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*O Lord,
 we humbly
 beseech you,
 that those
 who devoutly honor
 the Blessed Virgin Mary,
 may be worthy
 to share with her
 in the charity
 of heaven.*

(From the Common of the BVM)

From The Editor's Desk

THANKS FOR EVERYTHING

I was visiting friends in the quiet town of Ooty. Aaron and Jessie had been friends for ages, and I had to make this trip because they had lost their twenty-three-year-old son, Donny. They were getting on in years, and so when they knew I was coming, Jessie went out of her way to see I was comfortable. After settling down and the evening shadows lengthened, I sat in their little parlour and listened to them talk about Donny. I was glad to sit with them and help them grieve in that safe space. Jessie started (Aaron was a man of few words). She said: "It was close to midnight when Donny put down his pen and decided to take a break from writing. Leaving his unfinished poem on top of his bedside locker, he mentioned quietly while we were still pottering around in the kitchen, 'I'm going off for a walk.' And out he headed into the darkness of a windy night, following his usual path down to the lake. Shortly afterwards, Aaron retired for the night, but I waited up, as I always did on these occasions, listening to the sound of his key in the lock. All through the night, I waited patiently, then anxiously, for Donny to return. But he didn't. Three days later, his frail body was recovered from the swirling waters of the lake among seaweed and moss. No one knows for sure what happened to him: whether he dived into the lake or whether he was just sucked under. And no one knows, or will ever know, what dark spectres may have preyed on his young mind. For us, his heartbroken family, the anguish of uncertainty was added to the cruel pain of loss. All that he left us was the poem on the bedside locker."

I read that poem that Jessie handed to me. Though not the most artistic work I have ever read, it is undoubtedly the most inspiring. Donny's short journey through this life led him through long stretches of shadow. He carried with him, along with other disabilities disrupting his studies, his frequent bouts of depression, because of which he encountered failure more often than success. And yet his poem was a glorious hymn to life, a joyful song of thanksgiving, in which he poured out his appreciation for God's blessings. He took nothing for granted. He thanked God for all those blessings which were gift-wrapped and easy to recognise - life and health, family and friends, laughter and success. He thanked him too for those other blessings which were not easy to identify and which came, as it were, parcelled in brown paper and hairy jute string - the blessings in disguise, the unwelcome gifts of sickness and tears, failure and disappointment, loss and rejection. Though never ranked amongst the stars of academic life, Donny's prayer to God was simple and touching: "Thank you, Lord, for the little German I managed to learn." And though not conventionally handsome, his final prayer to his Creator was marked with the humour of the humble: "Thank you, Lord, for my large ears." Aaron and Jessie are still grieving but are eternally grateful for the blessing of a grateful son who saw everything in life as good and a gift of God's love."

Fr. Ian Doulton, sdb

THE ETHICS OF LOVE

by Mons. Gianpaolo Dianin, bishop

Love is the gift of self and the acceptance of the other in freedom; it demands commitment and patience; it does not fear the dimension of duration, and knows how to curb the need for everything, all the time.

In our reflections on the emotional world, provoked by the dramatic facts of femicides, we have tried to describe 'true love' in these words: 'Loving means welcoming people as a gift with their richness and limitations without expecting them to be what they are not or to give us what they do not want or cannot give us. The idolisation of the other has a toxic root: those who idolise risk losing sight of the person and wanting to mould them from their desire.'

In light of these statements, we can say that love also has an ethi-

cal dimension. It calls into play values and motivations and generates good and constructive action. This dimension is not taken for granted in today's emotional and sentimental context.

In fact, in the eyes of many young people, love has the colours of sentiment, emotions, and a heart that warms in in the presence of the other. Love appears as something that must dazzle, excite, and overwhelm. Women mainly capture the emotional aspect, while men are more taken by erotic passion. But it is all signalled by the rhythm



of the seasons: love comes and goes, blooms and droops, promises and fails to deliver.

The image could be that of a labyrinth: one enters love, but then there are many paths, and one risks getting lost or needing help understanding the right direction. There are surprises, conquests and defeats, sometimes there is the feeling of still being at the starting point.

How can one fail to notice that, for many young people, love is in danger of being reduced to a generic 'well-being' together? A psycho-physical well-being rests above all on that feeling and those emotions that the love relationship distributes to both with abundance, at least at its beginning.

Love is the gift of self and acceptance of the other in freedom; it demands commitment and patience, does not fear the dimension of duration, and knows how to curb the need for everything all the time. To love also means to want to love, that is, to assume the affective intentionality that falling in love spontaneously offers – choosing to love changes the form of affection from passive spontaneity to active and fruitful action. From concentration on oneself and what one feels, love becomes the cultivation of a relationship so that it bears fruit. Falling in love is contemplation; love is the elaboration of the real.

For all that, we must say with Erich Fromm that love is also 'work': "The essence of love is to work for something, to make

something grow. Love and work are inseparable. One loves what one works for and works for what one loves." Work demands an investment of resources to transform the initial fire into a heat that time does not consume. Only such work guarantees the duration of love. If I do not want to work. It is like expecting to find a beautiful meadow in summer and wanting to live there without doing anything, without thinking that the grass must be cut, the weeds must be removed, and soon winter, rain and cold will come.

Here are the two dimensions of bonding: the affective and the ethical. The affective one, predominant today, involves attraction, eroticism, sharing, gratification, and mutual care. The ethical one involves a commitment to maintaining the relationship, the diversity of the other, hard work, forgiveness, and a spirit of sacrifice. It is about caring for the bond: only then can it become 'generative', while neglect makes it 'degenerative.'

“The universal condition that enhances an asset is not spontaneity but work and its constant cultivation”

BERNARD SURPRISED BY THE SIGHT OF MARY

by Paola Curzu

The saintly monk, whom the liturgy commemorates on 20 August, is surprised by the apparition of Her whom he liked to call the "star of the sea," who is most fittingly compared to a star."

The church of the Badia (abbey), one of the oldest in Florence, rises in the heart of the city, in front of the Bargello: it was founded in 978 by Willa, wife of the Marquis of Tuscany, and over the centuries has undergone profound transformations, such as that of Arnolfo da Cambio who in 1285 changed its orientation by turning the apse

towards Via del Proconsolo. At the hour of Vespers, as we enter the luminous ambience of the temple, also renovated in the 18th century, we are greeted by the chants and prayers that the members of the Monastic Fraternity of Jerusalem, guardians of this place, raise to God. The sweet melody of their voices accompanies us as we turn



our gaze to the left, just past the entrance, where stands the painting which we will admire and which we have chosen during these summer months to commemorate Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) and his devotion to Mary.

Let us briefly recall Filippino Lippi. He was the son and pupil of the painter Filippo Lippi, who left him orphaned at the age of 12. Because of this, he had to continue his training in the workshop of Fra' Diamante and Botticelli. From the latter, he adopted the delicately linear style that, during his artistic evolution, took on unreal, almost visionary tones, ignited by great imagination and emotional solid tension that heralded 'Mannerism.'

On the large painting stands out in the bottom right-hand corner the kneeling, clasped-handed figure of the commissioner Piero, son of Francesco del Pugliese, who ordered it from Filippino for the family chapel in the Campora Convent in Marignolle of the Badia monks. During the siege of Florence in 1529, the work was kept in the sacristy of the Badia and was later placed in the church.

The tall figure of Bernard stands out in the centre of the composition, wrapped in the broad, finely outlined folds of the cowl (the monastic habit), under which the sleeve of the rough sackcloth fabric with which the 'doctor mellifluous' (a nickname alluding to the sweetness of his words that dripped honey from the Scriptures) mortified his flesh can be glimpsed.

As a backdrop, a stack of various volumes serves as a visual representation of Bernard's vast theological knowledge, a hallmark of

his status as a Doctor of the Church. Above this, an open book, meticulously painted to capture the realism of a crumpled page, hints at his deep contemplation of the Gospel passage of the Annunciation.

Bernard sits on a crude wooden stool behind which we discover the devil figure holed up in a gloomy rocky ravine, angrily biting at his chains: an allusion to a medieval hymn celebrating Mary, the liberator of humanity from the bonds of sin.

While intent on writing his sermons in honour of Our Lady, the holy monk is surprised by the apparition of her, whom he liked to call "Star of the Sea," which is most conveniently compared to a star, for as the star gives forth its ray without corrupting itself, so the Virgin gives birth to the Son without injury to her integrity".

Mary, wrapped in brightly coloured clothing, is accompanied by a host of angels in whose faces some specialists thought they could recognise the portraits of the client's children. The soul's flight towards contemplation is suspended in the enchantment of the mystical dialogue enclosed in Bernard's half-closed mouth and the Virgin's sweet expression.

The scene is set in a wild landscape marked by rugged rocks highlighted by the incident light, behind which a fantastic landscape opens up towards the horizon. High up on the right, in front of the monastery, Bernard's companions participate spiritually in the mysterious event, gazing in amazement at the sky ripped open by the divine light bursting from the golden clouds. □

YOU'RE GOOD, AS YOU ARE

by Anastasia Dias

As usual, two men went to church on a day like any other. One of them was Chris, who sat on the first bench and said, not really under his breath, "God, oh God! I'm perfect, am I not? I'm in church every day; I help the poor regularly and fast twice a week. I'm so grateful that I am not like all those others (you know who I mean), especially John (who he just realised he was behind him) somewhere on the last bench."

Indeed, John was on the last bench, but he wasn't sitting; he was kneeling. He didn't look up; his teary eyes were lowered. The poor guy whispered, "God, forgive me; I'm such a terrible sinner."

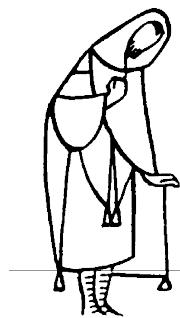
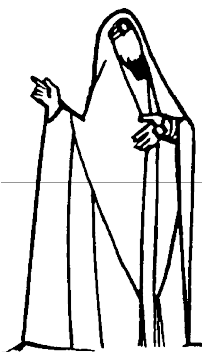
Jesus used that famous parable, also known as the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, to illustrate the importance of humility.

I took a reading course with one of my professors during my previous semester. Another student was already in the office when I turned up that evening. He was also a graduate student, a few years ahead of me. We had never spoken, but I knew

he was very bright. The professor asked him if and when he was going home - he was from China. The professor added that he was awarded a generous stipend over the summer. Hearing that, the boy was confused and replied, "You mean for my ticket back home?" That reply completely blew my mind! The boy standing right in front of me was perhaps one of the brightest students in the department. He was awarded a stipend to further his research, which would significantly contribute to the department. But all he was excited about was getting his flight fare home.

That simple encounter meant nothing to that confused guy, who may have won dozens of awards before. My professor, too, may have forgotten that I had overheard that conversation.

But that conversation left a deep and long-lasting impression on me. That day, I learned an important lesson: it was a lesson in humility.



I have thought about myself several times, which inclined me to look down on those around me. I've tried to put myself and my preferences, opinions, and perceptions before those of my friends and colleagues, and because of that, I've been oblivious to the feelings of others.

That conversation taught me that no matter how rich, successful, or famous one is, one must always choose to be humble.

Humility is a quality that I have to strive to attain.

Of course, on multiple occasions, I've met people who have said things like, "Hey, do you even know who I am?" or "I am the most successful person in the room right now," or "Look at me and then just look at yourself ... after that, we can talk."

My retorts to those people meant: "I don't know and don't care who you are."

The bottom line is: no matter how rich, successful, popular or famous you are, hardly anyone you meet will know or acknowledge or even care. There's always someone who's going to say, "I'm sorry, I just don't know who you are! But I know one thing: you're here to work, so finish the job, and then you can leave."

The hair on the back of my neck began to bristle at those 'barbs,' and I felt that I also needed a lesson in humility. I've always thought I should never want to sound or be like them.

And, even though I may not be the humblest person in the room, I have tried to practise humility.

But I must also admit (to my embarrassment) that I have this sick tendency to look around and think how much better I am than everyone else.

Believe me; it took a fellow graduate student who was better at Math than I am to teach me this all-important lesson in humility.

St. Augustine beautifully summarises my narrative: "Do you wish to rise? Begin by descending. The higher your structure is, the deeper its foundation must be. Do you plan a tower that will pierce the clouds? Lay first the foundation of humility."

Friends, let's strive to be humble - lowering our gaze and quietly looking, seeking not to claim how superior we are to others but acknowledging that even though we are talented and gifted, we are all alike. Of course, we are different; we sound and act differently, but we have the same breath in our nostrils and blood coursing through our hearts and veins. The moment even one of us thinks that we are superior to our neighbour, we have brought to birth some of the many problems plaguing our world today: War, famine, inequality, poverty.

But, as soon as we realise that we are all the same, we start extinguishing this fire of superiority, which causes hatred, indifference, and evil, which quite a few of our fellow human beings have ignited.

We have enough people who think they are correct, justified, and reasonable, and everyone else is not - you and I do not need to add ourselves to that list.

When you consider this, you would do well to cease being your old narcissistic self, itching to take sides and remind yourself that we all need peace. The only way it can be achieved is by allowing selfless peace to germinate within our beings, and we do that by simply cultivating humility! □

VIETNAM

The Don Bosco Mai Sen gastronomy school in Ho Chi Minh City is unique in Vietnam. It offers young people from poor families the opportunity to receive a qualified education. Professionals in the hospitality industry are in great demand throughout the country.

Tense with concentration, Vu Thi Anh serves Vietnamese rice noodle soup from the right, the way she learned it. She prepared the soup herself in the kitchen. The aspiring chef and catering specialist is in her second year of training at the Mai Sen Hotel Management School in Ho Chi Minh City, formerly Saigon. The Salesians of Don Bosco run the school and offer young people from poor families the chance of a better future.

After graduating high school, a nun told Vu Thi Anh about the hotel management school in Ho Chi Minh City. Vietnam's largest city is only a few hours' drive from her home. Her family lives in the countryside. Children and young people from poor families do not have to pay school fees and can stay in a dormitory. "My father initially did not want me

to go alone to Ho Chi Minh City. But I eventually convinced him. My mother supported me from the beginning," says Vu Thi Anh. The whole family is now happy that she is studying at Mai Sen School and has good prospects for the future.

'I can be very stubborn'

"The most difficult thing for me was learning English. In the beginning, I couldn't understand almost anything. But I tried hard. I had to speak English in the dormitory, which greatly helped me. With time, I gained more and more confidence," says the 20-year-old happily. Vu Thi Anh is a hard worker because she wants a reasonable degree. "When I set my mind to something, I can be stubborn. I work hard to achieve my goal." After graduating as a catering specialist, she would like



Treating each other with respect: in addition to other professional skills, boys and girls are also taught values such as courtesy and punctuality.

to gain professional experience, including abroad. "I want to get to know new places and countries and travel a lot."

Tourism has been booming in Vietnam for many years. Trained specialists are scarce because only a few gastronomy schools exist in Asia. This gave an idea to the German-Vietnamese Francis van Hoi, who worked for a long time as a chef and restaurateur in Munich: why should he not import know-how from Germany into his home country? Thus, the Don Bosco School of Gastronomy in Ho Chi Minh City was born.

Training in your own bistro

There are currently 22 girls and 26 boys attending the school. Demand far exceeds supply. Young people can stay in a Don Bosco dormitory during their training. The training and accommodation are free of charge. All sales from the restaurant go to support the apprentices. The young people use their tips to pay for school books. During the three-year training, teenagers and young people from poor families learn more than just cooking and serving. Their social skills, such as responsibility, reliability and the ability to work in a team, are also promoted. The timetable also includes hygiene, nutrition and English. The boys and girls are also taught values such as courtesy and punctuality. Mutual respect and non-violent problem-solving are also valued skills.

The gastronomy school also has its bistro. The training restaurant offers Vietnamese and European cuisine. In the bistro, young people learn to cook and work in service. From 2019, they can also com-



plete an 18-month training course to become bakers in the gastronomy school's in-house bakery.

The vocational training to become a catering specialist is a gateway to a world of opportunities. The practical training in a hotel - even a five-star hotel - lasts twelve months, providing ample time to hone your skills and gain valuable experience. The catering school works closely with starred hotels, opening doors to potential employment. In recent years, tourism in Vietnam has become an important economic factor. Even after Covid, many tourists return to the country, ensuring a steady stream of job opportunities. In the city of Ho Chi Minh alone, there are dozens of four and five-star hotels, as well as several thousand restaurants and snack bars, all



Learn in your bistro: theory and practice go hand in hand during training at the Mai Sen School of Gastronomy

potential employers for our skilled trainees.

Many companies would like to hire trainees. The unique thing about Vietnam is that young men and women receive dual training based on the German model: theoretical and practical lessons are closely linked during training. They take the final examination before the German Foreign Trade Chamber.

Beginning of a better future

Mai Sen's teachers come from around the world, including Germany, Ireland, Australia, and California. Many local entrepreneurs also teach voluntarily. Like Chu Huu Thang, a student at Mai Sen. The 25-year-old comes from Dak Nong province in the central highlands of Vietnam. In 2019, he completed his three-year training at the gastronomy school. He now teaches young trainees. He supervises and mentors younger students. "It's not just about money, but also about gratitude. I have received so much help from Mai Sen, and now I want to give it back to the young trainees and Don Bosco".

happy to be able to work, learn and live at the Don Bosco School. Many of my peers did not have this opportunity!" said Chu Huu Thang. He has clear goals for his future. "I want to develop my culinary skills. After that, I will go abroad or work as a chef at an international restaurant in Vietnam." He will remain loyal to Mai Sen because this is where his future begins. □



An aunt who studied in Mai Sen brought Chu Huu Thang to Ho Chi Minh City in 2016. There, she took him to her former school, a turning point in his life.

"I knew right away: this was the right place for me!" The school taught him everything he needed to know to work in the restaurant industry. "I was

Witnesses in & for Our Times



JOSEPH CALASANZ (August 25)

Ian Pinto, sdb

VATICAN II ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Since all Christians have become by rebirth of water and the Holy Spirit a new creature so that they should be called and should be children of God, they have a right to a Christian education. A Christian education does not merely strive for the maturing of a human person...but has as its principal purpose this goal: that the baptized...learn...how to worship God the Father in spirit and truth (cf. Jn 4:23)...be conformed in their personal lives according to the new man created in justice and holiness of truth (Eph 4:22-24); also that they develop into perfect manhood, to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ (cf. Eph 4:13) and strive for the growth of the Mystical Body; moreover, that aware of their calling, they learn not only how to bear witness to the hope that is in them (cf. Pet 3:15) but also how to help in the Christian formation of the world that takes place when natural powers viewed in the full consideration of man redeemed by Christ contribute to the good of the whole society. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 2



A CHRISTIAN EDUCATOR

Joseph Calasanz is honoured as the patron of all Christian popular schools. This title was bestowed on him by Pope Pius XII in 1948. He earned this title for his exceptional and pioneering work in the field of education. He gained renown for his model of schooling and for establishing a congregation, the Piarists, to carry forward the mission of providing a solid Christian education to young people.

Joseph was born in Calasanz, Spain on September 11, 1556, to wealthy parents. Despite coming from a small town, the Calasanz family was well-established, wealthy, and highly respected. Joseph's parents provided him with a good education by employing a tutor at home for his primary schooling before sending him to a regular elementary school. After recognizing his

capacity for academic excellence, Joseph was sent to a college run by the Trinitarian Fathers to receive an education in the classics and to become cultured. There he first became aware of stirrings within his soul and eventually realized that God was calling him to be a priest.

Joseph, however, did not desire to pursue the calling instead he chose to continue his studies. He attended the University of Lleida and studied philosophy and law. He ended up earning a Doctorate in Law and secured very high marks. He then proceeded to study theology in Valencia first and later in Madrid. Over the course of his studies, Joseph became more attentive to the stirrings of his heart and felt God's call more deeply.

He was about 26 years old when his mother died and his father turned to him to support the family and carry forward its legacy. At this time, Joseph revealed to his father that he had a vocation to the priesthood. This revelation surprised his father as he had not shown any signs in the preceding years. His father became upset that he was seriously considering pursuing this call and relations between them became sour. The tension with his father had a psychosomatic effect on him and he found his health deteriorating rapidly. Such was the extent of his illness that he appeared to be nearing death. Seeing his son critically ill shook his father to his very core. He perceived that the tension between them had something to do with it, and so he gave Joseph his blessings to pursue his vocation.

Joseph recovered his health and

a year later, on December 17, 1583, was ordained a priest of God. As a highly qualified young priest, Joseph was immediately recruited by Bishop Gaspar Juan de la Figuera of the Albarracin diocese as a theologian, confessor and procurator. When the Bishop was transferred to another diocese, Joseph went with him. Thus, for about 9 years, Joseph held various administrative responsibilities and posts of importance. But somehow he felt incomplete. This feeling was augmented by a dream he had in which he saw himself teaching a large number of children in Rome while being assisted by angels.

In 1592, at the age of 35, he resigned from administrative responsibility and moved to Rome. He was taken in by Cardinal Colonna who offered him a position as his personal theologian and spiritual director of his household. At first, Joseph struggled to pick up Italian but committed himself to the task. Along with his familiarity with the language, he became accustomed to the social conditions of Rome and found that there were many opportunities for charitable apostolate. The one that captured his attention the most was the education of children, particularly those who were neglected, homeless, and orphaned.

THE PIARISTS

Joseph's vocation as an educator began as a member of a confraternity that was directed to the Christian education of youth who lived on the streets. Though this wasn't a very successful apostolate, it laid the foundation for his future ministry. Eventually, he received help from a parish priest to conduct tuition classes for poor

boys in 2 rooms near the sacristy. Not only did the priest offer him space, he also volunteered to help him take classes. Sometime later, two other priests came forward to join this venture and on November 27, 1597, Joseph Calasanz opened what is considered to be the first free public school in Europe!

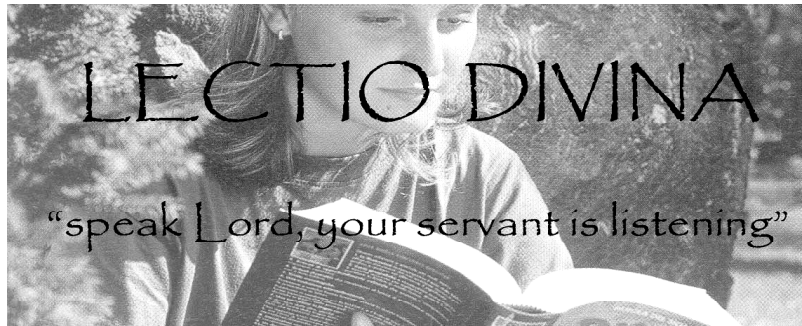
The sign that this was indeed God's work came in the form of huge numbers for admission. Such was the outreach to the needy that people of all walks of life began to take notice. More so, people of repute within ecclesiastical circles became curious. Calasanz's school was unique for ecclesiastics because it combined catechetical training with secular studies. He found benefactors and well-wishers among Popes, bishops, priests and laity. Popes Clement VIII and Paul V were notable benefactors.

Joseph perceived the benefits of setting up a religious society that would be wholly dedicated to the work of education. Thus he initiated the founding of the Piarists or the Order of the Pious Schools. In 1617, the society was recognized by the Church and given the name, Pauline Congregation of the Poor of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools. It was the first religious congregation that had the education of youth as its charism. On March 25, 1617, Joseph and 14 other priests became the first members of the new congregation. They took vows and donned a religious habit. Besides the three customary religious vows, the congregation added a fourth vow: to remain dedicated to the Christian education of youth, especially the poor.

In 1621, the congregation was

given the status of a religious order by Pope Gregory XV who altered the name to *Order of Poor Clerics Regular of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools*. The congregation carried forward its educational mission on the educational philosophy of its founder. Joseph made it clear that his vision of education was directed to the integral maturity of the individual, a precursor to the declaration made by the Second Vatican Council in its declaration on Christian education. Emphasizing love over fear, he wrote, "If from the very earliest years, a child is instructed in both religion and letters, it can be reasonably hoped that his life will be happy." This served as the motivating force behind his and the congregation's educational ventures. The reputation of Calasanz and the Piarists spread across Europe and he received invitations from various quarters to set up schools. One of the most noteworthy requests came from a premier within the Ottoman Empire. Unfortunately, Joseph was not able to accept these requests since he lacked the personnel.

Today the Piarists number around 1400 and are engaged in educational work in 5 continents and 36 countries. They have strong presences in Italy, Spain, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Latin America, West Africa, India and Philippines. Their motto is *Pietas et Litterae* (Piety and Learning), reflecting the educational philosophy of the founder. Joseph Calasanz died in 1648 at the age of 90. His heart and tongue are incorrupt and are preserved at the Piarist motherhouse in Rome. □



THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD

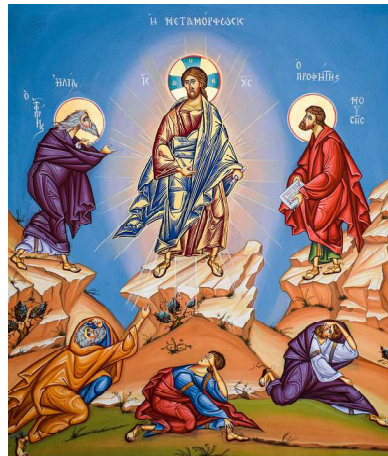
by Fr Dinesh Vasava, sdb

Mark 9:2-10

1. Reading: Take a few moments to read the Gospel passage slowly and attentively. Pay attention to the details of the story and imagine yourself in the scene. Try to understand the significance of Jesus' Transfiguration and the reactions of Peter, James, and John.

2. Meditation: Ponder on the message of the passage. Consider the significance of Jesus' Transfiguration, where His appearance changed, and He was seen conversing with Moses and Elijah. Reflect on the disciples' fear and confusion, as well as Peter's desire to build dwellings for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. What does this story reveal to you about the divinity of Jesus and the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets in Him?

In this passage we come across the story of Jesus' transfiguration. After leading John, James, and Peter to the top of a lofty mountain, Jesus is transfigured in front of them. His clothes turn a brilliant white that would outshine



any earthly bleach, and his appearance transforms.

Elijah and Moses appear during this transfiguration and start talking to Jesus. Awestruck and not quite realising the gravity of the situation, Peter proposes that three tents be built for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. They are, however, overshadowed by a cloud, and the cloud speaks, saying, "This is my son, the beloved; listen to him!"

A crucial moment in the Gospel story, the Transfiguration discloses crucial facets of Jesus' persona and purpose. It acts as evidence of Jesus' deity and his status as the Son of God. Jesus' brilliant white appearance and the presence of Moses and Elijah represent how the Law and the Prophets have been fulfilled in Jesus.

Elijah stands in for the prophetic tradition, and Moses for the Law that God gave the Israelites. Their presence next to Jesus indicates that he is the culmination of God's redemptive plan, the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets.

The disciples are told to listen to Jesus as the voice from the cloud, which is recognised as the voice of God the Father, confirms Jesus' status as his Son. This proclamation highlights Jesus' deity and authority, emphasising the significance of his teachings and the necessity of adhering to them.

In response, Peter expressed a desire to cling to the moment and prolong the experience by proposing to construct tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. The voice from the cloud and the overshadowing cloud, however, suggest that this event is not intended to be contained or prolonged. It is a taste of the heavenly kingdom and a glimpse of Jesus' glory.

The disciples find comfort and hope in the Transfiguration, especially since Jesus predicts his impending suffering and death. It fortifies their faith and equips them to face the difficulties that lie ahead. Jesus emphasises the value of comprehending the en-

tirety of his mission and the significance of his resurrection by telling them not to discuss the Transfiguration until after his resurrection.

3. Prayer: Engage in a conversation with God. Share your thoughts, feelings, and questions that arise from the passage. Thank God for revealing His glory through Jesus' Transfiguration. Ask for the grace to recognize Jesus as the Son of God and to be transformed by His presence in your life. Pray for a deeper understanding of the significance of the Law and the Prophets in relation to Jesus' mission. Seek guidance on how to respond to the call to listen to Jesus.

4. Contemplation: Enter into a moment of silence and stillness. Allow the words and images of the Gospel passage to settle in your heart. Imagine yourself as one of the disciples, witnessing the Transfiguration of Jesus. Reflect on the ways in which you can open yourself to encountering the glory of God in your own life. Simply rest in God's presence, allowing Him to speak to you beyond words.

5. Action: Consider how you can apply the message of this passage to your own life. Reflect on any areas where you may need to deepen your faith and recognize Jesus as the Son of God. How can you listen to Jesus and follow His teachings more closely? Reflect on how you can be transformed by His presence and become a witness to His glory in the world. Make a commitment to take action based on the insights you have gained. □

Quiet Spaces

A RESOUNDING SILENCE

Pope Francis' homily (edited) at Domus Sanctae Marthae on June 10, 2016

The Christian is “standing”, so as to welcome God in patient “silence”, in order to hear his voice and “go out” to proclaim Him to others, knowing that faith is always “an encounter”. These three attitudes, he explained, encourage and revive the lives of all those who feel overwhelmed by fear in the most difficult moments.

He explained that in the first reading, taken from the First Book of Kings (19:9, 11-16), “we heard about the prophet Elijah’s encounter with God”. The prophet “Elijah had a long history, he is a victor: he struggled so much, so much for the faith, because the people of Israel had turned away from faithfulness”.

Moreover, the Pope added, “to use a word from the Gospel, and Jesus also says it to the people of Israel, they had become an ‘adulterous generation’: on the one hand they wanted to worship God and on the other to worship idols”. There is “a phrase that the prophet Elijah said to the people: ‘how long will you go limping on two feet?’”. He uses the example of “limping with two feet: not standing firm with either God nor with idols, having one foot in one place and the other foot in another, or as we might say in everyday speech, ‘this person is well with God and with the devil’”.

Pope Francis pointed out that “Elijah struggled greatly against this situation the people were in, and he won: he won an arduous fight against the 400 prophets of the idols, he defeated them on Mt Carmel and he killed all with the power of God: he is the victor”. But then Elijah “went down from the mountain and heard the news that Queen Jezebel, a cruel and unscrupulous woman, wanted to kill him for this, because she was an idolatress”. And so Elijah “was afraid”. It seems that he “no longer steps up: death is better, and he sinks into deep depression. Lying on the ground, in the shade of a tree, he wants to die; he enters into the sleep that comes before death, that depressed sleep”.

But then, the Pope said, “the Lord sends an angel to wake him: ‘Arise! Have a little bread and water’”. And Elijah obeys him, but “then goes back to sleep”. The angel “came again a second time”, again inviting him to rise to his feet. Once he arose, the angel gave him “the next word: ‘Go!’”. Therefore, Pope Francis noted, “in order to encounter God it is necessary for man to return to his position at the time of creation: standing and walking”. Because “this is how God created us: at his height, in his image and likeness, and on a path”. In fact, the Lord says: “Go, go forward, cultivate the land, make it grow, and multiply”. He also says: “Go forth, and stand upon the mountain before the Lord”. And so, the Book of Kings tells us, “Elijah stood up and, getting up on his feet, he went out”.

In the Gospel, particularly “in the parable of the prodigal son”, we see the same situation. It is the reality in which that child found himself, “when he was depressed, watching the pigs eat while he was hungry”. At that moment “he thought about his father and said to himself: ‘I must get up and go out’ to find the father”. The Pope suggested “these two words: ‘get up’ and ‘go out’”.

Therefore, Elijah, the Pope continued, “went up the mountain to meet the Lord and, behold, the Lord passed by”. In what way “did the Lord pass by? How does the Lord pass by? How can I encounter the Lord in order to be sure that it is he?”. asked Francis, re-reading the page from the Old Testament: “Before all else a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart, and it shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind and the Lord was not in the earthquake; after the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire”. Elijah, the Pope said, “watched and waited for the Lord: there was so much noise, so much majesty, so much movement, and the Lord was not there”. Finally, “after the fire came the whisper of a gentle breeze, or, as it is in the original, ‘the thread of a resounding silence’. And there was the Lord”.

“To encounter the Lord”, Pope Francis pointed out, “we must enter into ourselves and feel that ‘thread of a resounding silence’”, because “He speaks to us there”. “What happens?”. the Pope asked. The answer is in that “Go!”, because the Lord “gives us a mission” as he did to Elijah: “Now, retrace your steps, and anoint this one as king, another as a king, and Elisha as a prophet and your successor”. Elijah knows “this is the mission he must fulfil”.

Elijah’s mission suggests “three clear things” the Pope said. “In order to go and find the Lord, standing, going out of ourselves, on a path”, the first clear point is precisely to be “standing and on a path”. The second point is “to have the courage to wait for that whisper, that “thread of resounding silence”, when the Lord speaks to the heart and we encounter him”. The third point is the “mission”, the invitation to retrace his steps in order to go “forward”.

This is “the message that this Scripture passage teaches us today”, said Pope Francis, recalling: “We must always seek the Lord: we all know what difficult moments are like, moments that pull us down, moments without faith, darkness, moments in which we do see not the horizon, when we are unable to get up, we all experience them! “In this passage we see the real life of a Christian”, said Pope Francis.

The Pope prayed “that even if we fall, we must have the strength to “arise” and go on,” not to be closed in the selfishness of our comfort: but patiently to wait for his voice and for the encounter with him, and then to be brave in the mission, to bring the Lord’s message to others”. □

A SECOND CHANCE AT LIFE

By Pierluigi Menato, Tr. Ian Doulton, sdb

With a trembling heart, she listened to the breathing of her mother and little sister Lucy in the next room: they were sleeping peacefully. Then, more quietly, she began get dressed. She slowly put together in her carry-bag the few things she wanted to take with her: a photograph of her family when her father was still there, a wristwatch, a gift from her mother and a few intimate items she had secretly put together during the day.

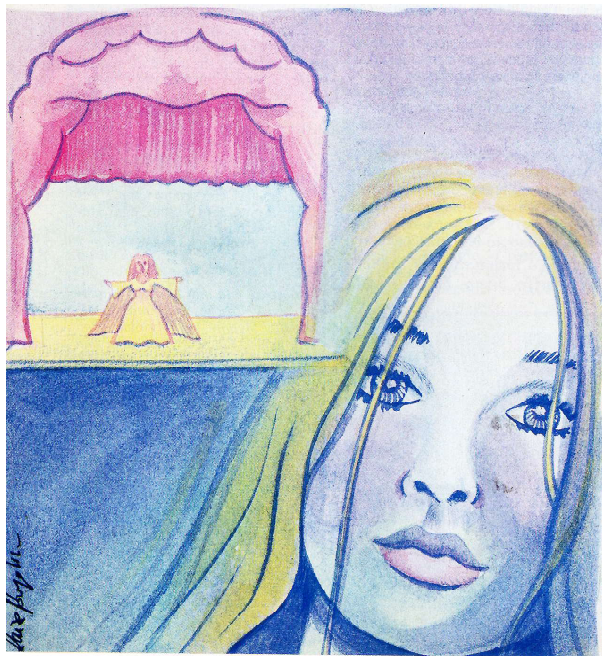
She tried to fix her golden-blond hair with her hands, looking now and with anguish coupled with a desperate 'love' she gazed at the room's closed door behind which her mother and sister snuggled close together, perhaps smiling at sweet dreams. At the same time, she was about to rudely sever that serenity with a cruel gesture and destroy a whole past of love and honesty and a future perhaps of joy.

At that moment, Anna's heart trembled in the uncertainty of the unknown towards which her talent was calling her with earnest appeals. An im-

mense desire to take refuge in her mother's arms seized her and she wanted to hold her once more before it was too late.

But in that instant, the sound of Johann's car horn pierced through her thoughts. It was too late to turn back now. She was captivated by how artfully Johann had projected her life; with seductive colours beckoning her towards a life of success. The new voice resonating within her was too powerful for her to find the strength to resist.

And she also loved Johann, that opera tenor, with his affection and personality, who would open for her doors to stardom. She thought back on his words;



recalling with a heart full of happiness the beautiful, elegant figure, the grey metallic eyes that softened with a light of tenderness only for her. She relived the hours of her dream, the promises with which he had been able to flatter her, to convince her to believe in him with all the thirst of her twenties brimming over with new horizons.

She was nothing but a poor girl blinded by the desire for fame, living only for that need to sing which quivered in her heart and through her veins like a whirlwind. She too, like the pale Mimí in Puccini's *'La Bohème,'* whom she dreamed of reviving one day, perhaps very soon, before a delighted audience, overwhelmed by the magical splendour of illusions and promises, forgetting reality and abandoning herself to those things that had such great charm, that spoke only of dreams and fantasy.

Her mother's grief and her frail sister's weeping had all disappeared in the great passion that was consuming her. To sing, to interpret the gentle, ardent figures of women from *Mimi* to Verdi's *Aida*, from Donizetti's unhappy *Lucia* to Puccini's tragic *Tosca*; to see delirious crowds; to sing... and go on singing. At last, her wonderful dream and all the aspirations of her youth would come true. Johann would clear the way for her with his fame as a famous and disputed tenor.

"You have a precious treasure Anna," he had told her one day, "you must not neglect it. Out of respect for your mother, you cannot frustrate your life or your future. Come with me. I love you,

you know, and as soon as we are in New York, we will be married. Tonight I'll wait for you in front of the house... Mind you, if you miss it, we won't see each other again. I've signed a contract with the Metropolitan in New York and at one twenty-three is the last plane available. I don't want to miss my appointment with the impresario tomorrow at noon. Understood, then?" Stunned by flattery and promises, Anna ended up giving in.

But in that final moment of parting, she was seized by a tormenting desire to say goodbye for the last time to her home: the small dining room where she had spent so many beautiful hours while her mother corrected her pupils' homework and her little sister read; the small living room where, one evening not so long ago, she had trembled with a strange emotion, listening to a magnificent man's voice modulating a love song on the radio, without thinking that Johann was to enter her life shortly afterwards and ignite it with passion and light.

Although she feared they would hear her, she could not resist the voice of memories calling her. On tiptoe, she walked down the short corridor, entered her mother's study, and turned on the dim light on the desk. She looked around with tear-filled eyes. How many struggling feelings gnawed at her heart!

The call suddenly rang downstairs; she shuddered as if a fiery current was ploughing through her. She smiled through her tears, almost unconsciously. Johann was always so impatient!

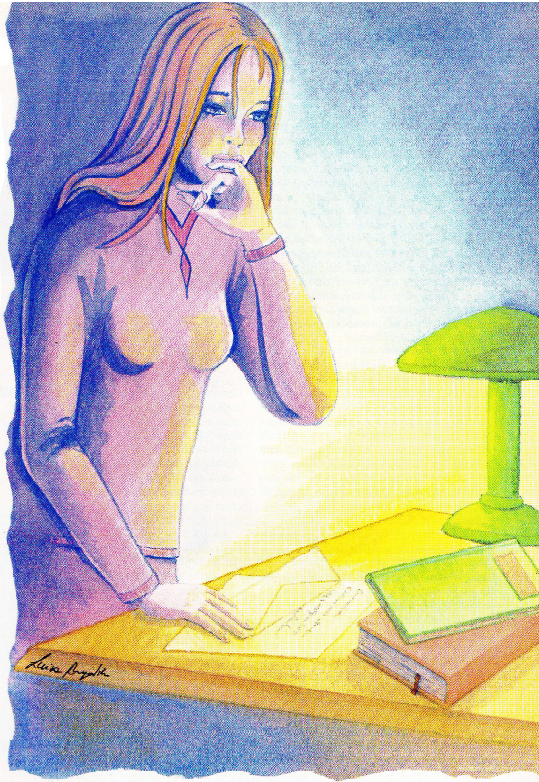
"Today," she thought, "he must be, and with reason, more than ever!"

It seemed to her that she saw him open the car door, thoughtfully help her into her seat, and then, shifting the engine into gear, saying in that bratty way: "Hop in, now we're off to the airport... to glory, my dearest Anna."

But her home still held her close; it wanted her; she caressed the familiar objects trying to say goodbye; she tenderly kissed one of her mother's notebooks, mentally asking her and her little sister for forgiveness for the pain she was inflicting on them, and the fact that she could not find the strength to soothe those two hearts that loved her so much.

"Mamma is so good... she will forgive me," she said, as she felt she lacked the strength to carry out her plan. Besides, the separation would be brief. "As soon as I am engaged" (and Johann had promised this), "You will come with me...."

But her heart wept. Suddenly, she stood still, motionless. A word had suddenly dropped down before her eyes, an atrocious word written on the top of an open piece of paper on her desk,



which until then, in her anxiety, she had overlooked, believing it to be a page from one of her mother's notes. "Tumour" was what she read.

She bent over the letter and looked at the heading: it was addressed to a cousin of hers, married and settled in Sicily. The letter was almost finished; mother had intended to complete it the following day. One day while she and Lucia were still resting, Mama said: "...I begged Professor Gilbert not to hide the malignancy of the illness from me for the sake of my children. I must prepare them little by little to adjust

to many things before leaving them forever. My body is devastated. I cannot be operated on; it would all be useless. I have only six months, maybe even less; who knows? I pray the Lord to keep me alive for as long as possible, not for me though. I suffer so much, for my children. Anna is good, healthy, and earning money from her music lessons, but my little Lucy? What would she do without her mother? She is so fragile and delicate?"

Mama, dear Mama was dying, and without divine intervention, her heart would be broken. In a heart-rending scene, she seemed to see Mama's pale face and leaning over that, in a desperate expression, Lucy's sweet little face desperately pleading for the one who could no longer answer her, her distant Anna. No... no... she could never leave them; that would be a crime. Her heart screamed, "And you will lose your future of glory and happiness forever... you will shatter your youth...."

But more potent than the new love and the desire for glory, the old and immense love, the voice of blood, spoke in her: "But if you go, you kill your mother, you will destroy Lucy's trembling soul."

With her face pale, almost white as a sheet, from where only her eyes burned with a light of anguish, Anna approached the window and looked long into the darkness. Once, twice, three times, the horn blared almost angrily; she felt her heart hammering in her chest until it broke. She turned, and her eyes fell on her father's portrait, in front of which

there was always a flower like the soul of her dear ones always close to him: "Daddy... Daddy," she prayed, "save me. Help me, papa, to hold on."

It seemed to her, that in her emotional tension, her father's eyes looked sternly at her: she trembled. As if a thick veil parted before her and she finally saw all her family and she desperately sobbed: "I'm sorry, I'm so very sorry... I was stupid, I was not thinking at all!" She began to pray, feeling that only in the thought of God could she draw strength and forgiveness against the shadow that had enveloped her. Again, a long and insistent call, then a moment of silence, followed by the nervous screech of the car on the asphalt.

Everything was over. Slowly, Anna returned to her room, threw herself on the bed exhausted, and slowly, peace returned to her burdened heart like a merciful gift.

Now, her tomorrow would be bright and would not seem empty and barren to her; she had a noble and pure purpose in life that would light up her soul with serenity.

To live for her mother and little Lucy. Now, the veil that had blinded her until that moment had fallen; she felt she had to thank Divine Providence on her knees for having saved her in that uncertain hour by placing her mother's wounded heart between her and her madness; her mother who had begotten her that night, once more. □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 55

by Michele Molineris

244 The power of Don Bosco's gaze (1879)

After a conference held in Nice in 1879. Don Bosco came out of the presbytery, walking to the door, pressed in by the crowd that would not let him proceed. A grim looking individual stood motionless, watching him, as if he were up to some nasty trick. Fr Cagliero kept an eye on him and was uneasy, because Don Bosco, slowly moving forward, was approaching him. Finally, they faced each other. Don Bosco, as soon as he saw him, spoke to him: "What do you want?"

"Me? Nothing!"

"Yet it seems you have something to tell me."

"I have nothing to say."

"Do you want to make your confession?"

"Me? Make my confession? Not by a long shot!"

"Then what are you doing here?"

"I'm here because I can't leave..."

"I see. Gentlemen, leave me alone for a moment," said Don Bosco to those around him.

Taking the man aside, Don Bosco whispered a few more words in that man's ear, who, falling to his knees, confessed in the middle of the church (M.B., XIV, 37).

247. Tell me if I'm in God's grace (1879)

Monsignor Postel, a learned priest and prolific writer who was also a man of great piety,

came to see Don Bosco in Nice. During the conversation, the prelate asked him point-blank: "Tell me if I have a conscience in good standing with the Lord."

Don Bosco, smiling slightly, made as if to leave, but his interlocutor cut him off, double-locked the door, put the key in his pocket and: "Look, Don Bosco," he said, "you won't leave here until I know how I am with the Lord."

Those words were uttered with such a resolute accent that Don Bosco, who became deeply pensive and remained a while with his hands on his breast one over the other as was his custom. He looked at Monsignor very benevolently and crisply said to him: "You are in a state of grace."

"But I still have my doubts," he replied, "it is only your kindness that makes you talk like that."

"No, dear Monsignor," Don Bosco added, "what I see, I say." (M.B., XIV, 38).

248. Against headaches (1879)

In 1879, while staying in Sampierdarena, Don Bosco produced a surprising effect with a blessing. Mrs Anna Chiesa had a daughter named Pia, who was intensely tormented by headaches. Having realised that Don Bosco was at the hospice of St Vincent, she brought her to him so that he could bless her, but as the saint was busy giving audiences, she could not approach him. She did not lose heart; she waited patiently for four or five hours.

Don Bosco left the room several times with some people without ever turning his eyes to her. Once at last, passing close to her, he said: "And what do you want,

Madam?"

The good mother told him about her daughter's state in a few words.

"Oh, it's nothing much," Don Bosco answered, lightly touching the sick girl's head. The sickness vanished instantly and never came back to trouble her.

The memory of this fact later gave rise to another miracle that was also extraordinary. When Don Bosco died, Mrs Casanova, who was suffering from a foot ailment. She so neglected her illness that, when she put herself in the hands of the doctors, there was no way out without the amputation of the leg. The poor woman, desolate at that verdict that she could not rest. When her friend Mrs Chiesa, mindful of her daughter's instantaneous and perfect recovery, advised her to recommend herself to Don Bosco, she left her one of those *ex lintaminibus* relics that were so much sought after, after the saint's death.

She appreciated the advice, prayed to Don Bosco and applied the relic to her leg. When the day of the operation came, the doctors, having prepared the needles, unwrapped her leg, but to everyone's amazement, there was an evident beginning of healing, which progressed to full recovery (M.B., XIV, 56).

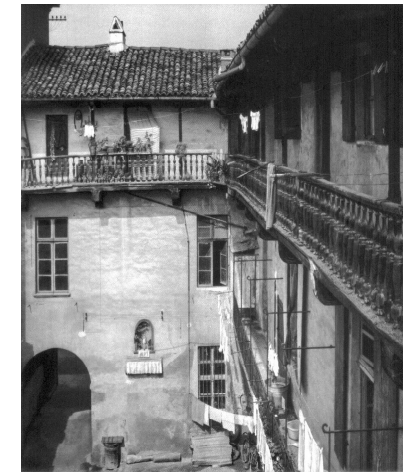
249. Don Bosco, how is it that it was so high this morning? (1879)

Don Bosco also had other singular gifts, such as ecstasies and other extraordinary phenomena, which admirably illustrate his holiness.

In the year 1879, a truly extraor-

dinary event occurred. As Fr Evasio Garrone recounts, during a Mass celebrated by Don Bosco in his antechamber, Franchini, a companion of mine, and I witnessed a sight that was nothing short of miraculous. At the moment of elevation, Don Bosco's countenance transformed, radiating a heavenly light that seemed to fill the entire room, leaving us in awe.

Little by little, his feet came off the dais, and he remained suspended in the air for a good ten minutes. We did not manage to raise his chasuble. I, beside myself with amazement, ran to call Don Berto but could not find him. When I returned to my seat, I saw that Don Bosco was beginning to descend, but the room felt heavenly. After he had made a long thanksgiving at the end of holy Mass, I brought him coffee, as usual, and said to him: - But Don Bosco, what was wrong with him this morning at the time of his elevation? How is it that he



Rooms in the city of Turin

became so tall in person?

He looked at me and, to change the subject, said: "Have some coffee, too."

He then handed it to me, pouring it into the cup. I realized he did not want to hear about it, so I kept quiet and sipped my coffee. Three times, I witnessed his levitation at the time of the Mass. (*Vita, II, 434*).

250. Join me at the Holy Face (1879)

One fact especially ran through the news of Lucca in 1879. Don Bosco, with the Rector at his side and surrounded by a coterie of gentlemen, moved towards the cathedral to venerate the Holy Face. This is the popular image of a miraculous Crucifix, which has been kept in Lucca since the 8th century and which is said to have been sculpted by St Nicodemus; it is rarely exposed to public veneration, and in private, it is not revealed except to important dignitaries and only behind closed doors. It did not even cross Don Bosco's mind to ask for such a privilege.

So, they were on their way when a cry echoed: "A blessing!"

They were a father and mother carrying their 20-year-old son, who had been ill with spinitis for some time. He struggled and dragged his legs, unable to support himself.

"But," Don Bosco said to them, pausing, "should I give you the blessing here on the road?" Then, raising his eyes to heaven, he resumed: "God can bless you here too."

Everyone around him knelt down, and the crowd thronged on all sides. As he blessed the sick

man, his parents lifted him up.

"Can't you take a few steps?" The saint asked him.

"No, I'm not strong enough," he replied.

"Do you feel any pain?"

"No, sir."

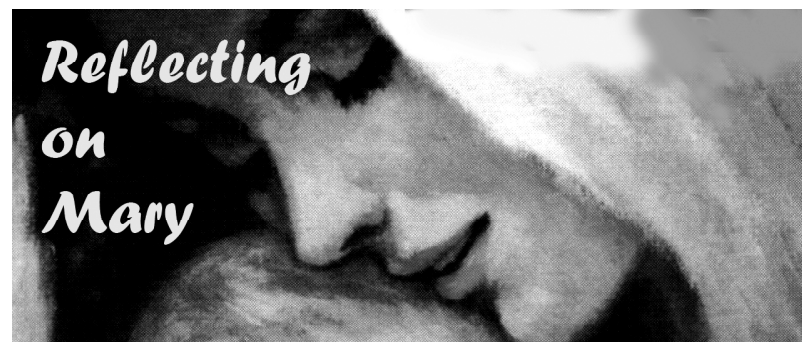
"Come on, take a few steps so that we can see you."

The young man tried: he moved by himself, but Don Bosco: "There," he told him, "Come with me, I'm going to see the Holy Face."

And continuing to talk together, they set off. The young man took two hundred steps with Don Bosco without any support. The crowd began to clamour once the first astonishment had passed, and the relatives, having recovered from their daze, deviated with their son, followed by a queue of people. The dreamy young man ran home and was never seen again. (*M.B., XIV, 60*). □



The Church of St. Anthony, Turin



ALL GENERATIONS WILL CALL ME BLESSED

Alberto Frasson

An interview with Fr Romolo Sbrocchi, who has practised and continues to practise a twofold ministry: for young people in schools and to devotees of the Virgin Mary.

"In today's day and age, pervaded by profound contradictions due to the unleashing of revolutionary ideologies in every field," writes Father Romolo Sbrocchi in the Introduction to a forthcoming book, "the Virgin Mary appears as the last providential raft on which to save us. If she descends so frequently from Heaven to support her children with motherly messages, this responds to a precise plan of Providence."

Fr Romolo, an Apulian native working in the Veneto region, professor of literature, headmaster of a classical high school and finally, inspector for the Ministry of Education, is a scholar of the Virgin Mary. He has published numerous books on the subject, including *La Castellana d'Italia*, *L'età di Maria*, and *Anna la Madre di Maria*. He has translated works by celebrated Marian authors such as Ephrem the Syrian, St Bernard of Clair-

vaux, St Alphonsus de Liguori, and St Louis of Montfort. He is also publishing another volume in which the Marian faith is intertwined with Italian literature, titled *La Vergine Madre nella Divina Commedia* (The Virgin Mother in the Divine Comedy).

The path of the professor and talented writer Fr Romolo Sbrocchi, is open to great spaces. This is why we felt it our duty to interview him in order to overcome at least some of the 'revolutionary ideologies' mentioned at the beginning of this introduction.

When did the great cult of the Virgin Mary begin and what were its first major manifestations to pious devotees?

"The cult of Mary has deep evangelical origins, stemming from her lofty dignity as the Mother of God (Lk 1:43); from her "fullness of grace" (Lk 1:28); from her cooperation in the work of Redemption (Gen 3:15; Lk 2:35);

from her function as Mediatrix (Lk 1:41; Jn 1:11) and her super-natural Motherhood in our regard (Jn 19:26-27). As the very first manifestations of Marian worship, we recall the significant expression Elizabeth addressed to Mary: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (Lk 1:42). Also significant is the exclamation of a woman addressed to Jesus: "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breast that you sucked" (Mt 11:27). The Blessed Virgin herself, who attributed her ineffable greatness exclusively to God's mercy, expressed herself prophetically as follows: "All nations will call me blessed" (Lk 1:18).

The great devotion to the Virgin Mary has had a fruitful and trying season of maturation, characterised by the impulse of an ever more profound knowledge of her ineffable and providential functions, by the figures of great saintly devotees of the calibre of St Bernard of Clairvaux, St Bonaventure, St Bernardine, St Alphonsus of Liguori, St Louis of Montfort, to name but a few; by the devotion of the faithful and by the frequent interventions of the Magisterium, which have gradually become more and more earnest in pressing it.

In this regard, I consider it reasonable to dwell on a symbolic episode that is highly illuminating on the irresistible rise of the Marian cult from the earliest times. It was 22 June in the year 431: in Ephesus, now in Turkey, 198 bishops, presided over by the papal legate St Cyril of Alexandria, were gathered in Council in the temple dedicated to the Virgin. The subject of the supreme

assembly was the examination of the unprecedented claim of Nestorius, Patriarch of Ephesus, that Mary should only be called 'Mother of Christ' and not 'Mother of God'. This was a complex matter of definition since Nestorius taught that Jesus would have two persons, each with its nature: the divine person with the divine nature and the human person with human nature. Mary, therefore, would only be the mother of the human person of Jesus. Nestorius had tried to prevent the Council from being held anyway and, although summoned, he did not go. The faithful milled about and crowded the doors of the church, which were closed for the work of the Council. Finally, late in the evening, they were opened, and the text of the dogmatic definition was promulgated, which is faithfully quoted here: "If anyone does not confess that Emmanuel is God according to truth, and for this reason the Blessed Virgin is the Mother of God... let him be excommunicated". At these words, the immense crowd erupted in applause and shouts of jubilation. Ephesus took part in an impromptu procession, the first in history in honour of Mary; the Council Fathers were carried in triumph and escorted to their homes with lit torches. On the following day, 23 June, a large poster with the text of the definition of Mary's divine Motherhood was hung in all the squares of Ephesus.

Of course, from then to the present day, the Marian cult has steadily expanded and deepened. Marian apparitions are numerous, resulting in an embarrassment of choice. I consider it app-



ropriate to recall at least those recognised by the Church, which constitute the Virgin's preferential appointment with the modern world, oppressed as never before by such numerous and profound evils: first of all that of 1830 in Paris (Miraculous Medal), that of 1858 in Lourdes and, finally, that of 1917 in Fatima".

What were the reasons for her predilection for France, where she appeared repeatedly in the 19th century and was honoured by the people and illustrious personalities?

"France had long seemed to have no peace. Already overwhelmed by a ruinous war that lasted over a century: 'the Hundred Year War,' it no longer found lasting peace. It suffered bloody civil wars; then the revolution with all its aspects, including the 'Terror'; then the dazzling star of Napoleon Bonaparte, variously defined, the Restoration and more revolutions; then the Second Republic, the Second Empire and the Third Republic... In short, it was a noble but tormented land. The Virgin also

favoured France for this reason. She predicted to St Catherine that grave misfortunes would happen in France, but she added: 'Have confidence, do not be discouraged, for I will be with you'. The 'grave misfortunes' happened in 1871 and culminated with the surrender of Paris to the Prussians.

We all know the history of Lourdes, and I will not dwell on it. I recall that the Miraculous Medal, linked to the apparition of Mary to St Catherine Labouré, was called so due to its exceptional diffusion and equally exceptional events, which involved not only humble people but also illustrious personalities, such as the former Archbishop of Malines, who was miraculously cured, and the well-known anti-clerical Jew Alphonse Ratisbonne, to whom the Virgin of the Medal appeared in 1842 in Sant' Andrea delle Fratte, Rome, suddenly converting him. Not to mention the extraordinary diffusion of the Medal throughout the world.

You have made a long and valuable study on the presence of the Virgin in the Divine Comedy, which we hope to see published soon. What did this great poet anticipate about Mary's glory?

"First of all, the supreme praise of Dante that Pope Leo XIII, the great pontiff of the Rosary and a great man of letters, gave in his Brief of 20 March 1892 to Cardinal Galeati, Archbishop of Ravenna, on the monument to be erected to Dante in that city, represents a solemn recognition of the perfect Catholic orthodoxy of our supreme Poet. I quote the most significant part: "It was

never that he was averse to the truths of Christian wisdom; for, on the contrary, from the depths of Religion he drew incorrupt and sublime concepts; and the flame of genius sprung from nature always nourished and corroborated with the breath of divine Faith so that the poetry inspired and composed by him sang with verses not previously heard regarding the greatest mysteries."

Among 'the greatest mysteries' sung by the poet 'with verses not previously heard' is that of the Virgin Mother. Only a serene study of the *Commedia* can reveal the golden thread, which is uninterruptedly prolonged from the first to the last canticle, of the presence of the maternal and mediating Mary. She, in fact, with an uninterrupted and effective crescendo, sustains the Poet throughout the long *itinerarium mentis in Deum* until the Poem's grand finale, with the prayer of the Virgin, in which the Virgin Mother is solemnised as the ecumenical and providential Mediatrix.

Such maternal mediation is reduced here even to the Virgin's simple fixing of her eyes on the Almighty, who, welcoming her Mother's eloquent gaze, finally enables the Poet to complete his spiritual itinerary, allowing him to see for a moment "the love that moves the sun and the other stars." This *itinerarium mentis in Deum*, illuminated by the efficacious aid and smile of the Virgin Mother, casts beams of light on each one, along their way, to follow in their unrepeatable footsteps. The Supreme Poet presents the Comedy as a document of Mary's maternal solicitude and mediation." □



MY VOCATION STORY

FR. ROMEO SALAMI

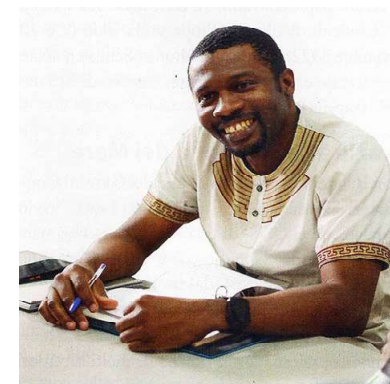
In the heart of Salesian Africa
by
Sarah Laporta

Can you introduce yourself?

I am Romeo Salami, a Salesian, religious and priest. I was born in Benin on 25 April 1991. After a bachelor's degree in administrative and management sciences and techniques (commonly known as BAC G2 in Benin), I started my religious and priestly formation from September 2007 to August 2019. During my formation, I obtained a Master's degree in Philosophy. I am currently on a mission in Bamako, Mali. The work in Bamako belongs to the Salesian Province of North West Africa, "Our Lady of Peace", which includes Benin, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Guinea-Conakry, Mali and Senegal. I enjoy music, sports and writing. My passion for writing has led me to publish two novels: *L'aventure d'Iwé sur les chemins du savoir*, *Vigile*, a religious pamphlet *Veillez et prez* and the biography of our confrere Antonio César Fernandez.

Why did you become a religious and Salesian?

It is tough to explain all the reasons for a vocation. There is often an element of grace that eludes exhaustive explanation. However, I am aware of some motivations. In this sense, the desire to make of my life a gift for those most in need first attracted me to the Salesian charism. I was fascinated by the pastoral work of the Salesians of Don Bosco with vulnerable children

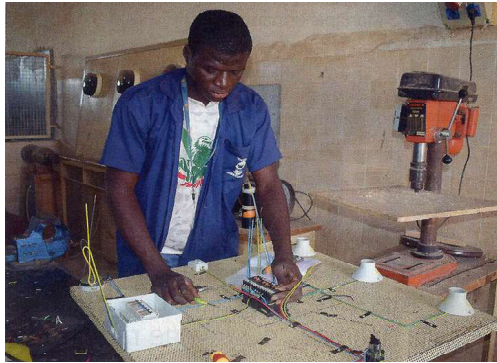


(sometimes call-ed *street children*) in my home-town, Porto-Novo (Benin). I told myself that their mission corresponded to my deepest aspiration. I wanted to give my life to improve the lives of disadvantaged children, just as the Salesians did. Later, discovering Don Bosco's story and mission reinforced my intuition that I was in the right place for what I felt. With time, I realised this style was rooted in the figure of Christ the Good Shepherd, whom I got to know better and tried to imitate by becoming involved in the Salesian religious life.

How did your family react?

Apart from my father, who categorically refused at first, the other family members thought I had to mature my desire. My father categorically refused because my choice went against his

aspirations for me. It was a few years of misunderstandings and sometimes tensions. However, after the intervention of several people, he agreed to let me start the initial formation on the condition that after a short experience, I would return to his aspirations for me. From the practical stage, my father and I began to understand each other. Seeing that I showed true joy in this path, he gradually accepted my choice. Eventually, he expressed happiness at seeing me happy with my life choice. He attended my perpetual profession in 2017 and my ordination in 2019 before leaving this world on 12 January 2020, the liturgical day of the Lord's baptism.



ments despite the challenges. There is a 'joie de vivre' that nothing seems to take away from people. An obvious element is cultural heritage, which is being increasingly valued and conveys not only the achievements of the past but also the cultural and development potential of the peoples of our regions.

What is your current work?

I am currently bursar of the Salesian work in Bamako, Mali. This work includes a vocational school, a parish, an oratory-youth centre, a student hostel, and a large farm. The Provincial also entrusted me with the responsibility of Director of the Planning and Development Office from July 2022. This structure has four teams, in Benin, Burkina-Faso, Mali and Senegal, respectively, and with a staff of about twenty people, support the eighteen (18) workers in our province in strategic planning, identification, formulation, monitoring and evaluation of projects and program-mes.

What is your dream?

I wish to make this part of Africa "a better world for our young people." They are full of hope, full of life, sometimes full of fear, and all they want is to be accompanied. My dream, without idealising too much about the future, is to offer them concrete and realistic paths and itineraries in our families, our schools, our colleges, our neighbourhoods, our municipalities, our cities or our countries so that they can grow as people, acquire skills that will enable them to make a living and contribute to the well-being of their environment. □

Which are the most beautiful realities?

In addition to what has already been said, we can mention the optimism in the various environ-

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

We Have Them Clean

One of the masters of a boarding school noticed a new boy cleaning the knife on the table cloth, and immediately rebuked him:
 "That's what you do at home, I suppose?"
 "Oh, no" replied the boy quietly, "we use clean knives at home."

Sponging...

A sailor engaged a kindly old gentleman in conversation.
 "I've had a hard life, sir. Had an operation only three months ago. When I came around after it, the doctor told me he had left a sponge inside me. "Let it be," I said. And there it is to this very day!"
 "Does it pain you much?"
 "No, sir, but it does make me terribly thirsty."

One Up

The newly-rich woman was out to make an impression.
 "I clean my diamonds with ammonia," she said, "and my rubies with Bordeaux wine. I touch my emeralds with Danzig Brandy and my sapphires with fresh milk..."
 "I don't clean mine at all," said the quiet woman sitting next to her. "When they are dirty I throw them away and buy new ones."

Lucky Mistake

A passerby noticed a handprinted sign in a store window that read: "Hard Wear." She went in and informed the

proprietor of the miss spelling. He thanked and she wandered around the store and made a few purchases.
 "Aren't you going to correct your sign?" she asked.
 "Goodness, no!" he exclaimed. "Everyone who comes in to correct my spelling buys something."

Just remember that:

- Most people are in favour of progress. It's changes they don't like.
- Every minute you are angry you lose sixty seconds of happiness.
- If you find that your politics and religion don't mix, there is something wrong with your politics.
- Optimists are people who make the best of it when they get the worst of it.

At Home Too

Boss: "Why are you so late this morning?"
 Clerk: "Sorry, sir, I overslept."
 Boss: "You mean to say that you sleep at home too?"

Election Campaign

A politician running for office was incensed at the remarks that had been made about him in the local paper. He burst into the editorial room and shouted, "You are telling lies about me in your paper and you know it!"
 "You have no cause for complaint," said the editor. "What would you do if we told the truth about you?" □

THE APPLES

A group of young managers who had finished a week's refresher course ran through the airport concourse. It was Friday evening, and they all wanted to go home for the weekend.

They had been late and were now desperately running late. Their flight had already been called for a while, adding to their sense of urgency. They clutched briefcases, tickets and passports, running through the airport.

Suddenly and unintentionally, two of them tripped over a fruit stall and upset a basket of apples. The apples fell and scattered on the ground. Without waiting or looking back, the young men continued running and managed to get on the plane — all but one.

The latter stopped, feeling pity for the young girl at the apple stall. He told his friends to go ahead without him and informed his wife that he would arrive on the next flight.

Later, he returned to the terminal and saw all the apples scattered on the ground. His surprise was enormous when he realised that the owner of the apples stand was a blind girl. He found her crying, with big tears running down her cheeks. She was touching the floor, trying, in vain, to pick up the apples, while multitudes of people passed by without stopping, without anyone caring what had just happened.

The man knelt with her, put the apples in the basket and helped her mount the bench again. As he did so, he realised that many of them had down. He picked them up and put them in the basket. When he finished, he took out his wallet and asked the little girl: "Are you OK?"

Smiling, she nodded her head. The man put a hundred euro note in her hand. She felt the note he had put into her hand saying: "Take this, please. They are for the damage we have caused. I hope I didn't ruin your day."

The young man started to walk away; the girl shouted: "Sir..." He stopped and turned to look at her blind eyes. She continued, "Are you Jesus...?" He stood motionless, turning around a few times, before heading off to take flight, with that question burning and disturbing his soul: "Are you Jesus?" □

Do people sometimes confuse you with Jesus?



LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

I was trying very desperately to get in touch with my property buyer who was just not answering me nor was he replying back to my numerous messages. Being an ardent devotee of Mother Mary I said the magical powerful 3 Hail Mary's and the my beloved mother heard me and then next day when I called my buyer he answered my call and even apologized for not answering or messaging me. All glory and honor to Mama Mary.

Candy.

My elder brother suffered a major cardiac arrest on 17th August 2023. He suffered a 2nd attack on the same day during Angiography. He had multiple blockages out of which 4 were major ones. In two of the blockages a stent was inserted on the right side. But on the left side doctors couldn't insert a stent as those were severe blockages. And hence bypass surgery was suggested within 8 days. We decided to get him operated in one of the best hospitals in Mumbai. On the 23rd morning they took him for the surgery and it was very successful. But on the same evening doctors noticed some variations on the heartbeat. As per the doctors the right side on which the stent was inserted had stopped working hence the heart was not pumping blood. The condition was very critical and they immediately took him back in the OT for 2nd bypass surgery. From the time they took him inside I don't remember how many times I might have prayed the rosary, till the doctors came out and said surgery was successful. That night I felt Mother Mary was holding my hand and comforting me. Holding the rosary was like holding Mother Mary's hand. After the surgery he came to consciousness after 4 days i.e. on 28th August. From that day till date I never keep the rosary away from me. I thank Mother Mary for pouring her blessing and grace on my brother and our family. Truly Mary was and is always there with us.

Anita Peter, Kalyan

My sincere and heartfelt gratitude to the Blessed Trinity and Mother Mary for a very special favour granted to my daughter. Also thanks for all the graces and favours granted to us thus far. *A Devotee* Thanks to the Blessed Sacrament and Mother Mary for all the help received from my cousin and for suitable employment and the lovely time over Christma.

M. Dodd

POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK

AUGUST 2024

For Political Leaders

Let us pray that political leaders be at the service of their own people, working for integral human development and the common good, taking care of those who have lost their jobs and giving priority to the poor.

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A WOMAN CLOTHED WITH THE SUN

Today, as the Church gazes into her future, we are reminded of the awe-inspiring event of Mary's Assumption. She, a woman clothed with the sun, was a divine sign of that future. In her Assumption, the definitive destiny of man is unveiled, a destiny redeemed by Christ crucified. His Resurrection from the dead and Ascension into heaven mark the 'call to glory' of all God's people.

"Mary" is the first among the redeemed. She is also the first among those called to glory. This is precisely what the Church celebrates.

The Church, looking towards the future, meditates on it in the light of Mary's Assumption, "starting from her past." (St. John Paul II)

(*L'Osservatore Romano August 1984*)

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