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**O God
you crowned Mary
this day
with surpassing glory,
grant through
her prayers,
that, saved by the
mystery of your
redemption,
we may merit to be
exalted by you on high.**

*Adapted from the Proper
of the Solemnity
of the Assumption*

From The Editor's Desk

NOT JUST THE FUTURE

The expression “*young people are the future of the world*” often overlooks the potential of new generations and fails to respect their dignity. While it is true that today’s youth will become tomorrow’s adults, we must not underestimate their current capabilities. Young people represent both the present and the future, and it is essential to acknowledge them as such. Focusing solely on their future might cause us to overlook their contributions today. They deserve the opportunity to take on active roles now in order to become tomorrow’s leaders. Therefore, we must value young people with special care, recognizing their importance in both the present and the future.

The historic student protests of the late 1960s have largely faded, and the political ideals of subsequent decades seem to have diminished. Currently, there is less interest in social and democratic issues. However, millennials are challenging a society of adults who are nostalgic for their youth and reluctant to move forward. Movements like the *Last Generation* ecological initiative, university protests against high rents, and *Fridays for Future* are making headlines every day.

We expect young people to pursue higher education, yet we profit by charging exorbitant rents for housing. While we aspire to save the planet from global warming, we continue to rely on fossil fuels. We want them to quickly enter the workforce, but we insist on prior experience. To genuinely value the contributions of young people and secure their futures—our futures as well—we need to provide them with the necessary conditions, not just make empty promises.

Ultimately, adults hold the levers of power, and the determination of the future remains in their hands. However, mere wishes and appeals are insufficient to drive real change.

Relationships, families, vocations, projects, and hopes have emerged from initiatives at gatherings of youth when they meet from around the globe. Christian communities and civil society have also benefited from this involvement. Generation Z is not solely defined by protest; not all young people engage in vandalism or deface the beauty of our country. We have even seen them helping to clean up mud in flood-stricken towns and trash from our beaches. Young people remind us that genuine dissent comes from taking responsibility, living out a proactive lifestyle, and making constructive acts of disruption.

This was exemplified by Don Bosco, a native of rural Piedmont in Northern Italy, whose intense experiences in his youth led him to make significant choices for his future. Our young people possess the same potential!

It is crucial to instil confidence in them, create conditions that encourage their participation in decision-making, and make them feel valued today—not just as the hopeful future of tomorrow.

Fr. Ian Doulton, sdb

A GIFT FOR...EACH DAY

by Bishop Giampaolo Dianin

As Catholics, at the Sacrament of Baptism and further at the Sacrament of Confirmation every Christian has been anointed with the Holy Spirit and so each day, couples would do well to remind each other to seek the gift of the Holy Spirit again and again.

In June, we celebrated the Solemnity of Pentecost, which marked the conclusion of the Easter season. That occasion reminded every disciple of the Lord to overcome fear and dread and become a witness of the Risen Lord in the world. This gift was also bestowed upon the bride and groom during their baptism, confirmation, and wedding celebration. The rite includes four options for prayer and invocation of the Spirit, from which you can choose one.

The first option states: "Look kindly upon these your children,

who, united in the bond of matrimony, seek your blessing. Pour upon them the grace of the Holy Spirit, so that, by the power of your love poured into their hearts, they may remain faithful to their marriage covenant."

The second option reads: "Pour into their hearts the power of the Holy Spirit. Grant that in this union consecrated by you, they may share the gifts of your love and, becoming for each other a sign of your presence, be one heart and one soul."

The third option says: "O Lord,

may the riches of your blessings descend upon these spouses, and may the power of your Holy Spirit enflame their hearts from on high, so that in the reciprocal gift of love, they may bring joy to their family and the ecclesial community with children."

Finally, the fourth option: "May your blessing descend upon these spouses so that, marked by the fire of the Spirit, they may become a living Gospel among people."

The Spirit is called upon to help couples faithfully uphold their marriage covenant, serve as signs of God's love for one another, become one heart and one soul, be good parents, and embody the Gospel in their lives. It is important to read all four invocations, as each highlights a different aspect of married and family life.

Each year Pentecost has been a wonderful opportunity for married couples to renew these prayers and seek the gift of the Spirit in their lives. It is becoming increasingly evident that we cannot navigate life's challenges alone. Every couple and family experiences not only moments of joy and happiness but also times of trial, uncertainty, worries about their children, and fears regarding the future. We need the gift of the Spirit — the giver of life — the presence of God beside us ("I will be with you every day"), and the love shared between the Father and the Son, which is bestowed upon those called to live out and witness mutual love.

On the feast of Pentecost, the Spirit brings the gift of tongues, enabling dialogue between

*"May they be
marked by the fire
of the Spirit that
they may become
a living Gospel
among people."*

different people and helping us connect with others, especially with those we love, including our children. This connection is particularly important during adolescence when it often feels like we no longer understand them.

The Spirit awakens the unique gifts and charisms within each person, enriching and nourishing family life. At the same time, the Spirit fosters unity and communion, bringing together our differences. Furthermore, the Spirit guides us toward the whole truth, leading us to a deeper understanding of the mystery of God and Jesus, as well as the mysteries of those we love and our children — people we often think we know better than anyone else. This understanding extends to the meaning of life and our experiences, especially those that are unexpected and troubling.

The Spirit acts as our counselor, accompanying us in our life choices, purifying our motivations, and helping us to choose what is truly best for the family.

The Spirit represents strength and courage during life's trials; he is the comforter, the God who wipes away our tears; he embodies the nurturing aspect of God. □



LISTENING: A MATTER OF THE HEART

Monica Cornali, (clinical psychologist and writer)

Listening implies recognising and accepting the other as a person, it means cherishing and recognising their dignity.

Two young men in the history of Israel, whom I admire, inspire me to reflect on the theme of listening.

When Solomon, the son of David, becomes king, he feels overwhelmed by the responsibilities that lie ahead of him, recognizing that he is just a boy. In a dream, God questions him, and Solomon expresses his concern about being burdened by duties too heavy for him. However, he knows what to request: a heart that listens “so that it may know how to do justice for your people and distinguish good from evil” (1 Kings 3:7-9). In his request, the young king demonstrates wisdom by asking for a listening heart.

The other young man is Samuel. He hears a voice calling his name in a dream, and, guided by Eli, he responds: “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3).

The verb “to listen” appears more than a thousand times in the Bible, underscoring Israel’s call to heed God’s word. The daily prayer of the Israelite believer begins with the imperative: “Listen, Israel!” (Deut 6:4).



Listening goes beyond simply hearing someone’s words and understanding them; it is not limited to analysing and comprehending what is said. True listening involves recognizing and accepting the other person as an individual, valuing and acknowledging their dignity. It forms the foundation of genuine interpersonal relationships. In this light, it relates to obedience, as the etymology suggests (ob-audire means “to listen to”), which means placing oneself before someone whose worth one acknowledges and wishes to respect.

In a family context, knowing how to listen is particularly essential, especially when it comes to children. Listening also involves grasping the emotions of others and understanding what remains unsaid. Being able to listen fosters trust and mutual accept-

ance. Children, like the two biblical young people, respond to their calling (they hear and act accordingly); they are not the possessions of their parents. Instead, parents should support their children’s journeys, recognizing that they are engaging with a profound mystery (“Every child is a mystery,” as Massimo Recalcati puts it).

Knowing how to listen does not mean finding a solution to the other person’s problems. It is essential for individuals to feel heard, recognized, and accepted, even in the absence of specific issues. In a romantic relationship, for example, a common scenario is that a woman may feel unheard because a man feels obligated to solve her problems. Conversely, for the woman, it is crucial to have someone who listens to her.

Here are some simple suggestions for developing empathic listening skills. Initially, this may require a conscious effort, but over time it can become an attitude, a mindset, and a style of interaction:

1. The first step to effective listening is **to be silent – not just in terms of not speaking**, but also by calming your mind and putting your thoughts at ease.

2. After the speaker finishes, take **a pause of about five seconds** before responding. This allows for the possibility that they may not be done yet and gives you time to process what you have heard on a deeper level.

- We try **not to assume we understand** and ask for clarifications if necessary.

- We **summarize what we’ve heard** with a rephrasing, such as, “Let’s see if I understood correctly,” to demonstrate our attentive-

“Our first reaction when faced with the assertion of another is an evaluation or judgement, rather than an effort of understanding. When someone expresses a feeling or an attitude or an opinion, we tend immediately think ‘that’s unfair’, ‘that’s stupid’, ‘it is abnormal’, ‘it is unreasonable’, ‘it is incorrect’, ‘it is unkind’. Very rarely do we allow ourselves to ‘understand’ exactly what the meaning of the statement is for him.”
(Carl Rogers)

ness. This also invites the other person to reflect on their points and allows them to correct any misunderstandings.

- Even if we disagree with someone’s viewpoint, **we avoid making judgmental statements**.

People who can listen are quite rare. Often, those who talk a lot listen very little. Interestingly, those who believe they are good listeners may actually struggle with listening effectively. Conversely, ‘good listeners’ are often more reserved, possibly because they find it challenging to defend their ideas in front of others and may be more inclined to prioritize others’ thoughts.

Another group of effective listeners consists of those who genuinely care for others. It is generally easier for people who seek the well-being of others to set aside their own egos. □

REASONS TO BELIEVE - 8

by Franco Molinari

II JESUS, A UNIQUE CHARACTER

Where did you throw the match

Vittorio Messori, the insightful author of *(The Jesus Hypothesis)*, notes that there can be no fire without a match, just as there can be no brazier without the blaze that ignited it. This metaphor illustrates a fundamental principle: there can be no effect without a cause. In this context, the cause of Christianity is Christ.

This figure, who initiated the most significant religious phenomenon in history, cannot simply be regarded as a mere man, especially considering the belief that he failed on Calvary. To delve deeper, we can examine the oldest Christian documents to see what they reveal. Scholarly consensus, drawing from both secular and Catholic perspectives, indicates that the earliest text is the Gospel of Mark, which is believed to have been written before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

Critics have identified the oldest layers within this ancient text, particularly in its second and third chapters. Three episodes found in these sections warrant a thorough examination of their



content.

First: in a house in Capernaum, Jesus restores a paralytic to his feet and forgives his sins. This act provokes the indignation and fury of the Pharisees because they believe that the forgiveness of sins is reserved for God alone.

Second: the Pharisees tear their clothes in outrage because the apostles pick ears of corn on the Sabbath. Jesus responds by declaring

himself the master of the Sabbath, effectively silencing them.

Third: a similar scene occurs when Jesus heals a man with a withered hand, culminating in a dramatic confrontation: the Pharisees, enraged, conspire with the Herodians to have him killed.

In conclusion, from the very beginning of his preaching campaign, Christ is aware of his divinity. His deification is not some spontaneous development arising from an obscure community's slow contemplation. Rather, it is recognized even by his most lucid and determined adversaries, who condemn him for blasphemy, claiming that he has usurped divine prerogatives. However, it is possible to trace this understanding even further back.

The scientific analysis of the New Testament writings shows that the oldest Christian document is the first letter of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, which was composed no later than 52 AD. The events surrounding the crucifixion on Golgotha occurred between 30 and 36 AD so we are getting closer to the historical facts. Notably, Paul confronts Peter, who is considered a pillar of the faith, before he begins his extensive ministry of spreading the Christian message, as he does not want to run in vain.

This remarkable proclaimer of the good news reassures the Thessalonian believers about the issue of death, stating, "If Jesus, as we believe, died and rose again, then God will raise those who have died in Christ."

The essence of the message – that Christ died and rose again out of love for humanity – is already complete in its earliest form

and did not develop through a slow or obscure process. The announcement is even clearer and more detailed in St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (15:3-4).

The significance of the proclamation's historical accuracy is matched by the essence of the precept of love that St. Paul presents in a poignant passage, which stands as a true gem of religious literature through the ages. He writes, "Strive for love! I may speak all languages, but without love, I am like a sounding brass or a clanging cymbal."

Pagan authors support Christian sources by confirming that the mustard seed of faith had already reached Rome by the mid-first century. Suetonius recounts that Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome around the year 40, as they were stirred up because of Christ, whom he referred to as 'impulsore Chresto.' Tacitus describes the gruesome and sadistic tortures that Nero inflicted on Christians, turning them into living torches.

The Gospel did not only touch a major centre like Rome; it also reached the town of Herculaneum, which was buried under lava from Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD. Beneath the destructive layer that engulfed the city, a cross was unearthed. An archaeologist's pickaxe was found in a slave house that was connected to a patrician villa. The marks of the nails used to support the curtain that concealed this symbol of faith are still visible.

A biography written in advance

A significant mystery in history is the survival of the Jewish people. Adolf Hitler, in his monstrous



campaign, slaughtered more than six million Jews, believing that the descendants of Abraham were the bane of humanity. Ironically, Jesus of Nazareth, whom Christians regard as the Son of God, was born of a Jewish mother.

Throughout the Middle Ages, Jews faced horrific pogroms and, in more modern times, were confined to ghettos. No other group has endured such a harsh fate. Yet, despite these challenges, the Jewish people withstood the storms of persecution and have managed to keep their ethnic identity alive. They were once decimated by the Phoenicians, the Etruscans, the Assyrians, and the Babylonians, who invaded Jerusalem and destroyed its Temple.

The Temple, in its time, outlived the pharaohs of Egypt and the emperors of Rome. The persecuted Jewish people are still here today. The seemingly vanquished have triumphed over their oppressors. How can we explain such a profound mystery?

Pascal, the mathematical genius, proposed a hypothesis that Jews are the keepers of messianic prophecies. Jesus is unique as his biography was recorded centuries before his birth, with prophecies found in the Old Testament, a text recognized by both Jews and Christians.

About three hundred prophecies in the Bible refer to the Messiah, acknowledged by both communities. If these texts were solely Christian, manipulation might be suspected; however, the Old Testament holds significance for both faiths, even as many Jews have partially rejected Christ.

A notable Jewish poet, Judas



Halevi, remarked that while Christians adore Christ, they overlook the enduring suffering of the Jewish people. Those who curse a Jew also curse Christ, as many Jews, from humble apostles to the fervent Saul, have followed him. Their conversions were influenced by the fulfillment of various prophecies, particularly as emphasized in the Gospel of Matthew.

In Genesis, Jacob foretells the Messiah with the words: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah...until he comes to whom it belongs" (Genesis 49:10). By the time of Jesus' birth, Roman rule meant the sceptre no longer belonged to Judah.

Prophets foretold many aspects of Christ's life, including his miraculous deeds and the suffering he would endure. Isaiah's focus on these sufferings contrasted with the Jewish hope for a victorious Messiah, which may explain their rejection of him.

The collective Jewish rejection of Jesus underscores that these prophecies could not be fabricated. Unlike Muhammad and Buddha, who lack earlier prophetic references, Jesus was anticipated across generations, as philosopher Hegel noted, "Christ is the hinge of history." □

CARMEN LAVAL

TIME FOR THE SPIRIT

THE NINE INGREDIENTS OF LOVE

The supreme and absolute gift of life, according to St Paul, is love. But true love is composed of nine precious and essential elements.

The nine ingredients of love are:

1. Patience

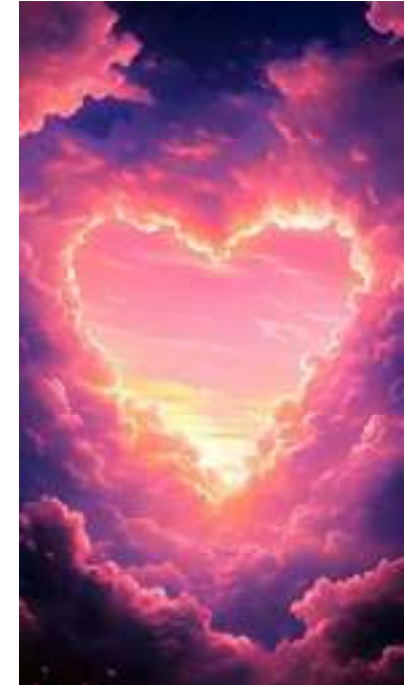
Patience is the characteristic attitude of love. It involves waiting calmly, without hurry, and knowing that, eventually, love can overcome even the most challenging situations. It is the ability to endure, accepting both the pleasant and unpleasant aspects of life while always supporting the one you love.

2. Goodness

Have you ever thought about how Jesus dedicated his entire earthly life to demonstrating goodness to others and making them happy? He used much of his limited time in this world to bring joy to those around him. If you view his story from this perspective, you will see that Christ never neglected to express love to his neighbours, despite being overwhelmed with countless responsibilities (H. Drummond). We possess immense power: we can make others happy! Being loving is something that costs us nothing. It has been said, "The most important thing we can do for our Heavenly Father is to show love to His other children." Too often, we focus on trying to please others when we should simply strive to bring them joy.

3. Generosity

Love is not envious; it is large-



hearted. Some people achieve success in various areas more than others do. Do not let envy take hold of you. Envy can ultimately destroy the best aspects of those around us and is one of the worst feeling a person can experience.

4. Humility

We must remain humble and quiet after Love has touched our lives and fulfilled its magnificent purpose. Love often hides even from itself. It steers clear of complacency, refusing to boast or

"Let Love therefore enter you. And remember: it is a matter of life and death."

— H. Drummond

become arrogant.

5. Kindness

The fifth ingredient in the Rainbow of Love may seem unusual or unnecessary: kindness. Kindness is Love expressed in small, thoughtful actions. Love is never aggressive or inconvenient. A person with Love in their heart is always polite.

6. Dedication

Love is an act of selfless service. We love because Love is the Supreme Gift, not because we expect anything in return. Love is sufficient unto itself. In today's world, individuals are often preoccupied with obtaining and receiving, achieving, conquering, and being served by others. This mindset is what many people consider 'fulfillment.' In contrast, 'realization' involves giving and serving. Jesus said, "Whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you will be the slave of all."

7. Tolerance

Jesus continually fought against intolerance and preconceived notions, often expressing ideas that were difficult for the conventional thinkers of His time to accept. He proclaimed, "Sinners and prosti-

tutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you." Love does not create divisions among humanity into 'us' and 'them.' In the Heavenly Kingdom, there is no room for those who hold prejudices or who are intolerant. Those who harbour such biases may find that they make Paradise unbearable for them-selves and others.

8. Forgiveness

A true lover does not hold onto resentment for the wrongs they have suffered. They always strive to see the good in things and to bring out the best in themselves.

9. Sincerity

He who knows how to love, values the Truth as much as he values his neighbour. He rejoices in the Truth and seeks it with a serene, humble mind, free of preconceptions and intolerance. As a result, he finds satisfaction in whatever he discovers. This is not about the kind of sincerity that humiliates others, but rather the honesty that reveals the goodness of the speaker, rather than exploiting the errors of others. True Love does not involve pointing out the weaknesses of others but embracing all things and finding joy when situations turn out better than expected.

St John says, "God is Love." The universe was created out of Love, and this incredible force still exists: a Love that, when it penetrates us, softens, purifies, and transforms everything. It drives away what is wrong and renews, regenerates, and rebuilds our innermost selves. The power of will alone does not change a person; only Love can transform us. □

ST JOHN BERCHMANS

August 13

Ian Pinto, sdb

Nurtured with Love

In a quiet and nondescript town in Belgium called Diest, there stands a seemingly ordinary two-storey building. It is nearly camouflaged amidst the ordinariness around it. The house however, is special, and attracts thousands of pilgrims every year. In fact, Diest is mostly visited by people looking for that house. This was the house of a simple and hard-working shoemaker named John Charles Berchmans. John lived here with his wife and five children. One of his children would go on to become a saint, and it is to honour and venerate this saint that pilgrims flock to this house in Diest.

John and his wife, Elizabeth gave birth to their firstborn, a son on March 13, 1599. They named him John in honour of St. John the Baptist. Despite the name, the child demonstrated opposite characteristics; he was fickle and prone to lose his temper. He could become quite irritable and stubborn. His parents however, and especially his mother, saw to it that they didn't let John persist in his rude ways. His mother, being a deeply religious woman herself, inculcated in the young boy a strong sense of God. Under her maternal guidance, little John not only learned to control his temper, he nearly got rid of it. People who met him were immediately struck by his gentle mannerisms. If earlier he behaved like a wild horse, now he was a gentle lamb.



Parents have a critical role to play in the life of the child. Bringing a child into the world is only the beginning of parenting—it is not the end. Parents are solely responsible for moulding the character of their child, at least in early childhood. Studies show that the traits and mannerisms picked up in the first few years of life, influence and to a certain extent determine the later personality traits and emotional capacities of the child. Some parents bu-

sy themselves with their careers and social life while neglecting their role; they delegate the responsibility of nurturing the child to babysitters, grandparents, or teachers. This sort of neglect has serious repercussions on the child, and can lead to confusion. The role that John's mother played in his upbringing cannot be glossed over. If the boy went on to become a saint, it is largely due to his family's influence over him.

The Berchmans family were not wealthy. They lived a simple life, and so when it came time to educate the children, they had to strain their finances to do so. When John was around nine years old, his mother contracted an illness that left her at death's door. The young John spent nearly all his time at his mother's bedside, offering her any help that he could. With such a delicate domestic situation, John's parents couldn't think of educating their children. Nevertheless, his father, at great personal cost, put him under the tutelage of Father Peter Emmerich, a Norbertine monk who was chaplain at Our Lady of Diest, and who was running a school of sorts to train boys who were interested in becoming priests. In order to help his father with his fees, John offered to work at the presbytery. Later, he moved to Mechelen for his higher studies, he found a job as a page in the house of a wealthy Canon.

At school, John developed a reputation for being meticulous, studious, and exemplary in prayer and conduct. He learned from a young age to balance study and prayer so much so that he caught the eye of the monk-teacher who perceived that the boy was bless-

ed. John did not engage himself in the fun and games of his classmates. He refrained from playing but instead chose to study or pray during that time. However, he was not a bore or a prude. He manifested a cheerful disposition and was always ready to lend a hand to those in need.

Entry Into the Society of Jesus

In 1615, the Jesuits opened a college at Mechelen. John and the other boys from Diest were sent there for further studies. John stood out in college; on account of his intelligence he was placed directly into the highest class. There he continued to excel in his studies without prejudice to his spiritual life. Already as a young child he manifested an extraordinary devotion to Jesus especially in the Holy Eucharist. When he was 7 years old, he would wake up before dawn and ready himself for Church. When his grandmother asked him why he was up so early, he replied in childlike simplicity, "I want to have the blessing of God on my lessons and so I serve two or three Masses before I go to school." While under Father Emmerich, he would receive Holy Communion at least twice a month. At the time, it was not common for the faithful to receive Communion frequently. This practice he continued at Mechelen.

At College, he enrolled himself in the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin. This sodality was founded by a young Belgian Jesuit by the name of Jean Leunis. The sodality aimed at the spiritual growth of its members. They would attend the Holy Eucharist daily, make their confession every week, re-

ceive Communion at least once a month, make a half hour of meditation daily and participate in other devotions like novenas etc. whenever the opportunity arose.

The atmosphere in College and the influence of the Sodality, led John to seriously consider a vocation to the Jesuit way of life. On hearing about this, John's father rushed to Mechelen to speak to his son personally and to dissuade him from this consideration. He wanted John to take up a job so that he could contribute to the family's meagre finances. His father enlisted the help of a relation of his who was a Franciscan at Mechelen. He sent John to live with the Franciscans for a few days so that he could reconsider in a neutral environment. But John was unfazed. His father even threatened to withdraw all financial support if he insisted on becoming a religious. John wrote in a letter to his parents, "for three or four months our Lord has been knocking at the door of my heart. At first I would not open to Him. But seeing that, at my studies and on my walks, no matter what I might be doing, I always have felt myself impelled to settle my future state of life. After many Communion and many good works, I have come to the conclusion, yes! I am resolved to serve our dear Lord, with His grace, in the religious life."

John entered the Jesuit novitiate on September 24, 1616. He was an exemplary novice: affable, kind, possessing an endearing personality and a gifted mind. He expressed to the novice master his desire to serve as a military chaplain in the hope of being martyred for the faith. He was pursuing a degree

in philosophy which is mandated for those aspiring to the priesthood. He began his studies in Antwerp, Belgium but later moved to Rome. While in Rome, he contracted the Roman fever, which was lethal at the time. His body couldn't cope with the illness and he eventually succumbed to a combination of dysentery and fever on August 13, 1621. He was just a little over 22 years of age when he died. After his death, a large crowd gathered to pay their respects, so much so, that the funeral had to be postponed for a few days. He was declared a Blessed in 1865 and was canonized in 1888. His heart is preserved in a silver reliquary on a side altar in the parish church at Louvain. He is often depicted holding a crucifix, the Jesuit Constitution and the rosary. These were the pillars on which John rested his faith.

John is recognized as the patron saint of altar servers, Jesuit seminarians and students. He modeled his life on the young Jesuit saint, Aloysius Gonzaga. He was also inspired by the Jesuit martyrs of England. His spirituality was one of ordinariness. He did no mighty works nor did he achieve anything spectacular in life. He simply lived his life to the full and gave his best in all he did. He received life as a gift and lived it as such. By naming him patron of altar boys, the Church presents him as a model for finding holiness in everyday life: dedication to chores, commitment to study and prayer, and attentively serving at the altar are the things a young person can do to become holy after the example of John Berchmans. □



YOUR TREASURE AND YOUR HEART?

by Dinesh Vasava, sdb

Is it possible for someone to accept the futility of their efforts, or can we aspire to a reality that redeems our lives from emptiness?

The Book of Ecclesiastes begins with a harsh and disillusioned observation that invites us to reflect on the foundations of our lives: what can we rely on to give our existence real meaning? Perhaps the wisdom of Israel goes even further, prompting us to consider not just what we base our lives on, but how we approach these foundations. Even seemingly positive pursuits like working wisely, engaging with science, and achieving success (cf. Ecclesiastes 2:21) appear to be destined for failure and disappointment. Is it possible for someone to accept the futility of their efforts, or can we aspire to a reality that redeems our lives from the emptiness that Ecclesiastes laments?

We often refer to Jesus' parable in Luke

12 as the "parable of the rich fool." But how do we differentiate between foolishness and wisdom? The Gospel encourages discernment, echoing Paul's words to the Colossians: "Seek the things that are above... think of the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth" (Colossians 3:1-2). What should we seek? What should we focus on to find redemption from our endless struggles



and restless nights, as lamented in Ecclesiastes?

Jesus addresses these questions through the parable of the rich man, initially sparked by a man's request: "Master, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me" (v. 13). This man likely believes he has a valid claim for justice that has been denied to him. However, Jesus shifts the discussion to a deeper level. While having a strong need for justice is understandable, it alone cannot provide a lasting foundation for life. Jesus states, "Even if a man has an abundance, his life does not depend on what he possesses" (v. 15). This message can be interpreted more broadly, emphasizing not just the nature of possession (goods, wealth, abundance) but also the attitude that accompanies it—specifically, the greed from which Jesus warns us to stay away.

When we centre our lives on what we possess, we inadvertently place ourselves at the forefront, mistaking our ability to control our lives as the ultimate reality. Jesus exposes the fallacy of this mindset: "Life does not depend on what he possesses." In essence, our lives do not hinge on our own efforts but rather on our trust in a higher power. True security is found in recognizing our dependence on Another and the gifts we receive with gratitude, rather than clinging to what we own or desire.

This reflection serves as a contrast between foolishness and true wisdom. In biblical terms, a fool is one who believes "God does not exist" (cf. Psalm 14:1) or lives as if God is distant and indifferent to our lives and history. A fool prior-

itizes his own existence over God's, relying on his own possessions rather than on God's gifts. As Jesus puts it, a fool "lays up treasure for himself and does not become rich toward God" (v. 21).

Through this parable, Jesus elucidates the nature of true riches before God, urging us to consider what it means to live in a way that is oriented toward God rather than centered on ourselves. A self-referential and narcissistic perspective often isolates us, reflecting only our own image instead of encountering the broader reality of God's presence and the faces of others.

Questions for Reflection

1. How do you define "wealth"? In what ways do you believe society's definition of wealth differs from the biblical understanding of being rich toward God?

2. Reflect on a time when you were reminded of the fragility of life. How did that experience change your perspective on what is truly important?

3. In what areas of your life do you prioritize material possessions over spiritual growth? How can you shift that focus?

4. The book of Ecclesiastes speaks to the vanity of chasing after the wind. How does this perspective influence your understanding of work and ambition in your own life?

5. What practical actions can you take this week to be "rich toward God"? Consider how you can serve others, engage in acts of kindness, or deepen your prayer life. □

Quiet Spaces

LEARNING TO LISTEN TO GOD

On Sunday May 11, the Holy Father Leo XIV went to the Vatican Grottoes to celebrate Holy Mass at the altar near the tomb of Saint Peter. The following is a translation of the the Pope's homily.

The Gospel that we just heard on this Sunday of the Good Shepherd: My sheep listen to my voice, I know them and they follow me.

I think about the Good Shepherd, especially on this Sunday, which is so significant in Easter time. While we celebrate the beginning of this new mission of the ministry that the Church has called me to, there is no better example than Jesus Christ himself, to whom we give our lives and whom we depend on. Jesus Christ whom we follow, he is the Good Shepherd, and he is the one who gives us life: the way and the truth and the life. So we celebrate with joy this day and we deeply appreciate your presence here.

Today is Mother's Day. I think there is only one mother present: happy Mother's Day! One of the most wonderful expressions of the love of God is the love that is poured out by mothers, especially to their children and grandchildren.

This Sunday is known to be special for several different reasons: one of the first ones I would mention is vocations. During the recent work of the Cardinals, before and after the election of the new Pope, we spoke a lot about vocations in the Church and how important it is that all of us search together. First and foremost by giving [a] good example in our lives, with joy, living the joy of the Gospel, not discouraging others, but rather looking for ways to encourage young people to hear the voice of the Lord and to follow it and to serve in the Church. "I am the Good Shepherd", he tells us.

[In Italian] I will now add some words also in Italian because this mission we carry forward is no longer directed to just a single diocese, but to all the Church. This universal spirit is important. And we also find it in the first Reading we heard (Acts 13, 14:43-52). Paul and Barnabas go to Antioch. They first go to the Jews, but they do not want to listen to the Lord's voice. So they begin to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world, to the pagans. As we know, they leave on this great mission. Saint Paul comes to Rome, where he eventually fulfils it — another example of the witness of a good shepherd. But in that example, there is also a very special invitation to us all. I also say this in a very personal way: to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world.

Take courage! Without fear! Many times in the Gospel Jesus says: "Do not be afraid". We need to be courageous in the witness we give, with the world and above all with life: giving life, serving, sometimes with great sacrifices in order to live out this very mission.

I saw a little reflection that made me think a lot, because it also comes out in the Gospel. In this sense, someone asked: "When you think about your life, how do you explain where you have arrived?". The answer they gave in this reflection is in a certain sense mine too, with the verb "to listen". How important it is to listen! Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice". (Jn 10,27). And I think it is important for all of us to learn how to listen more, to enter into dialogue. First and foremost, with the Lord: always listening to the Word of God. Then also listening to others, to know how to build bridges, to know how to listen without judging, not closing the doors thinking that we have all the truth and no-one else can tell us anything. It is very important to listen to the voice of the Lord, to listen to it, in this dialogue, and to see where the Lord is calling us towards.

Walking together in the Church, let us ask the Lord to give us this grace of being able to listen to His Word, to serve all His people. □



A CHILD PRODIGY

By Pierluigi Menato, T.A. by I.D.

In the square shaded by plane trees, located in front of the large 'Belvedere Hotel,' children of holidaymakers were playing at war, chattering excitedly. They twirled wooden sabres, brandished harmless rifles, and pretended to fire paper cartridges. Paper helmets pushed down on their heads, and flimsy little flags waved as they defended their make-shift positions with fervour. Occasionally, one of the children would stumble, falling to the ground and shouting for help, but they would quickly get back up, unharmed, and rush to reinforce their team.

On the sidelines stood a delicate-looking boy with blond hair and an intelligent profile. He observed the game with a mix of shyness and disdain, choosing not to join in or smile. Suddenly, he was nearly knocked over by a running boy who shouted at him in a breathless voice:

"You also come to the assault... we must win! Why won't you play?"

The big blue eyes blinked, full of light, while the thin lips spoke with a harsh foreign accent: "To play, yes, but not with that..." He softly finished, pointing his rifle, "I am afraid."

"Afraid of what? Of a toy? It doesn't do anything, you know. But if you like it, you and I can play another game. What's your name?"

"Humphrey. And you?"

"Henry. Have you come to stay in Italy?"

"No, just spending the summer here because Mama is Italian. But



then we're going back to Athens to see my dad. I study the violin at the Conservatory of Thessaloniki ..."

"Ah, so it's you who plays so beautifully every morning on the hotel's first floor?"

Humphrey stood admiringly, speechless, as he contemplated the blond boy who finally smiled.

Among the holidaymakers, there was a rumour that Humphrey, a 13-year-old violinist, was a "child prodigy" due to his remarkable artistic temperament and extraordinary talent. He had already performed in public concert halls and even at the Belvedere. To showcase his talents, a gala evening was organized at the Salore Theatre, drawing a significant crowd of curious spectators eager

to hear him play. The programme featured the "Paganini Concerto," which he performed with orchestral accompaniment.

Suddenly, silence enveloped the noisy hall when the young boy appeared on stage, pale yet inspired, his blond head shining under the bright lights. He raised his violin, resting it against his shoulder, and confidently drew the bow across the strings. The notes blossomed, agile, sharp, and fast, under his small, nimble fingers. He played, fully absorbed in the enchantment of the music that transported his youthful soul to a delightful world, far removed from life and the crowd that listened, admiring his extraordinary talent.

As he finished the first piece, he was met with overwhelming applause. He performed the second and third pieces brilliantly, displaying a casual ease and the playful simplicity of a boy unaware of the emotions his exquisite musicality evoked. He was embarking on a challenging and dangerous path toward premature fame, unaware of the implications.

From the centre of the room, Henry held his gaze fixed on the prodigious child, almost as if he wanted to imprint the boy's image into his eyes and, in a way, into his soul. He saw a small, passionate spirit capable of great enthusiasm, daring, and generous impulses. It was a boundless and innocent admiration, free from any hint of envy.

Above all, he believed that Humphrey, a foreigner, would one day bring great honour to his country with a famous name. However, as an Italian boy of average intelli-

gence and ability, he doubted that Humphrey would ever accomplish anything truly great to fulfil his lofty, yet vague, aspirations. He felt these ambitions pulsing in his heart, fermenting in his blood, creating a strange restlessness — a desire to run and jump like a young horse. In his play, he often took on the role of a soldier, framing his friends and leading them to victory against their pretend enemies. He was always the victor!

But could this childish play compare to Humphrey's musical talent? Henry, a fearful and delicate boy, was afraid of rifles, while his courageous friend could never achieve greatness.

A shadow of sadness crossed his eyes as a moment of childish discouragement washed over him. He rested his forehead on his mother's arm as she sat beside him, holding him tight. Astonished by his sudden outburst, he buried his tears in her lap.

At that moment, the music fell silent, and the audience's enthusiastic applause erupted at the end of the performance.

In the seats in front of Henry, a girl of about twelve named Greta, with a tangle of black curls and two mischievous eyes, turned to her friends and said, provoking laughter, "When I grow up, I'm going to marry a boy- a wonder boy!"

As summer faded, the crowds of holidaymakers at the Belvedere began to thin out. Even the young Humphrey, who was in high spirits, said goodbye to Italy, promising to return the following



year. However, he never did return, not even in the subsequent seasons, and nothing more was heard of him at the grand hotel. Each new season brought a fresh clientele, erasing the memories of the past. Only a few families remained loyal to the hotel's characteristic beauty over the years, allowing Henry and Greta to get to know each other and eventually fall in love. Day by day, their love was spontaneous, sincere, and joyful, merging the beats of their hearts.

Before they could reach the shore they had dreamed of together, they had to face the harsh reality of life. Henry, who had by then become a lieutenant in the Alpine troops, found that the games of childhood were over as the Second World War broke out. He was among the first to leave with his battalion for the Greek-Albanian front, and he wanted to keep Greta from being sad about their separation. He joked with her, saying, "I don't want you to think you mistakenly loved me, my little Greta. You, who dreamed of marrying a 'boy-a wonder boy!'"

She smiled, holding back tears, and replied, "But I'm sure that I

love only you!"

On the iron-grey cliffs of the Hellenic mountains, the legendary valour of the Alpine forces was once again demonstrated as they faced challenging ascents along icy trenches and sheer drops into the abyss. They bravely resisted the enemy's advances, occupying the most strategic positions at great cost—through bloodshed and acts of heroism—a demanding, tenacious, and exhausting struggle that ultimately resulted in victory.

Henry, leading his soldiers, was always at the forefront where the fiercest resistance needed to be broken. He confronted formidable obstacles, daring the fiery trajectory of bullets. During one of these epic advances, he was struck head-on by machine-gun fire and fell under a barrage of shrapnel that hit him in multiple limbs.

In excruciating pain, he was carried back on a stretcher to the field hospital, where wounded Italian soldiers, as well as prisoners who had surrendered after the battle, gathered in need of urgent medical care.

Amidst the cries for help, a continuous and pained moan from a nearby stretcher made Henry turn his head with great effort. He looked at the wounded man, startled. Perhaps the fever was causing him to have strange hallucinations, or maybe it was delirium, but that pale, delicate face, with a slight tuft of blond hair on his chin and golden strands clinging to his sweaty forehead, was one he recognized well. It was Humphrey. Only the expression—one that was not



pious, belonging to a teenager—eluded him. If only the boy had opened his eyes and spoken a word in his foreign language... No, it couldn't be him. Henry must have been delirious.

He tried to summon the strength to pull himself to the edge of the gurney and called under his breath, "Humphrey... Humphrey!"

A slight blink of the eyelashes, a contraction of the face, an imperceptible movement of the lips during a pause in the moaning, and the eyes—full of liquid blue light—opened for a moment, meeting Henry's anxious gaze. Yet, the moment was fleeting; the eyelids quickly closed over the wounded man's pupils, and he returned to moaning.

Henry, lost in thought, continued to stare at him, now certain that it was indeed Humphrey! Not the pious, frail boy born only for art and glory, but a soldier—an enemy soldier—here to fight for his country. Now, as a wounded prisoner, he groaned in despair.

In the meantime, the medical captain wanted to assess the morphine shortage for the more critical cases. The last available dose was decided to be given to Henry, who was riddled with shrapnel and faced a long, challenging operation.

As they lifted him to take him to

the operating theatre, he said, "Captain, sir, I don't mind the morphine; save it for that wounded man who is in a lot of pain," pointing to Humphrey's stretcher.

They noted that Humphrey's injury was less serious—just a single gunshot

wound to the leg, which could be easily treated by removing the bullet. The surgeon, somewhat gruffly, remarked, "He is a prisoner soldier. I have orders to give precedence to Italians in medical treatment."

However, Henry insisted and remained at peace with his decision. He was aware that his sacrifice was being made in that field hospital, on that bed of spasms, under the torment of the surgeon who plunged burning instruments into his living flesh. He tightened his lips to suppress any groan, keeping his eyes closed to hide the unspeakable agony he was experiencing.

The hero savoured, along with his torment, the profound joy of having alleviated another's suffering. He did not fool himself into thinking, as he considered Humphrey, that he was also a "wonder boy." Still, it would have been extraordinary to survive the excruciating pain that consumed his limbs, to wear his brilliant uniform adorned with a medal for valour, and to return to his mother's arms like a child. He would have hidden the tears of his fulfilled happiness in her lap.

He could almost hear, as in his distant childhood, Greta's sweet voice softly repeating to him, "I will marry a 'wonder boy!'" □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 67

by Michele Molineris

303. Brats and more brats (1883)

One Sunday at the end of July 1883, Monsignor Cassani recounts an incident involving Comizzoli, a man from Novara who later served as the parish priest at San Bernardino. He wandered into the Oratory vegetable garden, which has since been transformed into the courtyard where the statue of Dominic Savio now stands, and furtively took some unripe tomatoes.

Comizzoli gave some of these tomatoes to me, as I was already worn out from studying, enduring the heat, and managing the long year. I ate them eagerly and drank an excessive amount of water afterward. This led to severe indigestion, and shortly thereafter, I felt unwell and sought refuge in the dormitory. By evening, I was taken to the infirmary.

The doctor was called immediately and found me in critical condition, with no medicine appearing to help. Fr Canepa, the catechist, asked me, "When did you last go to confession?" — This morning to Don Bosco.

- Did you receive communion?

- Yes.

That night, I received assistance as one would provide for someone who is dying. In the morning, my parents arrived after receiving a late-night telegram. The porter, Rossi, introduced them to Don Bosco, who was in the courtyard at the time, with the words: "They are the parents of that dying youngster." However, Don Bosco quickly replied, "No, no; he has

already recovered." He then turned to my parents and said, "You can take him home now, and bring him back here in October." After blessing them, he continued on.

When my parents entered the infirmary, they found me arguing with the assistants. "Give me my shorts! I need to go for my exams, which start today. I don't want to fail!"

A short time later my clothes were brought and set down in the dormitory. The school counsellor, Fr. Febraro, also arrived with a note stating: "The pupil Lino Cassani, on Don Bosco's orders, is being promoted without examinations, having achieved an average grade of 8 throughout the year in all his subjects."

That same day, I boarded the train with my parents. The towns and stations whizzed by; the telegraph wires rose and fell outside our window. I was reluctant to give up my spot at the carriage window. We passed through Santhià, Vercelli, and Ponzana. There was the dome... Long live Novara! Thus began the autumn holidays. (*San Giovanni Bosco nel ricordo degli exallievi*, 109).

304. Inner Sanctity (1883)

In 1883, after giving a conference, Don Bosco was walking from the sacristy to the rector's office at St. John the Evangelist Church when he encountered a group of noble ladies waiting in the doorway to pay their respects. He stopped to graciously speak with them.

Fr. Borgatello, who later became one of the most dedicated Salesian missionaries in Patagonia, was surprised to see how comfortably the saint interacted with women.

As he pondered this thought, the servant of God, whom those co-operators had previously dismissed, leaned in and said to him, "You see, one must not define holiness based merely on outward appearances." (M.B., XVI, 24).

305. An involuntary bath (1883)

On 24 February 1883, in Nice, Don Bosco attended Mass in the private chapel of a generous benefactor. To save time on his return journey, he took a footpath that crossed the Paglione River, which was quite shallow at the time. However, because Don Bosco had poor eyesight, he tripped and fell into the water. Although he got up immediately, he was soaked from head to toe.

Fortunately, the benefactor's house was nearby. When he arrived there in a hurry, he requested a change of clothes. The household was in a flurry of concern, fearing that Don Bosco might have hurt himself. He reassured everyone with a smile, saying he simply needed to change clothes.

The father of the household searched frantically for clean linen and clothing, but returned looking distressed and told Don Bosco, "I have nothing, Don Bosco. I'm so sorry!"

In response, Don Bosco encouraged him with a smile: "Don't you see that this poverty brings me great joy? Even in the future, people will admire the fact that I had nothing to offer Don Bosco to wear. This is a good sign. Oh, how wonderful this poverty is for me!"

He had to go to bed, and all of Don Bosco's clothes, which had been strung out to dry, were soon dried by the gentle Nizza sun. The news of him taking to his bed due

to a lack of clothes spread astonishment among the good gentlemen who came to visit. The good Lord turned this situation into a blessing for the house, as everyone felt compelled to provide him with clothes, linens, and socks, allowing Don Bosco to get dressed without having to return to bed. The house in Nice, which was supported by those generous co-operators, always brought great comfort to Don Bosco's heart. (Francesia, *Vita di Don Bosco*; v. and M.B., XVI, 39).

306. The seminarians are in school (1883)

In 1883, a wealthy gentleman from Marseilles, who was a great benefactor of the institution, sought an impromptu visit from Don Bosco for his cleric son. Don Bosco agreed to accompany him. Upon arriving at the seminary, they inquired about the Rector, only to be informed that he was unavailable. They then requested to see the vice-rector, who came to meet them. With a polite yet haughty demeanour, he asked what they needed.

"Permission to see young Olive," the father replied.

"You cannot. The seminarians are currently in class," the vice-rector responded.

"But this is an exceptional case," Don Bosco explained. "It is a friend of his, a visitor who won't have another opportunity to return."

"I regret that you find yourselves in this situation," the vice-rector said. "Only the Rector can make an exception in such matters. I certainly won't do so."

"Yet you must grant us this favour," insisted Don Bosco. "I am

confident that you will have your Superior's approval."

"Forgive me, but I do not understand the Superior's intentions. I have the rules to follow, and that is sufficient for me."

The dialogue continued with polite insistence on one side and polite refusal on the other until the cleric's father, having lost his patience, interrupted by indignantly asking the vice-rector, "Do you know to whom you are speaking?"

"I am speaking to a priest, whom I assume to be a person of merit, especially because he is in such company. However, this does not give me a reason to violate the rules," replied the vice-rector.

"This is Don Bosco!" Mr. Olive shouted at him. "Is this Don Bosco?" the worthy priest exclaimed. Upon realizing who was before him, he fell to his knees and began repeating, "Don Bosco! Don Bosco!" He kissed Don Bosco's hands with enthusiasm and rushed to ring the bell, shouting, "Don Bosco! Don Bosco!"

At the sound of the bell and the sound of those voices, teachers and students ran out of their classrooms, echoing, "Don Bosco! Don Bosco!" They rushed up the stairs, gathered around him, and eagerly grasped his hands to kiss them. It was a scene of profound enthusiasm.

Meanwhile, the Rector returned, having taken the clerics to another room. He led Don Bosco there, imploring him to say a few words to them. (M.B., XVI, 53).

307. Chicken shortage at Porta Palazzo (1883)

Fr. Lodovico Olive, who died as a missionary in China in 1919, is said to have met Don Bosco for the

first time in 1883. A zealous Cooperator introduced the Olives to the Servant of God, who accepted an invitation to lunch from them. The numerous children – thirteen boys and girls – immediately caught his attention. After dinner, he wanted to meet each of them personally, offering a few encouraging words.

When it was Lodovico's turn, Don Bosco fixed him with a glance and then turned to his mother, saying, "This one will be for Don Bosco." Lodovico was his mother's favourite, and even that profoundly Christian woman offered him to the Lord in 1886 for the mission of her saintly servant.

The name Monsieur Olive became well-known at the Oratory because of his generosity. He announced that on a day determined by Don Bosco, he wanted each of them to be served half a chicken. When the anticipated day arrived, he had to search for five hundred chickens to fulfil his promise.

At Porta Palazzo, Turin's general market at the time, vendors displayed long rows of poultry that had been killed and plucked the night before. However, that morning, to their surprise, none could be found anywhere. At every stall, one could hear vendors repeating, "Don Bosco has taken them all away." The famous cook, Rossi, who understood the buying habits of customers, had created a universal incentive that had been in place for a long time. You could hear the comments from regular customers, along with the special terms they coined for their favourite products. But that day, all the poultry from Porta Palazzo was simmering in the pots at Valdocco. (M.B., XVI, 55). □



THE CELEBRATION OF MARY'S HEAVENLY JOURNEY

by A.B. Bosco

The Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary is a significant event in the Christian calendar, celebrated annually on August 15th. This feast honours the belief that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was taken into heaven – both body and soul – at the end of her earthly life. With deep roots in Christian tradition, this celebration holds special meaning for Christians today. To fully appreciate the significance of this feast, it is important to explore its origins, the story of St. Thomas and the empty tomb, and how the Salesian community commemorates this day, particularly in connection with the life and legacy of St. John Bosco.

The Origins of the Feast

The belief in Mary's Assumption has been integral to Christian tradition for centuries and gained official recognition when Pope Pius XII declared it a dogma in 1950. This essential teaching asserts that Mary was taken up into heaven – body and soul – at the end of her earthly life, affirming



her crucial role in God's divine plan. Long before 1950, the Eastern Christian churches celebrated Mary's Assumption with the "Dormition," or "Falling Asleep of Mary," commemorating her peaceful transition to eternal life. By the 5th and 6th centuries, the Western Church joined in this observance, highlighting Mary's profound significance.

The elevation of the Assumption to official doctrine was rooted in the belief that, as the mother of Jesus, Mary plays an irreplaceable role in salvation. It honours her vital contribution in nurturing and guiding Christ. The Assumption embodies the hope of eternal life for all Christians, reminding us that, like Mary, we too can aspire to share in the glory of being united with God in heaven.

St. Thomas and the Empty Tomb

Though the Assumption of Mary is not explicitly outlined in the Bible, a compelling story involving St. Thomas and the discovery of Mary's empty tomb offers profound insight into this cherished belief. According to tradition, after Mary's death, the apostles came together with the solemn task of burying her. To their astonishment, upon reaching her tomb, they discovered it was empty. Some versions beautifully describe the tomb as being filled with a divine fragrance, while others depict blooming flowers, like roses, appearing in place of her body.

St. Thomas, who had been absent during Mary's passing, found himself skeptical of this miraculous claim. Echoing his previous doubts about Jesus' resurrection—when he sought to see the wounds of the risen Christ—he longed for tangible proof. In response, the apostles reopened Mary's tomb, only to confront the undeniable truth: it was empty. This extraordinary revelation confirmed that Mary had indeed been assumed into heaven, body and soul, mirroring the ascension of Jesus Himself.

This story of the empty tomb re-

sonates deeply within the Christian faith, emphasizing that Mary, as the mother of Jesus, shares in the eternal life promised to all believers. While this narrative may not be documented in the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—it has been cherished through the ages, handed down through both oral and written traditions within the Church.

St. Thomas' desire for understanding acts as a powerful reminder to us all. Even in moments of uncertainty about our faith, Christians are called to trust in God's promises and the profound truths embodied in the teachings of the Church. Embracing this faith allows us to connect with the divine mystery of our beliefs and the legacy left by Mary and her son, Jesus.

The Assumption and Salesian Celebrations

The Feast of the Assumption is a profoundly significant occasion for the Salesians, founded by St. John Bosco. They celebrate this feast with heartfelt devotion, just one day before St. John Bosco's birthday on August 16th, honouring both the Virgin Mary and their beloved founder.

St. John Bosco had a remarkable love for the Virgin Mary, particularly as "Help of Christians." His devotion inspired his followers to seek her guidance, emphasizing her vital role in the lives of Christians, especially young people. He even named the Salesian order after her to highlight her importance in their mission.

Since St. John Bosco's passing in 1888, the Salesian community has eagerly embraced the Assumption. This period transforms into

a celebration of Mary and St. John Bosco's legacy, marked by special prayers and Masses. For the Salesians, the Feast of the Assumption is not only about Mary's journey to heaven but also a time to reflect on the values of holiness, faith, and devotion that St. John Bosco instilled in his followers.

What Does the Assumption Mean for Us Today?

The Feast of the Assumption goes beyond historical significance; it offers a powerful promise of eternal life for Christians today. Just as Mary was taken into heaven, body and soul, so too will believers be united with God. This event symbolizes victory over death and sin, made possible through Christ's resurrection, with Mary showing us the hope that awaits.

For Catholics, the Assumption is a time to reflect on Mary's virtues of faith, humility, and obedience. Her courageous "yes" to God as the mother of Jesus serves as a compelling example for all Christians, reminding them to trust in God's plan for their lives.

This feast also strengthens the bond between Catholics and Mary, their spiritual mother, who is believed to continually intercede for them. The Assumption emphasizes that Mary is a living presence, actively supporting those who seek her guidance.

Ultimately, the Assumption invites Christians to embrace the hope of eternal life. It reinforces that our true home is in heaven, urging believers to lead lives that reflect eternal joys and to look forward eagerly to their union with God.

The Assumption and Our Faith Today

The Feast of the Assumption, celebrated every year on August 15th, is a powerful reminder of the hope, faith, and love that Christians are called to live by. It celebrates the belief that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, was taken into heaven, both body and soul. Although this belief is not directly written in the Bible, it has been part of Christian tradition for centuries and was officially recognized by the Catholic Church in 1950.

The story of St. Thomas and the empty tomb helps to explain why this belief is so important. St. Thomas' doubts and his desire to see for himself remind us that, even though we may not understand everything about our faith, we are called to trust in God's promises. The Assumption also assures Christians that they too will one day share in the glory of heaven, just as Mary has.

For the Salesians, this feast carries additional significance, as it coincides with the birthday of St. John Bosco. His deep devotion to Mary and his mission to care for young people continue to inspire Salesians around the world. For them, the Assumption is a time to renew their commitment to Mary and reflect on their own mission of education, faith, and love.

For all Christians, the Assumption is more than just a celebration of a past event. It's a call to holiness, a reminder of the hope of eternal life, and an invitation to trust in God's plan for our lives. By living with the goal of eternal life in mind, we are reminded to live lives that reflect the faith, love, and hope that Mary exemplified so beautifully in her Assumption. □



O. PORI MECOI

MY VOCATION STORY

BULGARIA: THE FUTURE IS HOPEFUL

*Interview with Marcos Dalla Cia
Argentinian Missionary on the Black Sea*

Please introduce yourself.

My name is Marcos Dalla Cia, I have been an Argentine Salesian Brother for nearly twenty years. Born in Buenos Aires, I grew up in San Carlos de Bariloche in Patagonia. Since 2019, I have been living in Stara Zagora, Bulgaria.

What about your family?

My parents, Alejandro and Delia, raised me alongside my three younger siblings: Cecilia, Santiago, and Agustín. Each has started their own family, blessing me with three grandchildren. Our family embodies a traditional Argentine structure with Italian roots, marked by joyful gatherings, hearty meals, and a strong sense of faith and belonging. In 2021, my father passed away after a series of surgeries, leaving us with treasured memories and a lasting legacy of love.

How did your vocation come about?

During my adolescence, I participated in oratories and youth groups, which deepened my experience of the Christian faith. My concern for the wellbeing of young people ultimately led me to consecrate myself to God. A pivotal moment was the testimony of a

young Salesian pre-novice on Pentecost, which sparked my vocational journey.

How did you come to know the Salesians?

I attended the Salesian school in Bariloche and participated in SYM groups. Continuing a family tradition, my relatives—including my father and grandfather—also attended Salesian institutions. This enduring connection has allowed me to know the Salesians throughout my life.

Why did you ask to go on a mission?

During my novitiate, I developed an interest in missions. My novice master recognized this before I did. After serving as the provin-



*The beautiful family of Marcos,
last from the right*

cial secretary of Southern Argentina, I felt a strong missionary calling. At 38, I approached the Rector Major to make myself available for missions ad gentes, extra, and vitam.

What is your current task?

I oversee the Youth Centre, coordinating activities and managing groups such as the scouts. I also run a small oratory on the outskirts of town and legally represent our Foundation in the country, while serving as the local bursar for the past two years.

How many confreres are there in your community?

Our community consists of four brothers: three priests and one coadjutor, along with a theology student from Turin who has been assigned to this mission in Bulgaria for a few months. Most of the brothers are Czech, while two come from Guatemala and Argentina.

What are Bulgarian youngsters like?

We work with both Bulgarians and Roma, commonly referred to as 'Gypsies.' Our primary focus has been on the Roma, especially at the youth center on the edge of their neighbourhood. The Roma in Bulgaria are marginalized and often misunderstood, facing significant challenges such as limited



The educational deficit of the Roma population is another of our main concerns. In addition to a rather low level of education, there is a very high drop-out rate."

access to education, unemployment, family separations due to emigration, and substance use, even among children. We feel privileged to support their educational and spiritual development.

What is your rapport with local dioceses and other churches?

Relations with the dioceses are excellent, with a small but united Catholic community. Interactions among different religious congregations are joyful, although relations with the Bulgarian Orthodox Church are cordial yet somewhat distant. However, unofficial interactions are more frequent and friendly, occasionally resulting in cooperation on specific issues.

What problems are you facing?

Working in marginalized contexts presents challenges, particularly regarding the fragility of the people we serve and the socio-economic factors affecting them.



The Salesian Community

Main Concerns

We are deeply concerned about young girls and adolescents who are forced or persuaded to marry older individuals under the guise of "cultural traditions." This often leads to their involvement in prostitution networks abroad. The Salesians focus on supporting these girls by helping them complete their secondary education, postponing marriage until adulthood, and encouraging them to pursue different futures.

Another major issue is the educational deficit within the Roma population, characterized by low education levels, high school dropout rates, and inadequate public policies for integration.

Future Plans and Dreams

I am still learning, particularly improving my Bulgarian language skills and understanding of the local community. However, I dream of establishing a Salesian presence in Bulgaria that aligns with our mission. The educational centre is crucial for addressing high illiteracy and dropout rates within the Roma community. We

aim to offer quality education with human and Christian values, as well as vocational training, to provide individuals with opportunities for growth and a pathway to better futures.

How do you see the future of the Congregation in Bulgaria?

With great hope, we recognize that Don Bosco is an immense gift to both the Church and society. His unique originality, the strength of his convictions, and his broad yet concrete perspective, along with his fruitful school of holiness, are all invaluable treasures for a weary and suffering society that struggles to find solutions to the social, moral, and spiritual crises it faces. The future is filled with hope because that is how we, who follow Jesus in the style of St. John Bosco, are called to envision it. □



IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Good Suspenders

The venerable old gentleman consulted his doctor about his heart. Every time he took a deep breath, he said, he could hear his heart squeak. The doctor examined him carefully, and could find nothing amiss. But he did prescribe a bit of lubricating oil for a small pulley on the old man's suspenders.

Time-Keeper

A workman put a ladder up against the tower on the town hall and reached the clock. A woman stopped to watch and said, "Is there something with the clock?"

"No madam, I'm a little nearsighted."

Only a Salesman

The airliner flew into a violent thunderstorm and soon was swaying and bumping around. One nervous lady happened to be sitting next to a priest.

"Can't you do something?" he replied gently, "I'm in sales, not management."

Not for Mother - for Sisters!

"Money can't buy love," the Sunday School teacher said. "What would you do if I offered you \$ 1000 not to love your mother?"

A silence followed and then a boy asked, "How much would you give me not to love my big sister?"

Just Missed

A busload of American tourists in England pulled to a stop at Runnymede.

"This is where they signed the

"Magna Carta" explained the guide.

"When did they do that?" asked one of the tourists.

"1215"

Looking at his watch, the tourist said to his wife: "My gosh, we just missed it by 40 minutes."

The Doctor's Little Girl

The doctor's little girl opened the door for the caller.

"Is the doctor at home?" he asked.

"No sir," replied the child, "he is at the hospital performing an appendectomy."

The caller smiled and said, "That's a very big word for a little girl like you. Do you know what it means?"

The little girl nodded, "Oh yes,...it means \$ 150."

Sleeping Apart

Dick: "I was so cold last night I couldn't sleep. I just lay there and shivered."

Mick: "Did your teeth chatter?"

Dick: "I don't know - we sleep together."

Worst Next Week

For three nights father had struggled dutifully to help his little daughter with the arithmetic problems she had been given for homework. They were not making much progress.

"Daddy, it's going to be even worse next week," she warned him.

"What happens next week?" He groaned.

"Next week," she said, "we start learning the 'dismal' system." □

THE SCARECROW

A goldfinch was once wounded in the wing by a hunter. It managed to survive for a time by scavenging what it could find on the ground. However, a terrible and icy winter soon arrived. One cold morning, as the goldfinch searched for something to eat, it landed on a scarecrow. This scarecrow was a distinguished figure, a great friend to magpies, crows, and various other birds. His body was made of straw, and he wore an old ceremonial gown. His head was a large orange gourd, his teeth were made of corn husks, and he had a carrot for a nose and two nuts for eyes.

"What's the matter, goldfinch?" the scarecrow asked gently.

"It's bad," sighed the goldfinch. "The cold is killing me, and I have no shelter. Not to mention food. I fear I won't see spring again."

"Don't be afraid," the scarecrow replied. "Take shelter here under my jacket. My straw is dry and warm."

The goldfinch found a home in the heart of the thatched scarecrow. However, the problem of food persisted. It became increasingly difficult for the goldfinch to find berries or seeds. One day, as everything shivered under a frosty veil, the scarecrow gently said to the goldfinch, "Goldfinch, you can eat my teeth; they're like good cornflakes."

"But then you won't have a mouth," replied the goldfinch.

"I will look much wiser without one," the scarecrow answered. The scarecrow lost his mouth but was happy that his little friend could eat.



He smiled at the goldfinch with his walnut eyes. A few days later, it was time for the goldfinch to eat the scarecrow's carrot nose.

"Eat it; it's rich in vitamins," said the scarecrow. Then came the turn of the walnuts that served as his eyes. "I will be satisfied with your stories," the scarecrow said.

Finally, the scarecrow offered the goldfinch the gourd that served as his head.

When spring arrived, the scarecrow was no longer there, but the goldfinch was alive and took flight into the blue sky. □



"While they were eating, Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to the disciples, saying: 'Take and eat; this is my body.'" (Matthew 16:26)

POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK **AUGUST 2026**

For mutual coexistence

Let us pray that societies where coexistence seems more difficult might not succumb to the temptation of confrontation for ethnic, political, religious or ideological reasons.

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OUR SISTER, OUR FRIEND

Embracing God's glory uplifts
our daily lives with true beauty,
especially in a world often filled
with disillusionment from liter-
ature and entertainment. We are
called to look upward and seek
guidance from Our Lady – our
Mother and Teacher.

Her greatness radiates love,
drawing us closer. As our Moth-
er, Queen, sister, and friend, she
deeply understands our strug-
gles and embodies hope.

The Holy Father encourages us
to deepen our devotion by ask-
ing, "*What would Mary do?*" This
reflection offers us a limitless
source of goodness and joy to
guide us on our journey.

(St. Paul VI, 1969)

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