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A Christmas Prayer

Father, as Christmas Day
draws near,
capture me today with
a desire for *being faithful*

Through all my interactions
with others –
some perhaps awkward
and uncomfortable
- *help me be faithful*

Through the stress points
I may experience
in these days,
- *help me be faithful*

When I'm tempted to lose
you in the noise
of the holiday,
- *help me be faithful*

Faithful to You
for You have always been
faithful to me.

From The Editor's Desk

DIGNITY

As the mercury plummets and Christmas approaches, (Pune can get get beastly cold if you're sleeping on the footpaths or under the bridges) we at DBYC receive numerous calls from people eager to donate 'stuff.' This trend has intensified since the COVID pandemic.

Sadly, the stuff donated come to us in ragged bundles, unkempt and literally moth-eaten and at times we notice the great relief our donors have felt as they 'unburdened' their so-called gifts for the less privileged who come to our doors. For what it's worth, it hardly spells dignity. However, our beneficiaries primarily need warm clothes and blankets and while we receive many men's coats, old suits, tattered sarees, and housecoats, there are hardly any cardigans or shawls. Most donations arrive unaccompanied and some need additional care. We believe that those who benefit for this generosity also have a sense of dignity that needs to be honoured in the manner in which we 'prepare' these gifts.

Walking through the back lanes, I often see individuals wearing mismatched outfits which they picked up during a garage sale held here. They would come to carry away stuff for a pittance. It's disheartening to realize that some individuals wear the same clothes until they're completely worn out.

A year or two ago, there were a group of college students who got some large outlets to donate last year's blankets to give to the migrants who lived under the bridges while constructing the Metro here. In the dead of night this team of six or eight youngsters went out and distributed these blankets very quietly to quite a few migrants and without any fanfare. They were thrilled that they received no mention in any of the mainstream media. One of them was heard saying: "We wanted to safeguard their dignity" a sentiment that is lost on so many of those who yearn to hog the limelight.

While providing clothing to those in need is relatively simple, ensuring they can wear these clothes with dignity is much more complex. There is a deeper poverty experienced by those who cannot choose or mix and match their clothing, which further strips them of their humanity. This sense of exposure should impact us all.

Many NGOs highlight the vulnerable during this season, but often they exploit emotions without delivering real solutions. These sensationalized narratives contribute little to the greater good.

Reflect on the Babe born 2,000 years ago in a forgotten village, who embodied the vulnerability we still witness today. As we head to Mass on Christmas night, dressed in our best, we must recognize the significance of our shared humanity. Each occasion reveals both our limitations and our insecurities, reminding us to uplift rather than diminish those facing greater challenges. "Then Christmas will truly be Christmas" as Jesse and Carol Owens sing about, "when it happens in your heart...because that's where Christmas really starts."

Fr. Ian Doulton, sbd

SPOUSES AND RELATIONSHIPS

by Mons. Giampaolo Dianin

After listening to many married couples discussing the meaning of the Jubilee, there is a strong desire to confront the malaise we sometimes experience and to embark on a journey of liberation and reconciliation.

The jubilee for married couples is an opportunity to look into each other's eyes and evaluate how the quality of the relationship, deep communication, and spiritual intimacy between the two, as well as with God, have grown.

It is interesting how Dante used the verb "indulge" twice in the Divine Comedy. He first references it in relation to the glances exchanged between Beatrice and himself. The meeting of their eyes is such a profound grace that Dante notes, "her gaze indulged virtue," meaning it provided him with strength, energy, and motiv-

ation to continue on his path. I believe this highlights the necessity for couples to experience these "indulgences" – these intense exchanges and deep communication – to continuously renew their relationship.

This is not a minor theme: being married in the Lord signifies that our love and relationship serve as a "memorial, actualization, and prophecy" of God's love, which reflects a divine relationship (FC, 13). To reflect on our own relationship is to evaluate how we are living out the sacrament of marriage.

We also assess the temperature



of our relationship with God. As a Christian couple, we aim to keep our marital relationship and our relationship with God intertwined; one relationship influences the other. Our conjugal relationship provides us with the foundation, style, and symbolic language for our relationship with God. If there is a "holy door" we must pass through, it is the one that leads us to meet Him, to welcome Him into our home, and to accept His presence in our lives. Observing the everyday lives of families reveals a prevalent sense of unease, particularly among those who prioritize their Christian faith and actively engage in church service. This malaise arises from the challenges of navigating different worlds – work, family, and church. Within family life, there is often a hurried existence where tasks take precedence over meaningful interpersonal communication, nurturing relationships, spending quality time with children, and creating space for the Lord. Instead of infusing our lives with new light and hope, Christian living can sometimes feel like another obligation added to our to-do list, rather than the essence that brings everything together.

Recognizing discomfort is not sufficient; yielding to an outburst is unproductive. Blaming others, society, or the Church serves as an escape. It is far more effective to make conscious choices. It is crucial to continually seek the inner peace and unity that enable us to navigate complexity without being overwhelmed by it.

Time is one of the most important aspects that families must

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navigate. Every moment in life offers a chance for growth and renewal. It's essential to maintain a balance between weekdays and holidays, personal and social time, as well as free time and work, without sacrificing any of these elements. This doesn't mean living in a state of conflict; rather, it's about finding harmony among these opposites. Holidays should enrich our work lives, and personal time should bring balance to time spent with others. Additionally, even though work demands can be challenging to reconcile with family life, it can become meaningful time in our lives when approached thoughtfully. To achieve this balance, it's crucial not to eliminate any of these distinct time categories. Instead, we should prioritize our commitments by learning when to say yes and when to say no, starting with what is truly essential. □

A HEART THAT CHANGES THE WORLD

From the Editor

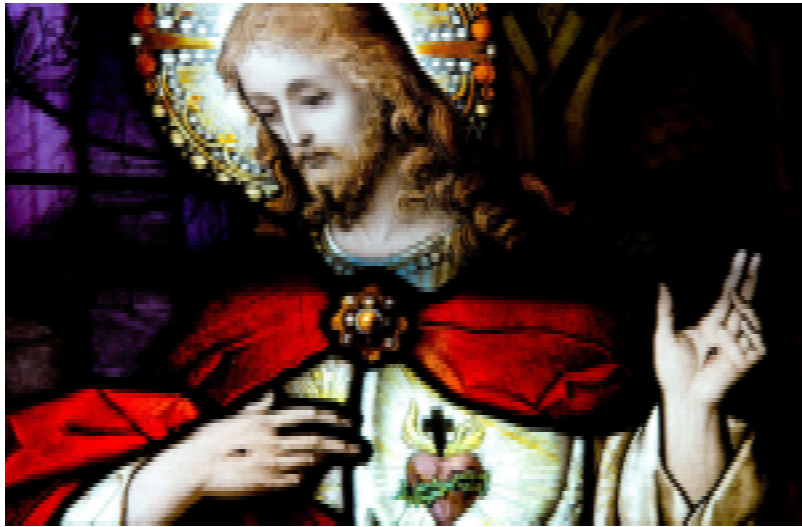
Pope Francis's fourth encyclical is dedicated to the divine human love of the Heart of Jesus Christ.

Saint Paul refers to Christ when he writes, "He has loved us" (Rom 8:37), showing us that nothing "can ever separate us" from this love (Rom 8:39). This theme introduces the fourth encyclical of Pope Francis, titled "*Dilexit Nos*" (He has loved us), which focuses on the human and divine love of the Heart of Jesus Christ. The encyclical was presented at the Vatican Press Office on October 24, 2024.

In announcing the preparation of the document at the end of the general audience on June 5, the Pope emphasized that it aims to inspire meditation on aspects of the Lord's love that can guide ecclesial renewal and offer

meaningful insights to a world that seems to have lost its heart. This announcement coincides with celebrations marking the 350th anniversary of the first revelation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque in 1673, which will culminate on June 27, 2025.

The encyclical arrives during the challenging years of the 21st century, marked by bloody wars, significant social and economic injustices, rampant consumerism, and new technologies that threaten to distort and harm the human soul. A note from the Vatican suggests that through this document, the Pope calls for a change in outlook, perspective,



and objectives, urging us to recover our hearts.

The encyclical begins with a brief introduction and is divided into five chapters. It brings together valuable reflections from previous magisterial texts and draws on a long history that reaches back to the Holy Scriptures. Its purpose is to reintroduce to the entire Church a form of worship imbued with spiritual beauty.

The essential elements of devotion to the Heart of Christ have been part of the Church's spirituality throughout its history. From the very beginning, the Church has focused on the Heart of Christ, which was pierced on the cross. However, modern devotion to the Sacred Heart began with St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622) and his work, "*The Treatise on the Love of God*" - Theodotion, where he portrays the history of the world as a "love story" revealed in the Heart of Jesus.

This devotion was further promoted by St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, a French Visitation nun who, on December 27, 1673, received a vision of Jesus. He entrusted her with the mission of spreading His love for humanity, particularly for sinners. Jesus specifically requested that the Friday after Corpus Christi be dedicated to the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

In 1856, Pope Pius IX extended the feast of the Sacred Heart to the entire Church, which led to the establishment of male and female congregations, universities like the 'Cattolica' in Milan, as well as churches and chapels dedicated to this devotion.

"Fratelli Tutti" highlights the urgency of fraternity and social friendship in a world fragmented by fratricidal wars and conflicts, often fought in the name of God.

In 1956, Pope Pius XII issued the encyclical "*Haurietis Aquas*," which aimed to revive the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus as "a banner of salvation for the modern world." Pope Francis has consistently demonstrated a deep connection with the Sacred Heart. In 2016, at the conclusion of the "Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy," he encouraged priests to direct their hearts, like the Good Shepherd, towards lost sheep—those who are most distant—shifting the focus of their hearts beyond themselves. He emphasized that the heart of Christ is the center of mercy.

"*Dilexit Nos*" follows "*Lumen Fidei*" (29 June 2013) and "*Laudato Si*" (24 May 2015), which addresses the environmental crisis and the need to care for creation, our common home. It also precedes "*Fratelli Tutti*" (3 October 2020), which highlights the urgency of fraternity and social friendship in a world fragmented by fratricidal wars and conflicts, often fought in the name of God. □

THE QUESTION

by Carmen Laval

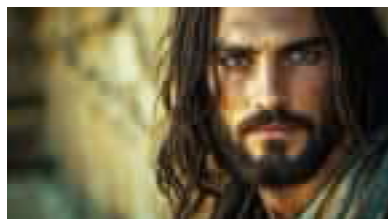
TIME OF THE SPIRIT

There is a fundamental question at the heart of history that no one can evade: "Who is Jesus of Nazareth, really?" Understanding this question is crucial, not just for historical reasons but for each of us personally. It is Jesus himself who compels every individual to consider: "Who am I to you?"

He himself poses this strange question directly to his friends and, indirectly, to us: "Who am I?"

We cannot avoid answering if we are endowed with a normal mind, because many surprising or inexplicable facts prevent us from doing so:

- ♦ Eight billion people, i.e. practically the whole planet, use his year of birth as a reference for their calendars, even though they have never heard of him. All contracts, legal acts, and publications worldwide use this reference. This is clearly an extraordinary fact, given the numerous attempts, all of which failed, to erase this temporal reference. The French revolutionaries tried to create a new calendar with 1793 as year one, but the attempt, confined to France alone, lasted only twelve years. The Jews, Muslims, and Chinese also have their own calendars. Still, their use, limited



Do you know who I am?

to the spheres of influence of the individual countries, is nonetheless alongside that of the Christian calendar. The date of Jesus' birth thus ends up representing an absolute and universal meridian, an 'equator of time' that divides human history in two, with a 'before' and an 'after Christ'.

- ♦ More than 20,000 books have been written about him in the last century alone, and hundreds of new ones are published every year! For its part, the Bible is the most widespread and most translated book in the world in all languages. Today, 2.5 billion people,



i.e., one-third of humanity, claim to believe in the divinity of Jesus.

Strictly speaking, Jesus should have remained an illustrious stranger!

His was a hidden life: the son of a single mother, he was born in an obscure village.

He grew up in another town, where he worked as a carpenter until he was thirty. Then, for three years, he traveled around his land preaching.

He never wrote a book.

He never held public office.

He never had a family or a home.

He did not attend university.

He did not stray more than three hundred kilometres from where he was born.

He did none of those things that are usually associated with success.

He had no credentials other than himself.

He was only thirty-three years old when public opinion turned against him. His friends fled. He was betrayed by his enemies and suffered a trial that was a farce. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves.

As he was dying, his executioners played dice with his clothes, which were the only possessions he had on earth. When he died, he was laid to rest in a tomb provided by a friend moved by pity.

Two days later, that tomb was empty.

Twenty centuries have passed, and today He is the central figure in human history. Not even the armies that have marched, the fleets that have sailed, the parliaments that have assembled, the kings that have reigned, the thinkers and scientists put all together, have changed man's life on earth as much as this one solitary life.

Everyone is capable of seeing it

for themselves: the destiny of Jesus of Nazareth is something beyond imagination.

The untenable answers

The question, "But who do you say that I am?" (Mt 16:15) may seem simple and harmless at first glance, but it actually presents a complex dilemma because there are very few viable answers. We have enough information to discount nearly all of them. The answers that have been proposed throughout history represent the only logical options for the question: "Who could Jesus be?" (and people have considered them all).

One such answer is that Jesus never existed and is merely a myth created later. However, the historical reality of Jesus is well-documented and supported by substantial historical and archaeological evidence.

He was a remarkable sage, a quiet yet deeply human figure, often seen as the easy choice by those who are mediocre and superficial. The writer C.S. Lewis expresses this idea clearly: "You have to make a choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or he was a fool, or worse. We can either throw ourselves at his feet and call him Lord and God, or we can silence him, believing he is a madman, or even kill him. But let us not settle for the complacent idea that he was merely a great moral teacher. This option is not available to us."

He was a passionate visionary. In fact, no one — not even his enemies or the great accusers at his trial — described him in that way.

He was an impostor who ultimately failed — a claim that is more senseless than useful, yet it

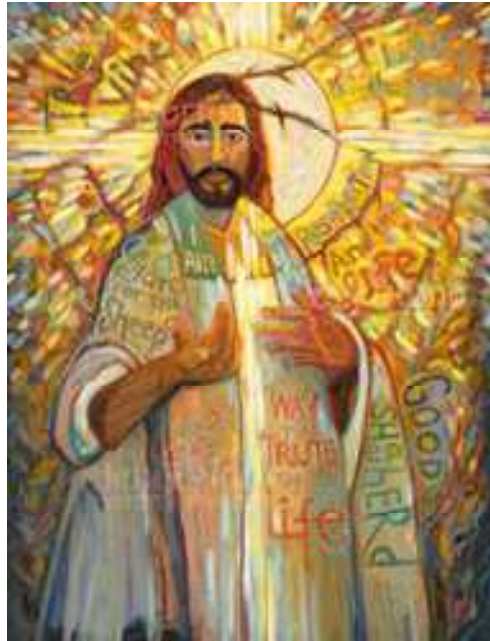
is an ancient narrative. Let's summarize its main points:

Taking advantage of the intense anticipation for the Messiah, a clever trickster, having learned the art of magic in Egypt, declares himself to be the long-awaited Saviour. This figure captivates the crowds with miracles and attempts to incite an uprising to seize power. However, this initiative proves to be dangerous enough to alarm the authorities. Consequently, the impostor is arrested, condemned, executed, and buried.

His disciples, who had scattered at the time of his death, re-group in secret. Within a few hours, they decide to carry out a bold sequel to this story. They steal Jesus' body, bury it in a hidden location, and, by presenting the empty tomb, orchestrate a sensational hoax, claiming that he has risen from the dead.

Why didn't the high priests investigate the disappearance of Jesus' body at that time? It would have been straightforward! If they had exposed this absurd resurrection hoax created by Jesus' followers, they could have silenced them once and for all. By simply finding the body, they could have put an end to this far-fetched and dangerous deception. Yet, no official investigation was initiated!

Do we really want to believe that this small group of frightened disciples could have agreed within a few hours to orchestrate the



greatest deception in history? To claim that someone who ultimately turned out to be just an impostor, an ordinary man, was actually God incarnate – stealing his body, resurrecting it, and then proclaiming his Resurrection? What, then, would have been the purpose of such a sham? Why would they venture to the ends of the earth, each alone, presumably without families or financial support, to tell the story of a resurrected Messiah to pagans who didn't even understand the term, let alone the meaning of the concept of Messiah?

He was a prophet. Due to the severe criticism he faced and his death on the cross, Jesus can be included in the long line of prophets. His calls for conversion also carry a prophetic tone. Additionally, Muslims – approxima-

tely 1.5 billion people – recognize Jesus as a prophet, as mentioned in the Quran.

However, this thesis encounters significant implausibilities. Firstly, a prophet who inherently possesses knowledge of the future would not have surrounded himself with individuals who were dishonest and criminal. These individuals would eventually have dug up his remains and buried him in a different location, later presenting him as the God-man.

Ultimately, a prophet, by nature, cannot be God and therefore cannot be resurrected. As a result, all the points we've discussed regarding the implausibility of the operation orchestrated by the disciples – including the disappearance of the body, the fabricated resurrection, and everything that follows – remain valid in this context.

Jesus is indeed the Messiah and an extraordinary individual, but he is still just a man. The idea that "Jesus is the Messiah, but merely a man" becomes completely untenable after his death because, by definition, the Messiah is a king appointed by God to reign over Israel. To the great disappointment of those who had hoped Christ would restore the temporal power of Israel, Jesus dies on the cross, abandoned by all. Therefore, if he is considered the Messiah, he cannot simply be a human Messiah.

The Only Possibility:

Jesus is God made man

Once the challenge is taken up, everything starts to become clearer, and doubts and contradictions disappear. To begin with, this thesis makes clear the meaning of words that had previously

seemed puzzling or even shocking.

If Jesus is the Son of God, indeed, then he has always been so and can well say:

"Before Abraham was, I am" (Jn 8:58).

"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Mt 24:35).

Jesus' divinity makes him omnipotent, even over death and sin, and justifies words:

"Your sins are forgiven" (Mt 9:5).

"I am the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11:25).

"To me has been given all power in heaven and on earth" (Mt 28:18).

Through the Eucharist, he can finally give his body as food, in the form of consecrated bread: *"I am the bread come down from heaven"* (Jn 6:41).

From anyone else, these words would have been the sign of boundless pride, of scandalous presumption, of a dangerous delirium of omnipotence. But in the mouth of the Son of God, of the Messiah, they take on an entirely new meaning, in a logic that goes beyond our usual categories.

The radical change in the apostles' behaviour becomes understandable

The transformation of the apostles is clearly illustrated at this point: cowards who once denied Jesus and isolated themselves in the cenacle suddenly emerge, seemingly by a miracle, filled with boldness and strength, ready to proclaim the Good News to the crowds. And it truly is a miracle. This change resulted from their encounter with the resurrected Jesus. Having seen and touched

him, they now understand that death is merely a passage to resurrection, and that facing persecution is an essential expression of faith, as well as a sharing in Christ's sufferings. Thus, their response is completely logical.

The success of the apostles did not have an exclusively human origin

The apostles exemplify a profound commitment to their faith, one that they value above their own lives. Blaise Pascal famously stated, "I believe the witnesses who get themselves killed." This belief served as a powerful testament for early Christians. Despite facing persecution, particularly under Nero, the flow of conversions did not cease; in fact, the courage and faith of the martyrs inspired even more people to join the faith. Therefore, this perspective offers a compelling answer to the question, "Who is Jesus of Nazareth?"

Now it's our turn to answer

A little story can help us understand what we need to do.

A powerful ruler was traveling through the desert, accompanied by a long caravan carrying his fabulous treasure of gold and precious stones. Halfway through the journey, one of the caravan's camels collapsed, gasping for breath and never got up again. The chest it was carrying rolled down the side of a dune, shattering and scattering its contents—pearls and precious stones—across the sand.

The prince did not want to delay their march, especially

since he had no other chests and the camels were already overloaded. With a gesture that was both apologetic and generous, he invited his pages and squires to gather up the precious stones they could find and take them along.

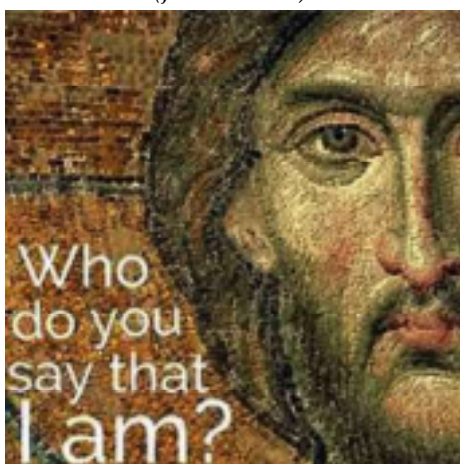
As the young men eagerly pounced on the treasure and frantically rummaged through the sand, the prince continued his journey through the desert. However, he noticed that one of his pages was still following him, panting and sweating.

"And you," the prince asked him, "have you not stopped to collect anything?"

The young man, full of dignity and pride, answered, "I follow my king."

Many of Jesus' disciples turned back and no longer accompanied him. Jesus then asked the Twelve, "Perhaps you also wish to leave?"

Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have words that give eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the one God has sent." (John 6:66-69) □



ST. LUCY December 13

Ian Pinto, sdb

LUCY—THE LIGHT

St. Lucy is an early Christian virgin and martyr. She lived and died in the early 4th century and is a significant figure in Church tradition as she is among only 7 women, excluding the Blessed Virgin Mary, to be included in the Roman Canon of the Mass. That speaks of the widespread veneration that she enjoyed in the early Church and is a testament to the powerful witness she gave.

While her name means 'light,' it is ironic that her history is mostly covered in darkness—we know very little about this young saint. What is known for sure is that Lucy was killed in Syracuse, Italy during the reign of Diocletian, an emperor who unleashed a brutal persecution on Christianity. By the 5th century, her cult had spread so far and wide that she was recognized universally as a martyr saint.

Since there was curiosity about this popular though unknown saint, legends began to surface attempting to provide background information and explain the reason for her popularity. According to the *Acts of Martyrdom*: a collection of traditions, popular tales and legends, Lucy was born to a wealthy, high-ranking family in Syracuse. She was brought up in the Christian faith but lost her father at a young age. Her mother, Eutychia, nurtured her with love and dedication, and ensured she walked in the light of faith. Lucy showed signs of spiritual advancement, as she developed a



reflective demeanour and a prayerful habit. In spite of the persecution, she boldly witnessed to her faith and spread the values of Christ even without openly giving any cause for concern.

By the time she was a teenager, she believed that she ought to dedicate her life to God as a consecrated virgin. Her mother had arranged for her to be married to a rich pagan nobleman but Lucy kept postponing the wedding under various pretexts. Her mother was not aware of her desire to

consecrate herself. When Eutychia developed a bleeding disorder, Lucy thought that this would be an opportunity to change her mother's mind. In an attempt to obtain a cure, she took her mother to the shrine of St. Agatha in Catania – another early Christian virgin and martyr, who is also included in the Roman Canon. A legend says that while on the pilgrimage, Lucy was visited by Agatha in a dream and told that she would become the glory of Syracuse just as Agatha was of Catania. Her mother was cured by the intercession of St. Agatha, and Lucy used this as an excuse to distribute her dowry to the poor, thereby showing that marriage was not on her mind. When her mother protested, Lucy said, "Whatever you give away at death for the Lord's sake you give because you cannot take it with you. Give now to the true Saviour, while you are healthy, whatever you intended to give away at your death." From her point of view, it was clear that she wanted to give to the Lord not just her wealth but her entire self; from the observer's point of view, she was being unnecessarily generous.

THE HOUR OF DARKNESS

On hearing that his share of precious stones and wealth was being distributed to the poor, Lucy's betrothed complained to the Governor that she was a practicing Christian and an enemy of the Emperor. Lucy was captured and tested by being asked to burn incense before the bust of the emperor. When she refused to do so, she was sentenced to be confined to a brothel and humiliated. Knowing well that she treasured her virginity, the cruel Governor

sought to defile what she held most sacred. She is believed to have said, "No one's body is polluted so as to endanger the soul if it has not pleased the mind. If you were to lift my hand to your idol and so make me offer against my will, I would still be guiltless in the sight of the true God, who judges according to the will and knows all things. If now, against my will, you cause me to be polluted, a twofold purity will be gloriously imputed to me. You cannot bend my will to your purpose; whatever you do to my body, that cannot happen to me."

According to a legend, when the guards came to escort her away, they were unable to move her as her body had become as heavy as a block of stone. In their desperation, they even tried to pull her with the help of oxen but were unsuccessful. Seemingly humiliated at their incapacity, the soldiers resorted to harsher and harsher means to torture this beautiful light and snuff it out. They surrounded her with bundles of wood and tried to set them on fire so as to burn her alive. However, while the wood burned, Lucy remained unharmed. One of the soldiers drove his sword into her throat but she still miraculously did not die, on the contrary, she prophesied against her persecutor. At their wits' end, the soldiers gouged out her eyes. In depictions, she is often shown holding a pair of eyes on a golden plate, and she is the patron saint of blindness and eye problems. Finally she was beheaded, and thus, this great and courageous lady received the crown of martyrdom.

Another legend (and we are not sure which of them is true) says

that she did not lose her eyes during the persecution but rather earlier. When she was approached for marriage by a suitor, who acknowledged that he was drawn by her beauty, particularly of her eyes, she removed her eyes and sent them to him along with a note asking to be left in peace. This legend was taken up and included by Dante in his *Purgatorio*.

LIGHT OF HOPE

Lucy was no more than 25 when she met her death. But as mentioned earlier, her renown spread far and wide. Her feast day, December 13 is celebrated many places as St. Lucia's Day and marks the beginning of Christmas celebrations. In Sweden, there is a tradition where the eldest daughter of the family dresses in a white robe and wears an evergreen wreath as a crown on which are fixed candles. The idea is to remember the purity of Lucy (white), her bold witness even in death (crown of martyrdom) and the hope that her life brings (candles) – light shining bright during the dark-est time of the year.

The relics of Lucy have a history of their own but I will spare the details as they might seem irrelevant to the average reader. The majority of her bodily relics are preserved in Syracuse. Some were in Venice: they were transferred to the Church of San Geremia when the church of Santa Lucia was demolished in 1861 to make way for a new railway terminus. In 1981, thieves stole her relics but they were recovered by the police on her feast day. At present, there are relics of her in Rome, Naples, Verona, Lisbon, Milan and parts of Germany and France.



Altar of St. Lucy, Syracuse, Sicily

Lucy offers us a model of courageous witness to Jesus. She offered herself in body and mind to the Lord and did her utmost to remain faithful to that dedication. She teaches us that commitment to a vow is sacred – whether one takes the vow of marriage or the vows of religious life and the priesthood, vows are sacred to God, and therefore, have deep spiritual significance and power. Fidelity to a vow carries tremendous spiritual power. Lucy's fidelity prevented her from physical harm at the hands of her torturers. Her fidelity bore spiritual fruits and contributed to her sanctification. Fidelity to our vows ensure that we are always at the service of the other and never become self-seeking. Ultimately, it is this openness and attitude of service that allows the Holy Spirit to manifest His gifts and fruits in our life. □



THE SOLEMNITY OF THE HOLY FAMILY

by Dinesh Vasava, sdb

Reading: Engage with this powerful gospel passage that recounts how Joseph, warned in a dream, flees to Egypt with Mary and the infant Jesus to escape King Herod's massacre. After Herod's death, an angel guides them back to Israel, where they settle in Nazareth. This narrative emphasizes Joseph's protective role, Mary's unwavering faith. Reflect on these themes of courage, faith, and divine guidance.

Meditation: As we explore the readings, the Book of Sirach offers profound insights into family roles and responsibilities. (Sirach 3:2). This respect for parental authority reflects God's divine order and is essential for familial harmony.

The passage from Sirach also highlights the reciprocal nature of family relationships. Honouring our parents is not just a duty; it brings blessings and is linked to spiritual growth. Sirach reminds us that "whoever honours his father atones for sins" (Sirach 3:3), showing that this respect leads to

healing and reconciliation with God. This call to honour extends to all family members, fostering an environment rich in love and support. Let us embrace this imperative and create a nurturing family atmosphere where respect thrives.

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul offers vital guidance for living a Christian life within the family. He urges us to embrace "heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience" (Colossians 3:12). These qualities are essential for building loving relationships and a nurturing home. The reminder to forgive one another, as the Lord forgave us, reinforces that forgiveness is a cornerstone of family love.

Paul also highlights the relationship between parents and children. This balance of authority and sensitivity is crucial for a healthy family life. By emphasizing mutual respect and understanding, Paul inspires us to live out Gospel values in our families, fostering a more compassionate and loving environment.

The passage strongly encourages us to let the peace of Christ guide our hearts while embracing gratitude. This essential spirit of thankfulness fosters an environment where family love can thrive. We must reflect on how to embody these virtues, creating spaces where every family member feels valued.

The Gospel of Matthew highlights a pivotal moment for the Holy Family as they flee to Egypt to escape King Herod. This narrative emphasizes the challenges families face and the courage needed to protect one another. Joseph's obedience to God's command illustrates the importance of faith and discernment in family life, showcasing how true leadership stems from love and attentiveness to God.

The Holy Family's return to Nazareth symbolizes hope and renewal, reminding us that families may encounter hardships yet can regain safety and stability through faith. They serve as a powerful model for all families, showing that with commitment and love, we can navigate life's challenges together.

Prayer: Engage in a conversation with God. Share your thoughts, feelings, and questions that arise from the passage. Thank God for the gift of Holy Family to us as a perfect example to imitate and pray:

Heavenly Father, I thank You for the gift of the Holy Family. Help me to learn from their



example of faith, obedience, and love. May I embrace my family with compassion and understanding, and may I always seek Your guidance in my life. Amen.

Contemplation: Visualize the scene of their flight to Egypt and the challenges they faced. What feelings arise as you meditate on their journey? Allow yourself to feel the love, protection, and faith that characterized their family life.

Action: Consider how you can apply the message of this feast to your own life. Consider actions such as:

- Making a conscious effort to strengthen your family bonds through communication and shared activities.

Conclusion:

As we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, let us reflect on the essential values of faith, obedience, and love they embodied. By nurturing these qualities in our families and communities, we can recognize the importance of support and compassion in our relationships. Let us honour the Holy Family by fostering unity and love in all we do. □

Quiet Spaces

MARY TEACHES US TO BE THE HOLY PEOPLE OF GOD

His Holiness Pope Leo XIV

Saturday, 6 September 2025

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Peace be with you!

Dear brothers and sisters!

I am pleased to receive you at the conclusion of the Congress of the International Marian Academy. I greet the President, the Secretary, the members of the Executive Council, the collaborators and all the benefactors.

The Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, teaches us to be the holy People of God; hence the importance of this Pontifical Academy, a forum for thought, spirituality and dialogue, tasked with coordinating the studies and scholars of Mariology, in the service of a genuine and fruitful *pietas mariana*.

At this 26th Congress, you pondered whether the Church's Marian dimension is a remnant of the past or a prophecy for the future, capable of freeing minds and hearts from the customs and nostalgia of a "Christian society" that no longer exists. You have discussed the goals and values that Marian devotion offers to believers, considering whether they support the hope and consolation that the Church is called to proclaim. You have recognized in the *jubilee* and in *synodality* two biblical and theological themes that effectively express the vocation and mission of the Mother of the Lord.

As a "jubilant" woman, Mary is always ready to respond by first listening to the Word, according to the disposition described by Saint Augustine: "All consult you about what they want, but they do not always hear the answer they want. Your most faithful servant is the one who does not seek to hear from you what he wants, but rather to want what he hears from you" (*Confessions*, X, 26). As a "synodal" woman, she is fully and maternally engaged in the action of the Holy Spirit, who summons those who previously believed they had reasons to remain divided due to mutual distrust and even enmity as brothers and sisters (cf. *Mt* 5:43-48).

A Church with a Marian heart always better preserves and understands the hierarchy of truths of faith, integrating mind and heart, body and soul, universal and local, person and community, humanity and cosmos. It is a Church that does not shy away from asking herself, others and God uncomfortable questions — "how shall this be?" (*Lk* 1:34) — and to walk the demanding paths of faith and love — "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according

to your word" (*Lk* 1:38).

A Marian *pietas* and practice oriented towards the service of hope and consolation frees us from fatalism, superficiality and fundamentalism; it takes all human realities seriously, starting with the least and the discarded; it contributes to giving voice and dignity to those who are sacrificed on the altars of ancient and new idols.

Since the vocation of the Mother of the Lord is understood as the vocation of the Church, Marian theology has the task of cultivating in all the People of God, first of all, a willingness to "start afresh" with God, his Word and the needs of our neighbor, with humility and courage (cf. *Lk* 1:38-39). It must also cultivate the desire to walk towards the unity that flows from the Trinity, in order to bear witness to the world, to the beauty of faith, the fruitfulness of love and the prophecy of hope that does not disappoint. Contemplating the mystery of God and history of Mary's inner gaze protects us from the distortions of propaganda, ideology and unhealthy information, which can never speak a disarmed and disarming word, and opens us to divine gratuitousness, which alone makes it possible for people, populations and cultures to walk together in peace (cf. *Lk* 24:36, 46-48).

This is why the Church needs Mariology. It should be considered and promoted in academic centers, shrines and parish communities, associations and movements, institutes of consecrated life, as well as in places where contemporary cultures are forged, valuing the limitless inspiration offered by art, music and literature.

In recent years, the Marian Academy has also launched various initiatives to advance the image and message of the Mother of Jesus as a way of encounter and dialogue between cultures. Indeed, as the perfect cooperatrix with the Holy Spirit, she never ceases to open doors, build bridges, break down walls and help humanity to live in peace and in the harmony of diversity.

I thank you for this ecclesial service, which continues to remind us that the Church always has a Marian "face" and a Marian praxis. I also congratulate those who have submitted their musical and artistic works for the annual international award "Mary, Way of Peace between Cultures."

Dear friends, may your Academy always be a home and a school open to all those who wish to place their Marian studies at the service of the Church. For this I pray and offer you my blessing. Thank you.

IT HAPPENED ON NEW YEAR'S EVE

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

The sound of his playing was angelic, and that was his only redeeming quality. For other attributes, Andrea Val was not highly regarded. Many considered him quite ugly and unpleasant. Aware of his poor physical appearance and unfortunate circumstances, he lived in isolation and distrust, resembling a misanthrope. He had attempted to connect with others more than once, only to face cruel rejection. This experience left him profoundly unhappy, and in his unhappiness, he became embittered and incapable of any pleasant feelings. He knew neither love nor hate. His face, like his soul, was dark, cold, and impenetrable.

He played for days without stopping; music was his life. He cherished his old violin like a faithful, invisible friend, loving it as one would a living creature. To the violin, Andrea Val could confide everything: the pains that roared within him like captive beasts, the hopes that sprouted stronger every time he ruthlessly crushed them, and the illusions that left him dizzy, so lofty were they, so inadequate to his modest life.

He could talk to his violin about anything; he could make it vibrate, quiver, or moan at will. Music was subject to his remarkable skill: it was born as he wished, expressing the emotions of his heart and soul. In those moments, Andrea Val felt like a genius! A proud joy flooded through him; he could have overshadowed the fortunate favourites of society if he chose to, those envious indivi-

duals who dismissed him with quiet contempt. Because Andrea Val believed he could compose; he felt capable of it. He imagined everyone in ecstasy, entranced by his music, filled with quivers of dreams, thumps of mystery, and touches of originality – all in admiration of him.

But Andrea Val did not want to compose; he did not want to reveal his secret world to the uninitiated. It was a blend of modesty and pride. He preferred to enjoy his music alone, improvising for himself as sublime notes echoed in his mind, inspired by fantastic images and emotions. During those moments, he felt transfixed; he became a different man, transfigured by noble passion. He created, enjoyed, and suffered.

No one had ever seen Andrea Val's gaunt, unattractive face during that hour of fury and ecstasy.

That evening, Andrea Val could not refuse the Marquis Del Giglio's earnest invitation to attend a lavish end-of-year party. Reluctantly, he went. Silent, horrified, and contemptuous, he felt out of place among the elegantly dressed guests. He had no admiring glances for the beautiful women or words for the VIPs crowding the hall, adorned in velvet suits and rustling silks, dinner jackets, and bow ties, all mingling amid the scents of expensive perfumes. Dressed in jeans and a black jumper, his shoulder-length raven black hair framing his face, he stood apart, his bitter demeanour emphasized by his unattractive features.

He knew that no one would care about him, and despite his deliberate indifference, he felt sad. A hundred women, each one, prettier and wittier than the last, fluttered gracefully around the hall like colourful butterflies, filling the space with joy. Yet, not a single woman turned her gaze to him with even a hint of promise, love, or kindness.

Andrea Val played, frantically running his bow over the taut strings, giving each piece a remarkable interpretation that inspired composers with special charm. However, his deep black eyes seemed to gaze into emptiness, and the bitter crease at the corner of his mouth deepened. His face twisted with emotion as he played.

In the midst of this, a beautiful girl, half-hidden and absorbed, fell silent, staring at the musician with tears welling in her brown eyes. Perhaps she could sense his intimate torment and spiritual loneliness – she, who was also alone, orphaned, poor, and devoid of affection.

She was Maddalena, niece of the Marquis Del Giglio. They kept her in their house out of charity, not out of benevolence; she was more a pious maidservant to the marquise than a true relative. It was understandable that she felt unhappy. She had heard of Andrea Val as a monster – ugly in both face and soul. Now that she saw him, she noted that he certainly wasn't handsome, with his pale, gaunt face and feverish eyes. However, Maddalena thought that Andrea Val's ugliness was a hundred times preferable to the unattractive and insipid good looks of the empty, gallant men



she knew. What harmonious inner beauty he must possess! Could it be that such a man could be as mean and insensitive as the rumours suggested? She felt a fervent attraction that was more than just pity.

Determined, she stood up and approached him.

"May I accompany you?" she asked, a slight tremor in her voice, as she sat down at the piano. "I play badly, but I put my soul and passion into it... just like you!"

Andrea Val flinched, looked into her magnificent, velvety eyes, and replied dryly, "Go ahead... if you like."

He did not care for her. He listened to Maddalena's music and discovered a good, warm,

vibrant soul within it; he saw tears streaming down her slender face. However, he noticed that the ladies and lords were smiling ironically behind the back of the daring maiden who had dared to accompany Andrea Val's music. Suddenly, he interrupted the sound and burst into a loud, sarcastic laugh that echoed ominously in the hall. Everyone turned in confusion, but they soon calmed down as Andrea Val resumed playing.

"He's mad!" they whispered to each other, "one cannot be an artist without a touch of madness." Maddalena, on the other hand, felt resentment and fear. Meanwhile, dessert had been served at the tables.

"Why?" Maddalena asked Andrea Val, with a stern expression, did he laugh in such a naughty and provocative manner?

He had a mischievous grin as he plunged his teaspoon into a large piece of exquisite cake. He took a sip from a goblet filled with liqueur and, without looking at her, replied bluntly: "Because, for a moment, I thought I felt a soul resonating with mine. But it couldn't be true, and so I laughed at myself, at you... I laughed at everyone. We are all deluded. Everything is false and vulgar, even love. All of life is nothing but horror, sadness, and deception."

As he animatedly expressed his pessimistic theories, he irreverently mocked every noble ideal in life. Maddalena jumped to her feet, her face glowing, her eyes blazing, and her voice sharp. She harshly reprimanded him for his words. However, realizing that she had humiliated him, she quickly ran away, leaving him alone. Andrea Val stood breath-

less and speechless for a moment. He lowered his head and placed his hands on the coffee table, feeling a deep sorrow and great mortification. No one had ever spoken to him with such firm love. No one had dared to confront him or reproach him like the little velvet-eyed Maddalena had. How could she have stirred such a storm in his parched heart? Yet, instead of resentment or aversion, he felt something in him that he couldn't explain.

Even as he dreamed and hoped to feel her close to his soul through music, he believed he wanted her, loved her deeply. But who was this girl? Why did she care for him? Why did her words linger in his ears like tumultuous and tender music? Phrases that both pained him and brought him bliss. A scramble of emotions. Now, Andrea Val could no longer contain the flood of feelings overflowing from his spirit. He realized that he would love her endlessly, that he already loved her. He understood that she was the only girl who could bring light and warmth back into his life. Yet, he was afraid of deceiving himself. He wanted to laugh sinisterly, but he couldn't. He was suffering. Or was he enjoying it? He loved! And he felt as weak as lost as a child. He stood up and stealthily left the table.

Like a madman, he stepped onto the platform. He grabbed the violin and held the bow tightly. The notes rushed spontaneously to his fingers. He began with a timid melody of sweet notes, which then became impetuous and dense, only to return to a gentle sound. A whirlwind of music that subsided, died, and was reborn,

fervently full of longing. It was sheer marvel, pure magic. All the couples stopped talking and turned to the musician, who, oblivious to the sudden silence, continued to play his inspired music. It quieted and softened, becoming as light as a breath, as graceful as a smile, and in that joyful stillness, it faded away.

Vigorous, frenzied clapping erupted sincerely and spontaneously, waking the improviser from his dream. Only then did Andrea Val become aware of the crowd watching him. He turned around with a bewildered expression and abruptly exited the hall.

In the antechamber, Maddalena was crying, alone and ecstatic. As Andrea Val almost ran past her, he accidentally bumped into her. Recognizing her, he retraced his steps, took her cold hands in his, and rested his feverish forehead against them.

The dawn of the New Year was about to break. The party was coming to an end; the sound of endless tiredness filled the air. Andrea Val and Maddalena were nearly alone in the antechamber. Suddenly, he offered her a trembling leaflet full of hastily drafted notes. "Miss Maddalena, this is for you... this music is yours alone. Please accept it. It is my first composition."

Maddalena took the paper and read the title: "Prelude to Love." A shiver ran through her as she recalled the miraculous music she had just heard — music that stirred deep emotions. Andrea Val had improvised for her, playing passionately and dedicating himself entirely to her. She reflected on the harsh words she had directed at him and felt a wave of



remorse.

When she lifted her gaze, she found Andrea Val's face relaxed, smiling softly, and transformed. His deep, dark eyes, typically lost in thought, now sought hers, diving eagerly into the moisture of her tearful gaze while she smiled through her tears, her heart beginning to change. Andrea Val asked for nothing; her tears were a powerful response. He was offering her the gift of his music as one might offer one's heart. However, Maddalena remained unaware that it was her harsh words which had, in a miraculous way, awakened Andrea Val's heart, revealing the depth of his tenderness. She had sparked an extraordinary prelude and brought happiness to him.

The air was cold, and the night was giving way to the morning. A few stars still twinkled against the velvet sky. Andrea Val took Maddalena's hands in his and gently placed them not on her forehead, which was now calm and serene, but on her lips, marking the beginning of a great love. Two hearts had found each other, united and glowing in a radiant halo, as happiness descended on golden wings of music. The new year had just begun. □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 71

by Michele Molineris

317. A glance from Don Bosco made her a nun (1883)

In 1883, at the *Dames du Refuge* in Paris, there was a young girl who was 14 years old. Her mother wanted to take her back home, but the girl was determined to stay. Believing that Don Bosco's visit would help resolve the situation, her mother asked for eight days of patience. In the meantime, the girl turned to the Lord, praying for a sign to understand His will.

When Don Bosco arrived, the young girl received Holy Communion from him and noticed that he smiled at her as he handed her the host. "He must smile this way at everyone," she thought to herself. Later, as he walked through the hall on his way to the dais, he passed between two rows of pupils lined up. When he approached her, he paused for a moment and gave her a special smile, meant just for her.

Her classmates, feeling a bit jealous, wondered why he smiled only at her. The girl claimed she did not know, but she interpreted that smile as the sign she had been seeking: it was a clear indication that she should not leave that place. From that moment on, she never left and eventually decided to become a religious sister. (*M.B.*, XVI, 198).

318. Grand Master of Freemasonry (1883)

The Paris newspapers of 28 March 1883 announced a confer-

ence of Don Bosco with extensive information about his work. The conference was due to start at three o'clock in the afternoon, but from one o'clock onwards, the multitude was waiting in full force and not just made up of commoners. The fate that had befallen the previous day's latecomers, who had been inexorably left outside the door, had taught them what they had to do to get any place at all inside. Expecting an extraordinary contest, they had taken away all the furniture that was not strictly necessary. The men also filled the choir, occupying the steps and the altar-step.

Those who made way for the servant of God in the midst of the throng sweated quite a bit. Amongst others, a tall and well-built gentleman offered himself for that service from the entrance. Don Bosco was getting out of the carriage when he offered his arm to support him and defend him from the crowd that was oppressing him. The saint, believing him to be a Frenchman, made a gesture of thanks, but the Frenchman, in plain Piedmontese, asked him how he was. Don Bosco looked at him with grateful surprise, but without knowing who he was.

"Don't you recognise me?" said the other. "Yet we see each other from time to time."

"Right now," Don Bosco answered, "my head is tired.... I don't know..."

"I'm from Turin... Buscaglione!"

"Ah, I've got it!"

Commendatore Buscaglione was a professor at the University of Rome, the director of the Stefani agency, the consul of Spain, and the Grand Master of Freemasonry

in Turin. Despite his impressive titles, he held a deep affection for Don Bosco. In his teaching, he made an effort to respect the conscience of young people. When he fell ill in Naples and was cared for by nuns, he requested the presence of a priest just a few hours before his death. His relationship with Don Bosco had a positive impact on him (*M.B.*, XVI, 233).

319. It's not as bad as they think (1883)

While Don Bosco was in Paris, on the evening of 28 April 1883, he brought great comfort to a noble family.

Madame Du Plessis had a granddaughter of just twenty-six months who had caught whooping cough with dangerous complications, which made the doctors predict a sad end. The grandmother, through De Combaud, had obtained a promise from Don Bosco to visit the sick girl. She went herself in her carriage to fetch him and his secretary. In the palace, she found the little ill girl's parents weeping. They had also recently lost a son. The saint was led to the bed of the little, he said a short prayer, and then he invited the relatives and bystanders to pray too.

While they were praying, he suddenly stopped and turned to Mr Du Plessis: 'It is not enough,' he said, 'that others pray; the father must also pray.'

Finally, he placed a medal of Mary Help of Christians around the child's neck, saying, "It is not as bad as they think." As he left, he declared the child out of danger. She became Countess Carla Du Reau de la Gaignonnière, who

inherited from her family a great devotion to the servant of God. (*M.B.*, XVI, 242).

320. Healed without meaning to! (1884)

One day, in 1884, Don Bosco was asked to visit an old and gravely ill priest, indeed in despair of the doctors. He moved at once, but found him almost unconscious. When asked how he was, he gave no sign of understanding.

Then the saint shouted in his ear: "Don't you understand?" The sick man stammered out a few syllables without any meaning. And Don Bosco: "Do you know Don Bosco?"

"Don Bosco? Yes, I know him. Well?"

"I'm Don Bosco. Don't you have anything to tell me?"

"What? She..." And suddenly he sat on the bed and said he wanted to get up. The sister thought he had lost his mind, but the patient said, "I tell you I want to get up." "Let the parish priest know that he is not to be disturbed anymore." "Thanks to the Holy Oil, I am no longer sick. He did get up, spoke lucidly, and the next day he was at Don Bosco's Mass (*M.B.*, XVII, 40).

321. Like an auction (1884)

In Toulon, Don Bosco spent the night with Count Colle, from whom he had asked 100,000 francs in February for the purchase of the Bellezza house. But his letter, having been misunderstood, had thrown the two gentlemen's souls into turmoil.

Hearing their explanations, they both exchanged a few words: "Well," concluded the Count,

smiling, "we will give you 50,000 francs when we can."

"And why not 100,000?" said the countess.

"Eh, yes, let it be 100,000," added the Count. "Although... on further thought... I have specific titles to realise... If you're happy, we could give Don Bosco 150,000 francs."

"Yes, yes," approved the holy woman.

"Here then: 50,000 francs for the purchase of the Bellezza land at the Oratory; 50,000 for the Sacred Heart Church in Rome; 50,000 for the Patagonian missions."

The generosity exceeded expectations; indeed, later, consenting to the above-mentioned amount, she doubled the sum.

The Count and Countess, when they had the good fortune to talk to Don Bosco, would never tire of questioning him and listening to him. That evening, the conversation went on long after dinner, without them giving any indication that they wanted to end it.

Around ten o'clock, Don Bosco rose up and made it clear that he felt he needed to rest. They got up, but the dialogue continued as they stood. The count finally took the lamp and, with the countess, accompanied him to the door of the room prepared for him; but on the threshold came new questions, which required new answers. Entering at once, the count followed him to see if everything was in order. When the servant of God chorused himself, it was shortly before midnight. (*M.B.*, XVII, 48).

322. Healed in spite of his mother (1884)

On 10 March 1884, a young man

of about sixteen, blindfolded, was brought into Don Bosco's room.

- It has been a long time,' his mother informed him, 'this son of mine has been suffering so much with his eyes, that he is always moaning and shouting the whole night through.

Don Bosco blessed him, gave him the Mary Help of Christians medal to kiss, then asked him: "What pain do you feel?"

"Nothing," the young man answered him.

"How come nothing?" his mother interjected. His eyes hurt so much, Father.

"Do your eyes still hurt?" returned to ask the saint.

"No, they don't hurt any more."

"But they do hurt," his mother resumed. "He can't stand the light and is always shouting."

"Can you see?" Don Bosco questioned him, after having freed his eyes from the empyema.

"Yes, I can see very well," he answered.

"Can you stare into the light?"

"Yes, I can stare at it," said the young man, looking out of the window and evading his mother.

She could not rest, as if afraid of appearing a liar. At her son's reply, she lost the sight in her eyes so much, that at one point she wanted to slap him.

Don Bosco had to tell her, "So, you want your son to be sick? Well, if you want him..."

The son, on the other hand, jumped around, laughed, looked here and there, not knowing why he had to believe his mother more than himself. In reality, he was perfectly cured. (*M.B.* XVII, 44) □



OUR LADY OF LAS LAJAS: BEACON OF HOPE

by A.B. Bosco

Introduction:

Nestled in the breathtaking Las Lajas Canyon of southern Colombia is Our Lady of Las Lajas, one of the most revered Marian images in the world. While it holds deep significance for millions of Latin Americans, its story remains largely unknown in many areas, including India. As the Marian feast in December approaches, let us embrace this image and its powerful message of healing and hope, inviting all Catholics to reflect and find inspiration in their faith.

The Miracle of Las Lajas: A Humble Beginning

The miraculous story of Our Lady of Las Lajas began in 1754, when a mother named **Maria Mueces** and her daughter, **Rosa**, a deaf-mute child, took shelter from a fierce storm in the canyon. As they sought refuge in the cavern, Rosa experienced a divine intervention: she was healed of her muteness, miraculously regaining the ability to speak. When the mother returned to share this extraordinary event with the local priest, she was told to return to



the cave. Upon her return, Maria and Rosa witnessed something truly awe-inspiring – the image of the **Virgin Mary** with the child Jesus appeared, etched in the rock face of the canyon.

The painting of the Virgin, which had miraculously appeared in the natural rock formation, was striking in its clarity and beauty. The sight was undeniably sacred, and word of this divine manifestation spread rapidly

throughout the region. The news of the miracle transformed the site into a sacred pilgrimage destination, and the miraculous image was venerated by locals and pilgrims alike.

The Image: A Marvel of Natural and Divine Beauty

The image of Our Lady of Las Lajas has long been a subject of fascination and devotion. It is particularly notable because of the fact that it is painted directly onto the rock surface. The colours and clarity of the image, despite the centuries that have passed and the natural elements it has endured, continue to be remarkably preserved. This mysterious aspect of the image only adds to the sense of the divine mystery surrounding it.

The icon depicts the **Virgin Mary** holding the infant **Jesus**, with a radiant and peaceful expression that inspires reverence. Surrounding the Virgin and Child are angels and other symbolic elements that convey the sacred nature of the image. The image is both lifelike and spiritual, capturing the maternal love of Mary while also pointing to her role as a protector and intercessor for the faithful.

The image features St. Dominic and St. Francis of Assisi, inviting deep reflection. St. Dominic, easily recognizable in his distinct habit, prays alongside St. Francis, known for his iconic traits. Their inclusion suggests that the Virgin Mary's presence symbolizes not just protection and healing, but also the powerful spiritual legacy of those who devoted their lives to God and faith.

Furthermore, scientific investigations have deepened the mys-

tery surrounding the image. Experts, especially in art history, argue that it could not have been created by human hands, given its extraordinary preservation, vibrant colors, and clarity. Some scientists propose that it must be of divine origin, lacking evidence of human craftsmanship. This notion leads many to conclude that its miraculous appearance signals God's direct intervention, highlighting the site's profound spiritual significance.

The Message of the Miracle

The miracle of Our Lady of Las Lajas is rich in symbolism. First and foremost, it is a testament to **divine intervention in times of distress**. The healing of Rosa's speech impediment is symbolic of the broader message of the image: **God's grace can transform even the most impossible situations**.

Moreover, the image of Our Lady of Las Lajas represents the deep **maternal love of the Virgin Mary**. As the mother of Jesus, she is the intermediary between humanity and the divine. The act of the Virgin appearing to Rosa in such a powerful way highlights Mary's role as a **protector and healer**. The image shows that the Virgin Mary's intercession is a means of grace, bringing comfort and relief to those who invoke her.

The Virgin's image on the rock also serves as a **sign of hope** for the oppressed and marginalized. The site itself is nestled in a remote, rugged part of the world, far from the grand centers of power and influence. This speaks to the way in which God's grace can reach the humblest and most unlikely of places. The message is clear: **faith is not limited by status**

or wealth; it is available to all who seek it.

The miracle represents healing and a chance for spiritual renewal through Mary's intercession. Las Lajas Canyon, the site of this event, symbolizes a sanctuary where individuals can find refuge from life's struggles and connect with the Divine's healing presence.

The Pilgrimage and Cultural Importance

The shrine of Our Lady of Las Lajas has become a vital pilgrimage destination, attracting visitors from around the world. Pilgrims come to honour the Virgin, express gratitude for miracles, and seek comfort during difficult times. The Basilica of Our Lady of Las Lajas, located near a stunning rock formation, stands as the spiritual heart of these devotions.

Annually, on December 9th, the feast of Our Lady of Las Lajas celebrates the miraculous image's discovery. This day invites the faithful to reflect on its significance and renew their devotion to the Virgin Mary. A solemn procession fills the basilica with worshippers offering prayers, lighted candles, and flowers, each act reflecting their faith and gratitude.

In Colombia, this feast is a joyous occasion of reverence, celebrating the Virgin Mary's intercession in the lives of believers. Its significance extends around the globe partake in this heartfelt celebration of faith and unity.

A Message for the Global Church

Although the story of Our Lady of Las Lajas is most deeply rooted

in Colombian tradition, its message resonates far beyond the boundaries of Latin America. The miracle calls on all Catholics, wherever they may be, to reflect on the **healing power of faith**, the **maternal love of Mary**, and the importance of seeking refuge in times of trouble. The devotion to Our Lady of Las Lajas invites the faithful to turn to the Virgin for comfort and intercession, to trust in God's grace, and to recognize that no situation is beyond the reach of divine mercy.

As we enter the season of Advent and prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ, the miracle of Our Lady of Las Lajas offers a beautiful opportunity for contemplation and prayer. It calls us to turn to the Virgin Mary as a source of **healing, strength, and hope** in our own lives.

A Traditional Prayer:

In conclusion, we offer the traditional prayer to **Our Lady of Las Lajas**:

"O Blessed Virgin of Las Lajas, Our refuge and our consolation, we come before you with hearts full of gratitude, seeking your maternal care and intercession. Through your miraculous image, grant us healing and peace. Touch our hearts and souls with your love, and guide us closer to your Son, Jesus Christ. May your protection be a shield over us, and may your grace restore what is broken. O Mary, Our Lady of Las Lajas, pray for us now and at the hour of our death. Amen."

This prayer serves as a reminder of Mary's ongoing role as a loving and powerful intercessor, ever-present to guide the faithful on their spiritual journey. □



**Don Jean-Marie Petitclerc, sdb
calls them...**

NEW MICKEY MAGONES

Willy, Romeo, Virgil... These names are just a few among the growing list of the young lives lost to senseless violence in street fights. This heartbreaking reality doesn't just end in tragedy; their final moments are captured on camera and shared online for all to see. We must confront this cycle of violence and work to change it before more lives are lost.

Yet again, we are confronted with the grim reality of youth violence. A 17-year-old boy was fatally stabbed in Formia, while Naples witnessed two gang fights on its seafront in less than 24 hours, triggered by nothing more than a fleeting glance. The troubling trend of 'movida brawls,' fights erupting in nightlife hotspots, is becoming alarmingly frequent.

Psychologist Maura Manca, who has dedicated over 15 years to studying youth gangs, reveals a disturbing truth: the profiles of these young individuals often defy our assumptions. Many come from what society deems 'good families.' This fact challenges our beliefs that violence is solely a product of disadvantage or obvious risk factors. We now find aggression lurking within what might appear to be 'normal' teenagers, according to parents and teachers.

Juvenile deviance has undergone a profound transformation in recent years. These boys appear to have everything they could want, yet they still grapple with an insatiable need for power and validation. Their behaviour reveals a stark emptiness, a desperate quest

for recognition that manifests through violence. It is essential that we confront this issue head-on, acknowledging that these young individuals require our attention and understanding more than ever.

Why are youth so restless?

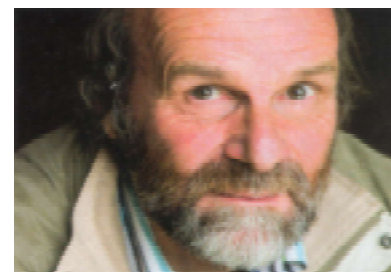
"It's a narrative as timeless as Italy itself," asserts Professor Paolo Crepet, a sociologist and psychiatrist deeply attuned to the realities of youth culture. "This story incorporates elements that extend beyond Italy; it highlights the struggles between social classes, the stark divide between urban centres and their outskirts, and the entanglement with the underworld. Throughout my decades of observation, I have encountered countless examples of this dynamic."

He adds, "While there are echoes of the past, such as the infamous story of the 'boys from Via Pal...' today's situation is far more troubling. Unlike thirty or forty years ago, we now face an overwhelming barrage of violence portrayed in the media. Just flipping on the TV reveals channels like Fox Crime 24, which didn't exist

in our childhood. The landscape is saturated with a compelling yet disturbing body of work linked to extreme noir, featuring everything from 'cursed writers' to 'cannibals' and pulp fiction.

The new frontier, however, lies in video games—the PlayStation and its vast array of titles, both violent and non-violent—drawing young minds into immersive experiences that blur the lines of reality.

So, how do we confront this pressing issue? "The responsibility lies with the common sense of parents," Krepet insists. He argues passionately that the role of parents has eroded over time, contributing to this chaotic landscape. "It's imperative that we reclaim that essential role in our children's lives, as they navigate a world fraught with challenges."



A Salesian perspective

Fr. Jean-Marie Petitclerc, a dedicated Salesian educator and coordinator of the 'Don Bosco Action Sociale' (DBAS) network, has initiated an important conversation following the brutal assault of a 15-year-old boy named Yuriy in Paris. This tragic incident underscores the urgent need for adults to take responsibility in guiding and supporting vulnerable youth.

Just a month ago, Yuri was violently attacked in the 15th arron-

dissement, leaving the nation shocked. While the assailants, primarily teenagers, have been apprehended, the standard response from politicians and media focuses on harsher punishments. As the outcry shifts, we must reflect on the troubling trend of 'gang warfare' affecting our youth.

It's time to change our approach from retribution to understanding. We need to empower our young people with the guidance and resources necessary to navigate their challenges and make positive choices. By taking proactive steps, we can break the cycle of violence and create a safer, more supportive community for everyone.

Is this a new phenomenon?

I believe we need to reconsider the situation. In the early 2000s, a shocking incident unfolded in the western suburbs of Paris where gangs from different towns clashed violently in the bustling shopping centre 'La Défense.' In response, I wrote an article titled "The War of the Buttons, Year 2000 Version," drawing a parallel to Louis Pergaud's 1912 novel. While the struggle for territory among teenagers is not a new phenomenon—it's been evident since Pergaud's time—the level of violence we are witnessing today is unprecedented, escalating even to attempted murder. What is truly alarming is the complete breakdown of boundaries among these adolescents and their apparent inability to control their aggression. This raises a crucial question: Shouldn't we hold adults accountable for this? It is imperative that those in educational positions step up and convey the essential

limits that our youth seem to lack. If we fail to do so, we risk allowing a cycle of violence and chaos to continue unchecked.

It's crucial to recognize the damaging effect screens have on our empathy. Violent games and graphic videos separate us from the harsh realities faced by victims and their families, leading to dangerous desensitization. Peer pressure further exacerbates this issue, as many teenagers prioritize social acceptance over concern for those who suffer.

The absence of empathy is a significant factor in our crisis. The disturbing attack on Yuri highlights the chilling lack of compassion among young perpetrators, who often come from backgrounds of abuse themselves, as noted by Dr. Berger, a child psychiatry expert.

It's contradictory that we sympathize with young victims while advocating harsh punishments for young offenders. While not every victim becomes an aggressor, many perpetrators have their own victimization stories. To break this cycle of violence, we must focus on addressing the root causes rather than solely imposing punitive measures. Only then can we work toward a more compassionate society.

It is essential to recognize that giving a voice to victims, starting from childhood, is a powerful strategy for preventing violence among adolescents. Consider the inspiring encounter between Don Bosco and a troubled boy from the outskirts of Turin, Michael Magone, who

fancied himself the "general" of his neighbourhood. Don Bosco possessed the remarkable ability to see beyond the rebellious exterior of this young provocateur and perceive the deep-seated pain of an abandoned child. By embracing him into the initiative he founded in Turin, Don Bosco provided a safe haven for all disoriented adolescents. This example illustrates the profound impact of understanding and addressing the root causes of behaviour, ultimately guiding young people toward a more hopeful future. □



IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

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. "1225."

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

Pessimist

A pessimist is a person who feels bad when he actually feels good for fear he'll be worse when he feels bad."

After Him

In asking for a raise, the employee hinted that several companies were after him.

"What companies?" his boss asked.

The man replied, "the gas company, electric company and the finance company."

Without reading

"Why did you tear the back part out of that new book?" asked the long suffering wife of the absent-minded doctor.

"Excuse me, dear," said the famous surgeon, "the part you speak of was labelled 'Appendix' and I took it out without thinking."

Sign of Success

Thoughtful father: "If my son is getting as much out of college as his college is getting out of me, he will be a success."

Synonym: A word you use when

you can't pronounce the other one.

Sign in travel office: Please go away!

Question: What did the balloon say to the pin?

Answer: "Hello buster!"

Not very generous

Two children were each given a dollar in change with instructions to put some in the collection box.

"How much should we give in the Church?" asked one.

"We could throw it up in the air, and what falls on your side we give to the Church and what falls next to me is ours," answered the other.

"Better yet," said the first, "we'll throw it up in the air and what God wants he can keep, and the rest is ours."

Not used to shoes

In a little church in Peru the missionary was shocked by the sight of the bridegroom unsteadily making his way up the centre of the church. He stumbled at the altar and had to grasp the rail to keep from falling over entirely. The priest's outburst was checked by a whisper from the Sacristan: "He's alright, Father, he's never worn shoes before, that's all."

In the family

At the Catechism class the teacher asked: "Why do we love God?"

A boy drawled: "I don't know sir, I guess it just runs in the family." □

WHERE'S MY KISS?

Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Cecily. Her parents worked very hard, but they were a beautiful family and lived happily together. However, there was one thing missing from Cecily's life, though she never realized it.

One day, when she was nine years old, Cecily spent the night at her friend Adele's house for the first time. When it was bedtime, Adele's mother tucked them in and kissed each of them goodnight.

"I love you," Mommy said to Adele.

"Me too," whispered Adele.

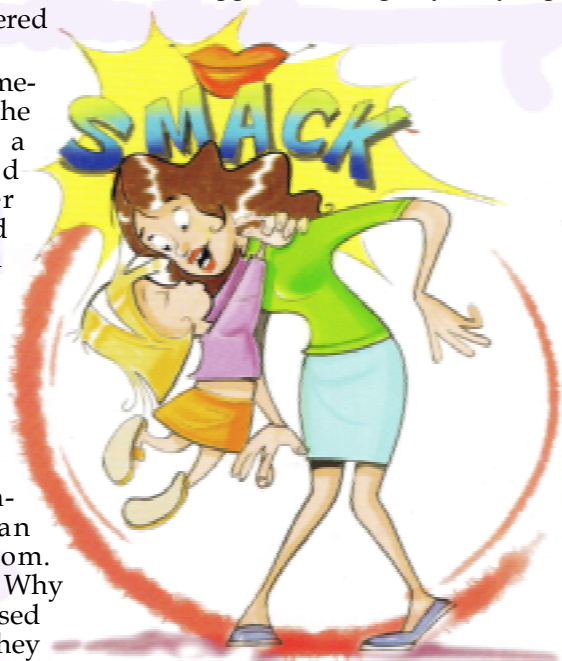
Cecily felt extremely upset because she couldn't sleep a wink. No one had ever kissed her goodnight or told her that they loved her. She lay awake all night, thinking and rethinking, "That's how it should be!"

When she came home, she didn't even greet her parents, she just ran straight to his room. Cecilia hated them. Why had they never kissed her? Why hadn't they

hugged her and told her they loved her? Maybe they didn't love her at all. That night, Cecilia cried herself to sleep and remained angry for several days. Eventually, she decided to run away from home.

She packed her school bag but didn't know where to go. She felt trapped with the coldest and worst parents in the world.

Suddenly, she found a solution. She went straight to her mother and planted a kiss on her cheek, saying, "I love you." Then she ran to her father and hugged him tightly, saying,



"Good night, Daddy. I love you." After that, she went to bed, leaving her parents in the kitchen silently stunned.

The next morning, when she came down for breakfast, she gave her mother a kiss and her father one as well.

At the bus stop, he stood on tiptoe and kissed his mother again. "Bye, Mum. I love you."

Cecilia continued this routine day after day, week after week, month after month. Sometimes, her friends would flinch, feeling stiff and awkward. Other times, they would laugh. But Cecily did not stop; she had a plan and followed it faithfully.

Then one night, she forgot to kiss her mother before going to bed. A little later, the door

to her room opened, and her mother came in.

"So, where's my kiss?" she asked, pretending to be annoyed.

Cecily sat up quickly. "Oh, I forgot," she said. She leaned over and kissed her mother, then added, "I love you, Mama." After that, she went back to bed and closed her eyes. But her mother stayed there and finally said, "I love you too." Then she bent down and kissed Cecilia right on the cheek, adding with mock severity, "And don't forget to kiss me goodnight again."

Cecilia laughed and promised, 'It won't happen again'.

Someone is waiting for a kiss from you today. □

**May we raise children who love the unloved things -
the dandelion, the worms & spiderlings.**

*Children who sense the rose needs the thorn & run into
rainswept days, the same way they turn towards the
sun...and when they're grown and someone has to speak
for those who have no voice, may they draw upon
that wilder bond, those days of tending
tender things and the ones.*

Nicolette Sowder

POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK DECEMBER 2025

For Christians in areas of conflict

*Let us pray that Christians living in areas of war or conflict,
especially in the Middle East, might be seeds of peace, reconciliation and hope.*

Regd RNI no. 9360/57;

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GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY

“Fear not, O Mary... Behold, you will conceive a son, give birth to him, and name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High...” (Lk 1:30-31). This statement succinctly captures the core message of the Gospel: the virginal conception and birth of the Son of God. The Angel first delivers this announcement to the Virgin Mary, which is then communicated to her husband Joseph (cf. Mt 1:20-21) and shared with the shepherds and the Magi (cf. Lk 2:10-11). The one who is to be born and has just been born is the “Saviour.” In line with His name, “He will indeed save His people from their sins” (Mt 1:21). Therefore, this same proclamation, from a theological perspective of salvation, is directed to “all” humanity throughout “all” centuries, serving as a message of indescribable joy. (St. JP II, OR, March 1983)

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

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

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