

CONTENTS

From The Editor's Desk:
Waiting in Silence..... 3

Relationships that Broaden
 Horizons - *Gianpaolo Dianin*.....4

Lent: Purifying Your Viewpoint
 - *Sr. Marzia Ceschia*.....6

Love, Lost and Found
 - *Anastasia Dias*.....8

Don Bosco in Istanbul
 - *Pierluigi Cameroni*..... 10

Witnesses In And For Our Times
 St. Bridgid of Ireland
 - *Fr. Ian Pinto, sdb*.....13

Lectio Divina: The Temptations of
 Jesus - *Fr. Dinesh Vasava* 16

Quietspaces: Do not Fall Prey to
 Indifference
 - *Pope Francis*.....18

The Liitte White Bonnet
 - *Pierluigi Menato*.....20

Fioretti of Don Bosco - 49
 - *Michele Molineris*.....23

Reflecting on Mary: A Project of
 Life Inspired by Mary - Part One
 - *Enrico dal Covolo*.....28

Vocation Story: The Face of Don
 Bosco in Papua New Guinea
 By *Hoan Phan Trung*.....31

In a Cheerful Mood.....33

Heaven on Points - *B.F.*.....35



*As we venerate
 the glorious memory
 of the most
 holy Virgin Mary,
 grant, we pray,
 O Lord,
 through her
 intercession, that we
 too, may merit
 to receive
 from the fullness
 of your grace.*

*(From the Common
 of the Blessed Virgin Mary)*

From The Editor's Desk

WAITING IN SILENCE

I sit down to write of faith but all I write is words. I sit down to think of faith but all I think is words. I sit down to speak of faith but all I speak is words. God however, speaks more through silences, through the fragrance of his presence, through the radiance of his works.

I kneel down to pray but my mind is full of thoughts and wild imaginings. I form pictures of Christ, his face, his hands, his clothing, but all these may be figments of my mind. I make pictures of how he might seem in the carpenter's workshop, or walking down the hill to Capernaum...but perhaps all this is of my own making. I wonder how his voice might sound, how he handled a hammer, how he talked with neighbours when the day's work was done. I see him throwing his head back in laughter at stumbling, impetuous Peter, smiling wistfully at Thomas, looking patiently at John and accepting the exuberance of youth. But maybe all I am doing is imagining how it was. Where, I ask myself, is the real Christ?

When I was a small boy, I wondered what Mary, the blessed Mother, looked like, so I said it to my grandfather, "I find it hard to picture holy Mary in my mind." After a short pause came the never-to-be-forgotten reply: "Don't try to picture her. Just think of her as standing behind you."

We sometimes struggle fruitlessly to form images of those to whom we pray. Artists make carvings, icons and paintings to help our prayers and these, indeed are helpful. But in the final reckoning they are but symbolic tokens imagined appearances, figments of the artists' imaginations. So, when I pray, or when I read the Gospel, I no longer make pictures in my mind. I listen for his feelings. Perhaps feelings are closer to the person. How must he have felt when he said to Peter: "Why did you doubt?" Was Jesus disappointed or was he rebuking? When he turned to Peter on another occasion and asked "Will you also go away?" was he downcast, utterly shattered, almost begging that they would not leave him there, to start all over again? Was he elated when the good thief said his piece, elated that it now seemed all worthwhile and he was seeing the beginning of the harvest, the first into the Kingdom. Did he feel affirmed just then? Was this a heart-lift?

To hear God's reply in my prayer I can only wait in silence, attentively watching, reflecting on what is given in Scripture and in the Sacraments where he comes. To hear God I must be still, I must let go of my own visions and words and desires until I catch a glimpse of his being, something of his person. Then the reply I seek will come, not just in the form of words but as a real presence, not as ideas but as the visit of a friend, heartfelt. The search is for the heart, the loving heart, the heart which we long to know and hold sacred, the heart that feels, the heart that suffers with us, the heart that heals the inmost wounds of our being, the heart that befriends.

Fr. Ian Doultton, sdb

RELATIONSHIPS THAT BROADEN HORIZONS

by Bishop Gianpaolo Dianin

The family is called upon to overcome the temptation of isolation and to break down the wall separating the private from the public because conjugal love is indeed a personal asset, but also a social one.

The modern-day family has often been described as 'nuclear' because it consists, in most cases, of the married couple and one or two children. Many of these small nuclei find themselves living in cities, in flats of a few square metres that seem to guard and protect, but also compress and privatise this little community of love.

Pope Francis suggests broadening the horizon: "The nuclear family needs to interact with the wider family made up of parents, aunts and uncle, cousins and even neighbours" (AL 187). His is an invitation not to close oneself off in a kind of family individualism because, the Pope continues, 'there may be some who need help or at least companionship and gestures of affection, or there may be great sufferings that need comfort. Isolation, the perception of what is outside as a potential enemy, prevents the family from being a gift, a resource, a social good.

The family is the custodian of the basic structures of relationships: sonship, brotherhood, fatherhood and motherhood. We are all sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, we are in the home and we are called to be in social and ecclesial life witnesses of a

high and prophetic quality of relationships.

The experience of sonship tells us that we are not 'thrown into the world' (Heidegger), but have been desired, loved, cared for, called by name and thus recognised in our uniqueness. We are heirs to a history, beneficiaries of a heritage that has been given to us and passed on to us.

Being children also concerns our relationship with God: we are children who are loved, desired, expected, called and forgiven. But above all, we are "adopted" children in the sense that all beings are children of God, but we, the baptised and Christians, know that we are and can live as children. "To all who received him he gave power to become sons" (Jn 1:12). I would like to emphasise the word power. John does not speak of possibilities, of opportunities, but of a power. There is something that depends on us and us alone because it has to do with our freedom. The Christian is given the power to understand, to become aware and above all to live as a child of God. We have God's surname, and God becomes man to bear our surname too. We are Christians, we are Christ's, and we are children of God. To God, we can call him



father, a term unheard of in many religions.

The experience of brotherhood is more complex and, on the Christian horizon, goes beyond that which binds us to our biological brothers and sisters to extend to every man and woman of our time. It happens, for example, that if we are in a foreign country and meet some who speak Italian, we immediately perceive a special bond, a familiarity that we do not perceive when we are at home. We are part of the same human family, starting from our national identity, but extending to all because we are depositaries and custodians of the same human dignity.

Paternity and maternity, finally, is a common destiny. It is about making our life a generative and not sterile reality. It is not only physical generativity, but also becoming respons-

ible for someone, generating in the spirit. The Pope never ceases to remind us that we are not made to be 'spinsters', but it is possible to be so, perhaps by thinking that we are not.

The term 'extended family' becomes a strong invitation to be a family, to broaden the horizons of the small community of love so that being children, brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers are experiences that go beyond the bonds of blood and become words that nourish, make grow and fertilise social life too. Broadening the horizon of the family nest is good for the family itself and good for society and also for the Church, the spiritual family of God's children, brothers and sisters, called to be generative.

Pope Francis insists by recalling other aspects of the extended family. First of all, the relationship between generations: "The virtuous bond between genera-

tions is the guarantee of the future, and the guarantee of a truly humane society" (AL 189). We are well aware of the Pope's predilection for caring for the elderly and grandparents: "We must reawaken the collective sense of gratitude, of gratitude, of hospitality, which make the elderly feel like a living part of the community" (AL 191).

Then the Pope insists on brotherhood and states: "It is the family itself that introduces fra-

ternity into the world" (AL 194). These timely words recall another pearl of *Amoris Laetitia* when the Pope affirms that "God has given the family the job of "domesticating" the world and helping each person to see fellow human beings as brothers and sisters" (AL 183).

The Pope continues to expand by including in what is familiar the network of friends who support and enrich the journey of families (AL 196). □

A SPECK OF FIRE

Once a hundred thousand people were gathered in the great Coliseum stadium in Los Angeles, California. Suddenly the Reverend Keller, who was speaking to that immense assembly, interrupted: "Have no fear; now the lights will go out. Darkness fell over the stadium, but through the loudspeakers Father Keller's voice continued: "I will light a match. Everyone who sees it glowing will simply say 'Yes'.

As soon as that little dot of fire lit up in the vast dark hall, the whole crowd shouted, "Yes". Father Keller continued to explain. "Behold: any act of goodness can shine in a heart of darkness. Remember: no matter how small, it never goes unseen in the



eyes of God. But you can do much more. Everyone who has a match, light it!".

Many followed the preacher's summons. Suddenly the darkness was broken by a limitless sea of flickering of tiny fires." □

LENT: PURIFYING YOUR VIEWPOINT

by Sr. Marzia Ceschia

Man is not just earth and mud, but sky and light; not just flesh and heft, but consciousness marked by the destiny of an unparalleled ascent

The celebration of Ash Wednesday (14 February) marks the beginning of Lent, the season that prepares us for Easter which is the climax of the liturgical year and Christian life. Forty days have a great symbolic significance: the number forty, in fact, evokes salient moments in the history of the people of God and the days of fasting experienced by the Lord in the desert before undertaking his public mission. The conciliar constitution on the liturgy *Sacrosanctum concilium* notes a "twofold character of Lent." It is a time that "especially through remembrance or preparation for the solemnity and through penance, invites the faithful to listen more frequently to the word of God and to prayer and thus disposes them to celebrate the paschal mystery" (n. 109). A characteristic dimension of this is penance, which *Sacrosanctum concilium* recommends should be "not only internal and individual, but also external and social" (n. 110) and which is manifested in fasting and almsgiving, external signs of a profound journey of interior conversion, of a "healing" of the relationship with creation and with every creature.

These years after COVID 19, which struck us so virulently during that Lent and surprised us with its unforeseen consequences, this year's Lent still bears the wounds of the pandemic. Per-



haps we are not yet fully aware of the fact that we were entering a change of epoch, which would have demanded - and urgently demands - newfound awareness of the inescapable value of solidarity between peoples and of care as a political, cultural and social criterion as well.

How can we recover, with spiritual intelligence, the depth, not only theological, but also existential significance of these Lenten spaces and attitudes?

I would like to take up a recurring word at this time of the liturgical year and try to investigate its relevance: the term asceticism. It connotes not only Lent, but the entire Christian itinerary, and in common, the feeling appears to need an effort - at times a little sad and mortifying - to purify oneself of whatever might appear undesirable in God's eyes. A reaction of annoyance towards this word often does not allow us, instead, to grasp its liberating scope and the opportunity that flows from it to restore meaning to our being disciples. Asceticism has to

do with “ascending” and with becoming lighter, freer precisely in order to advance with our gaze raised high. It is the decision to shake off the ballasts, the weights that repress the joy of recognising the Lord present and providential in our lives and that faithfulness to his promises.”

In this context, it is possible to better understand the sobriety to

which Lent invites us: it is a matter of returning to the authentic destination of things and relationships, freeing ourselves from what feeds our selfish and self-centred impulses (the meaning of fasting) and opening ourselves to the sharing of goods for the protection of the good that is, before God, every brother and sister (the meaning of almsgiving). □

DIFFERENT WAYS OF SEEING

Abraham is forced by the need to survive to go down to Egypt where Jacob’s sons will return for the same reason. Abraham knows well that the Egyptians, sons of Cam, have the vice of seeing. This term, in the account of Sarai given to Pharaoh through his officers, recurs three times. But of the three times this term actually occurs the first time as Abraham glances at Sarai: “See, I know that you...” In a certain way, Abraham betrays himself because, faced with a new step in his life, his fears about Sarai surface or re-surface within him: she is a beautiful woman, whose beauty endangers his life, so it is better to give her up without a second thought, to avoid the worst and ensure his own survival. A game of ‘male’ looks transforms Sarai - before she becomes Sara when the Three Mysterious Men visit - with an intent.

Abram, in front of other men who can ‘see’ Sarai, has almost an instinct of self-preservation and fear. These feelings automatically lead Abram to surrender his woman, pretending that she is only his sister. This act of surrender will also occur in Gerar with Abimelech (cf. Gen 20). Sarai, with-

out a word, almost willingly, gets herself handed over to another by the man to whom she belongs in order to bail him out and secure a whole series of advantages for him.

Let us not be too hasty to say that “these are things of a bygone age.” How much violence, especially on women, still happens in our day and on our own doorstep. The root of all violence at a sick gaze that tends to possess the other so much so that it thinks it can use them to its own advantage.

For his part, the Lord God seems to be watching over the fate of the vulnerable, and by sickening Pharaoh and his servants, he tries to heal Abraham of his superficiality that leads him to choose his own benefit over caring for his fellow traveller and life companion.

We need to be careful not only who and what we look at, but above all how we look at others to avoid any form of abuse that always starts with the presumption that we have everything under control.

Abraham, pray for us!

Fr. Michael Davide Semeraro

LOVE, LOST AND FOUND

By Anastasia Dias

“Mom, I’m going to take the sheep to the fields,” said the boy. “Make sure you eat before you go into the fields. The last time you fainted and the neighbours came to let me know,” replied his mother with a tinge of worry in her voice. The boy shook his head and left for his father’s fields.

There were a hundred sheep, his father’s property. His father had died recently and the sheep had been handed over to his charge.

He knew each one by name. The lad had no friends and this worried his mother a bit. But the boy couldn’t chat with humans the way he could with the animals, especially his sheep. He felt as if they were listening to him; that they understood him and maybe, loved him.

Riley, Rhys, August, Freddie, Betsy, Gabby, Becky, Tammy...he knew and loved each one of them.

Tammy was born just a few months ago and quickly made her way into the boy’s heart.

It was a cloudy day as the boy walked out in front and the sheep followed him. In about half an hour they reached the fields. The sheep started grazing without so much as a nudge. The boy felt something; he looked around,

someone was missing. Tammy, yes, it was her!

Fear gripped his heart and he gulped back tears. He felt his heart beating faster. His stomach churned with fear and his palms were sweaty. Where did he lose her? He began to cry.

He left the ninety-nine in the field and retraced his steps, not stopping once to think that he may lose the rest.

He ran and ran, till he saw Tammy, his Tammy at a distance. He leaped for joy and went towards her. He held her in his hands and laid her on his



shoulders. His little Tammy, his lost sheep, he had found her. With Tammy on his shoulders, he went back to the ninety-nine.

This is a parable that you and I have heard a thousand times, alongside the parable of the lost son and the lost coin. But, have you ever thought of reading between the lines? If you haven't, don't worry. I hadn't either, until recently.

What brought me to notice this, are the incidents that took place in my life recently. I moved to a new country and just like I did in my home country, I thought no one cared about me. Earlier, it bothered me but as I grew older, I started to care less. A few weeks ago, I stayed back at the library late one night and came back to my dorm room around midnight. "Hey, are you okay?" I heard a voice from the living room. "I called you thrice and was about to come and see if you were still in the library. Not just me, all three of us were very worried," said a friend and fellow graduate student.

That day, I knew for sure, there were people who loved and cared for me. My life mattered to them. My presence made a difference in their lives. Like me, many graduate students there were several of us from around the world and the country. We had little in common. There was a stark contrast between our cultures, but we loved and cared for each other. And, at the end of the day, that's what mattered. It wasn't the colour of our skin, our race, religion, gender or caste but all the love that we carried within us.

If you'd asked me a few years

ago, I'd say love meant a romantic relationship. And if you'd asked me the definition of true love, I may have defined it romantically. I'd have believed that I needed a partner to experience love. Today, I would never concur with that.

Love, today, means accepting another person, just like I have been accepted maybe even in a new country and another culture. It means sacrifice and it means care. This could come from anyone: a parent, partner, friend or even a stranger.

However, as love has been restricted to romantic feelings for so long, I chose to make my point and say it may not always be the case. Love is something that makes a mother stay up for nights at a stretch, taking care of her sick child. It may be a boy professing his love for a girl or when a friend gives their friends gifts.

That's not all....

Love includes the people who ask you if you are okay when you're late at work. It is people who take you to the hospital when you're unwell and unable to drive yourself. It is people who leave everything to drop you off at the airport. It is people who welcome you into their culture, community and country with open arms and love you like their own.

So, if you feel lonely and sad this Valentine's month, take a moment to think of all those who love and care for you. Your presence matters to them.

You are loved and you cannot be replaced by ninety-nine or ninety million others.

Happy Valentine's Day! □

DAILY LIFE IN ETHIOPIA

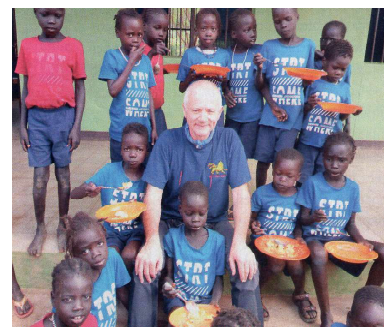
The Missionary's Diary

Through Fr Filippo Perin's diary, we can spend some time in a Salesian corner of the mission.

September

We had a visit from some guests, Mr Natalino who has been supporting us and coming to visit us for three years now, helping the kindergarten in the village of Ilea, 100 children with their teachers and workers in tow for the school, with various activities and daily lunch. Then we will meet in Addis Ababa with Mrs Elisabetta, a dear friend and benefactor for many years for the water wells, remembering her son Andrea, who in the last two years has inaugurated 6 wells with us.

Our Vicariate of Gambella kicked off this new year with a good meeting of all the priests and nuns, even the last ones ordained in July received their assignments: there are 12 local priests,



Mr Natalino has been supporting us and coming to visit us for three years now, helping the kindergarten

1 Italian priest, 5 Sisters of Mother Teresa, 6 Salesians and 4 seminarians. This year, 7 young men entered the minor seminary in Gambella, for an experience of at least two years to think and understand whether they should then enter the major seminary in Addis Ababa; we have good hopes.

Mission life in Lare is also re-viving: every Sunday many people come to Mass, even a number during the week, we have Eucharist three times a morning. We are starting with the choir, altar boys and catechesis group. Towards November, we will also start the possibility of evening study for students who want to and some English courses.

New Year's Eve

Here in Ethiopia today, 12 September, we celebrated the first day of the year. So we are celebrating, holidays and feasting between the start of the new year and the Feast of the Cross on 28 September, then everything starts again: school and work.

We are 80 km from Gambella on the border with South Sudan, close to the Baro river: the population is all ethnic Nuer, and I will replace don Matteo, an Italian priest from Mantua who is returning to Italy after many years of missionary work. The welcome from don Matteo and the people

has been excellent, and this is helping me to adapt to the climate, which is always very hot, to their culture, to the simple village life, to the fact that I am the only white person with don Matteo, as for the language, I am picking up the Nuer language, which I had already learnt a little...

On the road from Gambella to Lare are most of the refugees who have arrived from South Sudan, distributed in four large camps, more than 50,000 people per camp. The Salesians of Gambella with us also have two projects in the camps. I go to a camp, since they are all ethnic Nuer.

A well and good news

The work in our chapels also goes on: in Pilual, we inaugurated a beautiful hand-dug well, thank God we found water, the people and our children who come to the kindergarten every day are really happy. This community lives most of the year near the Baro river and after two years of accompaniment, we built a small church and continued to follow them. In the chapel in Kubri, we have had our catechist sick for a couple of months, he is now better and by Pentecost we are preparing some for baptism and first communion."

It was in 2014 that the civil war broke out in South Sudan and soon afterwards these camps sprung up to take in refugees fleeing the war and, given their very high numbers, there is always tension between them and the local population, which is ethnic Anuak in that area.

At the mission in Pugnido, where I have spent the last six years, the local diocesan priest

who has replaced me in recent months, Abba Henock, will continue to run the mission; he is working very well and Bishop Abba Angelo has preferred to leave him there and send me to replace Fr Matthew in Lare. I will certainly visit him once to say goodbye to him and the people.

Two pieces of good news: at the beginning of May we had the ordination of a new priest for our diocese, Fr Antonio Aballa, the first Anuak priest. It was a beautiful celebration in the church in Gambella and then followed by a nice party for the new priest.

In mid-May we had a good meeting in Addis Ababa with all the Salesian rectors of Ethiopia, and those from the north, from Tigray, were also able to attend. Now the situation has changed a lot, there is the possibility of movement, of going in and out of the region, schools, communication, electricity and everything else is almost back to normal. We celebrated this meeting because it had been two and a half years since we had seen them because of the civil war in Tigray, although some sadness appeared when they told us about their life and the life of the people during these two years of war: some situations are truly terrible. But now they are trying to look forward and rebuild and restart everyday life.

I conclude with a prayer of Saint Bakhita, originally from Sudan: "O Lord, if I could fly down there, to my people and preach Your goodness to all with a loud voice, oh, how many souls I could win over to You!" □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST BRIGID OF IRELAND (February 1)

Fr. Ian Pinto, sdb

St. Brigid is venerated as a patroness of Ireland alongside Patrick and Columba. As recently as 2023, her feast day has been declared as a public holiday in Ireland. But who is this saint? Frankly, we don't really know. The enigma surrounding her personality is as great as the devotion offered to her. Modern writers and historians propose that she might not have even been a real person! There are very few historical facts and pieces of evidence that can be traced to her, thus, strengthening their proposition. However, medieval hagiographies reveal her to be an abbess and foundress of one of the most important monasteries in Ireland.



Celtic goddess, Brid.

According to *Cormac's Glossary*, an explanation of Irish terms written by Christian monks in the 9th century, Brid was a goddess and daughter of the Dagda – an important and powerful god who was portrayed as a father-figure, king and druid (high-ranking priest). She was the goddess of poets and wisdom. She was known for her protective care and was loved by animals. According to the *Leabhar Gabhála Éirenn* or *Book of Invasions* written in the Middle Ages, Brid possessed two oxen, Fea and Femen. Their

THE MISTS OF MYTH

Though medieval hagiographies suggest she really existed, much of what they contain are legends and miracle accounts. Some of the legends can be traced back to pre-Christian Irish folklore. This has led critical scholars to suggest that Brigid is in fact, a Christianized version of the

names were applied to the areas surrounding two of Ireland's most important rivers, Barrow and Suir. Besides, she was also believed to have possessed 'the king of boars,' Torc Triath after whom another significant plain in Ireland is named (Treithirne) and 'the king of sheep,' Cirb after whom the plain of Cirb is named. The legend states that these animals would cry out whenever Ireland was being looted in order to alert the citizens. Thus, she came to be recognized as the goddess of domesticated animals.

Brid was honoured during a special festival that marked the beginning of spring called *Imbolc*. This was the season of breeding for sheep. The *Cormac's Glossary* records this as *Oímelc*, which literally translates as 'ewe milk.' This feast was celebrated at the beginning of February. The similarities with the goddess are uncanny, and it doesn't take long for one to see why such an association was made.

One of the miracles attributed to St. Brigid is the healing of a sick woman who told her she needed to drink milk or else she would die. Brigid asked for a cup of water to be brought to her and for the cup to be concealed under a cloth. When it arrived, she blessed it and gave it to the woman. The water had turned into milk and once the woman drank it she instantly became well. The connection with *Imbolc* is vivid.

The weaving of straw and rushes as part of the festivities of *Imbolc* have been appropriated to the celebration of the feast of St. Brigid in the form of weaving Brigid's crosses. They are pecu-

liar crosses with a diamond-like shape at the center. It is usually hung in the house and is believed to carry the blessing and protection of the saint. Along with the shamrock, Brigid's cross is considered a national symbol of Ireland.

EDIFYING ANECDOTES

Since her historicity is questioned, it has been very difficult to trace the family connections of St. Brigid. It is believed that her mother's name was Brocca. She was a convert baptized by St. Patrick. Her father was Dubthach, a pagan chief. Her mother was actually a slave who was impregnated by the master. Upon discovering the pregnancy, Dubthach got rid of her by selling her to a druid landowner. According to hagiographies, Brigid was unable to consume any food. Her mother was probably malnourished and so appears to have been incapable of producing milk to feed her little infant. Whatever else she was fed, she vomited. At last, she was given the milk of a white cow and she consumed it without any problem. The association with milk here is another indication of the nearness of the cult of Brigid with the goddess.

Already as a child, she displayed a predilective love for the poor. She was known to give away whatever she had when confronted by the poverty of another. On one occasion, she gave away all the butter her mother had prepared. After she was scolded by her mother, she prayed and miraculously all the butter returned. When she was 10, she went to live with her father and

there she continued to do charity much to his chagrin. One fine day, fed up with her habit of giving things away, her father took her to the King of Leinster hoping to sell her and put an end to the losses her incorrigible behavior was incurring. While he was speaking to the King, Brigid took his jeweled sword and offered it to a poor beggar. The King saw this and was pleasantly surprised. He was a Christian and he immediately recognized something spiritual at work in the girl. He convinced her father to free her from her bondage stating that "her merit before God is greater than ours."

THE BRIGIDINES

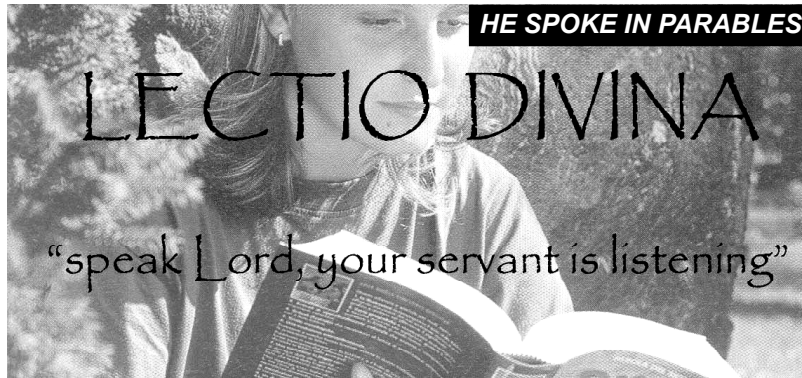
Brigid grew up with the desire to offer her life to God. She took a vow of chastity as a teenager and prayed that God would take away her beauty so that no suitors would attempt to keep her from her intention. Her wish was granted and it was not until she made her final vows that her beauty was restored. St. Patrick received her vows and guided her on the path of Christian perfection.

She desired to establish a monastery and approached a local king for land. He mockingly suggested that she could have as much as her cloak could cover. To his dismay, her cloak expanded to cover a vast plot of land. She was around 40 years old when she set up the monastery. According to legend, it stands on the place where a pagan shrine dedicated to goddess Brid stood earlier, under a large oak tree. Thus it came to be called Kildare or Church of the Oak. She had gath-

ered around her a group of 7 nuns with whom she set up the first religious convent in Ireland. She went on to found another monastery for men and invited Conleth, a hermit to assist her and be a spiritual guide. Conleth went on to become the first Bishop of Kildare. For centuries thereafter, Kildare was governed by a double line of abbot-bishops and abbesses. The Abbess of Kildare was considered to be the superior general of all monasteries in Ireland. Such was the impact of Brigid. Her monasteries became centres of religion and learning.

Sadly, the religious orders founded by Brigid died off sometime during the Reformation. In 1807, the Bishop of Kildare, Daniel Delaney (a secular bishop) established the Institute of the Brigidines. He believed he was merely re-founding the original congregation and was not forming anything new. However, in the eyes of the Church this was a new congregation and it took a few years to get the approval of Rome.

The Brigidines were the first native religious congregation founded in Ireland since the Reformation. They were wholly dedicated to the work of education. They set up boardings and schools to cater to the needs of children from all walks of life. The motto of the congregation is *Fortiter et Suaviter* which means, Strength and Kindliness. The Brigidines continue to work for the education and evangelization of youth particularly in the countries of Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. □



THE TEMPTATIONS OF JESUS

Mark 1:12-15 1st Sunday of Lent
by Fr. Dinesh Vasava, sdb

1. Lectio (Read): Take a moment to read the account of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness.

2. Meditation: Pope Francis in his Homily on 10th March 2019 shares his reflection which may be of help to all of us. This Sunday's Gospel reading for Lent describes Jesus' experience being tempted in the wilderness. The devil tempts Jesus three times after his forty-day fast. The three routes that the world constantly presents as having tremendous success and as potential avenues for deception are indicated by the three temptations: *to possess*, have *human vainglory* and *the exploitation of God*. These are three paths that will lead us to ruin.

"The first, the path of *greed for possession*. This is always the devil's insidious logic. He begins from the natural and legitimate need for nourishment, life, fulfilment, happiness, in order to encourage us to believe that all this is possible without God, or rather, even despite Him.

The second temptation: the path

of *human vainglory*. The devil says: "If you, then, will worship me, it shall all be yours". One can lose all personal dignity if one allows oneself to be corrupted by the idols of money, success and power, in order to achieve one's own self-affirmation. And one tastes the euphoria of a fleeting joy. And this also leads us to be 'peacocks', to vanity, but this vanishes.

And then the third temptation: *exploiting God* to one's own advantage. In response to the devil – who, citing Scripture, invites Him to seek a conspicuous miracle from God – Jesus again opposes with the firm decision to re-



main humble, to remain confident before the Father: "It is said, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God'. Thus, he rejects perhaps the most subtle temptation: that of wanting to 'pull God to our side', asking him for graces which in reality serve and will serve to satisfy our pride.

These are the paths that are set before us, with the illusion that in this way one can obtain success and happiness. But in reality, they are completely extraneous to God's mode of action; rather, in fact they distance us from God, because they are the works of Satan. Jesus, personally facing these trials, overcomes temptation three times in order to fully adhere to the Father's plan. And he reveals the remedies to us: interior life, faith in God, the certainty of his love – the certainty that God loves us, that he is Father, and with this certainty we will overcome every temptation. But there is one thing to which I would like to draw your attention, something interesting. In responding to the tempter, Jesus *does not enter a discussion*, but responds to the three challenges with only the Word of God.

This teaches us that one does not dialogue with the devil; one must not discuss, one only responds to him with the Word of God." (https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2019/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20190310.html) Therefore, let us benefit from Lent as a privileged time to purify ourselves, to feel God's comforting presence in our life.

May the maternal intercession of the Virgin Mary, icon of faithfulness to God, sustain us in our jo-

urney, helping us to always reject evil and welcome good.

3. Prayer: Turn your reflections into prayer. Speak to God about your thoughts, questions, and emotions that arise from contemplating Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Ask for guidance and strength to resist temptation in your own life. Offer prayers of gratitude for Jesus' example and His proclamation of the Good News.

4. Contemplation: Enter into a moment of silence and stillness. Allow the words and images from the passage to settle in your heart. Listen for any insights or messages that God may be bringing to you through this passage.

What is God inviting you to understand or experience through this reflection on Jesus' temptation in the wilderness? How does this passage deepen your understanding of the significance of Lent and the call to repentance and belief in the Gospel?

5. Action: Consider how you can respond to what you have learned or experienced through this personal reflection. Are there any temptations or areas of your life where you need to seek God's help and strength? How can you embrace the message of repentance and belief in the Gospel in your daily life?

As you begin the season of Lent, may this your personal reflection on Jesus' temptation in the wilderness inspire you to deepen your relationship with God, resist temptation, and embrace the Good News of salvation. □

Quiet Spaces

“DO NOT FALL PREY TO INDIFFERENCE”

Pope Francis' homily (edited) at Domus Sanctae Marthae on Thursday, March 12, 2020

Introduction

Let us continue to pray together (...) above all I would like to ask you to pray for those who govern: they must make decisions, and very often decide on measures that people do not like. But it is for our own good. And very often those in authority feel lonely and misunderstood. Let us pray for our government leaders who must make decisions on these measures: may they feel accompanied by the prayer of the people.

Homily

This account of Jesus (cf. Lk 16:19-31) is very clear; it may even seem like a child's story. It is very simple. Jesus wants to bring to our attention not only a story, but the possibility that all humanity might be living like this. That we too, all of us, might be living this way.

Two men, one satisfied, who knew how to dress well, who perhaps sought out the best fashion designers of the time to dress well. He wore purple and fine linen clothes. And then, he enjoyed himself, throwing lavish banquets himself for every day. He was happy like this. He was not worried. He took some precautions, maybe some cholesterol pills because of the banquets. His life was going along well like this. He was content.

There was a poor man at his door: Lazarus was his name. The rich man knew the poor man was there, he knew it, but it seemed natural to him: "I am getting along well and this man... well, that's life, you make do". At most - the Gospel does not say it - perhaps he at times sent maybe a few crumbs. And so, the life of these two men went on. And both submitted to the law that applies to us all: to die. The rich man died, and Lazarus died. The Gospel says that Lazarus was taken to Heaven, with Abraham, into the bosom of Abraham. Of the rich man, it tells us, "He was buried". Period. And there it ended (cf. v. 22).

There are two things that are striking: the fact that the rich man knew that there was this poor man and that he knew his name, Lazarus. But he didn't care, it seemed natural to him. The rich man probably even carried out his business, which in the end was against the poor. He knew very clearly, he was informed of this fact. And the second thing that touches me greatly is the phrase "great abyss" (v. 26), which Abraham says to the rich man. "Between us and you there is a great abyss: we cannot communicate, we cannot pass from one side to the other" (see v. 26). It is the same abyss that was present in life between the rich man and Lazarus: the abyss did not begin there, the abyss began here.

I have thought about what this man's problem was: the problem of being very, very informed, but with a closed heart. This rich man's

information did not reach his heart, he could not be moved by the tragedy of others. He was not even able to call one of the boys who served in the kitchen and say: "Take him this, that, or the other...". The tragedy of information that doesn't penetrate the heart. This happens to us too. We all know, because we have heard it on the television news or seen it in the newspapers: how many children suffer from hunger in the world today; how many children do not have the necessary medicines; how many children cannot go to school. We know of continents affected by this tragedy: we know. "Eh, poor things...". And on we go. This information does not penetrate our heart. And many of us, many groups of men and women live in this detachment between what they think, what they know, and what they feel: the heart is detached from the mind. They are indifferent. Just as the rich man was indifferent to Lazarus's pain. There is the abyss of indifference.

On Lampedusa, when I went for the first time, this word came to mind: the globalisation of indifference. Perhaps we today are worried about our own problems. And we forget about starving children, we forget about the poor people who are at the borders of countries, in search of freedom; these forced migrants who flee from hunger and war, and find only a wall, a wall made of iron, a wall of barbed wire, a wall that does not let them pass through. We know that this exists, but the heart does not go there, it does not penetrate. We live in indifference: indifference is the tragedy of being well-informed but not feeling the reality of others. This is the chasm: the chasm of indifference.

Then there is another thing that strikes us. Here we know the name of the poor man, we know it: Lazarus. Even the rich man knew it, because when he was in the underworld he asked Abraham to send Lazarus, he recognised him there: "Send Lazarus" (see v. 24). But we do not know the name of the rich man. The Gospel does not tell us what the name of this "Sir" was. He had no name. He had lost his name. He had only the adjectives of his life: rich, powerful... so many adjectives.

This is what selfishness does to us: it makes us lose our real identity, our name, and leads us to evaluate ourselves and others only in terms of adjectives. Worldliness contributes to this. We have fallen into the culture of adjectives, where our value is what you have, what you can do: you have lost your name. Indifference leads to this. We are only "the rich", we are this, we are that. We are the adjectives.

We ask the Lord today for the grace of not falling into indifference, the grace that all the information we have about human suffering might penetrate our hearts and move us to do something for others. □

THE LITTLE WHITE BONNET

Pierluigi Menato, T.A.I.D.

After Anna's sudden death, something had broken within her. Paola, her sweet sister who shared deeply Anna's feelings and dreams, felt overwhelmed by a tormenting inertia, a profound aridity from which, she felt she could not rise again. The particular richness, that mysterious talent that every creature possesses in the secret recesses of its heart, which had been nurtured day after day by love and an understanding, seemed dulled and dead.

They were two sisters, but they had, as it were, only one soul: they understood each other perfectly, scaling peaks of perfection where only the pure air of perfection blew, they perceived the truth and beauty of things created by God. They had the same enthusiasm and passion for the power of art expressed in music or poetry.

Anna had a refined and sensitive musical temperament in which Paola's passionate nature found a perfect match. She secretly wrote beautiful poems and lyrical prose and dreamed of doing something great with them, once she had achieved some recognition. Anna encouraged her sister's poetic inspiration very lovingly; she judged it beautiful and defended it from the ironic disregard of those among her relatives who did not consider it any good at all.

Both sisters had married and, although they lived in distant cities, they had retained that harmonious fusion that filled their frequent correspondence and

long daily phone calls which sustained the spontaneous confidence and sincere solidarity between them. Motherhood had embellished and brought them tremendous fulfillment: each had been blessed with a blond and sweet baby girl.

"I'm so happy," Anna had said to her sister, who after three years of marriage was already despairing of being a mother, "that you, like me, also had a baby girl." And that moment full of endearment became another reason for them to merge perfectly.

Motherhood and family commitments had not distracted Paola's focus from her early poetic passion: in the drawer of her desk, she still jealously locked what she mysteriously managed to write in the hours 'all her own,' when the child slept contentedly and serenely. She contributed to a few literary magazines and prepared a larger work, a work into which she put her most fervent passion, the fruit of serious study and assiduous research in the town library.

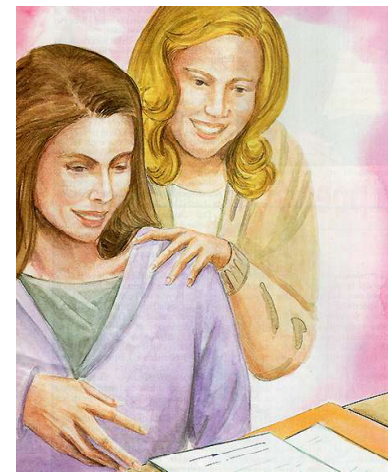
From afar, Anna followed her sister's work, asked for news of it, encouraged her, wished her every success and trusted that she would complete her work. Anna was full of hope and trust, because she felt that through that work Paola would be able to realise all the energy that was palpating in her, ardent and yet always repressed, shy and yet vibrant and full of possibilities.

At Anna's house little Noemi

grew lively and robust and filled all the rooms with her mischievous grace. With jealous love, Anna watched over her little sparrow, cradled her at length when she could not sleep at night, sewed her little clothes, supervised her growth, delighted and happy with the sublime gift that is motherhood.

But suddenly a storm hit the house, death broke the loving bond that held the three hearts of that little family that had just sprung up together in an indissoluble knot.

The mystery of sorrow so great, its boundaries encompassed the whole earth as far as the inscrutable horizon and were lost in the divine realm. Therefore its infinite strength overpowered man's mute questioning, when, struck by its power, he falls, and everything seems to collapse with him and an irrepressible cry bursts from his lips: *why?* Around the mystery of pain, faith and prayer kept watch like two sentinels, and both fused together to save the creature from despair. With ineffable and profound wisdom God allowed



the spring of weeping not to dry up on the earth, for in its nature fulfilled its sublime cycle and the creature was refreshed and the heart was renewed, rediscovering itself in a gift of primitive humility.

Paola spent two days and two nights beside her sister's bed, who was no longer able to recognise her: a lightning-quick illness had inexorably struck the vitals of her body: all hope was lost from the start. From the furthest rooms came the occasional voice of Noemi intent on playing; distracted by one or other of the family, so that she did not insist on asking again and again about her mother. Later they told her that her mother was so sick, so ill, that a host of angels had come to take her to heaven where she would surely be cured. And Noemi, who was then four years old, believed those sad words of her father, her grandmother, and everyone around her. It was so easy to distract a little girl, just a little flower swaying in the wind, a little golden star in the sky, a white butterfly; yet when Noemi returned after a few days, to the room, and found herself in front of her mother's portrait, her little face took on a wrinkled expression: "No, I don't want to see her anymore," she said. "Mummy should have told me she was going away, she shouldn't have left me like this, she should have taken me with her."

She had a fit of rebellion against the sweet likeness, grabbed the portrait with her determined and nervous little hands and hurled it to the ground. Her father, from the depths of his desolation, was able to muster up the necessary words that calmed the child. In

the days that followed, Noemi was often distracted from playing and ran to the phone to talk to her mother, who would soon return from heaven, healed, surrounded by golden angels.

Paola returned to the city after spending time with Noemi and Anna's family. Only a week had passed, but that short period weighed heavily on her heart with a terrible weight that seemed to suffocate her. She found her cosy home again, her faithful husband, full of understanding, her fragile little blonde girl who was just beginning to stutter Mummy's name. Only a week had passed since she had left her, and yet, Paola looked at everything with changed eyes: she was dreamy, her eyelashes dry. In her little girl she saw Noemi left without a mother, she felt within herself the impossibility of making reparation for that tragic fate and, unable to dissolve her unspeakable sorrow in tears, she felt her heart as dry and cold as a stone.

Before her departure, Anna's husband had given her a gift: it was something very simple, a white baby bonnet that Anna had just begun and which remained unfinished, the last knitting that Anna had done, cherishing a new hope for motherhood.

Getting back home, Paola had found on her desk, forgotten in her haste to rush to the station, the manuscript she had been working on with so much love, when the dreadful call had come that had forced her to leave everything. Two chapters were completed, the third barely begun: Paola glanced at the folders. What did it matter now? She felt detached and distant, extraneous to her flight, like some



useless, vain fruit: all her fervour was extinguished because now she lacked the support of her sister, the animating impulse that aroused courage in her, the ardour of that heart that nourished her will with faith in herself. Paola took the white bonnet that her sister's gentle hands had left unfinished, placed it among the readymade folders that she rolled up and tied with a ribbon, then locked everything away in the drawer. That was how she seemed to bury the youth that had died in her with Anna's disappearance.

Time which plods on unceasingly oblivious of human events and surpasses and dominates them all, watched over by Goodness that was invisible to men and yet always present, carried within itself, while moving on the remedy capable of mitigating the most bitter wounds: with the passing of time, violent blows become less harsh, just as the warmth of the evening sweetens the hues and softens the contrasts after a sunny day.

Some years passed. In Paola's house there were now three little

baby bassinets for three babies - the youngest was in a tiny cradle - and they all looked so beautiful in the evening light, when, in the dim light veiled by the mother's hand, golden dreams throbbed in their gentle beating of innocent little hearts.

One day a poor, pregnant mother came to Paola's house. She was a pale, sick woman with large, dreamy eyes. She asked for something for the baby's bed: Paola gave her some of her little ones' discarded clothes. Then suddenly a memory flashed across her mind and her eyes lit up: she ran and opened the drawer of her desk, took out the roll of manuscripts which she unfolded and took out the white bonnet, saying to the young mother: "This is not yet finished but, in a few days, I will bring it to you for your little one." And that gift, which had a precious and profound meaning for Paola, seemed in that instant to prolong her sister's life beyond death, forming a bond of charity and love that transcended the barriers of time and space.

As she returned to her writing desk, in haste she found all the folders untied and scattered on the floor. Paola picked them up and rearranged them, one by one while pausing to read them over again. How far that happy time seemed, when she had started that work! It was the biography of a famous woman, whose existence was a fabric of pain and love. From her early youth to her final end, each stage had been marked by suffering as if by a seal of fire, and from that ardour had arisen the great poem that wrinkled her forehead and made her enter the literary garden of the

English 19th century. The second chapter of the biography, already completed, closed with the tragic death of her husband: "Everything was over forever in the eyes of the poetess, her personality seemed submerged in the abyss of a gloomy despair. And when her prostrate physique seemed on the verge of losing its last battle in that harrowing struggle, a superhuman and prodigious energy was released from her spirit. It saved her soul on the verge of being lost urging her to resume that intellectual work; work as a liberating conquest by a victorious will."

How deep and insistent that voice resounded! It vibrated in her mind and heart for a long time, arousing strongly felt sensations and feelings which awakened her dormant will and animated her life of thought, spurring her on to higher goals. Paola now looked beyond the window at the blue vault of the sky and felt that from up there a profound energy was coming towards her. It mysteriously latched itself on to her will, urging her to resume the work she had left undone. Death could not interrupt the affectionate bonds that bound her heart to her lost sister: only human weakness had dimmed in her the vision of an everlasting continuity beyond earthly life, but the highest love that comes from the immortal spirit survives the weakness of the flesh and overtakes creatures beyond the grave with indissoluble bonds.

And in that spiritual atmosphere vibrating around her, Paola finally found the ideal climate that nourished her with renewed energy. □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 49

by Michele Molineris

223. Don Bosco to Bertolla (1877)

In April 1877 Don Bosco received thanks from the archbishop for something very important. At Bertolla, a small hamlet on the outskirts of Turin, the people were up in arms against the parish priest of the Badia, the mother church. The latter, as the Parish church of Bertolla was vacant, was claiming certain rights over the Parish church, which the people did not want to recognise; thus, he wanted people to go to the Badia for baptisms, weddings and mass.

Monsignor Gastaldi took to supporting the parish priest; whereupon the irritated population threatened to call a Waldensian pastor threatening to become Protestant. Don Bosco, having heard this, inquired about the matter, and, caring more for the good of souls than for disagreements with the archbishop, pre-



sented himself to him and showed him how, by virtue of ancient rights, reason was on the side of the Bertollese. Convinced Monsignor Gastaldi abandoned the parish priest's cause, putting things back the way they should be. The contented people dismissed the idea of abandoning the Catholic Church and received the new rector with great celebration. Even in 1902, when the rector of Bertolla told Don Francesca about the event, those good people said: "If we're still Catholics, we owe it to Don Bosco" (*M.B.*, XIII, 121).

226. A plum and a priest's biretta

Michael Unia was a peasant. At the age of twenty-seven, on the feast of St Joseph in 1877, he came to Don Bosco and begged him to accept him because he wanted to become a priest. No doubt he had heard about the school for adult vocations that Don Bosco had founded. He had no intention of becoming a religious, but was looking for a special school for young men of his age. Don Bosco accepted him for the following August in the college at Lanzo, after which he could make a retreat before beginning his studies.

During those days of reflection, a very curious fact took place, which influenced Michael's whole life.

"Wouldn't you like to stay with Don Bosco?"

"I have always wanted to be a priest at Roccaforte."

"But what if the Lord wanted you for a wider field?"

"If the Lord would show me that this is his will..."

"Do you want a sign?"

"What would it be?"

"If God revealed your inner self to me and if I told you the state of your conscience, would you see in that a sign that the Lord wants you with me?"

Unia remained speechless. Then he resumed: "Well, tell me what you see in my conscience."

"You will only have to answer yes or no."

In fact Don Bosco told him everything in the past with such exactness and precision that Unia at first thought he was dreaming. Unia no longer knew what world he was living in. In the end he asked him in amazement how he had known all his misfortunes.

Seeing him mortified, Don Bosco continued in a facetious tone: "I know something else. One Sunday, finding yourself at vespers in your church, and noticing that a companion was sleeping with his mouth open, you, who had some plums in your pocket, pushed the biggest one into his mouth. The poor fellow, feeling suffocated, leapt to his feet, begging for help and causing vespers to be suspended. For this prank, the curate, your cousin, immediately gave you a half-dozen slaps for penance.

After three years of intensive studies and theology in the Salesian studentate, Michael was admitted to ordination but refused to enter the religious consecration. He was so adamant that he was allowed to go to Turin to talk to Don Bosco and delay ordination. He said and repeated again and again that he had not yet studied enough and still had too much of the profane.

Don Bosco received him in his room and listened to the reasons for his visit, smiling!

"So, you no longer want to go on," he then asked.

"No, absolutely, I don't have a head, and I want to stop where I am."

"And what would you like to do?"

"Leave everything and go to Roccaforte to study again."

"So you want to abandon Don Bosco?"

"Yes, be patient, but I have decided like this."

"Well, since you tell me you don't have a head, I'll give you mine; take it," and so, taking off his cap, he put it on his head saying: "Now go where I send you."

"Even to the ends of the earth?"

"Even to the ends of the earth!"

Fear, doubt, the thought of returning to his home vanished as if by magic under that magic cap. Unia left without returning it.

That biretta is at Roccaforte in the parish priest's house. Fr Unia had in fact ended up giving it to the parish before leaving for the missions in America, where his name soon became synonymous with apostle to the lepers (*M.B.*, XII, 461).

227. A strenna from Don Bosco

The strenna was a piece of advice, a maxim, a programme that Don Bosco gave to the Salesians and the students of his institutes on the last day of the year, to inspire their actions during the course of the new year. This custom still endures in Salesian houses today, only that it is the Rector Major, the Successor of St. John Bosco, who announces it, and the Rector of the individual houses who communicates it. Here is how Fr Brusasca narrated in 1926 the promulgation of the

strenna made fifty years earlier by Don Bosco, the year he entered the Oratory of Valdocco (Turin).

On the evening of 31 December 1876 Don Bosco, after the prayers, greeted by all the pupils, students and artisans of the Oratory, climbed to his pulpit to give the evening sermon. I can still see him, on the little pulpit, that good smiling priest; but, to tell the truth, I did not understand why so many applauses were given to him. Indeed, I thought to myself: 'Why don't we applaud Don Lazzero, Don Durando and the other superiors equally when they come to speak to us every evening? Are they not equally good, like that priest who smiles with such grace?'

Having made these remarks to one of my colleagues, I heard myself say: 'Ah, you are new, you don't know Don Bosco yet; he is the superior of all the superiors in the house, the founder and therefore the master of the whole Oratory.

"Even of the church?" I ventured naively.

"Even of the church," he concluded, motioning me to be quiet.

In fact the clapping had ceased and Don Bosco was saying:

"This is the last evening of 1876. While you sleep 1877 will begin, and I have come to give you the strenna. Here all the companions began to clap their hands, while I thought what kind of gift he could have given us on such an occasion."

"Try always to make your confessions and your communions holy, because of all of you who are present here at this moment and who hear Don Bosco's words, some will pass into

eternity during the year 1877 and will no longer be here on the last evening of the year that is about to begin. Of you, eight must die in 1877... and then others; and some of these begin with the letter B...

At this point I stopped following Don Bosco's discourse. For me, Brusasca, there was plenty. My little head was immediately in confusion. I would have preferred to be back in my native country, and I started thinking: "Look, look, what a boarding school my father has put me in!... and I was so happy to stay there and had already made friends with these good superiors... So, I must die... My name is Brusascal... That's enough Tomorrow I'll write to my father to come and get me, because I don't want to stay here any more".

But then immediately afterwards: "Don Bosco said that several of those present must die, and he didn't say that they would die here at the Oratory; therefore, although I am going back to my country, I will still die, because he said that someone from letter B would die... O what a mess, what trouble I have got myself into! "

At this point in my soliloquy the applause was renewed and Don Bosco was coming down from his pulpit. The young men, some were filing into the dormitories and some, like a torrent, were flowing towards Don Bosco. I asked my friendly neighbour: "Where are those boys going?"

"They are going to ask Don Bosco if they are the ones who must die."

"And I thought: "I want to be

the last one, even if I have to wait until tomorrow, because I don't want others to hear what Don Bosco is going to tell me."

"I stood at the back of the long line of those who said a word to Don Bosco and had the answer in a whisper." Around Don Bosco there were only a few superiors. I approached too, and Don Bosco smilingly asked me: "And what do you want?"

"I want to know if I have to die too."

"What's your name?"

"Brusasca Natale."

"Good; will you be a friend of Don Bosco?"

"Yes, but do I have to die?"

"Be cheerful and make sure you always make your confessions and your communions well... Be cheerful and go to sleep."

I kissed his hand and, neither happy nor displeased, I went to the dormitory. I will not hide the fact that that evening I was a little afraid of dying in the New Year, but I was soon reassured by the words "be cheerful" and I returned happier and more cheerful than before.

Life at the Oratory was so varied and I was so young that it was not long before I forgot the strenna and the letter B that was fatally attached to it. In truth, the Lord sent me many occasions of true joy and I lived my happiest days at the Oratory, although I did not think as I had promised Don Bosco to make me his true friend.

Instead he thought of me with

particular affection. He saw me with delight and from time to time would converse with me. However, in that year, someone from letter B actually died. From the list of deaths at the Oratory in 1877, it appears that there were eight deaths and four of them had surnames beginning with the letter B: Briatore Giovanni, Bagnati Antonio, Boggiatto Luigi, Becchio Carlo; two students, a family member and a cleric, who died at home, but was present at the Oratory in 1876-77. He died at the very end of the year planned by Don Bosco, 31 December 1877, and it was not worth his while to be away from the Oratory.

Towards the end of 1877 Don Bosco no longer gave the strenna for the reason that he was in Rome; but his words of the previous year came back to me more vividly than ever, for the reason I am about to tell you.

Since early 1877 I had had the good fortune to have been chosen by the lower class of the music school to be added to those of the upper class who were to perform Rossini's Mass. Among my new companions, I regarded with affectionate esteem a young man who was repeating his third year of secondary school and whose name was Baldomero Cornelio. He was very good, but of little talent; Maestro Dogliani had made him secretary of the music school, entrusting him with the keys to the music cupboard and the task of distributing the singing parts to the singers. (*To be continued*) □



A PROJECT OF LIFE, INSPIRED BY MARY PART ONE

by Enrico dal Covolo

I. VIRGIN OF THE CENACLE

In the passing of time, the Church is prepared to welcome the ever-new gifts of the Spirit by invoking Mary.

From the very beginning of the Incarnation, the virgin mother trained herself to "cherish and ponder on" the mystery of God (cf. Luke 2:19, 51). And in the Upper Room, gathered in prayer together with the apostles, she is the icon of the Church that awaits the Spirit: "on the upper floor where they lived", Luke recounts in the Acts, "the apostles were faithful and united in prayer, together with some women and with Mary, the Mother of Jesus" (1:14).

In this and the next meditations we will try to imitate Mary and make our own her project of docility and total openness to the Holy Spirit. Perhaps someone will ask: but is it legitimate to relate Mary's spiritual adventure to me, a simple believer? A holy monk contemporary with Bernard, Isaac, third abbot of the monastery of the Star, replies: 'What Scripture says about Mary can be

referred universally to the Church, and singularly to each faithful soul' (*First Discourse on the Assumption*, 24).

For now, I will just highlight two expressions from Luke, which I have already mentioned. The meditations that we will present in the next episodes are inspired by them.

First of all, in the Infancy Gospel Luke twice notes that Mary 'kept all these things in her heart'. The evangelist means that in the precious shrine of her heart the virgin mother "kept together with great care" (*sunetérei*) every treasure of the mystery of Jesus. But one of the two times Luke adds: "And she pondered them..." A very significant verb is used here: it is the verb *sumballein*, related among other things to the noun symbol. In this way, the evangelist means that Mary not only jealously guarded the Word of God in her heart: more, in her innermost self she sought to compare the individual elements of revelation, to decipher their



Mary is a model and guide for listening to and meditating on the Word of God.

profound meaning, to penetrate and discern the mystery of salvation.

Secondly, Luke states that in the Upper Room, together with Mary of Nazareth, there were also some women. So that group, which had accompanied Jesus in his public ministry all the way to the cross, is also present here: an unbroken thread of female fidelity runs silently from the Gospels to the Acts of the Apostles, and knits together the Master's life and the nascent Church. It is a discreet presence that - while expanding the spaces of femininity in the events of redemption - allows us to better understand the figure of Mary herself, around whom the other faithful women meet.

Precisely Mary's 'guarding' and 'meditating', on the one hand, and the presence of some sleeping beside her, on the other, constitute the double lane along which our meditations will unfold.

1. "Cherishing and pondering"

Mary's 'cherishing' and 'pondering' are the hallmark of *lectio divina*, that is, the prayerful reading of the Word of God.

A 12th century Carthusian monk, in a famous text, described this ancient practice of the spirit in a very delightful way.

"One day, occupied in manual labour," wrote Guy II, prior of the Great Charterhouse, "I found myself thinking about man's spiritual activity." So, just as he is doing a manual task according to the Benedictine precept of *Ora et labora*, Guy realised that any artefact, in order to be satisfactory, requires precise times and rhythms, or more precisely a series of scalar operations. So, he wondered if the same thing did not happen with spiritual activity and wrote: "Four spiritual steps suddenly presented themselves to my reflection, that is, reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation. This is the ladder that rises from earth to heaven, composed of a few steps, and yet of immense and incredible height, whose base is resting on the earth, while the top penetrates the clouds and scrutinises the secrets of heaven" (*The Monks' Ladder. Treatise on the Way of Praying* 1).

Well, Mary, who keeps the Word of God in the treasury of her heart, represents precisely the one who reads and meditates on the Word; and when she pene-

trates and discerns its deepest meanings, she is a figure of the believer, who opens the same Word to prayer and life.

In the following episodes we will put ourselves in Mary's school to read some passages of the Gospel in this way. In this way we will meekly welcome the Word and let it descend into our hearts, until it becomes prayer, and effectively transforms our lives.

2. "Together with some women..."

The presence of other women alongside Mary immediately raises a question: who were these women? and what was their story?

Let us just say that each of these women had a story that decisively intersected with that of Jesus and Mary: and that in each of those stories was reflected at least one characteristic trait of Mary's spiritual experience.

Using this method of the lectio divina we will try to illustrate some of these traits step by step: For example, in Mary of Bethany, who sat at the feet of the Master, we shall contemplate on the



In silent meditation, life experiences are confronted with the Word of God and find direction

faithful disciple, who cherishes and ponders on the Word; and in her gesture of scenting the feet of Jesus, we shall discern the humble handmaid, who magnifies the Lord, and releases the perfume of praise to him; while in the other Mary, the Magdalene, who saw and witnessed the Risen One, we shall see the blessedness of Elizabeth realised: "Blessed are you who believed!"; and finally in the sinful woman, who opened herself to the grace of forgiveness by washing and kissing the feet of Jesus, we shall catch a reflection of the woman who from the beginning was "filled with grace.:"

3. Questions for discernment

Once again that Word, which in Mary became flesh, challenges us, and demands our conversion.

Let us therefore willingly accept this demanding Word, a true two-edged sword, and let us examine ourselves: am I a "man or woman of the Word"? Do I daily hold the Scripture in my hand? Do I meditate on it, like Mary, in my heart? Do I prepare myself, to be able to proclaim it incisively and effectively? Does my life preach the Word? Am I capable of renewing the certainty of faith that when I proclaim the Word, it is the Spirit who speaks in me, it is he who accompanies me and guides me? □



MY VOCATION STORY

"THE FACE OF DON BOSCO IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA"

An interview with Joseph Thanh

by Hoan Phan Trung

Please introduce yourself?

I am a Salesian priest, Brother Joseph Thanh. I was born in Vietnam in 1973, two years before the end of the Vietnam War. I am now a Salesian missionary in the Blessed Philip Rinaldi Delegation in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands (PGS) since 2003. I am the eldest of five siblings in the family: myself, two younger brothers and a younger sister who is a religious belonging to the Sievas de San Jose Congregation and currently a missionary in Papua New Guinea. My father died in 1994, when I was only in my second year of university. It was my mother who supported the family and took care of the children.

Who first spoke to you about Jesus?

It was a privilege for me to have been born during the democratic government in Vietnam, but unfortunately it lasted only two years before the communists took power in 1975. In practice, I grew up under the communist environment and education system. Fortunately, I was born into a family with a strong Catholic tradition. As the first child in the family, I was under the undivided care and protection of my parents in all aspects, especially with regard



to the Catholic faith. I still remember that during primary school, every day I came home from school, my parents would ask me what I had been taught at school (the communist teachers). After listening to my



How did you discover your vocation?

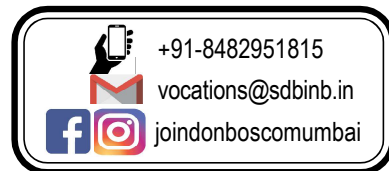
I served in the parish as an altar boy from fifth grade to twelfth grade. During these years in the altar boys' group I had many opportunities to meet newly ordained priests, visiting priests, and to listen to many conferences and presentations on vocation. All these activities and meetings had a great impact on me and helped me to start thinking about vocation.

reports, if there was anything different from the Catholic faith, my parents would immediately correct the mistakes and explain to me the right thing to keep in mind.

In addition, my parents regularly maintained the common devotion in the family, especially the routine of morning and evening prayer. These practices of my parents influenced me greatly. They taught me common prayers and prayed with me every day, for example before and after meals, in the morning as soon as I woke up and in the evening before going to bed. They accompanied me to church. They sat beside me during my First Confession and First Communion to teach me how to make a good confession, what prayers to say before and after confession, what prayers to say after receiving Communion. They asked the parish priest for permission to join the ministries when I was in fifth grade. I always thank God for giving me my parents and I am very grateful to my parents for passing on their Catholic faith to me in a very beautiful way.

How did you meet the Salesians?

When my dear father died, I was in my second year of university in Bien Hoa. This event often made me sad. One day, one of my classmates invited me to go with him to the football matches organised by the Salesians in Ba Thon every Sunday. At first, I just wanted to enjoy the games to help me overcome my sadness. Later, I realised that I also enjoyed the other activities offered by the Salesians. I liked seeing them when they prayed together and ate together. The Salesians inspired me to want to become like them. After following these activities in this Salesian parish for almost four years, I decided to join the Salesians to learn more about Don Bosco and Salesian life, as soon as I finished my studies at boarding school. □



IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

In the Pause Between

Megan was puzzled recently by the odd messages she kept getting on her voice mail. Day after day, all she'd hear from friends, family, and customers alike, would be their message and then they'd ALL say, "BEEP."

We were talking about something else and I had her check her voice mail message to find something out. She discovered the solution to the BEEP riddle.

Her message said, "I'm not available right now, so, please leave a beep after the message."

Compliments to the Chef

I have a reputation for not being a fantastic cook. One evening I worked particularly hard on a new recipe, and once again it didn't turn out as well as I'd hoped.

My son, always sweet and conscious of my feelings chose his words carefully after the meal. "Mom," he said, "that dinner was so good I thought someone else made it."

Arrangements

It was a difficult subject to bring before his aged mother, but John felt that he must: "Mum, you're no longer a spring chicken and you do need to think ahead of what'll happen in the future. Why don't we make arrangements about when...you know...when ...you pass on?"

The mother didn't say anything, just sat there staring ahead.

"I mean, Mum, like...how do you want to finally go? Do you want to be buried? Cremated?"

There was yet another long

pause. Then the mother looked up and said, "Son, why don't you surprise me?"

Classmate Reunion

While waiting for my first appointment in the reception room of a new dentist, I noticed his certificate, which bore his full name.

Suddenly, I remembered that a tall, handsome boy with the same name had been in my high school class some 30 years ago. Upon seeing him, however, I quickly discarded any such thought. This balding, grey-haired man with deeply lined face was way too old to have been my classmate.

After he had examined my teeth, I asked him if he had attended the local high school.

"Yes," he replied.

"When did you graduate?" I asked.

He answered, "In 1971. Why?"

"You were in my class!" I exclaimed.

He looked at me closely and then asked, "What did you teach?"

Empty Nest Craft

I am a first-grade teacher and a new empty-nester. One night I was trying out an art project: making a person with simple materials. I took a coat hanger, attached a paper-plate face, put a shirt on the hanger, and stuffed it. Then I set it on the couch to see how it looked.

Later that evening, my son walked through the door, home for a surprise visit. Taking one look at my coat-hanger friend sitting on the couch, he said, "Mom, it's not that bad, is it?" □

**LOVING CHILDREN TO
THEIR LOVING MOTHER**

Thank you Mother so much for your blessings upon us. No eye surgery was needed and I was just called back after six months. Mother, please continue to bless us. *A Devotee*

My thanks to Jesus and Mary for helping my daughter Uchenna Rita Cascia. *A Devotee*

Thank you mother Mary for the gift of a house, a life partner and a child and innumerable favours received through her intercession.

Mrs. Pereira

Thank you dear St. Dominic Savio for guiding me and taking care of me and blessing me with the gift of a child. I was blessed with a baby boy on March 6, 2023. *Devotee from Goa*

Thank you Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mother Mary for helping me and my elder daughter Trace after 21 years. *A Devotee, Mumbai*

Thank you Mother Mary for all the favours received through the faithful recitation of the Three Hail Marys, do continue to guide us.

Dolarosa Rodrigues

THE VALUE OF A SMILE

The number of smiles your smile provokes in others in a day will tell you how many times you have aroused satisfaction and confidence in them. Learn to make as many people as you know, happy. More than putting flowers on graves, fill hearts with love. Smile also to God, in loving acceptance of his will. Even in the most painful hours, may serenity, joy and a smile never disappear from your face. [...] Although afflicted by illness, strive to be serene, do not welcome anyone without giving them the gift of a smile, even if it is barely visible, to show your gratitude. Your smiling, radiant serenity will impress your visitors more than anything else and will animate them to have faith, patience and constancy even in suffering. You will do much more for the Lord if you strive to **bring more joy into your own life and the lives of others**. If your whole person radiates joy, serenity and peace, God will use you to bring souls to Himself. You will never know the good you can do with a simple smile. **A smile is the best ticket to a friendly soul**. With it you will know how to establish immediate friendship contacts even at the first meeting. A smile is worth more than a right word that you cannot find. [...] If you have nothing to give an indigent person, at least give him your smile that opens and sweetens the soul. If you offer him a gift, accompany it with a smile; **a gift without a smile is like a flower without perfume**. The Lord loves a cheerful giver (cf. 2 Cor 9:7). By Francesco Bersini, *Wisdom of the Gospel Journey*, Ed. Ancora (Milan 1996), 64-65.66-67



B.F. Art by Fabrizio Zubani

HEAVEN ON POINTS

A good Christian came to the door of Heaven. She was all awestruck. St Peter received her cordially. He tried to reassure her, but he told her seriously: "To enter Heaven, you need a hundred points".

The good woman began to list: "I've been faithful to my husband all my life. I have brought up my children in a Christian manner; I have not succeeded so much, but I have done all I could. I was a catechist for twenty-two years. I volunteered for the Missions and helped out at Caritas. I always tried to put up with the people around me, especially the parish priest and my neighbours..."

When she stopped to take a breath, St Peter said to her: "Two and a half points." To the woman it was a punch in the stomach.

Then she tried again: "And... Ah yes, I assisted my old parents. I forgave my sister who was waging war against me because of the inheritance.... And look! I never missed a Mass on Sunday, except for the birth of my children. I also attended retreats and Lenten missions... I always said my prayers... And the Rosary in the month of May..."

St Peter told her: "We are three points behind".

The woman became dejected. How could she get to a hundred points? She had said the essentials and found it difficult to come up with anything more.

With tears in her eyes and a trembling voice, she said, "If so, I can only count on God's mercy! ..." "A hundred points for that!" exclaimed Saint Peter. □



"The Lord is kind and full of compassion, slow to anger and rich in mercy. As far as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his love for those who are faithful to him. As good as a father is to his children, so tender is the Lord to his faithful ones. He knows how we are made; he does not forget that we are dust." (Psalm 103)

**POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK
FEBRUARY 2024**

For the Terminally Ill

Let us pray that the sick who are in the final stages of life, and their families, receive necessary medical and human care and accompaniment.

Regd RNI no. 9360/57;

License to post without prepayment
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

Thank you dear Infant Jesus and Mother Mary for all the graces and blessings received through the recitation of the flying novena to the Infant Jesus of Prague. Thank you for healing my husband from the pain he was suffering in his left knee for so many years. We are grateful that he is now able to walk without the pain. Thank you Infant Jesus for helping my son do well in his examinations and continue blessing him. Thank you for all the favours received. May Jesus and Mama Mary continue to bless and protect us always.

A Devotee

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.

To help a poor lad to reach the priesthood, is a privilege

You can help by establishing a Perpetual Burse with:

Rs 5000/-, 10,000/-, 15,000/- for a boy studying for the priesthood;

But any amount, however small, will be gratefully received.

Send your offerings by Payee cheque or Draft on Mumbai banks; MO/PO/INTL MO/BPO/Bequests, Wills, Perpetual Burses, all favouring Don Bosco's Madonna or Bombay Salesian Society or Rev. Fr. Edwin D'Souza, (Trustee).

Please address all correspondence to:

**Rev. Fr. Edwin D'Souza, sdb.,
SHRINE OF DON BOSCO'S MADONNA,
Matunga - MUMBAI - 400 019 - INDIA
Phone/Fax: 91-22- 2414 6320, email: dbmshrine@gmail.com**