himself bested by an unknown priest and most anxious to regain the upper hand, he went on: "That sly fox, Don Bosco, is quite good at hooking people in. He gets money from them to feed his boys and then buys fields and vineyards at Castelnuovo for his brothers who are already well off and can afford a coach and horses."

"I'm sorry to contradict you, sir, but you are badly misinformed. Don Bosco has no brothers." "I know what I'm talking about." "I tell you that Don Bosco has no brothers and so they cannot have a coach and horses. If you go to Castelnuovo, everyone will tell you that Don Bosco has nephews who are farmers as their father was. But talking about things you do not know you expose yourself to being called a liar. Furthermore, do you think it wise to speak ill publicly to someone who could do you some harm? Do you think Marquis Fassati would be happy with what you said about him?" "Well, we were only talking..." "Yes, but you were maligning a man well known for his charities. Aren't you afraid that someone one report what you said about him? Then what would happen to your job?"

"I don't think that anyone here would do that. Would you?" "Suppose I did?" "I can't believe that!" "Still, I promise you that if I find out you have again indulged in this kind of talk, I shall promptly inform the marquis! I am warning you. I'll do just that!" "I promise I'll never again say such things," the man stammered, "but who are you?" "I am Don Bosco's sacristan!"

The man was silenced and his fellow passengers could not help smiling at his embarrassment.

When Don Bosco arrived at his destination, he got off the train and was at once surrounded by several people who were waiting for him. The commendatore too had alighted. Hearing those people greet Don Bosco by name, he approached him.

"Are you Don Bosco?" "Yes!"

"Please forgive me..." "Listen," Don Bosco soberly replied. "Since you felt free to malign upright men in the presence of other people, I think I can inform them privately of what you so freely said publicly against them." "Please don't...I'd be ruined." "I make no promises. We must be fair and square."

The man kept pleading, but Don Bosco firmly refused to commit himself, so that the man withdrew in utter mortification.

And he left him with that sword of Damocles, which in his intentions were to serve more than any other means to keep him from the temptation to commit similar indiscretions again in the future (from EBM IX, 285-288).

180. Don Bosco doesn't give up (1869)

Towards the end of August 1869, Cesare Bardi, who lived with his guardian, on the Ponte Mosca, Casa Crida, number 6, not far from the parish church of Saints Simon and Jude, was nearing the end of his life, and no thought was given to calling the priest to administer the last sacraments, so as not to spread news among the neighbours that would undoubtedly be unwelcome to the people of the city!

Yet word of the seriousness of the poor young man's illness had spread, and the parish priest had already tried twice to approach him, but both times he had been rebuffed. Fortunately, a good woman, a fruit seller in the nearby market, having learned of the sick man's condition in the pharmacy, ran to the Oratory to let Don Bosco know that one of his former pupils from Lanzo was *in extremis* and did not want a priest to be called.

Don Bosco immediately went and knocked on his door, and the servant, who had seen him several times at Lanzo, recognised him and understood the reason for the visit. Although he indicated with his hand that the situation was a bit difficult, he let him in and called his master. The latter waited a little while; finally, he appeared and, with cold casualness, asked him the reason for the visit.

"I came to see the sick young man." "He's asleep and should not be aroused!" "Then I will wait..."

The reply was not welcome. Don Bosco realised this, but convinced that it was necessary to show determination, he did not change his mind. Then the guardian told him he was going to see if Caesar was asleep, and left him all alone for more than an hour. Finally, the lady appeared to tell him that Caesar was still asleep, so it was useless to wait, especially as the doctors had forbidden any visit, because just a little emotion and even two words could hurt him.

"Listen," he said, "Caesar was entrusted to us in the Lanzo boarding school, which is under my direction; I therefore have some reason to see him, all the more so since Caesar and I already had confidential relations, more than you can imagine; we have very important business and he certainly wants to see me, and it is necessary that I see him for a moment, and I cannot leave without seeing him..."

"Oh, that then, it seems to me..."

"I repeat... I am sure Caesar wants to see me, so I must wait; and if you forbid it, I could also appeal to the authorities." "And you would dare commit such an arrogance?" "I don't want to sound high-handed, but you well under-

stand that your refusal would not remain hidden... it would be spoken of... it would be said that Don Bosco went to see a friend of his, one of his pupils who was dying, and he was forbidden to approach him, and certainly such publicity would not bode well for the family." "But the doctor has forbidden it!" "Well then, allow me to go and see him for myself, if you can't or won't take me!... I'll go from room to room to find him." "If that's the case, to make no scenes... I'll go and see if he's woken up."

And she left. After talking to her husband, and also because of the fear that the servant, who was a good Christian, had put into their hearts. She returned and invited Don Bosco to enter the sick man's room, with the recommendation not to let him speak.

As soon as the poor young man saw Don Bosco, he got up and threw his arms around his neck exclaiming: "Thank you, Don Bosco, thank you!... thank you for coming to see me... I want to make my confession!" "Please," Don Bosco said to the bystanders, "leave me alone with him for a moment for a while!" It was a most moving scene. The young man made his confession and was beaming with joy; he also wanted to nail an image of Our Lady on the wall, which he never stopped gazing at with love.

When Don Bosco left, he was received with every courtesy; they even offered him some vermouth, which he accepted, as if there had been no misunderstanding. The young man died within two or three weeks, serene and tranquil, although his relatives did not think of allowing him to receive either Viaticum or Holy Oil. (M.B., X, 13).



DON BOSCO, A MARIAN EDUCATOR

by Aldo Girauda

Don Bosco, like all the saints of the Church, lived an intense Marian piety and considered devotion to Mary one of the spiritual cornerstones in the life of Christians. What are the aspects that qualify and characterise the Marian devotion lived and propagated by Don Bosco? What reflections can they have on our lives?

Don Bosco's Marian formation

Mary was present in Don Bosco's life from his earliest years. Born the day after the feast of the Assumption in 1815, he was educated by his mother Margaret in that tender and spontaneous love, typical of popular devotion, towards this Mother, Consoler and support of the Christian people. The woman "of majestic appearance, clothed in a mantle, glittering all over,"¹ described by him when he recounts the dream he had when he was nine years old, in which his mission as educator and pastor of the young was foretold, is Our Lady depicted according to the traditional representation common in those days. Of her Don Bosco emphasises above all the loving

and solicitous motherhood and her powerful intercession with God. This aspect was the one most suited to his soul, which would accompany him until his last breath.

In his *Memoirs*, he recalls many aspects and devotions typical of popular piety: the family rosary, the Angelus three times a day, novenas and triduums, invocations and short prayer phrases, consecrations, visits to altars and sanc-



Don Bosco always loved to point out the presence of Mary in his life

tuaries and Marian feasts (Her Motherhood, the Name of Mary, Our Lady of the Rosary, Our Lady of Sorrows, Our Lady of Consolation, the Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of Graces, etc.).

In the first book he published, *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo* (1844), in which he sketched the spiritual figure of his seminary companion and friend who died at a young age, Don Bosco recounts the traits that characterised the spiritual sensitivity and devotion of that good seminarian.

Louis, “when he spoke of Our Lady, he was filled with tenderness, and after having recounted or having heard of some grace granted by Our Lady in favour of the body, at the end of it all his face would blush, and sometimes he would even break into tears and exclaim: “If Mary so favours this miserable body, how many favours will she grant for the souls of those who invoke her?”²

And he tells us that in his final illness, Louis was consoled by the vision of Mary taking him by the hand: “Oh, if men could be persuaded of the joy that being a devotee of Mary brings at the point of death, they would all be competing to find new ways of offering her special honour. She will be the one who, with her Son in her arms, form our defence against the enemy of our souls at the last hour. Even if hell arms itself against us, with Mary in our defence, the victory will be ours. Beware, however, of being of those who, in order to recite a few prayers to Mary, to offer her a few mortifications, believe they are protected by her, while they lead a life that is entirely free and unruly.”³

This above all is the defining aspect of Marian piety that the young Don Bosco formed in meditating on the Marian writings of St Alphonsus: true devotion to Mary guarantees the most powerful protection one can have in life and in death.

He would also write this in *the Companion of Youth* in 1847: “If you are her devotees, besides filling you with blessings in this world, you will have paradise in the next life.”⁴

It was a trait most dear to the culture, tastes and ‘piety’ of the time. However, there is, digging deep into Don Bosco’s spiritual physiognomy, a dimension that goes beyond the historical and cultural sensitivities of popular piety and, precisely for this reason, can offer us inner nourishment and stimulus, if necessary, for a critical revision of our Marian piety.

Mary, an educational model

In the booklet *The month of May* dedicated to Mary Most Holy Immaculate for popular use (1858), Don Bosco explicitly and insistently framed Marian devotion in a context of a concrete and serious commitment to a Christian life lived with fervour and love.

“Three things to be practiced throughout the month:

1. To do all we can not to commit any sin during this month: let it be all consecrated to Mary.

2. To take great care to fulfil the spiritual and temporal duties of our state.

3. To invite our relatives and friends and all those who depend on us to take part in the practices of piety carried out in honour of Mary during this month.”⁵

It is significant that the thirty-

one *nosegays*, one for each day of the month of May, suggested in the booklet, consist essentially of practical exercises to nourish union with God, spiritual fervour and the exercise of virtues in the course of daily living.⁶

In the remainder of the book, Don Bosco provides a series of readings or small daily meditations, which are not about - as one would expect the “glories of Mary” - but present a motivating synthesis of the truths that must nourish and illuminate the life of the Christian: God the Creator - Soul - Redemption - Church - the Head of the Church - Pastors - Faith - Sacraments - Dignity of the Christian - Preciousness of time - Presence of God - End of man - Salvation of the soul - Sin - Death - Particular judgement - Universal - judgement - Penalties of hell - Mercy of God - Confession - the Confessor - Mass - Communion - Sin of dishonesty - Virtue of purity - Human respect - Paradise.

These were common themes in the spiritual literature and preaching of the time (which was concerned with “instructing” and catechising); however, they were taken up by Don Bosco with the emphases that characterised his spiritual pedagogy. The thing that seemed to preoccupy him most was the urgency of teaching the young and the people that the celebration of the month of Mary, that true Marian devotion, was and is an effective way to bring about a continuous conversion, a growth in Christian commitment, simultaneously on the moral and spiritual level and in daily duties: “May she obtain for us from Jesus her Divine Son the grace of being able to know, love and serve God

in this life and then one day go to enjoy Him eternally in Heaven.”⁷

The use of these expressions, which in the Catechism indicated man’s ultimate goal, and are quoted here to summarise and finalise Marian devotion, seems significant to me.

The other theme, inherited from an entire devotional tradition, is the connection between Marian devotion and eternal salvation: “Since the most beautiful adornment of Christianity is the Mother of the Saviour, Mary Most Holy, so I turn to You, O most clement Virgin Mary, I am sure to acquire the grace of God, the right to Paradise, to regain, in short, my lost dignity, if You will pray for me: Mary Help of Christians, pray for us.”⁸

Don Bosco is convinced that Mary intervenes as a most powerful advocate and mediator with God to help us achieve that lost dignity of sons, that “image and likeness” of God in man that our forefathers compromised with their sin, for themselves and their descendants. Therefore, recovering, through insertion in Christ the Saviour, a profound way of communicating with God capable of regenerating us into new men. In this perspective, one understands the whole of its educational mission and formative model. □

¹ G. Bosco, *Memorie dell’Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*. Introduzione, note e testo critico a cura di A. da Silva Ferreira, Roma, LAS 1991, I, 154-155.

² G. Bosco, *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo morto nel seminario di Chieri, ammirato da tutti per le sue singolari virtù [1844]*, in [A. Caviglia,] *Opere e scritti*, vol. V, Torino 1965, p. 40.

³ *Ivi*, p. 55.

⁴ G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto per la pratica de’ suoi doveri negli esercizi di cristiana pietà...*, Torino 1847, p. 51.

⁵ G. Bosco, *Il Mese di Maggio consacrato a Maria SS. Immacolata ad uso del popolo*, Torino 1858, p. 8.

⁶ *Ivi*, pp. 9

⁷ *Ivi*, p. 80

⁸ *Ivi*, p. 63-64



MY VOCATION STORY

THE 153rd SALESIAN MISSIONARY EXPEDITION

Sansão Manuel Sebastião Gonçalves

Among the departing members of the 153rd Salesian Missionary Expedition, on Sept. 25 received the Missionary Cross from the hands of the Rector Major, Fr. Ángel Fernández Artime, is also Sansão Manuel Sebastião Gonçalves, originally from Angola and now destined for the mission in Cape Verde. Today he offers his reflections and considerations to ANS readers.

What prompted you to apply for the missions?

In my vocational journey, I met several Salesians who awakened in me this desire for missionary life ad gentes. I think Fr. Marcello Civati deserves a special mention, the first Salesian I met. His apostolic zeal toward the poorest was an inspiration. Then there was Fr. Roberto Mussante, who was not only the priest who baptized me but also the one who accompanied me in the vocation group and finally invited me to become a Salesian. Finally, I must mention Salesian Coadjutor Brother Gaston Fontaine, who was my Spiritual Director and helped me discern my missionary vocation.

How did people close to you react to your missionary choice?

At first, they thought it was a joke or that I would change my mind anyway once I started this path. Then they understood that I was serious and from this mo-



ment on they gave me a lot of support. The family on my mother's side, in particular, has been very supportive. They belong to the United Methodist Church in São Paulo-Cuca, and together we have created a very nice ecumenical environment.

You are about to be sent to Cape Verde: are you happy with this destination?

I am very happy to be sent to Cape Verde. It seems to me that the Cape Verdean people are very rich in human and Christian values, and together with the

values of my culture, imbued with a shared mission of "life and work" with the Salesian community, I am sure that I will grow in the "Sequela Christi" and in fidelity to the charismatic legacy of our Father, St. John Bosco.

Do you have any missionary role models you want to imitate?

I have in mind the Salesians who gave their lives for Angola, such as priests Domingo Nokonoko, Agostinho Nazareno Pascoalini, Dionísio Pacheco Aldea and Filiberto Rodrigues, and Br. Núnzio Randisi. These Sons of Don

Bosco gave themselves entirely to the poor youth of my beloved country.

What message do you want to send to young people about the missionary vocation?

Dear young people, if you hear Jesus' call to missionary life, follow the advice of His mother Mary because Jesus transforms our water of fear, insecurity and uncertainty into the wine of joy and peace for so many people. And St. John Bosco tells us, "Trust in Mary and you will see what miracles are." □

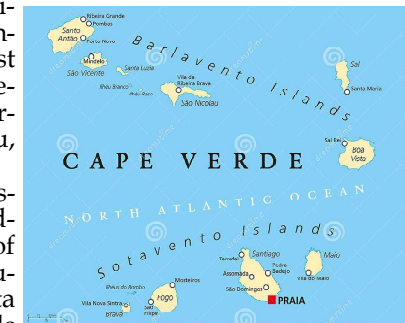
CAPE VERDE

Sansão Manuel Sebastião Gonçalves has been assigned to go to Cape Verde and here is a virtual guide to the islands of Cabo Verde, or Cape Verde.

It is an island nation on an archipelago of volcanic origin in the Atlantic Ocean off the north-western coast of Africa, about 600 km west of Senegal. Cape Verde shares maritime borders with Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, and Senegal.

Cape Verde is divided into two island groups, the Barlavento (windward) islands with the islands of Santo Antão, São Vicente, Santa Luzia, São Nicolau, Sal, and Boa Vista and the Sotavento (leeward) islands with the islands of Maio, Santiago, Fogo, and Brava.

The group of 10 islands combined land area of 4,033 km² is about 1.5 times the size of Luxembourg or slightly larger than the size of Rhode Island. Cabo Verde's population of 525,000 (2015 census) are descendants from the first permanent inhabitants in the late 15th-century: Portuguese colonists, West African slaves, and some Italian traders. The archipelago was the first European settlement in the tropics. Today it is one of the most developed democratic countries in Africa. Largest city and the capital is Praia, located on Santiago island. Spoken languages are Portuguese (official) and Kabuverdianu (a Portuguese based Cape Verdean Creole). About 95% of the population are Christian. □



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IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Tough Isn't the Word

Waiter: (after serving the bread) "What else will you take? Some butter?"

Diner: "No."

Waiter: "Some jam?"

Diner: "No."

Waiter: "What then?"

Diner: "Bring me a hammer and chisel."

What Happened?

A farmer went to visit a friende having carefully provided himself with a stable lantern to light his homeward way. An exceedingly merry evening was spent.

The next day he received a message from his friend. "This morning I found your lantern standing on my window sill. Please collect it and send back my parrot and cage."

How Considerate!

As a pretty girl entered a crowded bus, a young man immediately rose.

"It's kind of you," she said, "but I prefer to stand."

Politely raising his hat he said:

"Yes, but..."

"Really I meant it," she said.

"But I..."

Again she interrupted him, "I assure you I'd rather stand."

"But madam," he shouted desperately, "I'm trying to get out."

Well-mannered

"Why did the boys talk the least in class during the last monty?"

"Because, February had only 29 days."

Really Smart

The little boy came home after his first day in school and began to boast of his cleverness at the dinner table: "You know, Dad, I've learned a lot of Arithmetic in school today."

"Really?" asked Dad.

"Yes," said the little son. "Now, let me see...How many chickens are there on that plate?"

"Two, son," answered his father puzzled.

"Well, I can prove there are three." Putting his fork in one, the son said, "That's one chicken." Putting his fork in the second, he said, "That's two. Two and one make three. How's that?"

"Wonderful!" exclaimed the father and turning to his wife, he said: "Come dear, eat his chicken. I'll take the second one, and let our darling son have the third."

The Way Out

Mrs McKerty was getting fed up with the visitor. Just then the dog came in.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "have you taught the dog any tricks since I visited you last?"

"Yes," she said sweetly, "If you whistle he will bring you your hat and assist you to the door."

Too Bald

A hurried businessman rushed into the barber's shop and asked: "Can you cut my hair with my coat on?"

"Not only with your coat on," said the barber, "but also with your hat on." □

IS GOD THERE?

by Brendon Dillon OP

When I was young, I had my own special problem with our Christian faith. The question that kept teasing my mind. because I did not find any satisfactory answer to it, was: "Why was God so hidden from us?" I used to see written on the altar-covers in the churches: "Truly thou art a hidden God". To me it seemed unfair. If during our life on earth we were on trial and our future life for all eternity depended on the outcome, surely God could at least make us certain that he existed — perhaps by occasionally speaking down from heaven. Some wise people reminded me that God's ways are not our ways. but I felt sure there must be a better answer. There is. It took me years to find it. Some truths are so big that it is not enough to hear them. One has to grow into them.

A man claims to be God

Of course, I came to learn in time that God has revealed himself to us in the best possible way, by becoming one of us. Jesus Christ, is the revelation of God at our human level. Surely this is better than a voice from Heaven and far more extraordinary. When one thinks of a man claiming to be God, one can only be astounded. Can a man appearing in the midst of sinful men possibly measure up to the perfection we expect of a divine being? Yet through the centuries, millions have believed that Jesus Christ is God and countless numbers have given their



lives for this belief. Millions today believe that God is revealed in Jesus Christ. We are capable of grasping this revelation because God has made us in his own image.

Made in His own image

I remember the questions and answers of my catechism: "In what are we like to God? In our soul. In what is our soul like to God? In being a spirit and immortal and in being capable of knowing and loving God." You see, though we are finite, there is something infinite about our knowing and loving. There is no end to our knowing, no limit to our loving. We are made to one day see God face to face, to know him as he is and to love him totally and completely. "This is eternal life, to know you, the one true God and Jesus Christ who you have sent." It is comforting to know this.

God's reverence for us

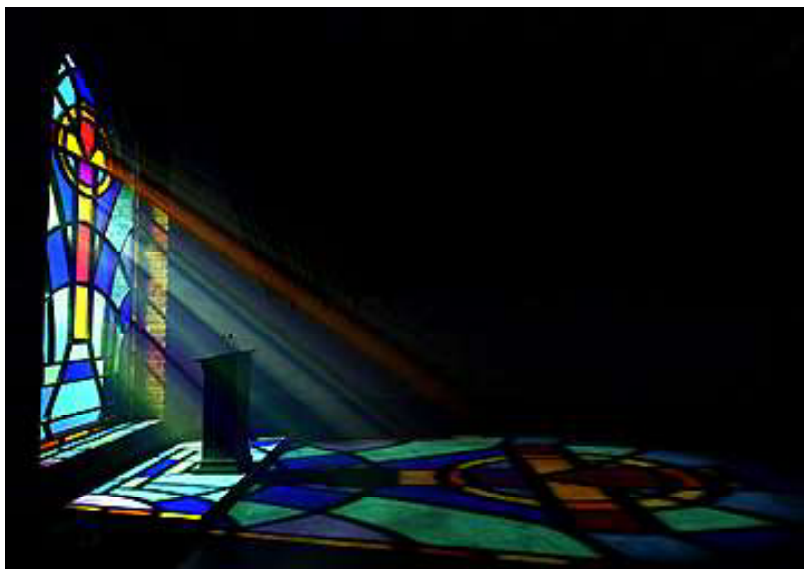
I think it was Fr. McNabb OP who gave me an insight into God's attitude when he spoke of God's reverence for us. It seemed an extraordinary idea. God is love and God's love for us we accept. After all he died for us. He loved us even while we are still sinners. But reverence? Yet, the more we reflect on this, the truer it seems. God has made us in his image and perhaps the most god-like thing about us is that we, though creatures, are free.

We are so free that we can choose to offend the very Creator without whose continued support we could not exist. God has given us this freedom. All our dignity as persons is based on it. The choice is ours. He will not force us against our will. But he does all in his power to freely win our love by showing the greatness of his love for us,

summed up in the Cross – Christ suffering and dying for us. "Greater love than this..." His love for us calls us, invites us, motivates us to love in return. But it respects our freedom, our dignity. This is the reverence Fr. McNabb speaks of. Because we are free, we can honour God by choosing him. Without this freedom there would be no honour for God. Because God lets us free, our responsibility also is great. God has chosen to depend on us for the spread of His kingdom. It is not only God's work but ours also.

A Saint is someone through whom the light shines

If we were all other Christ's, his Kingdom would be already among us. God would not be so hidden to the world if he were revealed in us and in our way of living. A boy who was asked: "What is a saint?" thought of those in the stained-glass win-



dows of the Church and replied: "A saint is someone through whom the light shines." How true! Not only the light of God's truth but the fire of God's love is experienced when we meet really holy people. To be with them is to be in the presence of God. Doubts of faith melt away when the goodness of God is made present through the holiness of men and women, in the revelation of the love and goodness of those who serve him generously. Only the truth that is lived

convines. Only the love I poured out in service enkindles love. The spirit of truth and love is here. God is revealed, not in an overpowering way that would make us less, but in the gentle way that reveals the delicacy of God's dealings with us. Perhaps in this way we can see the hiddenness of God, no longer as a problem, but as God's reverence for those He has made in His own image, the children to whom He has given freedom, knowledge and love. □

TRANSFIGURATION

"Jesus took with him Peter, James and John and led them up a high mountain... there in their presence he was transfigured." Mk 9.2

The three disciples saw Christ's glory and were strengthened in their determination to follow him. None of us has ever seen Christ but there are occasions in our lives when we can almost feel His presence. These occasions may be very rare but we are aware that He is with us and in us and loving us. Sometimes we find Him in the silence of prayer, other times in moments of grief or intense happiness. But mostly God's presence and love for us is experienced in the love or forgiveness we receive from another. This is why it is so important for us to forgive one another, to show love to one another, to help each other along the way. In that same love and forgiveness for one another we experience God's love for us and like the disciples on Mount Tabor we are strengthened in our determination to follow him. □



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MY MOTHER, MY HOPE

Let us honour the humble image of Mary most holy and the devout and sincere exclamation: "*Mater mea, fiducia mea*" (My mother, my hope) encircle, like a halo of humble rays this sweet image while each of us gazes at it, venerating it in our hearts trying to embody the meaning, the value, the comfort of those affectionate and bold words. Those bold words seem so affectionate. In them so many questions of Marian doctrine are practically resolved like so many exuberant fronds and exquisite flowers of devotion to the Virgin they find their root of sincerity and efficacy; and finally, it seems as if those few syllables contain a secret in each one's heart, intimate and personal: "*Mater mea, fiducia mea.*"

(Pope Paul VI - 8 February, 1964)

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