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***May the humanity
of your Only Begotten Son
come, O Lord, to our aid,
and may he, who at his birth
from the Blessed Virgin
did not diminish
but consecrated her integrity,
by taking from us
our wicked deeds,
make us acceptable to you.***
(From the Common of Our Lady)

From The Editor's Desk

UNLESS YOU BECOME AS LITTLE CHILDREN

It is wonderful how direct and simple God is and how very complicated we make everything!

"What is the greatest commandment?" Jesus asked. Possibly by someone bewildered by the multiplicity of Jewish rules and regulations. "Love God and love your neighbour" he replied. Could anything be simpler? And there are hundreds of such replies in the Gospels.

There is nothing we have made more complicated than prayer. So much has been written on the subject and still we find it difficult. Yet, sometimes in a flash God himself shows us the real heart of prayer.

Where I am, there are stipulated times for prayer, the main one is in the morning after Mass when we sit to "meditate." Most of our pews are crammed with books on prayer and spiritual reading at the ready to ward off distractions. We begin with invoking the Holy Spirit and then...off I go within seconds! I'm planning a programme, imagining a counseling session, an incident on the road during my daily walk, oh yes, letters to be written, calls to be made - truly I'm a thousand miles from God. Frustrated, I bring myself back to my prayer - and again, despite the spiritual books - I am gone. It is when I'm in this confused state, I believe, that the merciful Lord steps in.

I keep my head down, so I'm not tempted to look around to see who else is having problems like I am, when suddenly I hear the whining sound of a siren. It's surely on its way to the hospital. There goes my mind...I'm following the ambulance with concerned loved ones within and a critically ill relative finding it difficult to breathe.

There are other times when I'm on my walk through the arbor of trees on my route and looking up at the trees with a gentle breeze playing about my neck, there's a kind of calm that descends. I look up and see an elderly grandfather taking his young grandson for a scooter ride. The sheer delight in that little face and a sagacious serenity about the elderly gentleman and I've learned my lesson. The scene seems to indicate a trusting confidence in that little face: all is well with the world because my grandpa is in control; that's the Lord for me! No wonder, Jesus said. "Unless you become like little children you cannot enter the kingdom."

Don't we make religion difficult? Surely it is simply a loving relationship between our Abba and us, and prayer is the most natural outflow from that joyous spontaneous relationship. Jesus knew all about prayer to his Father.

I know I'm still going to have distractions at prayer, but I also know that I have been taught a wonderful lesson, God is my Father. I am his beloved child. Prayer happens when we get together.

Fr. Ian Douulton, sdb

THE BLESSING OF A CHILD

by Mons Gianpaolo Dianin

For parents, a child is a guarantee of a future, a hope that gives a deeper meaning to their love and a new motivation to the work and sacrifices they make every day.

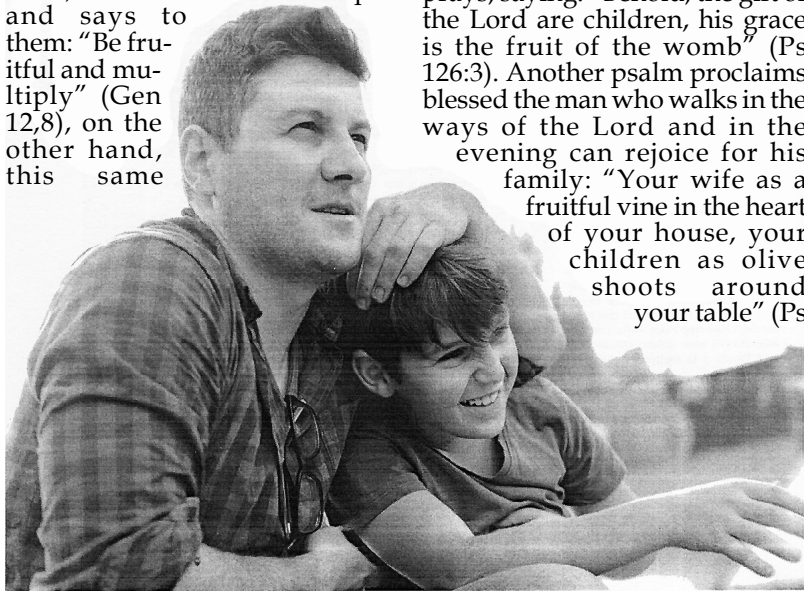
The birth of a child opens a new page in the life of the two spouses, one full of promises and also of fears. All of us, and parents in particular, feel awe and wonder before a new born child: a true miracle of life. We wonder, as believers, how God looks at a new born baby, what he thinks of and what he says to us when a new creature enters the world.

In the Bible, children are first and foremost evidence of God's blessing on the couple and on the whole people, because they represent a promise of the future and a sign of hope. If, on the one hand, God blesses the first couple and says to them: "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 12,8), on the other hand, this same

blessing becomes a promise to Abraham: "Look up to heaven and count the stars, such shall be your offspring" (Gen 15,3). Eve, the mother of the living, seems aware of all this and when she gives birth to Cain she says: "I have obtained a man from the Lord" (Gen 4:1).

For a nomadic people, as Israel was at the beginning of its history, a son represents a true gift, a promise of a future that continues, given that there was not yet a land, a nation, something stable that would taste of continuity in time. And so, Israel prays, saying: "Behold, the gift of the Lord are children, his grace is the fruit of the womb" (Ps 126:3). Another psalm proclaims blessed the man who walks in the ways of the Lord and in the evening can rejoice for his family: "Your wife as a fruitful vine in the heart of your house, your children as olive shoots around your table" (Ps

"Your wife as a fruitful vine in the heart of your house, your children as olive shoots around your table" (Ps



127:3). And the book of Proverbs reminds us that children are a blessing and a support even in their parents' old age: A Crown of old men are the sons of sons, honour of sons their fathers' (Prv. 17:6).

It is the same experience of many couples today: a child is for the parents a promise of a future and a hope that gives a deeper meaning to their love and new motivation to the work and sacrifices they make. To think that someone bears our name, has our features, will continue to live in the house we built, will leaf through the photos and remember those who gave him life, all this fills the thoughts of the couple.

But a child, in Scripture, is also a responsibility that God entrusts to parents. Let us recall the special attention the Bible gives to orphans and widows, that is, to the poorest and most defenceless categories. The books of wisdom devote pages full of wisdom to the educative task of parents, focusing much on the firmness and commitment to correct the child (Sir 30:8-11; Prv. 13:24). For the prophets, it is God himself, father and mother of his people, who is the educational model of reference ("It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, holding their hands, but they did not understand that I cared for them" Hos. 11:34). The whole history of Israel becomes, little by little, the expectation of a son promised by God whom the virgin will conceive and give birth to (Is 7:14). And when this long-promised son is conceived and born in Bethlehem, it will be Joseph and Mary who will welcome him and accompany him into adult life.

The cutting of the umbilical cord is a gesture laden with symbolism: a child is someone other than his parents, he has his own autonomy, an original history and vocation. He is indebted to life and many other gifts, but he is called to fulfil a dream that God has for him. How can we fail to recall the words of Psalm 139 that celebrate the uniqueness of each person: "It was you who created my inmost being and knit me together in my mother's womb [...] My bones were not hidden from you when I was formed in secret, woven in the depths of the earth." Jeremiah feels that he has always been known to his Lord: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you came forth into the light, I had consecrated you" (Jer. 1:5). To his parents who seek him, the twelve-year-old Jesus replies: "Why did you seek me, do you not know that I must look after the things of my Father?" (Lk 2:49). And to his relatives' request to see him, Jesus replies: "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the Word and put it into practice" (Lk 8:21).

There is a second birth and a second umbilical cord to cut when parents are called upon to give birth to their child to adult life, recognising its vocation, respecting its uniqueness and letting it go so forth that it can follow its own path. Two demanding tasks: begetting, nurturing, educating and then generating to adult life and letting go of one's own creature, who at that moment becomes more than ever a creature of God and the world.

Finally, children are a kind of 'sacrament' that provoke us to go

further. Jesus, speaking of the kingdom, calls a child: "Unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 18:3). Children become an icon of that awe, trust, joy, confidence and inner freedom that are indispensable requirements to enter the logic of the kingdom. In another Gospel passage, Jesus says: "Let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for,

to such as these belongs the kingdom of heaven" (Mk 10:14). Children are also weak and fragile, they need to be welcomed, loved, nurtured and so Jesus goes so far as to say: "Whoever welcomes one of these children in my name welcomes me" (Mk 9:36-37).

The Word of God asks us for a conversion of head and heart to recognise in every child a gift, a task and a place where we can meet God. □

THE FIRST BLOOM

In a small mountain village there is a very nice custom. Every spring, a competition is held among the inhabitants. Everyone tries to find the first bloom of spring. Whoever finds and picks the first flower will be the winner and will have good luck for the whole year. This is why everyone, young and old participates, .

One year, in early spring, when the snow was beginning to melt and leave wide gaps in the damp earth, everyone in the village set out in search of the first flower. For hours and hours they searched high and low, on the mountain slopes, but found no flower. They were already giving up their search when they heard a cry.

"It is here! I found it!" It was the voice of a child. Men, women and children ran towards him. He was clapping his hands and jumping for joy. That child had found the first flower.

The first flower, however, had blossomed among the rocks, a few metres below the edge of a terrible cliff. The child pointed at it with his outstretched arm, down below, but could not reach it because he was afraid of the gaping mouth of the ravine. The child, however, wanted that flower more than anything else in the world. He wanted to win the contest. He wanted good luck.

Everyone else was kind, they wanted to help him. Five strong men brought a rope. They intended to tie the child and lower him down to the flower so that he could pick it. The child, however, was afraid. He was afraid of the abyss; he was afraid that the rope might break.

"No, no," he said crying, "I'm afraid!"

They showed him a stronger rope. Not five, but fifteen strong men would hold it. Everyone encouraged him.

Suddenly the child stopped crying.

With one hand he wiped away his tears. Everyone was silent waiting to see what the child would do.

"All right," said the child, "I'll go down. I'll go down if my father holds the rope!" □



TRUE MASTER OF SANCTITY

by Antonio Barbierato

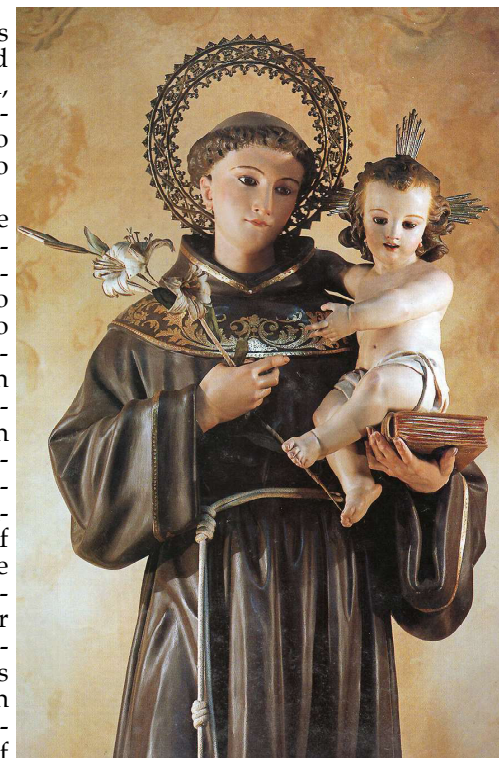
Those who know the life and thought of Saint Anthony have no doubt in identifying him as an exemplar and teacher of holiness. He is called "the Saint" (*il Santo*) *par excellence* by many. And not unjustly so. It is known that while he was preaching in Padua, his listeners tore off his cassock as if it were a relic. When he died, the children, who lived near the place where he died, rushed through the streets of Padua shouting: "È morto il Padre santo!" (The Holy Priest is dead! St. Anthony is dead!

At the school of Jesus Christ and his splendid imitator, Francis of Assisi, Anthony of Padua learned to only to give, but to give himself an to do God's will in all things.

He followed the divine will even when God rescued him from martyrdom, when He sent him to Sicily and called him to lead his brothers, as superior in France and then in Padua. After his wisdom was discovered in Forlì, the divine will concerning his apostolic activity was finally clear: Anthony was to give himself and do his utmost for the love of God and in the spirit of the Gospel, in favour of the poor and oppressed, against the overlords and moneylenders, in defence of the truth, against the aberrations of

heresy, in aid of the good, with preaching and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

In his writings, Saint Anthony taught a very high standard of holiness. One of the first demands of authentic holiness is to recognise that the effectiveness of our actions ultimately always depends on God. Commenting on Peter's words, "At your word I will cast the nets" (*Le* 5:5), he wrote: "Whenever I cast the net using my word, I cast me on you; I preached me to you; I preached



"In our thirteen days in preparation for the feast of the Saint," Father Ricca likes to emphasize, "we explain that the Saint's true miracles are those that lead to love of God and love of neighbour. In the first case, St Anthony's leading miracle is his love for the Eucharistic mystery, as revealed by the well-known episode of the mule in adoration of the Eucharist. In the second case, on the other hand, we recall that - taking our cue from the lesser-known but still important episode of the encounter between the tyrant Ezzelino and St Anthony - the latter is revealed as the protector of the poor and the suffering."

my things not yours. Therefore, I took nothing. If I caught anything, I caught not fish but talkative frogs croaking my gifts, and that amounts to nothing. But I will cast the net in your word. Let him cast his net in the word of Jesus Christ who ascribes nothing to himself, but everything to Him" (*Sermones, I, p. 505*).

Jesus was the perfect man. Of Him, the Saint of Padua extols "the incomparable holiness of life before which all the splendour of the saints pales" as the stars pale when the sun rises. "The examples, the words of salvation that (Jesus) has given us, are as many rays of fire that he has sent us so that we may become inflamed in his love" (*Sermones, II, p. 61*). "Christ," he

writes again "is wisdom...is prudence...is virtue.... In Him is the intelligence of all things... He is the food, the bread of angels and the nourishment of the righteous... He is the light to the eyes ... He is our peace ... Therefore, O Christian, implore this wisdom, that you may be wise; this prudence, that you may defend yourself; this virtue, that you may have courage; this intelligence, that you may know; this life, that you may be sustained; this food, that you may not fall with weariness; this light, that you may see; this peace, that you may rest. O blessed Jesus, where shall I look for you? Where shall I find you? Where, having found thee, shall I find so much good? Having obtained thee, shall I possess these goods? Seek and you shall find" (*Sermones, I, p. 472*).

Jesus became man to save men, to redeem them. To extol Christ's mercy, St Anthony willingly resorted to analogies, preferring, of all things, the one that sprang from Jesus' own lips: "I am the good shepherd. Pastor comes from *pasco, pascis* (i.e., to graze). And truly Christ feeds us every day with his flesh and blood in the Sacrament of the altar" (*Sermones, I, p. 250*).

Pope Francis once said: "Do not be afraid of holiness, do not be afraid to aim high, to let God love and purify you, do not be afraid to let the Holy Spirit guide you. Let us be infected by God's holiness. Let us not lose hope in holiness, let us all walk this path. The Lord is waiting for us, for all of us, with open arms! He is waiting for us to accompany us along this road to holiness! Let us live our faith with joy, let us let the Lord love us..." □

HE'S SPEAKING ALL THE TIME

by Anastasia Dias

"I'm very sleepy. I haven't slept properly in the last couple of days," Peter said. "Listen, He insists that we come with him. He's done so much for us can't we do this one thing for him?" John asked earnestly. "Ok...ok... I'm coming," Peter mumbled under his breath."

Peter, James and John had been to the mountain on multiple occasions, as children and adults. The climb wasn't too hard. But Peter was sleepy; John was focused on getting there because his friend had called him. James was there only because he had nothing better to do, he was following the others.

"Peter, do you believe in miracles?" John asked softly. "What? After we've seen Jesus perform so many, you ask me this?" Peter questioned angrily. "No, Peter! Not miracles like healing a sick person or raising someone from the dead." "Then what?" Peter said. "Miracles where God speaks to you directly. You hear His voice from heaven. Like Moses did. Like Elijah did. Do you believe in that?" "I don't think that's plausible today. Moses heard it

because he was righteous. So did Elijah...I'm sure I'll never hear the voice. As of now, seeing Jesus heal people and being part of that is enough for me. I'm not righteous for God to speak to me directly," said Peter, yawning.

"Guys, what are you talking about?" James chimed in. "James, you and your brother can have this conversation. I'm very sleepy. I just want to make it to the top," Peter replied and then fell silent.

Jesus walked on ahead of them, as if he was on a trek. He wanted to get there quickly.

John noticed all of this and was wondering why he'd called the three of them in the first place. Of course, the three of them followed him everywhere. But why today of all days?



"Peter, get yourself on the top soon. We don't have all day," James called. "Hey, I'm old and sleepy. Don't tell me what I should do. I'll do whatever I can," Peter complained.

John was wondering whether Jesus was listening to all of this. Even if he was, he'd never judge them or corner them. He understood them perfectly, like no one else did.

After about an hour of climbing, they finally reached the mountain-top.

Peter was about to place his bag on the ground and fall asleep when a bright light shone into his eyes. "John, is it the torch? Put it off. I want to catch a nap," Peter demanded. "Peter, Peter, wake up. Something's happened!" John whispered into his ear. Peter opened his eyes and was stunned at what he saw before his eyes. "Hey, is that Moses?" James asked. "Yes, yes...and...and...the other one is Elijah," Peter said.

Suddenly, the voice of God spoke from heaven. John looked at Peter who was in shock. After the scene, Peter approached Jesus and said, "Master, should I build three tents for the three of you," he blubbered, not knowing actually what else to say.

"Listen, I don't want you to tell this to anyone until the right time," Jesus sternly admonished them. The three of them were still too shocked to reply so they just nodded their heads.

I love this story of the Transfiguration of Jesus. It teaches us how something so human, so fragile, so weak and vulnerable can come in contact with the Divine.

I see myself in Peter's place, sleepy, uninterested, doubting my very self and potential and making excuses. Peter was a person who followed the path, not knowing where it led. He just wanted to get there to get it over and done with it.

John, the true believer, was a person I'd like to be. John doesn't know where the path goes, but he trusts and believes in the journey he's undertaken and the people accompanying him. James just followed along because he knew there was nothing else to do.

Which one of the three are you? Peter, James or John?

When life throws you challenges and hurdles, what do you choose to do? Lay your head down on a pillow and go back to sleep and shush people to keep quiet, or wait and work till you overcome the hurdle. These are questions each one of us should ponder upon and answer candidly.

Because while we're sleepy or tired, that is when the beauty of this life passes us by. Miracles happen each second and they elude us. The voice of God, whom we don't believe, is talking to us, wafts past us.

During this season, let us choose to sit quietly, stay awake and observe the beauty and miracles this life offers you and me. We may not hear God's voice on a mountain-trek but we will most surely hear it within us. In a place of desperation and craziness, that is where God speaks to you and me. When you and I are absolutely still and silent, amidst the madness; that is when He chooses to speak. The next time, be sure to stop and listen. □

SARAH LAPORTA

THE SALESIANS FOR YOU!

FABIO AYNAUDI

*From his first experience as an Oratory animator
...to Secretary of the SYM*

Can you introduce yourself?

I am Fabio Aynaudi, twenty-three years old, a master's degree student in history at the University of Turin with the dream of soon being able, with Salesian charisma, to teach middle school children. I grew up in Fenestrelle, a small village in Val Chisone with a few hundred inhabitants. There, summer has always been the most eagerly awaited time, because the many holidaymakers who come to Fenestrelle make it lively and animated, but above all because for the past fifteen years, more precisely since 2006, first a few animators, then more and more as the years went by, have been organising a few weeks of summer for children and young people.

The Mamma Margherita Oratory in Fenestrelle has just over a hundred animators and young people, but such a restricted context allows for a very unique activities and relations that cannot be found in other realities.

What is the Oratory for you?

Growing up in this atypical oratorian context, without a priest in charge but with great examples of older animators, I found myself following a path that I found natural for me; after eighth grade I started helping out as an animator's helper, then animator throughout high school, and from 2018, when the person who was in charge and coordi-



nator of the oratory informed us that he could no longer take care of it, together with other boys of my age we took over what for us had been home, fun, friendship and family.

As soon as we came of age, the difficulties encountered were not few, many mistakes, many failed attempts, but also great satisfaction and, above all, many steps taken, especially for us and the animators' group.

How did you meet the Salesians?

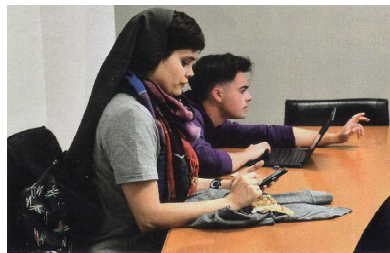
2018 was a very significant year for me. As soon as I finished the boys' summer weeks of my first year in charge, certainly the most tiring, confusing and least fruitful, I took part in a summer pilgrimage proposed by the Piedmont SYM (*Salesian Youth Movement*): invited almost unwillingly by my brother, I now remember it as a decisive turning point on my

journey.

It was the first real encounter with the Salesian world: until that moment, looking at it from the outside I had thought "it's not for me," but on that pilgrimage, at a time of so many changes. Up until that summer my faith journey had been extremely immature, static, made up of habits and a few masses during the summer, but that was no longer enough, there was for the first time an emotional and relationship aspect that I did not understand.

I started spiritual accompaniment and from there many steps. The SYM became more and more part of my agenda, between service proposals such as the SYM day or the Savio Clubs, and other path proposals such as spiritual exercises or quest groups.... The mistakes, falls and errors did not disappear, but a life of active faith and in relationship certainly changed many perspectives for me and changed the paradigm with which I looked at my life.

Prayer, accompaniment and service I now consider them three legs of a stool: without one of them I cannot "stand", and with the help of a guide I was able to reorder so many aspects of my life, from study to entertainment to relationships. The following years as leaders got better and better, the example of Don



Bosco's oratory helped us to make even the small reality of Fenestrelle grow, the group of animators grew a lot and today is able to walk on its own.

In fact, with the other co-responsibles, we decided to start passing the baton to the younger ones, to allow them to experience what we had been fortunate enough to experience, and because as young adults, some commitments make it prohibitive to dedicate ourselves full-time to the Mamma Margherita Oratory.

How do you see the Salesian Youth Movement?

Over time the Salesian world has become more and more a daily affair for me, and I feel Don Bosco's charism is mine. Since 2020 I have been part of the Piedmont SYM council, a group of young people with whom the secretariat, the delegate and the youth pastoral councillor discuss the paths, events and proposals that concern the whole territory. We strongly believe in a real and concrete co-responsibility between young people, Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, trying to fully reflect what the Salesian Youth Movement is.

As a council, when we meet, we walk together in the walk of what the pastoral proposal is, we compare past events and think together about future ones, we exchange ideas and proposals in an atmosphere that is as professional as it is family and community. It now numbers some 25 people, including 15 young people representing many of the Salesian realities in the area. □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST. JOHN BAPTIST SCALABRINI (JUNE 1)

Ian Pinto, sdb

A GOOD BISHOP...

Pope Paul VI published a decree on the role and identity of Bishops which was discussed and deliberated upon by the Second Vatican Council. It was titled *Christus Dominus*. In it he pointed out essential characteristics of a bishop besides delineating their pastoral activity and suggesting ways of enhancing their functioning.

Christus Dominus states that a bishop is a successor of the apostles in their preaching and pastoral ministry (#4). The Bishop is primarily responsible for proclaiming the Gospel of Christ to all people. He ought to keep his teaching in line with Church doctrine and interpret divine action in institutions, events and situations. His teaching should be relevant and "in a manner that will respond to the difficulties and questions by which people are especially burdened and troubled" (#13). Through it, he ought to "manifest the maternal solicitude of the Church toward all men whether they be believers or not. With a special affection they should attend upon the poor and the lower classes to whom the



Lord sent them to preach the Gospel" (#13).

Reading *Christus Dominus* helps us understand the Church's mind on the episcopate or the office of the bishop. It puts into perspective who bishops are and what they are supposed to do. On the other hand, it forces us to confront the expectations that the Church has with the reality of each of our dioceses. No one is perfect but what is important and

necessary, is that we put our best foot forward day after day. Nobody expects bishops to be perfect all the time; even if they do, that expectation is irrational and unfounded. But the active effort to want to be good and to do good can help allay the irrationality of the expectation and generate hope.

John Baptist Scalabrini was someone who could be described as a good bishop. He was an Italian by birth but is now a universal saint. Pope Francis canonized him on October 9, 2022. There are good reasons for his canonization but perhaps the most significant, is that he was a good and holy man.

Bishop Scalabrini lived out his vocation to the best of his ability. He was motivated by the love of the Lord and spent his time working for the evangelization of people and the development of the Church. He made it a point to spend at least an hour if not more in Eucharistic adoration every day. He was a faithful devotee of Our Lady. He recited multiple rosaries a day and would not miss an opportunity to deliver homilies on Mary and make pilgrimages to places of Marian significance. As a bishop, he made five pastoral visits across his diocese of Piacenza and gave a great boost to the work of evangelization that was being carried out. He took personal interest to reform seminaries and his pastoral initiatives earned him the recognition and praise even from those who generally opposed him.

JOURNEY TO THE EPISCOPATE

John Baptist Scalabrini was born into a devout Catholic fa-

mily. From a young age, he appeared to be drawn to a life of holiness. He was particular about setting aside time for prayer and would not miss praying the angelus thrice a day. As a young man, he admired Aloysius Gonzaga and sought to imitate him. As he grew up, he developed devotion to St. Joseph, St. Francis de Sales and St. Charles Borromeo.

He displayed a lively intelligence and scored excellent marks in all exams. After becoming a priest, he was appointed to a seminary to teach and help seminarians in their journey to the priesthood. John felt called to be a missionary and desired to work in the Indies. He applied to join PIME (Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions). His bishop however, was not prepared to let him go. He told him, "Your Indies are in Italy." John accepted the bishop's wish as an indicator of God's will. He dedicated himself to the work entrusted to him.

A few incidents were responsible for his receiving the honour of the episcopate. The first was his proactive bravery during the cholera epidemic of 1867. He organized efforts to care for the sick and to provide for their needs. The second was his keen interest in catechesis. When he opened a kindergarten in the parish he was posted to, he wrote the "Little Catechism for Kindergartens" to be taught there. This showed his concern for the faith formation of the people. Age was not an excuse; he desired that everyone be aware of their faith so that they can live it with conviction.

Finally, and perhaps most decisively, was his series of lectures on the First Vatican Council. It is

interesting to note here that these lectures were popularized by Don Bosco. Don Bosco was impressed with the way in which John Baptist had gone about preparing and delivering the lectures that he had them published. This publication became popular and caught the attention of officials in Rome. Don Bosco had also spoken highly about John Baptist to Pope Pius IX. The latter had consented to appointing John Baptist as a bishop and had informed him of his impending elevation to the episcopate.

Cardinal Alessandro Franchi of Rome consecrated him a bishop on January 30, 1876. Within a few months of his consecration, he was attacked by a group of nationalists who accused him of being servile to the Roman Pontiff and upholding the Pope's decision to deny a requiem mass for King Victor Emmanuel II, who had been excommunicated. Bishop John took it all in stride and remained till the end of his life a devout servant of the Church and of the Successor of Peter.

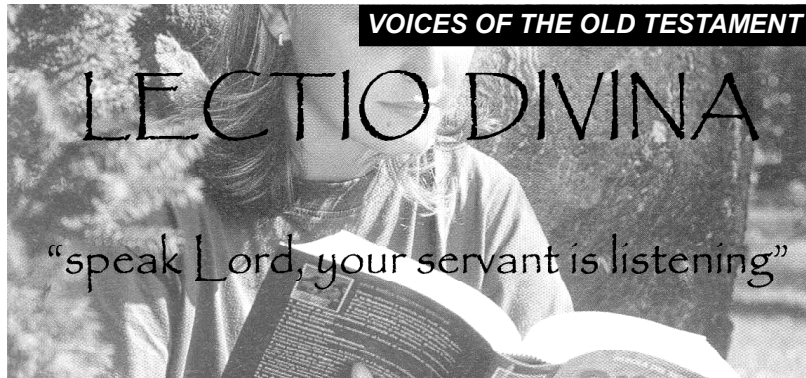
LASTING IMPACT

Bishop John was instrumental in founding the first ever Italian Catechetical magazine called 'The Catholic Catechist' and the first ever Catechetical journal in Italy and second in the world! He pioneered the first National Catechetical Congress in 1889 and emphatically proposed a unified catechism for the whole of Italy. His dedication to the Church's teaching earned him the title, 'Apostle of the Catechism' from Pope Pius IX. He organized courses in Gregorian chant which were much appreciated and even promoted by

Pope Pius X. He organized three diocesan synods: one on the Eucharist, the second on Diocesan administration and the third also on the Eucharist. The document of the last synod was 350 pages long and personally written by the good Bishop himself!

He was attentive to the situation of the poor and needy. When famine struck in 1879-80, he sold his horses, pectoral cross and a golden chalice that the Pope had given him in order to purchase food to be distributed to the needy. He founded the 'Deaf and Dumb Institute' in 1879. Perceiving the influx of migrants into Italy and being privy to their destitution, he earnestly organized efforts to reach out to them. He set up a congregation, the Missionaries of Saint Charles in order to look after the religious, moral, social and legal needs of the migrants. Later, he also founded the female counterpart, Missionary Sisters of Saint Charles.

Bishop Scalabrini stands out as a model pastor with the heart of the Good Shepherd. What captured people's attention after his death was the amount of work he was able to do over the course of his life. He was noted to say, "Without doubt we are in the hands of God, but we must not sit there idly." Scalabrini exercised his episcopal office with dignity and with courage. He was not afraid to take up new initiatives like the work for migrants. Today, Pope Francis is drawing renewed interest to the condition of migrants. Bishop Scalabrini had set the stage over a century ago. His life is a reminder that God doesn't want us to do great things but rather to do things with great love. □



THE HOLY NAME OF GOD

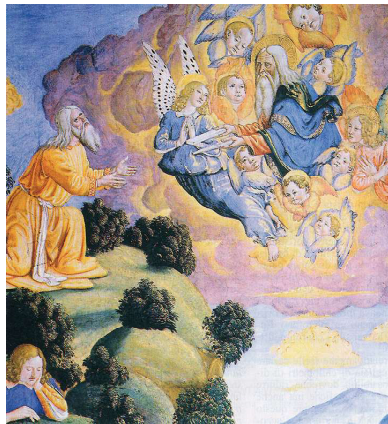
by Carlo Broccardo

The book of Exodus recounts events that we are all very familiar with, perhaps also - why not? - thanks to the many films that have been made about Moses; the facts of Moses' life lend themselves well to being recounted. We are at the end of the book of Genesis when Jacob goes down to Egypt with his sons and their families; in the land of Canaan, in fact, there was a terrible famine: they had nothing more to eat. Thanks to Joseph, Pharaoh gives them a portion of fertile land on which to live.

Then the years go by, the generations follow one after the other, and Jacob's family becomes a numerous people; so strong and numerous that the new Pharaoh, who had not met Joseph, is frightened and decides to reduce the risks drastically. He forces them to work for him as slaves; he makes a law that requires midwives to kill all male children as soon as they are born; he makes their lives hell. The people then cry out and the Lord does not remain insensitive. We

read from the book of Exodus: "The Israelites groaned because of their slavery, they raised cries of lament, and their cry from their slavery went up to God. God heard their lament, God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God looked upon the plight of the Israelites, God was mindful of it" (Ex 2:23-24).

God intervenes to help his



God gives Moses the Tablets,
Cosimo Rosselli (1439-1507),
Sistine Chapel, Vatican City, Rome

people. How? Through Moses, rescued from the waters: who grows up in Pharaoh's court, then flees into the desert, from where he is sent by God to free his people. And it is at this point that the films unleash their imagination, when it comes to showing all the prodigious actions by which Moses tries to convince Pharaoh to let his people go; the climax is the ten plagues of Egypt and then, in the final act of liberation, there is the crossing of the Red Sea.

So far I think we all know the facts. But we are only in chapter fifteen of the book of Exodus, that is not even halfway through! And after that? There follow many chapters that are somewhat boring, from the point of view of narrative. They tell of Moses going up the mountain and receiving from God the tablets of the law: not only the ten commandments, but also a whole series of precepts to be observed.

Unfortunately, the story does not immediately have a happy ending, because while Moses is on the mountain with God, the people with Aaron build the famous golden calf. Moses comes down, sees the betrayal committed by everyone and destroys the tablets of the law. That is why - finally we come to today's passage - he must go up the mountain again, to receive God's law a second time.

Before giving the laws, however, God fulfils a request from Moses, who had told him: "Show me your glory" (Ex 33:18). Before explaining to us what we should do, God introduces himself, reveals his name.

He is 'merciful'; it is difficult to translate the Hebrew adjective with an English word, which comes from the noun 'womb' and says a very deep, physical, life-giving love. "Merciful" is synonymous with "merciful" and says the attitude of one who loves us even if we do not deserve it. "Slow to anger": the literal translation of the Hebrew expression is curious, for it would be "with wide nostrils"; God is one who before unleashing his wrath breathes deeply, reconsiders and then forgives. Finally, "rich in love and faithfulness": God's love and faithfulness are almost an idiom (i.e., a single concept expressed in two words), to say that his love is faithful, that he loves us forever, as the psalm repeats: "eternal is his love for us" (cf. Ps 136).

The end of today's passage is beautiful: "if this is your name," says Moses to God, "then I am not afraid to ask you to continue walking among us." Yes, it is true, we are sinners and we will continue to err; but God's love will be greater even than sin.

Therefore, before giving them the commandments again, God remembers all that he is, has been and always will be for his people: he is one who loves deeply and forever. A Jewish scholar, Pincas Lapide, writes: "Among men, this is the customary way: first comes the task, then the work, and finally the reward. God acts in the opposite manner: first comes his gift, then the commission, and then, with unparalleled patience, he is still waiting for our performance." □

Quiet Spaces

“WITH JESUS TO THE FATHER WHO WILL GIVE US EVERYTHING”

Pope Francis' homily on Sunday, May 10, 2020

In this passage of the Gospel (see Jn 14:1-14), Jesus's farewell discourse, Jesus says that He is going to the Father. And He says that He will be with the Father, and that also those who believe in Him "will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me anything in my name, and I will do it" (vv. 12-14). We can say that this passage of the Gospel of John is the declaration of ascent to the Father.

The Father was always present in Jesus's life, and Jesus spoke about Him. Jesus prayed to the Father. And many times, He spoke about the Father who cares for us, as He cares for the birds, the lilies of the field... the Father. And when the disciples asked to learn how to pray, Jesus taught them to pray to the Father: "Our Father" (Mt 6:9). He always addresses the Father. But in this passage it is very strong; it is also as if He opened the doors of the omnipotence of prayer. "Because I am with the Father: ask me and I will do anything. Because the Father will do it with me" (see Jn 14:11). This trust in the Father, trust in the Father who is capable of doing everything. This courage to pray, because it takes courage to pray! It takes the same courage, the same boldness it takes to preach: the same. Let us think of our father Abraham, when he - I think the right word is - "negotiated" with God to save Sodom (see Gen 18:20-33: "And if there were fewer? And fewer? And fewer...? He truly knew how to negotiate. But always with this courage: "Excuse me, Lord, but give me a discount: a bit less, a bit less...". Always the courage of struggling in prayer, because praying is struggling: struggling with God. And then, Moses: the two occasions that the Lord wanted to destroy the people (see Ex 32:1-35 and Nm 11:1-3), and to make him the leader of another people, Moses said "No!". And he said "No" to the Father! With courage! But if you go and pray like this [whispers a timid prayer] - this is a lack of respect! Praying is going with Jesus to the Father who will give you everything. Courage in prayer, boldness in prayer. The same that it takes to preach.

And we have heard in the first Reading about that conflict in the early times of the Church (see Acts 6:1-7), because the Christians of Greek origin were grumbling, complaining - they were already doing it back then: it is obvious that it is one of the Church's habits - they were complaining that their widows, their

orphans were not well cared for; the apostles did not have the time to do many things. And Peter [with the apostles], enlightened by the Holy Spirit, "invented", let's put it that way, the deacons. "Let's do something: let's look for seven people who are good and these men can take care of the service" (see Acts 6:2-4). The deacon is the one who takes care of service, in the Church. "And so these people, who are right to complain, have their needs taken care of, and we", Peter says, we heard him, "and we can devote ourselves to prayer and the proclamation of the Word" (see v. 5). This is the bishop's task: praying and preaching. With this power that we heard in the Gospel: the bishop is the first who goes to the Father, with the trust that Jesus gave him, with courage, with parrhesia, to fight for his people. The first task of a bishop is to pray. Peter said so: "And to us, prayer and the proclamation of the Gospel".

I knew a priest, a holy parish priest, good, who when he found a bishop, greeted him well, very amiably, and always asked the question: "Your Excellency, how many hours a day do you pray?", and he always said, "Because your first task is to pray". Because it is the prayer of the head of the community, interceding to the Father so that He may safeguard the people.

The prayer of the bishop, the first task: to pray. And the people, seeing the bishop pray, learn to pray. Because the Holy Spirit teaches us that it is God who does things. We do very little but it is He who "does things" in the Church, and prayer is what makes the Church progress. And therefore the heads of the Church, so to speak, the bishops, must persevere in prayer.

Peter's word in this case is prophetic: "May the deacons do all this, so that the people are taken care of well, their problems are solved and their needs met. But to us, bishops, prayer and the proclamation of the Word".

It is sad to see good bishops, good people, but busy with many things, the finances, with this, that and the other... Prayer must take first place. Then the other things. But when the other things take away space from prayer, then something is not right. And prayer is strong because of what we have heard in the Gospel of Jesus. It is "because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (Jn 14:12-13). Thus the Church progresses in prayer, in the courage of prayer because the Church knows that without this ascent to the Father, she cannot survive. □

"WE DID IT!"

By Pierluigi Menato, Tr. Ian Doulton, *sdb*

The telephone still worked, so when the doctor heard that he was being summoned to the Marshes, he didn't think much about whether he should or should not go. He just threw back some lukewarm coffee to wake him up, 'forced' the bike, an old 1948 'Guzzi,' and shot off into the darkness and the rain. His wife had not even tried to dissuade him: she knew he would go anyway. She looked at the picture of the Madonna and slowly got out of bed: she wouldn't have been able to sleep anyway. Besides, there was so much to do on that Holy Saturday: her children and grandchildren were coming for lunch the following day.

Near the embankment the doctor was stopped. There were a lot of people there in the dark, with mud even in their hair. The bike came to a screeching halt. The mist passed in front of the lighthouse, caressing those muddy statues that looked on in muted silence. But when he turned off the engine, the doctor heard the river screaming. Since he had last passed by a few hours earlier, the water had reached the height of the embankment and was now threatening to overflow onto the plain.

One of the men,

who was a constable from the city, approached the doctor and said something that was lost in the roar of the river. But the doctor had already understood: it was impossible for anyone to pass.

"You see, doctor, the embankment five hundred metres down from here, is about to burst. We've been working hard so far, but there's almost nothing to do, it's a huge job. I can't make it to the Marshes. The road is jammed with trucks and the traffic has been suspended since last night."

"But there's a boy who needs me, he has tetanus and he's dying...."

"I understand, my dear doctor, but you can't, it's humanly impossible. Besides, by now, they



will have taken him away from there. Everyone knows that the river is about to burst its banks. At this moment..."

"They phoned me ten minutes ago, from the switchboard" answered the doctor dryly. "That means they have no intention of leaving and the boy is too critical to be moved."

The constable spread his arms wide helplessly.

"You can make do if you want to, but you're not going through here."

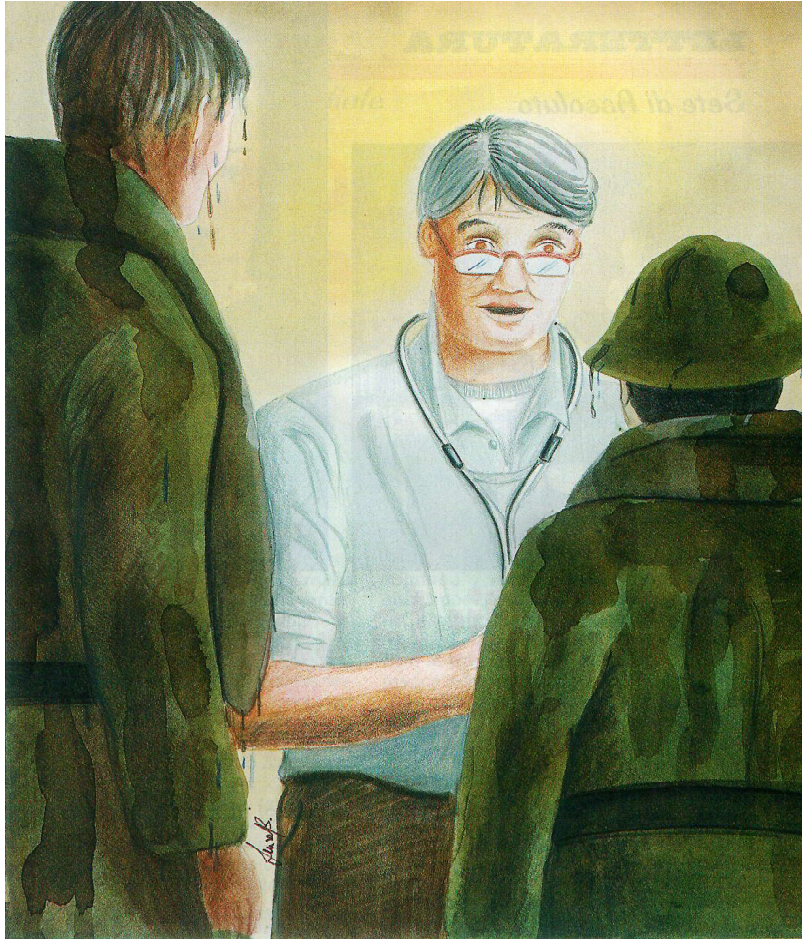
The doctor turned back at full throttle and, having reached the archway and stopped. He left the bike against the wall and strode into the fields, along certain paths he had known since he was a boy. Only now he had to be careful not to end up in ditches, and they were ditches full of icy, dirty water.

Suddenly his torchlight went out and the doctor found himself in the ghastliest darkness he had ever seen. Only an opaque glow above the distant city, reflected by the heavy clouds that continued to pour that relentless rain.

From the Marshes there was a quarter of an hour's drive, during the day and in good weather. In those conditions, two hours might not have been enough. Instead, the doctor was in a hurry, too much of a hurry to allow himself the luxury of watching his step, even though he was always in danger of drowning in a ditch. No, the doctor was not one for indecision and second thoughts. Then a formidable rage took hold of him against the rain that prevented him from walking as he wished.

So, steadfastly straightening his head and staring at a distant point where he thought the Marshes were, he set off, paying no heed to the paths, ditches and potholes. With clenched teeth, expecting at any moment the violent impact of the icy water, he mentally gave a rhythm to his advance, as when he was with the infantry, there at Salerno. Then he fell into a deep furrow and recognised the taste of the mud: now he was like one of those men he had seen at the embankment. If one of his old university classmates had seen him, at that hour, in that darkness, with those boots weighing a tonne and as long as clowns' slippers, who knows how much they would have laughed at him! He who wanted to become a famous urologist, of international fame, and to have his own, modern, state-of-the-art clinic. How many dreams he had then! But here he was, in the flooded countryside, in danger of being hit by an angry sea of mud, a doctor in a country town...

He found himself splashing in a kind of lake, water up to his knees. There was a distant light in front of him, it was the little houses of the Marshes. And there were people there, waiting for him, trusting him, and a boy dying, all alone, locked in his grief. No, no, he thought, if his friends had seen him, they would not have laughed, they would not have looked at his slime-laden boots with contempt. They would have smiled at him, they would have encouraged him, but not to laugh! And then there was a life to be saved, with God's help. And this thought spurred him on,



guided him, almost, along an imaginary path that went straight towards the light. And now, that small light was three steps away.

In the Marshes they did lose all hope of seeing him now, so when he arrived looking like that, a mass clay, they almost got a fright.

"What are you looking at me like sausages?" he exclaimed, finally exploding all the electri-

city inside him.

"Get this filth off me," he continued muttering between his teeth, trying to unbutton his mackintosh, "and let me boil this stuff. Careful you don't blow it to pieces for me!"

Everyone scrambled around to do something. There was boiling water enough to wash an ox and the kitchen was full of towels.

The boy was lying in bed. Pale,

his eyelids barely half-closed. When he approached him, the doctor's expression seemed to change abruptly, he suddenly emptied himself of all the anger that had stuck to him like the mud. He had recognised his Enemy, death standing there at the boy's bedside and looking at him. But he had not yet stretched out his thin hand to invite the poor boy to follow him. So, the doctor began to fight with him, subtly but with the same implacable decision that had led him there, in the dark, with a river bellowing behind him.

He moved about the room as lightly as if he had been in the operating theatre of a clinic. He had no nurses around him, only a poor frightened woman who could not have given him the slightest help. The others stood at the door, with strange, questioning faces. He had to do everything himself, he had to fight that furious battle alone, and by now the inner storm had subsided: he acted slowly but surely, mentally suggesting to himself all the acts and movements he had to perform. As if he had been charged with an experimental lesson, with a certain cold detachment. On the other side of the window, his former imaginary friends watched his movements, assessed them, took notes.

At one point the Enemy made a movement towards the boy. The doctor realised there was something, he felt deep inside that this was the icy moment of crisis. He could not check the boy's pressure, he had to be content with listening to the pulse. And the pulse had almost

gone out. So, the doctor gritted his teeth, trying not to lose his composure, and hastened the pace of his movements.

Time was worthless, the river, the embankment, the muddy men, who remembered them anymore?

The Enemy then left: the doctor moved lightly around the boy.

And when he had finished, two men caked with slime came in. They came from the embankment and stood silently watching the doctor trying to resuscitate the boy.

"We're done" said the doctor, with a sigh of relief. "Thanks be to God! Now give me some of that schnapps that raises the dead."

The men's eyes were glazed over.

"They sent us away," said one. "There's no more danger, at least not for now." The doctor looked at him as if he were waking up at that moment. He shook his head and went to wash his hands.

"Now," he exclaimed with a smile of mystery, "nothing can happen."

The rain did not down relentlessly anymore on the leaves of the mulberry trees. It was getting to dawn. The motorbike was still leaning against the column, in a pitiful condition, but still capable of making a racket and also of doing its good seventy kilometres an hour. The constable was fiddling around with a jug of hot coffee.

"So what?" the doctor shouted at him. "We did it! We're going to have a peaceful Easter," the constable smiled in reply. □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 41

by Michele Molineris

195. When you don't understand invoke Our Lady (1871)

Ten years after Don Bosco's death, Fr Bartolomeo Giuseppe Guanti, recalled: "In the year 1871, being at S. Ignatius near Lanzo for the spiritual exercises (between 9 and 20 August) I had the good fortune to be stationed next to our dearest Don Bosco, who was in charge of ringing the bell for the various services.

I remember very well how he was the busiest of the priests for confessions, as I never had occasion to see his bed unmade, since he only rested a few hours at night on a very ordinary arm-chair made of matting.

From the second day, I think, he asked me to transcribe the regulations that he would have printed and was correcting for the boarding being built in Marassi. I accepted the task with joy; but while transcribing, it happened that I could not decipher and understand his corrections, so I had to ask him for explanations.

The holy man satisfied me several times; but then, seeing that my frequent knocking at his door disturbed him from his confessions, he said to me: "You see, you having to run here often wastes both of our time, so from now on, when you come across some obscure expression that re-quires explanation, just say: *"Maria, Auxiliurn Christianorum, ora pro nobis,"* and you will see.

And what did I see? I saw, to

my amazement, that upon saying the ejaculatory suggested to me, I no longer had to run to him, but continued and finished the task happily. And this is what I can conscientiously testify as far as my memory sustains me, certain that from then on the esteem and affection I already had for the man of wonders and for his marvellous institute increased greatly" (M.B., X, 177).

198. I must therefore, leave this palace... (1871)

On 19 September 1871, an 84-year-old Marquise, benefactor of the Oratory, living at 13 Vittorio Emanuele Square, fell seriously ill, and sent for Don Bosco to go to confession. She confessed, and then asked him: "So I am at the end of my life!"

And she stared at him with a bewildered look. The saint answered her, that God alone knows the end of our lives, and we must rest quietly in his arms, letting him dispose of us as he pleases.

"So," she exclaimed, agitated with the fever, "I must leave this world: the riches of my house, and all that I possess will be taken away from me?"

Don Bosco told her about goods far greater than those of this poor world, which the Lord has prepared for those who love him, in comparison to which all the goods of this world are more despicable than mud!

The poor lady did not pay attention to what he said to her and went back to rambling: "So I must leave this palace, these rooms of mine, my drawing-room? It seemed to me that I

was quite well off in this world, but instead I must leave it..."

So saying, she summoned some servants, and commanded them to take her into the drawing-room. It was madness, and yet she insisted so much that even Don Bosco thought it right that she should be satisfied, because contradicting her might cause her greater stress. And the servants took the bed and carried her into the drawing-room, which was full of a thousand precious things, and she wanted them to place her beside a table, covered with a precious Persian carpet. She took one edge of it in her hands, stroked it, smoothed it, stared at it intently, exclaiming repeatedly: "How beautiful it is! How beautiful it is! Is this the last time I'm going to see him? Do you know, Don Bosco? It costs me 40,000 lire... and it will no longer be mine!"

And she would turn to one side and the other of the very rich room, as if to bid farewell to everything....Shortly afterwards, there in the drawing room itself, she breathed her last!

"How difficult it is for the rich," Don Bosco confidentially recounted the fact, "how difficult it is to detach the heart from the goods of this earth! And how painful it is for them to do so at the point of death!" (M.B., X, 98).

199. Don Bosco is neither an angel nor a devil (1871)

During a visit to Borgo San Martino a curious episode happened to Don Bosco in August 1871. In the same compartment

as Don Bosco there were two gentlemen who started talking about him. One, enthusiastic about his works said all the good things he could about him; the other, on the other hand, not only showed no esteem for him, but came out in bitter criticism of his apostolate. The dispute flared up, and one of them, seeing a priest in a corner, said to the other: "Well, there is a priest here, let us leave the decision on the matter to him; what he will say, we will approve.

"I'm in," replied the second.

Then the first, turning to Don Bosco, continued: "And you, reverend, forgive us for bringing you into the matter; but a priest is the best judge. Where do you come from?"

"From Turin."

"And do you belong to that diocese?"

"Indeed, I live in Turin itself."

"Do you know Don Bosco?"

"I know him, and very intimately."

"So, tell us impartially: which of us is right?"

"There," replied the saint, "you have said too much." Don Bosco is not an angel; angels do not dwell on earth, but are in heaven. But you too," he continued, turning to the second, "you have exaggerated. Don Bosco is certainly not so wicked as to be a devil."

"In conclusion?"

"Don Bosco is a poor priest, who may make mistakes; but, what little he does, he does with good intentions to benefit his neighbour."

Meanwhile the train had arrived in Borgo. Don Bosco got off, and there ran around him

priests and clerics, exclaiming joyfully: "Don Bosco! Don Bosco."

That gentleman, who had spoken ill of him, was filled with confusion and he too rushed down to apologise to him; and Don Bosco, with the loveliest smile, said to him graciously: "There is no need, there is no need! but when you want to criticise someone, be careful that he is not present and hears what they say..." (M.B., X, 128).

200. A plus B minus C (1871)

In 1871 Paolo Perrona from Valperga Canavese, who was 11 years old, was received at Valdocco by Don Bosco as a student. More shy than ever, and not knowing anyone, he was always alone, seeking relief for himself by watching the recreation of others.

One morning after Mass, during breakfast, while he was all alone, leaning by a pillar of the porticoes, he saw a priest come out of the church, who was immediately surrounded by many lads who ran to him from all sides, and he greeted them smiling and questioned them about a thousand things; he had a word for everyone.

"Who might he be?" Perrona mumbled to himself.

And he approached him and heard him explain to another newcomer the a+ b-c...

"If you want to be a friend of Don Bosco, be an A plus B minus C: and do you know what that means? I'll tell you," continued Don Bosco, "be all A, that is, cheerful, (*in Italian Allegria*) more B, that is, more

good (*in Italian buono*), less C, that is, less bad (*in Italian Cattivo*). Here is the recipe for being Don Bosco's friend.

Little Perrona said to himself: "Could he be Don Bosco?"

But he had no time to say more, because Don Bosco turned to him and affectionately said: "Who are you, my dear and what's your name? When did you arrive?"

"My name is Paolo Perrona, I'm from Valperga and I've been here two or three days."

"Do you also want to be a friend of Don Bosco?"

"Of course, I would; but I still don't know who Don Bosco is." At his naive reply, all his companions laughed, and repeated in a low voice, teasing him that Don Bosco was the very priest who was speaking to him.

He then uncovered his head and, opening his heart with confidence, said that he very much wanted to become friends with Don Bosco and that, coming from the village, he had had nothing else in mind: on the contrary, his parish priest had recommended him to Don Bosco with the charge of passing on his regards on his behalf.

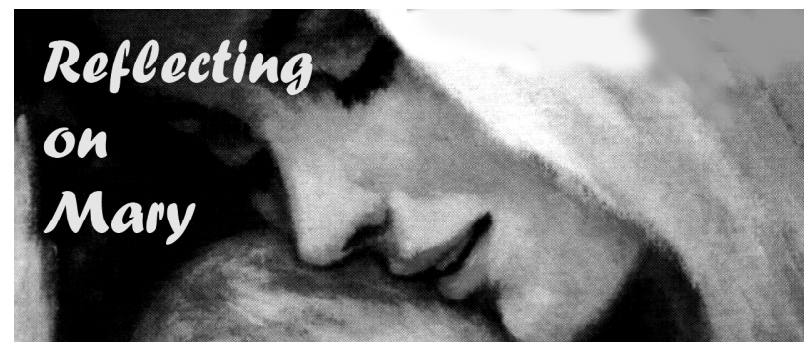
"Well," Don Bosco told him, "I am happy with what you tell me. Now do you know who Don Bosco is?"

"You are Don Bosco!"

"Do you know what he wants from his boys?"

"That they are all a, plus b, minus c..."

"Bravo!" concluded Don Bosco, "if you do that, we'll be good friends (M.B., X, 1011). □



WHY DO WE CELEBRATE MARY?

Mario Galizzi

In Nicaragua, on the eve of the Immaculate Conception, houses are well cleaned and then fires are lit in the streets, people shout, sing, dance and ask each other: "Who is it that gives us such joy?" And the answer is: "The Immaculate Conception of Mary". It is a feast that is celebrated throughout the Church, and in it we celebrate God who filled Mary with graces from the womb: he caused her to be saved by being conceived without sin. That is why we call her: "The Immaculate Conception." We want to celebrate God's great works in her.

Already in the Old Testament, God was celebrated as the Saviour, Deliverer, and Guide of his people, and for his great forgiveness. For this there were the feasts of Passover, Pentecost, the Tents, and the Great Forgiveness or Kippur. The feast consisted of "remembering," in the Hebrew sense, that is, actualising in the present day, for us, what God had once done. The act of faith at the feast of Passover and Pentecost did not say: 'God delivered our fathers from Egypt', but 'He



delivered us from Egypt'. So we do not say: Jesus two thousand years ago saved those who lived then; but we say: 'Jesus saved us and reconciled us to the Father'. In festivals and sacramental celebrations (e.g. Baptism) salvation history is actualised, it is celebrated today, because it is realised today. The meaning of litur-

gical feasts lies here: The actualisation for us of past events.

Now, when we recall the events of our salvation, we meet with 'Jesus, the Saviour, the only Mediator', but we know that we cannot meet Jesus without meeting Mary. As we retrace and actualize the history of salvation, which was fulfilled in Jesus, alongside Jesus we meet and therefore venerate and pay homage to, his Mother. The memory of salvation, in Mary's feasts, always appears united to the salvific deeds wrought by Christ. For this reason, in order to celebrate the salvation received in Christ, we celebrate and feast on Mary. Mary's feasts make sense because they bring us to Christ Jesus, because they are an encounter of salvation with Jesus. And the most beautiful proof of this is that in every feast of the Virgin, the central point is always the Eucharist, which is the culmination of the greatest hymn of thanksgiving that we can raise to God who has saved us in Christ.

In the Season of Advent

Many are the feasts of Mary celebrated by all Christians during the liturgical year. But the time in which the memory of Mary is most vivid is the time of Advent and Christmas; it is the feast of the Immaculate Conception, moreover, that begins this quintessentially Marian time. Christian piety invented the month of May to celebrate Mary, but liturgically the true Marian month is the one that goes from the Immaculate Conception to the Epiphany, or rather, up to the second Sunday after the Epiphany, when the fact of Cana is read. Paul VI points this out in his

encyclical on "the cult of Mary" (nos. 3-5) which we wish to paraphrase.

With Mary's Immaculate Conception we also celebrate, reading Isaiah in the preceding days, the radical preparation for the coming of the Saviour and the happy beginning of the Church without spot or wrinkle. It is indeed with Mary united with Jesus that the Church begins. We are reminded of this on this feast with the preface, that prayer that immediately precedes the central part of the Eucharist. The Immaculate Conception is therefore a feast of preparation for Christmas, but it is not the only remembrance of Mary. Whoever lives this period, even with a daily presence at the Eucharist, will notice how often one passes from Mary to Jesus and from Jesus to Mary. The two images are closely linked.

From 17 to 24 December, the prayers of the Mass and the readings are a continuous reminder of the Annunciation, that is, of the Incarnation of the Son of God, and, reading the Infancy Gospels according to Matthew and Luke, Jesus, Mary and Joseph are always before us. Observing Mary waiting for her Son, says Paul VI, we cannot fail to feel invited to take her as a model and to prepare ourselves to meet the coming Saviour, vigilant in expectation, exultant in praise. Here we can see how the cult of the Virgin always has Jesus as its point of reference: this is the criterion for knowing whether my devotion to Mary is correct: if it leads me to Jesus, to make the encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist the centre of my life, then the devotion to Mary is true,

because it achieves its purpose.

In the Christmas season

Mary prepares us for Christmas and at Christmas it is she who presents and gives us Jesus in the celebration of His birth. Christmas is the feast of the Lord who comes to us; but we contemplate Him as a little child, and as every time we see a little child, we look for the mother, so we do also at Christmas and find Mary. And so, as we celebrate the Saviour, we venerate the glorious Mother. Then follows the first Sunday after Christmas, the feast of the Holy Family. It is a very beautiful day to think of our family. On this day we cannot fail to observe Mary and Joseph together with the Son of God, made man, and we cannot fail to feel that the house of Nazareth invites us to meditate on the sense of communion, friendship and true love that there is, or should be, in our family. What happens at the house of Nazareth is a model of life for us. 29 December reminds us of Mary going to the Temple: it is Jesus being presented and offered to the Father, consecrated to the Father. It is the Holy Family living the Law of the Lord. Three times in a few lines the Gospel tells us that they are there to fulfil the Law of the Lord. That is why they obey that commandment that says: 'Every firstborn shall be holy to the Lord'. And then Mary offers for her purification a copy of young pigeons, the offering of the poor. St Bernard comments: 'O Blessed Virgin, there is no reason; you really have no need of purification. Yet Mary submitted to the law of childbirth, she the all holy.

Mary, in front of the other women giving birth, did not want to pass as privileged; she mingled with the other ritually impure mothers; like Jesus she mingled among sinners and presented herself to John to receive Baptism. There is a sense of solidarity in the Holy Family with the world in which we live.

1 January marks the solemnity of 'Mary, Mother of God'. It is also the day of peace. Celebrating Mary's Motherhood means, says Paul VI, celebrating Mary's part in this mystery of salvation: it is through her motherhood that we have received Jesus, the author of life, and it is also a day to renew adoration of the Prince of Peace, to hear again the glad tidings, as the Gospel reading makes us contemplate again the shepherds going to the grotto. The first of January is also a day to implore from God, with the help of Mary, Queen of Peace, the gift of peace. Who among us does not feel the need? Celebrating the Day of Peace with Jesus and Mary means feeling committed to being peacemakers in the environment in which we live. As Christians we must receive from Mary and give to our brothers and sisters Jesus, our peace.

Finally, the feast of Epiphany. Here the horizons widen, the biblical readings of the feast not only present us with the three Magi guided by the star who go in search of Jesus, but they are immense caravans going up to Jerusalem, as the responsorial psalm of the feast says, and all of them. They are diverted to Bethlehem. the feast of the universality of the faith. It is the feast of universal brotherhood, it is the missionary

feast par excellence. Well, on this feast, it is always Mary who presents Jesus to us and tells us: "If you seek him, you cannot meet him if you do not feel that you are brothers and if you are not committed to living universal brotherhood."

During the year

Seen in this perspective, all the Marian feasts are a true encounter with Jesus, a constant reminder of a Christian social and political commitment that leads to communion with everyone, and this means being bearers of reconciliation and peace in society. The other feasts we celebrate throughout the year also tend towards this. In the feast of the Annunciation, the announcement is made to Mary, but the one being announced is Jesus, which is why it is good to call it the Annunciation of the Lord. One could also call it the feast of the 'yes'. In fact, it celebrates the 'yes' of the Son who, entering the world, offering himself to the Father for our salvation and the 'yes' of Mary who accepts his mission. The question is whether that feast is also the feast of our 'yes' to God's will. As Christians we are called to a mission of good in the world. Let us therefore accept this mission from God by sealing it with our 'yes'.

And finally, we celebrate the feast of the Assumption of Mary into heaven, and even on this feast we celebrate not only Mary, but we celebrate the risen Christ who associates his glorious destiny, his triumph over death, with his Mother and tells us all what our destiny is.

There are many Marian feasts,

yet we never contemplate the Mother without turning our gaze to Jesus, without feeling immersed in the mystery of Christ who leads us by his life to understand the true meaning of our lives.

The fact that all these feasts culminate in the Eucharist is a call for all to be builders of communion in the world. Just think of what Jesus does in every Eucharistic celebration; breaking 'his bread' with us: he wants to unite us all in peace, he calls us all to be his co-workers for a world of peace... Let us allow his ideals to give meaning to our lives. Life is beautiful when it has meaning, but true meaning is only found in sincere commitment to Jesus.

PRAYER

How beautiful are your feasts, Mary, they are truly a privileged time for an encounter with 'Jesus in the Eucharist'. It is you who take us by the hand and lead us to Jesus. And then your feasts are never celebrated alone, there are always many brothers of faith and you are there as the true Mother of the community. Finally, on some in particular, such as the Feast of Peace, you make us look at the whole world and our Christian, social and political commitment. Your journey of faith then helps us to penetrate the mystery of Christ, to listen to his word, to contemplate him, to imitate him. Yes, to imitate him because the Christian life is a looking at Christ and living him in our lives. And this is what you want, Mary: you want us to see Jesus like so many others. Mother, implore for us the gift of the Holy Spirit, that he may make us all one heart and one soul, that is, a true fraternity, a true communion. And this is what we ask you insistently: may the Holy Spirit make us all truly brothers. Amen! □

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

ANCESTRY

It is said that King Edward once came upon one of his grandsons with a book in his hand, and asked him what he was reading.

"Studying about Perkin Warbeck," was the reply.

"And who was he?" asked the king trying to test the boy's knowledge.

"Oh," answered the young prince, "he pretended he was the son of a king, but he wasn't. He was the son of respectable parents."

Sound Advice

A portly lady in a bus had accidentally taken a rear seat reserved for smokers. With unconcealed disgust she watched the man beside her fill his pipe. As he prepared to strike a match, she said frigidly: "Sir, smoke always makes me feel sick!"

"Does it?" said the man after the first puff, "then take my advice, Lady, don't smoke."

I Told You

Dad and Mum went to the Parish Priest for information about the future son-in-law. The priest was quick and to the point:

"Well, all we can tell you is that he does not know the value of work, he's a poor player and he can't bear alcohol."

Reassured, the parents gave their consent for the marriage.

Very soon they realized the son-in-law was a lazy bones if there ever was one. He was a poor gambler and always lost.

And when drunk would beat up their daughter.

They went to the priest to complain: "Father, you, of all people... You have cheated us... That fellow is a scoundrel!"

"That's what I tried to tell you," he answered. "I told you he did not know the value of work: too costly for him. He did not know how to play... that's why he always loses, and he can't bear alcohol. When he drinks he does not know what he does..."

Starting

Holding up a pair of antique candlesticks, an auctioneer said: "Give me a start."

"Fifty cents!" came a voice from the crowd.

"What!" cried the horrified auctioneer.

"Ah!" said the bidder, "You wanted a start. I gave it to you!"

Courage

"What are you anyway?" shouted the wife during a quarrel. "A man or a mouse?"

Retorted the husband: "A man! If I were a mouse, you would be up on the table yelling for help!"

Time to Grow

The train was listed as an "express" but it stopped at every station and even in between.

Towards the end of the journey the ticket-collector came to examine the tickets. "Look here," he told the man, "this boy is too big to travel on a half-fare."

"Really?" said the puzzled passenger. "He was small, enough when we started." □



MY VOCATION STORY

THE SALESIANS IN BENIN
RESTORING THE LIFE OF CHILDREN

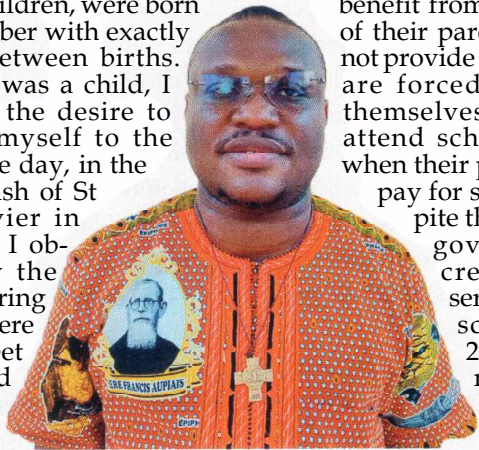
Adolphe Akpoue Coffi

The Republic of Benin, formerly Dahomey, is a state in West Africa with an area of 114,763 km².

It was here that the first Salesians, the pioneers, arrived on 9 August 1980 from the Province of Bilbao (Spain) to put themselves at the service of poor and abandoned youth. Let's ask Father Bernard Richard Azagba

Father, how did your vocation come about?

My vocation was a bit complex, as I come from a family of three children, the youngest and, moreover, the only boy. Moreover, there was a special element that helped my parents make a Christian interpretation and led them to offer their only child to the Church. In fact, we, my parents' three children, were born on 24 December with exactly five years between births. Ever since I was a child, I always had the desire to consecrate myself to the Lord. But one day, in the Salesian parish of St Francis Xavier in Porto Novo, I observed how the Salesians during the oratory were with the street children and the various games they



organised for them, the joy they sowed in the hearts of these children. So one day I was invited to play with them.

I was fascinated by the vitality of the Salesians. I began to realise that they were doing what Jesus did for suffering humanity.

I joined the group of Aspirants to Salesian Life and became a Salesian of Don Bosco. I spent my first years of my priesthood in this house, where I became the rector community director a few months ago. It is beautiful to give oneself to God.

What is the current situation of the children you take in?

There are many children in Benin. In some large families, due to polygamy (now prohibited by law), children do not always benefit from the attention of their parents who cannot provide for them. They are forced to fend for themselves. Those who attend school drop out when their parents do not pay for schooling, despite the fact that the government decreed free nursery and primary schooling in 2006. Unfortunately, free schooling on the horizon

was little more than a publicity stunt, a firework. Some children who are abused or mistreated and end up running away. Some are accused of witchcraft and are thrown out.

It was these abandoned children that we began to see more and more often on the streets or at the markets that attracted our attention. So, in Porto Novo, after reflecting in community and involving some brothers from other communities we made a commitment to offer them our services.

What is the condition of Salesian works in Benin?

In the unfolding of the educational and pastoral service we were carrying out in the parishes and two schools in Parakou (1987) and Cotonou (1990), we identified a new challenge to which we tried to respond to. We saw children and young people wandering day and night in the market. They were exposed to all sorts of dangers. So, in 1995, in Porto Novo, we initiated actions in their favour. Today this work extends to Cotonou (with a new community) and to Kandi, where attention is paid to these children to address this new frontier. Our child care centres are called Child Care and Protection Centre (CAPE).

Little by little, many children in vulnerable situations have started knocking on our doors thanks to the work of our field educators who meet them at our market places. Three of the six communities in Benin pay attention to vulnerable children.

What are the most pressing



needs?

The reception of vulnerable children in our homes raises the question of food, clothing, health care, school fees or apprenticeships. There is also the issue of specialised personnel working with the Salesians whose salaries must be guaranteed. Then there is the provision of various equipment and other needs....

How do you see the future?

We are optimistic about current and future results. There is a commitment and accompaniment on the part of the Province to respond to the needs of this side of the Salesian mission. This is encouraging. In addition, we work in synergy with other institutions that care for vulnerable children. The sensitivity of the brothers is growing.

There is much to be done to ensure that children's rights are known and respected, to ensure social justice, gender equality and parental responsibility. The future lies in education to change attitudes and behaviour. □



THE CANARY

B.F. Sketch by Fabrizio Zubani

Nancy Hamilton was born with a serious foot and hand disease. By the age of nine, she had already undergone numerous operations. Her feet and two fingers of her left hand had been amputated. Each operation caused Nancy acute suffering, but the smile always returned to her lips.

Her house was always full of little friends.

She liked ice cream, Coca Cola, records and songs that she accompanied with her thin little voice, laughing and clapping.

The child grew up healthy, intelligent, enchanted by the splendour of nature. Moreover, she became more beautiful by the day, arousing both admiration and compassion because of her physical state.

For example, when she moved to Santa Cruz, to a cottage near the St Lawrence River, she attracted the curiosity of some children returning from school as she stood with her mother on the entrance porch. "Why do you have those feet?" one of them asked her.

Nancy replied: "My feet don't go fast, but the rest of me enjoys making friends and playing". The next day, the child returned with some companions and brought her a bouquet of flowers as a gift. On Christmas Eve, she was taken to a department store to choose the presents she wanted. She went to the shop's Father Christmas and had only one request: a pair of red slippers.

At the age of twelve, she faced a new test: the amputation of her left leg. Her mother tried to prepare her, but received a surprising answer: 'Well, I'll get rid of this one,' she said, touching her diseased leg, 'and then I'll have a wooden leg with a real shoe. A red shoe'. And she decided to organise a sort of farewell party for the leg, to which all her friends were invited.

What she enjoyed most was the joy of others.

She gave everything she had to see the people around her happy. She gave her little dog, her guitar, her favourite books, her porcelain figurines. He gave with a lively, spontaneous, impromptu gesture.

One day Nancy begged her mother to take her beloved canary to a woman who was very sad about the death of one of her birds.

Returning, Mum found the little one crying by the empty cage.

"But why did you want to give him away if you loved him so much?"

"Oh mom, it's precisely because I loved him so much, I gave all my love to the old lady." □



LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

My Spouse had been suffering of Migraine for a long time and lately she has been having blackouts. The doctors in Bangalore suggested for an MRI scan. We also consulted another doctor in Hubli and he suggested the same as well. I was very worried for this scan but I offered the Devotion of 3 Hail Mary's and 3 Memorare's to Mother Mary. By her powerful intercession the reports came out normal. I am confident and sure Mother Mary will soon heal her Migraine as well.

Elvis Pink Bangalore

My sincere thanks to Mother Mary for helping me to do my cataract operation without getting the migraine problem during the operation. I always recite the 3 Hail Marys daily and am very thankful for all the favors received through mother Mary in my life.

Monica Fernandes, Goa

My sincere and heartfelt gratitude to my loving Mother Mary for my recovery from COVID in May 2021. I was first admitted to a private hospital close to my home as I was COVID positive. In the hospital, my conditioned worsened as the oxygen level was going down to 60% and I needed an ICU bed and there was none available in Vasai. But it was Mother Mary's intercession that I got an ICU bed at a hospital in Andheri. I was very serious and not in my senses at that time. It was Mother Mary who protected me. After 26 days I recovered from COVID. It was Mother Mary's intercession and the faithful recitation of the Three Hail Marys that saved me from sure death. Thank you Mother Mary for interceding with Jesus for me.

Mrs. Jessie Andrade, Vasai

Our heartfelt gratitude to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Our Blessed Mother, Dominic Savio, Don Bosco all the Saints for all the graces received and favours granted.

Mrs. Jane and Anthony Fernandes, Canada

I am grateful to Our Lady and Don Bosco for helping my wife pass her LLM examination at the University of Bombay.

Dr. Olav Albuquerque, Mumbai

My sincere and heartfelt gratitude to our Lord Jesus Christ and our Blessed Mother Mary together with St. Dominic SAVIO for keeping me and my family safe throughout this deadly pandemic in spite of us being separated by the distance of countries, it was through fervent prayer and devotion to the Triduum that we are safe. Please continue to protect us.

Clarence

POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK

JUNE 2023

For the abolition of torture

We pray that the international community may commit in a concrete way to ensuring the abolition of torture and guarantee support to victims and their families.

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posted at Mumbai Patrika Channel Sorting Office
on 1st & 2nd of every month
Date of Publication: 1st of every month

Subs: (one copy Rs. 20/-); **Inland Rs. 200p.a;** **Airmail: Rs 500 p.a.**

MARY WAS THERE

In January 2018, my son started complaining of red stools. We were very tense and went with him for a check up. The doctor said it could be because of a gluten allergy and hence a blood test needed to be done. The first report came positive which meant that my son would not be able to eat any wheat products for the rest of his life. My 3-year-old, who ate only wheat related food had to give up so much. Added to that we would have to take so many precautions for his entire life. I didn't give up. I asked the doctor to re-do the test and started praying the Rosary continuously day and night. Within two days my son's report came "negative." My mother saved my son! A thousand praises to Mama Mary.

(R.A. D'Costa, Vasai)

Don Bosco's Madonna, has developed to its present form from a folder published in 1937, by late Fr Aurelius Maschio, on behalf of the Salesians of Don Bosco, Bombay. The magazine is sent to all who ask for it, even though there is a fixed subscription (Rs 200/- India & Rs 400/- Airmail). We trust in the generosity of our readers/benefactors.

Whatever you send us will help cover the expenses of printing and mailing; the surplus if any, is devoted to the support of orphans and poor boys in our schools and apostolic centres.

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