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*We humbly implore
 your majesty
 that, just as your
 Only Begotten Son
 was presented on this
 day in the Temple
 in the substance
 of our flesh,
 so, by your grace,
 we may be presented
 to you with minds
 made pure.*

*(From the Solemnity of
 the Presentation of the Lord)*

From The Editor's Desk

BRUISED BUT BUSY

Wandering through the dark storerooms of the Shrine Office one morning last year, I chanced upon this totally discoloured statue of Our Lady. The humidity and moisture, the fungus and heat of the Bombay weather had utterly disfigured her features. The paint had come off her face and it looked patchy and ugly. There was however, a serenity in that face that no lack of paint or profusion of fungus could conceal. It was the statue of the Immaculate Conception with her arms outstretched, as if saying "look at my state." It was ugly and yet wonderful for it reminded me of features of a great old lady (*I'll tell you in a moment, why I call her great*). I encountered her when I visited a remote parish in the Nilgiris one summer. Among her other activities, she went around delivering the post and some groceries to the shut-ins in that remote community. I was visiting some friends who had invited me there for a fortnight. So, while pottering around the village I encountered her occasionally as she came out of one garden gate and headed determinedly into another; her basket getting lighter by each visit. I saw her struggle up steps to a house when she could quite rightly have claimed that she was unequal to the task and retired. But she had offered to do it years before and was not going to give in now.

Meeting her in the rectory one morning after Mass I came to know that she was unmarried, and had generously given herself to helping the priests: if there was work to be done, she simply said, "here I am!" She worked in the sacristy repairing vestments and doing other important jobs of that kind. There was no fuss: she simply did it at once. Yet she never invited priests to her house. There was no social side to her work: she simply did the job and disappeared. She liked the priests, but her work was for God.

I've mentally dedicated that discoloured and disfigured statue to her and pray for her whenever look up and see it lying on the top of my bookshelf waiting for a chance to restore her to her pristine glory. That great old lady died some time ago, but I'm sure she's in heaven praying for priests who are in difficulty, and perhaps giving a little prod to priests who could be trying a bit harder. For, let us confess that many of us, being after all human, may miss opportunities to help others. Priests and indeed all of us, need not only a prod from God but inspiration as well.

That discoloured statue can be an inspiration to all of us and not just to the elderly - who have borne the heat of the day - to do what we can; a reminder to do our best despite our weaknesses. And never let us say we are no good. Even as we plod along, God is with us. And it is not just the external activities which are not always be very impressive, that count, but the spirit that leads us on, the enthusiasm that may not show but which brings us close to God. This is the only thing that really matters and will come to its fulness in heaven.

Fr. Ian Doulton, sdb

YOU AND I IN THE BEGINNING: THE BIRTH OF LOVE

by Don Gianpaolo Dianin

Engagement is much more than being in love and comes before the decision to get married, which doesn't have to take place at all. Let's try to identify the stages present in every love story

We cannot belittle that precious period in the story of love that we call engagement. Even though many people today are taking the path of cohabitation, we believe that the potential of this period, does not already anticipate a spousal life. Let us try to situate the engagement within certain stages that are part of every love story.

In the beginning there is falling in love, when a person bursts into my life and throws it into confusion. It's a magical moment when you experience the wonder, the freshness and the

charm of something unique that involves every aspect of life. Indeed, it is a time of spontaneity and almost instinctiveness that appears necessary, a need. I might even consider it something I cannot do without, without falling into a void. Everything leads me to him/her, everything is transfigured by his/her presence. The relationship is made of promises, dreams, waiting, meetings, words and more words and the need to keep in touch. The art of seduction also enters to manifest one's best self and to offer oneself to the other as a beautiful and precious



reality. There is in the engagement also a subtle and understandable selfish game because at the centre there is still me, and I do not want it to end, because I feel good with you.

A second stage is the choice of the other. The previous stage does not end, only new elements enter, we begin growing and we mature. Falling in love is enriched by reflection, loving attention and by an enlightened decision. Love is intelligently assumed, coupled with freedom and responsibility and now it becomes a fully human experience. If falling in love is a little blind, because it appears flawless, almost idealized, now the contours of the other begins to become clearer, a little blur rises and there emerges alongside the beauty, a few wrinkles that exist in everyone of us. The choice makes the loved one my point of reference, s/he becomes an election and therefore also a serene renunciation of any other possibilities. One now enters onto a new path that involves me first and foremost and that becomes true when it involves both of us.

The choice generates a mutual commitment to that new reality i.e., us together. Only now can speak of an engagement, when two people begin to work on verifying their relationship, to understand if their love can have a future. There comes the fatigue and the joy of building something, of putting together two different stories to verify the possibility that a life project can be born from this encounter. Now the centre is no longer me, or you,

it is us, my life becomes your life and vice versa and the other is no longer "beside me," but above all "in me." The engagement recalls trust, the trust that each one gives to the other in a mutual commitment to verify, discern and evaluate without ceasing to dream of a future together

The relationship now takes on a public character with the involvement, always prudently and gradually, of their families and friends. Everyone knows that this couple is living an apprenticeship, a preparation for a possible life lived by the two of them. The couple is born when a secret is shouted to the world and everyone is asked to recognize and look at us as a couple because this is what we are meant to be.

One of the efforts that the engaged couples make is to unite, during this time in a rightful intimacy with an equally rightful openness to all that the journey can offer the two of them. The engagement is not an isolated phase but of "recollection." A serious engagement journey should also include the possibility of themes such as leaving each other: only under these conditions is there a genuine search.

The last stage is planning, when the two lovers don't just look into each other's eyes and hearts, but together look at the life that awaits them it is then that love becomes a life project. The experience of being a couple is not a closed circle in which they are comfortable, but a place from where the two of them can each grow, realize themselves and develop their own loves. It is the

moment in which the two begin to talk about marriage, home, children, work and relationships, not theoretically, but in the concreteness of promises and commitments. The conjugal alliance takes on more precise contours. Now enters the theme of freedom, which in its maturity is not only freedom from, but freedom for life. Authentic freedom is realized when, faced with many alternatives, I choose one that gives meaning to my life, even if this choice entails the renunciation of all other possibilities.

In dividing these stages, we have almost made a scholastic division, but in life it is more difficult to distinguish these moments that intersect and overlap. However, it is important that the two young people do not skip these steps, because whoever does not experience them first, will experience them in marriage, with all the risks they en-

tail. In a lighter vein one could say that one does not get married when one is in love, that is, when everything is ideal. Marriage is not just loving each other, but loving each other for life.

Engagement is already a choice: not the choice to get married, but to see if there exist conditions to do so. We can speak of engagement starting from the second phase, that of a choice, and especially in the third stage, when the journey of discernment, search and mutual responsibility begins. Engagement is much more than being in love and comes before the decision to get married, which cannot be taken for granted.

Once upon a time there were betrothals, real rites that made the engagement official, involving the family and the community, it was a public moment. Today, many engaged couples exchange a ring, a sign of a choice, a promise...a desire. □

RESENTMENT is not a word that is used very often to describe how we feel about things in this modern age. We are more apt to say: "I don't like my boss, my neighbours, or my relatives, etc . . . Or I hate going to work . . . going to church, or doing monotonous household chores, or even less insignificant tasks." But may not all of these expressions come under the heading of resentments, an emotional state that most of us would deny? For, after all, do we not go through our lives convincing ourselves that we are 'nice' people, that we would do anything to help a neighbour, that we would go out of our way to assist the less-fortunate? We probably assume that we contribute our fair share – through our taxes, etc. – to our society and do not begrudge anyone receiving payments of or benefits to which we feel they are entitled through necessity. But do we really go through life without ever feeling envy or jealousy? Do we not, even a little, resent those who seem to have acquired more material possessions than ourselves with the minimum of effort? Is it possible that we nod our heads in approval if a friend or colleague criticizes the unemployed, single parents, members of our community? Might we not even self-righteously voice our outrage that some of these unfortunates have the audacity to expect free medical treatment from welfare organizations? Perhaps we ought to reassess our own moral outlook and realise that 'There but for the grace of God go I' and that we would do well to end each day by counting our blessings and praying for those against whom we hold resentments. *E. Chandler*

A LIGHT THAT ENLIGHTENS PEOPLE

by Chino Biscontin

February 2 commemorates the Presentation of Jesus in the temple, welcomed by the elderly Simeon and Anna.

It is the feast known also as "Candlemas" referring to Simeon's words praising the Child as the night of the nations

Our lives are made up of seasons, each of which has its merits and limitations. Only a vision of reality strongly conditioned by prejudice, as is ours, prevents us, for example, from judging the gifts that adulthood and old age bring with them and makes us think that the ideal age is youth. Without ignoring the gifts that the latter age has as its own, it should be stated that a youthful view of life is limited and limiting. Our life takes place

in time, it is also made of time and when it is used wisely it enriches those who have already made a long journey through life. No one, for example, is more capable of having a vision full of wisdom regarding the problems of life, precisely because he or she can embrace a longer stretch of it than others, than those who have lived with heart and intelligence, those who have reached an old age that is not sour, closeted, but full of sympathy and understanding



towards the young.

I am convinced that the message of Jesus, which does not exclude children and young people, has as its interlocutors above all adults and the elderly, people, that is, who are able to have a fairly complete picture of what human life is, with its hopes and disappointments, its gifts and its failings, its graces and its faults, its loves and its solitudes... Only those who allow the flow of life to become an inner questioning, an invocation or a solicitation; only those who measure themselves against death without renouncing the desire to make of their lives at least a small masterpiece; only those who have sincerely sought to find a solution to the fundamental problems that life raises; only these are able to appreciate all the light that comes from the Gospel of Jesus.

But perhaps saying this is still saying too little, it remains within the narrow scope of individual experience which, if anything, can only measure a tiny handful of years. I believe that only a long memory of human living, possible only if there is dialogue and tradition among generations, can let us fathom the rightness, the depth, the preciousness of the Gospel. The Gospel is a response that, in order to be appreciated, requires, a question. But this question must be so profound that, to be born, it needs generations and generations of experience, reflection, research, prayer, joy and weeping. Only a community with a long historical memory can worthily

appreciate the Gospel.

Perhaps thoughts like these help us to understand the nature of the religious crisis, that we go through, which is also a crisis of tradition held by generational groups. And perhaps these thoughts can guide the path of a community that wants to be richly Christian: a diocese, a parish...

Thoughts that came to my mind as I meditated on the holy old man Simeon and the prophetess Anna. These two elders, burdened by the weight of the long historical memory of the people of Israel, enriched by the unshakable trust in a God who manifested himself too many times and faithful in that tradition not to be credible, who become the soil where the seed of the Word of God can take root, the throne where he can radiate his glory, the temple where he can establish his dwelling and consecrate himself to the work to which the Father calls him.

In my heart I dream of a Christian community, charged with a long tradition of faith, animated by the Spirit of light and accustomed to a long docility to God, which becomes arms outstretched to welcome into this old and sick world of ours the ever new and full of life: the Word of God. □

The seniority Simeon and Anna is the season rich in fruit, where life becomes a contemplation of God's salvation that is already there but is still as fragile as a new born child; of God's newness that demands the capacity for continuous regeneration.

A LOVE LIKE NO OTHER

by Anastasia Dias

John never felt loved, not once in his entire life. Of course, he had parents, an elder brother, friends and a few relationships along the way. But he never felt loved.

The feeling had eluded him since he was very little. As a child, he wished he could feel his parents love for him. But he didn't. As he grew up, he felt insecure in his relationships, always wondering if the other person truly loved him or not. Each and every relationship ended because of how insecure he felt.

At 21, he reluctantly took up his father and elder brother's profession; rather, they forced him into it. He had come of age and had to get married and start a family soon. His elder brother and he had to go fishing every day since their father had grown too old and weak to work anymore. So, he would sit beside them and watch them as they fished.

One early morning, John was at work, with his father and brother on either side. John saw Him approaching. He was the most attractive person John had ever seen. His face was radiant and John couldn't take his eyes off him. His elder brother ran towards Him and hugged him. John wondered, "Who could this be?" His elder brother returned and introduced John to Him. "John, don't you rem-

ember our cousin?" John didn't. His brother went on to explain that He was their first cousin, their mothers were sisters. Since they lived in different towns, they had lost touch with each other. John had heard of his cousin. He was almost 10 years older than John. He'd seen John, for the first time, when he was born and never after that. That is why John didn't recognize Him.

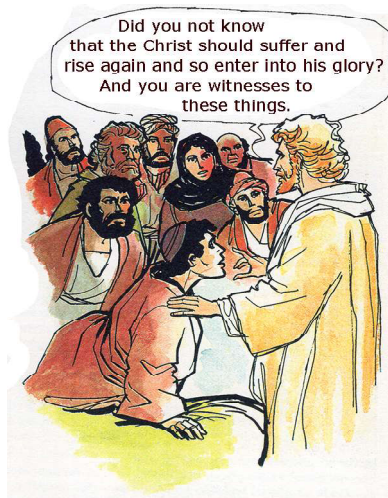
Over the next three years, John and He were always together. They formed a group of 12 friends. But, among the 12, only John and He were inseparable.

For the first time in his life, John felt loved. Love, a feeling that had eluded him since he was born; he only felt it now. John knew that He cared for everyone but, He loved John the most, John couldn't believe it.

John felt His death most painfully. He wept bitterly that night. To him it seemed that a part of himself being taken away from him. He had never felt loved, and just when he did, it was being taken away from him. He gave His mother to John; they were brothers now.

The week following his death, John never slept. He missed Him terribly. Each night seemed to pass so slowly as John cried his eyes out. He had never felt that loved. But





His love was still with John and John could feel it.

One sunny morning, a week after his death, a woman came running to him. She'd seen him, she was sure. John didn't wait to question her further. He heard that first line and ran and ran towards His tomb. It was the His love that drew him there.

He saw him; he couldn't believe his eyes. His face was radiant, like the first time John had ever seen him. John held His face in his hands and cried. He still couldn't believe it.

He came closer. "John, I love you," he whispered. These were familiar words, but they meant so much more when He said it. Not once did John doubt His love for him. Not once did he question His love for him.

John said, 'Lord, you know that I love you.' He nodded. He knew it. John was the disciple He loved, "His beloved disciple." No longer was he John, the name his parents had given him, the identity he had held on to since his childhood. His

identity had dissolved the moment he met Jesus. John was made new.

Over the next few years, John went on to record His love for Jesus in all his letters. He felt it every moment of his life, even though Jesus wasn't physically present with him anymore. Every single time, John preached, he started his sermon with, "God is love." John had never felt loved. But, when he did, he never forgot that feeling.

Many of us can relate to John at some point in our lives. No matter what we think, say or do, we just don't feel loved, or satisfied. Perhaps, we don't feel enough.

You see, John had never felt loved. Nevertheless, he wasn't looking for a fancy love-affair. He wasn't looking for something or someone to fill the void. Unexpectedly, he met Him. He met Jesus. And, in that moment, John found something he'd never searched for in his entire life. He found a love that would last a lifetime.

What you and I can learn from this narrative, especially during this "Valentine" season, is that love isn't found in the biggest or most remarkable moments of our lives, but in those small, tender moments that we often seem to overlook or most of the time, forget.

This day, make a note of all those tiny, little moments when you've felt loved, right from your birth to your childhood to the present moment. Think of your mother carrying you in her arms right after you were born, your father hugging you as a child, your elder brother holding on to you as you walk to school together, the day you met your little sister for the very first time. Now, take a deep breath. And, let all the love sink in.

Happy Valentine's Day! □

B.F.

THE SALESIANS FOR YOU!

MARCO BAÙ

In Parañaque, Philippines, there is the Sandor community for the specific formation of Salesian Coadjutors, Marco is one of them. He tells us his story

Can you introduce yourself?

My name is Marco Baù, I am a professed Salesian; I come from the north of Italy, my small province is Treviso, near Venice to be clear. I am 30 years old. I have been in Manila, Philippines, for a year and a half to study theology and finish my formation as a Salesian coadjutor, or brother as they say here. God willing, I would like to profess perpetual vows this year, upon my return to Italy.



How did this calling come to you?

"Try asking yourself if the Lord is calling you to follow him more closely," were the words a priest in my diocese said to me in confession when I was 12 years old during a school-camp. Now I see many connections between the Salesian vocation and my past, but the search was more of a "labour of the heart" than a walk. Now I am grateful for the faith that was passed on to me in my family as well as in our parish, of Our Lady of the Rosary even though I had to struggle to make it my own. Here I met Don Giuseppe, an elderly priest who decided to spend his last years in our sanctuary; he was my "Don Calosso", very good especially in confession. I really was a bit idealistic, like many teenagers, but I couldn't deny that these moments had brought me so much emotion and something true was there.

However, I was still far from a choice and peace; in fact, the path to the priesthood, although fasci-

nating, left me restless. During high school I got to know the Salesians. When during the school year a friend of mine, Elia, told me "are you coming to the Salesian feast in Jesolo?" I didn't think twice, I went. I followed this friend and thanks to the FMA of Guarda I participated in the preparation of the feast. At the end of high school, I decided to study Social Education in the Salesian University; I wanted to study mathematics but a summer experience of a month in the Salesian house in Bethlehem made me change my mind: "I want to work with people" I said to myself. I found a lot of meaning for my life in this experience. So, without reflecting on it in a cerebral way, one day to the question "Marco, for you the discourse of the Salesian vocation is already closed?" I answered,

after a moment of silence, “No.” I quit my job and finished my master’s degree during my aspirantate and pre-novitiate year and entered novitiate in 2014: that’s how the vocation was born.

How does your family feel?

I am very thankful to God for my family. Both my parents are happy with this path I have taken. My father supported me in a very concrete way, accompanying me to the meetings of the parish, the Way or the Salesians. He told me several times, when I had to pay some fees for a pilgrimage or for Salesian events, “there’s money for these nice things” even if sometimes there wasn’t really that much in the family. My brother and sister are one of the greatest blessings God has given me in my life, I realize this more and more.

How is student life like?

Studying theology during the pandemic was not easy. The second semester last year was abruptly interrupted in the middle. However, thanks to a Salesian priest, Fr Dennis Paez sdb, with my community I was able to help in producing plastic masks that we sent to hospitals in the Philippines. We worked mornings and afternoons on this project and with the experience we created a real assembly line getting to work with 15 people at the same time and producing thousands of “face shields.” I am very happy and fortunate to have the community of clerics and professors in the same compound; we can share with them the experience of theology that even in a difficult time like this is fruitful and full of hope for us.

What do you think of the Church and the Salesians in the Philippines?

I am very grateful to have been sent to study in the Philippines, I thank Fr Iginio Biffi, my provincial, for this. The Salesians here have been welcoming to me from the beginning. Many of the formators have studied in Italy and can speak Italian with me. Some have also been in my province for pastoral experiences. In short, I have really found many confreres who are accompanying me in this formation. There are challenges related to the many cultures from which we come. The Church in the Philippines is really numerous and courageous and engaged in very different environments. I was able to get pastoral experience, before Covid, both in a very poor neighbourhood and in an area rich in industry and development. This gave me an idea of the difference in challenges and richness of resources of the Philippine Church.

Your dreams for the future

My dream is to be able to profess perpetual vows once I finish theology and fully live the Salesian consecrated life as a “brother.” Sometimes some young people have asked me this question, “But do you get married to God?” I don’t really like this expression; if we want to use the beautiful image of marriage, I would say that the bride is the soul and the groom is Jesus. My dream is to be a true friend to both. I believe this is the best gift I can give to young people. I ask for your prayers for my vocation, for my family and for my fellow theology students and young people in the Philippines. □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST PAPIAS OF HIERAPOLIS (February 22)

History begins to leave the realm of science and enter into the realm of speculation the further back we wind the clock of time.

Papian was a saint of the second century. We know very little about him but it his work that has attracted attention. St. Irenaeus, who is one of the two persons responsible for keeping his memory alive and noting his contribution, tells us that he wrote 5 books titled *Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord*. The importance of these books, even though they have not survived in their entirety but only in fragments, is that they bear witness to the authority of those books we now consider as part of the Canon of the Bible as well as exegesis of the teachings of the Lord.

St. Irenaeus describes Papias as “an ancient man, who was a hearer of John, and a friend of Polycarp.” Each of these statements are loaded with valuable information about the saint. By calling him “an ancient man” Irenaeus wasn’t slighting him. On the contrary, he was showing respect. We have to remember that the early Church had high regard for ‘elders;’ these were not merely people of age but people of faith and experience. So, in



describing Papias as “an ancient man” Irenaeus is telling us that he was coming from the apostolic tradition and that he had received his knowledge and faith from people who were very close to the source – Jesus. Within the community of believers, those who had a personal encounter with the

Lord were given higher status as witnesses and teachers than those who hadn't. In this light we will be able to understand the episode of the election of Matthias as the replacement of Judas Iscariot.

After Jesus had ascended into heaven, the apostles along with another 139 or so disciples including Mary, the mother of Jesus spent time praying together. During this period, Peter spoke to the group regarding Judas and how his betrayal and subsequent death was reflected in the Psalms. Peter quotes first from Psalm 69:25: "Let his homestead become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it" and then from Psalm 109:8: "Let another take his position of overseer." Using the latter reference as Divine inspiration, he calls for the election of a replacement. What is interesting are the criteria he puts forward for judging candidates: "So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us — one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection" (Acts 1:21-22). Thus, Peter points out that closeness to Jesus throughout his earthly life and witnessing the Paschal events of his passion, death and resurrection are of the greatest importance.

The second statement describing Papias is "hearer of John." There is a debate regarding which John Irenaeus was referring to. Was it the apostle John or another Church leader named John? It appears as if Irenaeus believed it was the

former but Eusebius, the other man responsible for keeping Papias' memory alive, felt it was the latter. His reasoning was based on the words of Papias himself. Papias wrote in the preface of his book: "I will not hesitate to add also for you to my interpretations what I formerly learned with care from the Presbyters and have carefully stored in memory, giving assurance of its truth...If any follower of the Presbyters happened to come, I would inquire for the sayings of the Presbyters, what Andrew said, or what Peter said, or what Philip or what Thomas or James or what John or Matthew or any other of the Lord's disciples, and for the things which other of the Lord's disciples, and for the things which Aristion and the Presbyter John, the disciples of the Lord, were saying."

From these words one can find justification for both views. Papias lists out all those whose testimony he recorded from persons who had met them and he doesn't mention specially either John the apostle or John the presbyter but both among others. The Anchor Bible Dictionary notes that Eusebius' interpretation is probably correct even though he did not regard Papias' testimony as holding much value. Eusebius' prejudice however, did not pass on to later scholars who found in Papias' work significant details. Many scholars, prefer to side with Irenaeus and his reference to John the Apostle being the source for much of Papias' work.

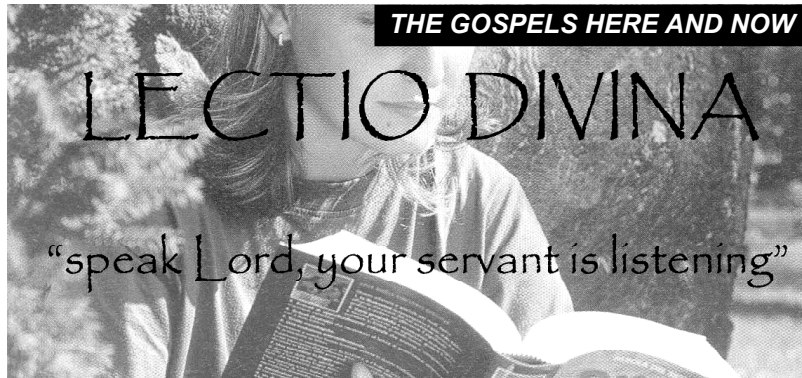
Papias was held in high regard by many of the Church

fathers beginning with Irenaeus, of course. His interpretations of the Gospels were being cited from the 4th cy onwards. A 5th cy manuscript known today as the *Codex Alexandrinus* which contains parts of Old and New Testament books in Greek mentions Papias as the one who transcribed the Gospel of John from John's dictation! Eusebius records Papias' evidence of the author of the first and second gospels. He notes: "Matthew put the *logia* (Greek for words/sayings) in an ordered arrangement in the Hebrew language, but each person interpreted them as best he could." "Mark, in his capacity as Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately as many things as he recalled from memory — though not in an ordered form — of the things either said or done by the Lord. For he neither heard the Lord nor accompanied him, but later, as I said, Peter, who used to give his teachings in the form of *chreiai* (Greek word meaning 'brief declarations' which were a popular style during that time) but had no intention of providing an ordered arrangement of the *logia* of the Lord. Consequently Mark did nothing wrong when he wrote down some individual items just as he related them from memory. For he made it his one concern not to omit anything he had heard or to falsify anything."

Finally, Irenaeus described Papias as a "friend of Polycarp." Polycarp was Bishop of Smyrna during the first half of the 2nd cy. He is considered to be a disciple

of John the apostle and perhaps it is from here that his connection to Papias stems. Legend has it that he was ordained by John himself and was made bishop of Smyrna. He is highly revered and venerated as one of the three chief apostolic fathers along with Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch. These three represent the first and direct link to the apostles. That is why the Church holds them in special regard. There could be 2 reasons why Irenaeus mentions Polycarp in relation to Papias. One could be to heighten the value and relevance of Papias. Associating him with a monumental figure like Polycarp, who was himself Bishop and also martyr would elevate Papias' witness value and highlight the significance of his contributions. Secondly, Irenaeus was something of a disciple of Polycarp. He mentions how he learnt so much from spending time listening and being with Polycarp. Perhaps, this was a way of honouring his own teacher and father in the faith.

Papias has played a key role in helping scholars defend the authenticity of the Gospel accounts besides offering valuable testimony regarding those sources that the early Church held as authoritative and scriptural. His work has helped give our Bible the shape it has. If not for him, perhaps some of the books we consider to be scripture today might not have made the cut! But Papias wasn't only a good scribe. He was a bishop and therefore, he passed on more than just information; he passed on faith, and it is for the latter that he is venerated. □



BELIEVING TOGETHER

by Carlo Broccardo

Today we accept a challenge: to read the prologue of the Gospel according to Luke. The very first words with which Luke, in the manner of the historians of the time, explains to his readers the purpose and method of his work. The challenge is beautiful because they contain a Gospel, that is, good news for us today.

Comparing Luke with the other evangelists will help us to better understand Luke's text. Let's look at how they begin their narrative. Mark, for example, has a title that is a condensation of the theology: "The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus, Christ, Son of God" (Mk 1:1); Jesus was a fairly common proper name in those days. Matthew instead prefers to begin with the genealogy of Jesus Christ, "son of David, son of Abraham. Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob..." and so on until Jesus. In this way, he emphasizes the profound link between Jesus and the history of salvation that began with Abraham. John opens his Gospel, so profound that it merits the name "spiritual," with a poetic page that takes us beyond history, into the eternity of God,



when "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn 1:1).

And according to Luke? In a few words we can answer this way: for Luke it is important to know that every Gospel is born in a community and is addressed to a community; no one believes alone.

It is clear that for Luke there are four stages in the journey of faith. First of all, "the events that took

place among us," that is, the words and actions that Jesus did, he did not do alone in the desert, but surrounded by a group of disciples. These disciples are now part of the Christian community, they are not strangers; this is why Luke can say "in our midst."

Later on, "those who had been eyewitnesses from the beginning," that is, the disciples of Jesus, "became witnesses of the word. As the book of Acts tells us, after Pentecost the apostles began to announce the death and resurrection of Jesus, stating without fear: "we are all witnesses" (Acts 2:32).

The third stage: the (written) accounts; Luke knows that he is not the first, but that many before him "tried to tell the story in order." In the spoken preaching done by the apostles, of which we have a few examples in the book of Acts, only a few things about Jesus' life are recalled: death, burial, resurrection, and ascension to heaven. At some point, however, someone came up with the idea of writing an ordered narrative; not just a few facts, but a story, with a beginning, a continuation and an end. Today, scholars agree that, after some partial collections of facts or sayings of Jesus, the first to write a "complete" account, that is, a Gospel, was Mark.

Fourth stage: Luke writes for Theophilus; perhaps this is the name of the sponsor who paid the expenses (which in the ancient world were very high) for the publication of the Gospel; perhaps it is a fancy name, behind which is hidden a dedication to all those who love God and are loved by Him (this is in fact the meaning of the word "Theophilus"). However, we understand this name, it is clear

that Luke is writing for people who already believe in God and indeed have already received an initial Christian catechesis; in fact, he says at the end of the prologue that he is writing "so that you may realize the soundness of the teachings you have received." With his account, Luke wants to give solidity to their action of proclamation. For this reason, as a good researcher, he reads the works of his predecessors and makes careful personal notes; he searches, investigates, studies, reads, listens... and finally writes an account of the life of Jesus. The purpose of his work is indeed precisely to show the beauty and truth of the work done by others!

In the Acts of the Apostles, the evangelist Luke (who is the author not only of the Gospel but also of the book of Acts) tells of the time when in Antioch some anonymous Christians had the idea of founding a mixed community, that is, composed of Jews and pagans; an absolute novelty, which had not been planned by the mother church in Jerusalem, and so from the centre they immediately sent Barnabas to check it out. And Barnabas, "because he was a good man and full of the Holy Spirit, when he came and saw the grace of God, rejoiced and exhorted everyone to remain faithful to the Lord" (Acts 11:23). Barnabas was Paul's teacher, whose collaborator Luke would later become; we see the same style, of those who know that it is not enough to be good but we must work together, capable even of being happy when others do good things before us and without us. This is the "Gospel" of the prologue: it announces to us a style of Church, which we can realistically put into practice even today. □

Quiet Spaces

NOT TALK BUT ACTION

Pope Francis' homily (edited) at Domus Sanctae Marthae on Tuesday, February 23, 2016

It is of no use calling ourselves Christians, because “God is impractical”. What is important is not talk but action. The Pope proposed a return to the basics of Christian life, and invited an examination of conscience on the Beatitudes and, in particular, on one’s witness in the family. This was the subject of his homily on Tuesday, 23 February, during morning Mass at Santa Marta.

“The Liturgy of the Word today introduces us to the Gospel dialectic between doing and talking”, Francis began, referring to the day’s reading from the Prophet Isaiah (1:10, 16-20). “The Lord calls his people to act: “Come now, let us reason together”. Let us reason and “cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow”. In other words, “act, do things”, he said, because “God is practical”.

After all, Jesus himself said: “those who call me ‘Lord, Lord’ will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven”, but rather, those “who have done the will of the Father”. Thus the Pope recalled that “the Lord teaches us the path of action”. And, he added, “how often we find people – ourselves included – so often in the Church” who proclaim: “I am a real Catholic!”. They should be asked, “what do you do?”. For example, Francis noted, “how many parents say they are Catholic, but never take the time to speak to their children, to play with their children, to listen to their children?”. Perhaps, he continued, “they have their parents in a rest home, but they are always busy and cannot go to visit them, leaving them abandoned there”. Yet they repeat: “I am a real Catholic. I belong to that association...”.

This attitude, the Pope stated, is typical of this “religion of talk: I say that I am like this, but I do worldly things. Like those clerics that Jesus spoke about”. They “liked being seen, they preferred their vanity, not justice; they liked being called ‘master’; they liked to talk, not to do”.

This situation is also recalled in the day’s Gospel passage, taken from Matthew, Chapter 25 (1-12). “Let’s think about those 10 maidens who were happy”, the Pope said, “because that evening they were supposed to go and meet the bridegroom. They were happy! But five did what they were supposed to do in order to meet the bridegroom; the other five had their heads in the clouds”. Thus, he continued, when “the bridegroom arrived they had no oil: they were foolish”.

“To talk and not do is deceit”, the Pontiff warned. And “it is deceit that really leads to hypocrisy”. It is exactly “as Jesus says to these clerics”. But “the Lord goes even further: what does the Lord say to those who draw near to him by doing?”. His words are: “Come now, let us reason together! Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool”.

Thus, Francis explained, “the Lord’s mercy is in doing”. Such that to “those who knock at the door and say: ‘But Lord, remember that I said...’”, he responds: “I do not know you!”. Instead, to those “who do”, he says: your sins are “like scarlet, you shall be white as snow”. This is how “the Lord’s mercy goes to meet those who have the courage to face him, but to face him on the truth, on the things that I do and those I do not do, in order to correct me”. And “this is the great love of the Lord, in this dialectic between talk and action”.

Therefore, the Pope continued, “being Christian means acting: doing the will of God”. And on “the last day – because we will all have one – what will the Lord ask us? Will he ask us: ‘What have you said about me?’ No! He will ask about the things we have done”. He will ask us about “practical things: ‘I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me’”. Because “this is Christian life”. On the other hand, “talk by itself leads us to vanity, to the pretence of being Christian. No, one is not Christian like this!”

As Easter approaches, “on this Lenten path of conversion”, Francis proposed an examination of conscience, suggesting several questions to ask ourselves: “Am I one of those who talk a lot but do nothing, or do I do things? Do I try to do more?” The goal, he said, is “to do the Lord’s will so as to do good for my brothers, for those who are close to me”.

In conclusion, before returning to the Eucharistic celebration, the Pope prayed that “the Lord grant us this wisdom to properly understand the difference between talk and action, and teach us the path of doing and help us to take that path, because the path of talking leads to the place where these doctors of the law were, the clerics who liked to dress and live as if they were kings”. But “this is not the reality of the Gospel!” Thus he prayed that “the Lord teach us this path”. □

FOR ANOTHER DRESS

By Pierluigi Menato, Tr. Ian Doulton, sdb

Chevalier Peter Rossi lived on the fifth floor of an elegant building on Via XX settembre. He really would have preferred a modest house with a little garden, because the hundred and forty steps that led to it were too much for the heart and feet of the poor gentleman. But his wife and daughters screamed like mad every time he touched that subject of moving to his dream home.

In that elegant edifice there was a liveried doorman, a vestibule with columns of real marble, the staircase with the red carpet up to the second floor and on Tuesdays there was a continuous coming and going of carriages and aristocratic cars because the landlady of the place, a duchess, gave entertaining tea parties.

All that pomp and circumstance made Mr Rossi and the Rossi girls dizzy, and every Tuesday as they climbed and climbed the stairs hundreds of times, they had to pass the doorman, who was compelled to greet them.

But every time Chevalier Rossi arrived at the door of his apartment, he felt that those one hundred and forty steps were really excessive.

Even that evening, when he arrived on the landing, breathing hard, Peter Rossi thought of the little white house and sighed. He asked the maid who came to open the door the usual question:

"And where are the ladies?"

She, in a foul mood, turned on him like a viper.

"The ladies? They're out and about, the ladies! And here I am slaving away like mad. I've been

ironing all day. Shirts with lace, skirts with lace, devils with lace...."

Chevalier Peter put up with the outburst very philosophically. He didn't want to eat his heart out, also because that very day in the office they had announced the long-awaited gratuity. Five hundred euros... A handsome sum that would have helped him pay the many bills of shoe and handbag stores, milliners and seamstresses that he was getting from all sides...

So, he calmly responded to the maid's inappropriate outburst:

"Take it easy, Rosie, take it easy." But she angrily went on:

"No, sir, I will not take it easy. I work hard, but I want to speak my mind. Your daughters are always gaping into the mirror... And they think of nothing but frills and frills, like so many princesses. And the master, meanwhile, wears a coat that looks like it was taken from Noah's Ark...."

And Chevalier Peter:

"Hush now, Rosie, take it easy." And the other:

"Yes, sir, I'll calm down. But you must know all of them. Even today they brought two new dresses... as if they didn't have any left."

And Chevalier Peter:

"Take it easy, Rosie, calm down." Finally, Rosie calmed down, wandering around the cramped kitchen like a caged sparrow. That was the story of every day. That evening, however, when the bell rang insistently, Chevalier Peter Rossi ran into the parlour, beaming with joy at being able to

give his ladies the good news of the gratuity. He was sure that it would be well received. And then, who knows?... When all is said and done, pulling a little from here and a little from there, in that five hundred euro there would perhaps be a little left over for a coat for himself too. He had seen some very cheap ones in a shop window on Via Salaria. Rosie wasn't wrong, his old chestnut-coloured coat was rather inappropriate for a government servant.

An irritated voice was heard shouting, "But how? It's not even been laid out? And it's almost eight o'clock!... What have you been doing all day?"

"I've been at the window making love to the moon!" came the cynical reply.

"Ouch!" thought the knight. "We're off to a bad start!"

The maid passed by him in a tumultuous burst of sobs:

"I'm leaving, I'm leaving! Not even a day of peace and would I want to stay in this house of hell?"

Peter Rossi's self-respect was stung; as master of the house, he had become a knight again in an instant, imposing himself and even raising his voice:

"Hey, I say! Is that any way to talk?"

But out of prudence he went to his room, where his wife was taking off her hat in front of the mirror. She was a beautiful woman, Mrs Celine: tall, strong and elegant. She would not have been given the fifty years she was, ten more than she confessed.

"Good evening my love," said the chevalier, turning to his wife like he did on any other day.

"Good evening," she answered without turning around. "Do you understand what a nice little viper we have in the house? Uptight and impertinent!"

"Phew!" made the Chevalier Peter as boldly as possible. Uptight, no; I don't think so. I saw her ironing a mountain of stuff today."

The lady turned on him like a hyena:

"The handsome landlord is taking the servant's side."

The husband turned red but kept silent.

At the table, the mother and the daughters were grumbling. The broth was salty, the meat, bland and dry.

Paola rejected the dish:

"I'm not hungry," she said with a grimace. "This is junk food...." Chevalier Peter looked at the bottom of his glass astonished.

"Maybe you're not feeling well?" he said half-heartedly. Lucia, the elder girl, shook her shoulders:

"She ate too many pastries at the



Ferdinand Cafe, that's where she gobbles up everything. She, with her ferocious appetite would have eaten even the legs of the table."

Her father turned to her:

"Did you all go to the Ferdinand Cafe?"

His wife put down her fork and deigned to explain:

"Naturally. We invited Countess Alois and the young lady there. You must understand: in a house like this we can't return the hospitality they extend us."

The chevalier had a sudden palpitation of heart, here was a good moment to give way to the consoling news of the gratuity. He wiped his lips then said almost sounding out the syllables:

"And I'm going to pay you all. Someone will take care of our deficit."

"Oh!" came from the lady grasping at straws. "A couple of thousands?"

He nodded 'yes,' triumphantly.

"A gratuity" she announced solemnly. "It's high time."

Lucia clapped her hands, pleased; Paola smiled, too. Her mother, on the other hand, kept to herself she did not blink:

"How much?" she asked quietly. And the chevalier, raising his open hand:

"Five hundred euros..." he announced proudly. "That's not bad, is it?"

The girls squealed with joy; the elderly lady thought a little, then said:

"A pittance."

The poor man turned to fire and his sad little eyes became veiled with tears. Even his daughters were disappointed when he rose and left. The moth-

er, then, realizing the disastrous effect produced by her words, thought it her duty to give an explanation:

"A misery confirmed. With these dismal conditions, what's the point of five hundred euros? There are, for example, the bills of the dressmaker and the hairdresser... huge, yes, huge, but given the current prices we can be content that the five hundred euros will be used to make advances..."

She spoke to her daughters as if her husband didn't exist. Lucia shook her head. "There's always time for those.... If instead...", she interrupted herself, looking at her sister with a smile which incited her:

"If instead... what? Out with it!"

"If instead we accepted the invitation of Countess Louise for the New Year's Eve ball? But mom said no today, so as not to embarrass ourselves... But now there's this money and we can make a nice dress and go too. How great!"

Paola clapped her hands, but while the girl was talking, Chevalier Peter turned ashen and his lower lip began to tremble as if he was about to cry.

Then he recovered and said courageously and in a low voice:

"Oh, not this time! Wasting my earnings on madness! What do you think, you pin-head! That I should steal money?"

The three women looked at each other, astonished at that outburst, the first, perhaps, to which the peaceful father permitted himself. But the astonishment lasted briefly; Paola threw aside her napkin and burst into

desperate sobs.

Lucia, seeing her mother put a handkerchief over her eyes, began to whimper too... Rosie came in bringing the coffee tray, because she clearly saw and heard as well. She glanced at the master, presumed to have been the author of that tragic scene. She seemed to read a bitter reproach even in the eyes of the maid and became red as a poppy. Was he really the tyrant of the family? Why make these daughters of his cry, when he could please them?

"Well, well, well..." he said quickly, as if those words burned his mouth. "Do whatever you want and God bless you..."

He took his usual coffee without sugar and lit his cigar. Smoking was not allowed in the dining room so, he got up and went downstairs as usual to the lobby to play his usual game of "backgammon" with his friends (in which he'd always lose about twenty euros). It was the only entertainment he permitted himself, nothing else. But he felt extremely tired! Maybe it was the one hundred and forty steps to his house; maybe it was the weather; maybe some other bitter and serious thing...

As he put his hand in his coat pocket, he heard a rustling of papers. It was an envelope. Then he remembered that the messenger had given it to him at the Ministry, just as he was leaving. He hesitated before opening it; then he decided to cast an uneasy glance at it.

It was the milliner who was threatening legal action if he didn't get paid within three days the bill of one thousand seven hundred euros that the ladies

owed her.

Chevalier Peter leaned against the wall; looked up at the ceiling as if asking heaven to intervene; clutching his old chestnut-coloured coat, as if he were cold. From there the voices of Mrs Rossi and Paola the younger girl could be heard. They were arguing over the new dress. The mother demanded that it be white and the daughter screamed that she wanted it to be blue, like the one she had seen at the Duchess' gala evening at the Opera. As long as there was money, why skimp so much? They went so rarely to any celebrations... She didn't want to embarrass herself.

Chevalier Peter slowly took off his chestnut-coloured coat and tried to slip into his room without being seen. Instead, his wife saw him from the end of the corridor and shouted:

"How come you aren't going out?"

"No," he answered in a hoarse voice. "I'm sleepy and tired. I'm going to bed."

Paola cried out in turn:

"What about the game, Dad?"

"No game," he said without turning around.

But his wife replied:

"Leave it, Paola, it's money saved. We must economize."

He did not answer and was already putting his hand on the bedroom door handle, when he heard Lucia's little voice whisper into his ear:

"I understand everything, Papa. I'm so sorry, forgive me. I don't want the dress."

He answered, this time, with a kiss; then he closed the door quickly, so that they would not see him crying. □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 25

by Michele Molineris

134. Catherine, you are good now, but... (1864)

In 1941 Fr Mathew Cravero, a Salesian, was walking through the women's ward of Our Lady's Hospital in San Francisco, USA. It was National Thanksgiving Day.

The priest exchanged nods and greetings with some of those sick people for whom he was an old acquaintance and an expected visitor. In a bed in the corner lay an old woman silently locked in her pain. You could see the sadness and loneliness in her eyes; but she tried to hide herself with an almost cynical indifference. The priest was about to pass by, but he did not want to miss the opportunity to bid her an encouraging greeting.

It seemed to him that he was speaking to a piece of ice: the woman did not move a muscle. The priest, rather disappointed, thought it was better to go on. He went on, but only a few steps. He felt strangely pinned to that place. He approached the woman's bed again. He asked her: "Is there anything I can do for you? I would be glad to help you."

The woman's eyes sparkled with a flash of contempt: "No, I don't want help from any of you priests. Leave me alone." Her words came out truncated and broken by short breaths. She was in excruciating pain.

Realizing that he had tried unsuccessfully, the priest turned to leave. Strange! Something seemed to be calling him back. He

tried one last time. The woman's features were Italian; the accent itself betrayed her. The priest turned to her and spoke in his mother tongue, since he too was Italian. The barrier collapsed. The patient began to respond in short words to the priest's direct questions. It took only a few minutes of conversation to discover that they were both from the same province of Italy. This made their dialogue easier. Then Fr Cravero "cast his line" into the depths of her soul, speaking to her in her native dialect.

This comforted the woman's heart. She was unable to resist and immediately both remembered their distant hills, the country, the people, their local customs.

The priest, however, kept himself prudently discreet. He had noticed that the old woman changed the subject as soon as he touched on a religious topic. It was an amiable and cordial conversation that took place between the two of them; perhaps one of the easiest and sweetest that the woman had ever held.

A heavy buzz warned the two that visiting hours were about to end. The priest would not have wanted to tear himself away from the sick woman, but the signal of the end offered him the right to try once more to speak to her about the soul. He took his hat and as he was about to leave, he said: "I am really happy to have met you. When you are well, do not fail to come to the church of Saints Peter and Paul; there Don Bosco's sons will be very happy to help you."

The woman moaned; her face turned white as a sheet. She fixed

her bewildered eyes on the priest who was looking at her, towering in his tall stature over the doorway. She stammered excitedly: "Don Bosco? ...but how do you know?"

And she burst into uncontrollable sobs. Then he told his story.

"When Don Bosco went to some village in Monferrato, all the people ran to welcome him. During one of those visits, the saint had taken up residence in the rectory. As usual, a crowd of visitors thronged to see him. A mother came to see him with her little daughter. She wanted to receive the saint's blessing and wanted Don Bosco to bless her little girl as well.

When the saint found himself alone with mother and daughter, he did not pay attention to the little girl's intelligent face, but started talking to her mother. It was only when the woman asked him to bless the little girl that he slowly turned to her and put his hand on her head in a strange way. The eyes of the saint and those of the innocent child met.

"My little Catherine, little Catherine," Don Bosco asked her slowly to be very serious. "You are a good child now; I know that your mother is happy with you, but the time will come when you will cross the sea and go to America. Then, little Catherine, you will lose your faith and almost lose your soul. But do not be afraid; my sons, the Salesians, will be there to take care of you; they will save you from the brink of hell."

That prophecy, expressed in such clear terms, upset the mother; the child began to cry. The mother meanwhile asked for an

explanation, while Catherine sobbed to herself.

"May the Lord take care of her!" were the last words of the saint.

That little girl emigrated to the United States and had led a life that had been an impressive fulfillment of Don Bosco's prophecy. The meeting with the Salesian had also fulfilled the last part of the saint's concern.

During the last months of her life, in fact, the woman, in that corner bed, suffered acute pains, but she no longer suffered alone; every morning she received the one who is the source of all comfort and help. She died with the name of Don Bosco on her lips. She did not want to say more (*B.S., February 1964, 42*).

136. A lecture to a plainclothes officer (1864)

"And now," said Don Bosco one evening in December 1864, "I will tell you about something that happened today, while I was returning from Vercelli to Turin. In the same carriage in which I had boarded there was a gentleman who, when I entered, was gossiping about confession. As soon as he saw me, he turned to me and exclaimed:

"Fr. Abbot, say something on this subject, for God's sake."

I sat down and asked him: "Sir, could you tell me who invented confession?"

"We know that," he answered, "from the Council of Trent."

"And would you be able to tell me at when this Council was held?"

"In the time of Saint Bernard".

"And when did St. Bernard live?" "At the time of Saint Augustine."

This pompous piece of historical erudition caused a general laughter in the carriage. I then resumed: "You see, the Council of Trent was celebrated about 300 years ago, St. Bernard died about 600 years ago, and since St. Augustine lived, 1400 years have passed, and about 1850 years ago Jesus Christ instituted this great sacrament."

My adversary first fell silent, then added: "I say frankly: I don't like making my confession."

"All right, and I will suggest some means."

"I do like you: you're the first priest who teaches us not to confess: how do you do that?" "Never commit sins." "I don't commit sins."

"I congratulated him; however, I would like to point out that the first words he said, he took the name of God in vain!

"It's true, I wasn't thinking of that."

"Besides, if he would allow me to question him, you would see that he would have something on his conscience."

"Speak, speak," I allowed him. "Not in public, because otherwise I would displease you and offend the ears of these gentlemen."

"Speak frankly; I won't hold it against you."

"I will not speak in public; rather, what I want to say I will say in your ear."

"Ok, ok!"

I then said to him in a low voice what I wanted to say and he answered me aloud: "You are right; but you should know, sir, that I am a citizen of Palermo."

I congratulated him, "but is Palermo different from other cities?

Isn't the Lord in Palermo?"

He kept silent and after a little pause he added: "I am called to Turin to teach accounting to the Piedmontese soldiers, who know nothing."

This boast disturbed me greatly and: "How," I said to myself, "do you think the Piedmontese are such asses that they need your school?" And I added loudly: "Sir, what do you mean by accounting? Algebra, arithmetic, the accounting or double-entering?"

"By accounting I mean book-keeping," he answered. And, adding a few more words, he began to get confused, and all the others began to laugh.

"You see," I said to him seriously, with a masterly air, "by accounting I mean the ledger, double-entry bookkeeping, simple book-keeping, in short, I gave a demonstration of my knowledge of the lesson of accounting."

The travellers looked at each other and said: "This priest knows everything, even about military accounting; and turning to me they said: "It seems that you have been a soldier."

"Not only have I been a soldier, but I still am one..." They looked at me even more astonished and added: "You are dressed as a priest: maybe you are a soldier in disguise."

"Oh no, this is my uniform, and what's more, I'm not just a soldier, I'm a graduate, or rather an army general." The joke was over, and I, turning again to my interlocutor, said: "Look, sir: before speaking, always look around carefully to see whom you are talking with, because you might

meet someone who will make you look bad." I kept silent and after a few moments I resumed: "I confess, sir, that I know little about military accounting, but I was offended that you said with impunity that we Piedmontese know nothing about military accounting. If I, who have not studied it, know so much more than you do, imagine what those Piedmontese who have done their studies on purpose will know."

That poor accountant of mine did not answer any more and another gentleman said to me: "This one who annoys us with his awful talks is from Milan. Your presence, reverend, has been a real blessing; it was really necessary for you to shut his mouth."

He was an officer in plain clothes, who apologized and promised to come and see me in Valdocco. (*M.B., VII, 843*).

138. Exemplary resignation of a mother (1865)

In 1865 young Ferraris was seriously ill. His mother came to visit him. His condition was not then critical. After nursing him for a few days, she took Bisio aside and, believing Don Bosco to be a saint, she asked, "What does Don Bosco say about my son? Will he die?"

"Why do you ask?" Bisio replied.

"To know whether I should remain or return home."

"How do you feel about your son's condition?"

"As a mother, I naturally wish him to recover, but I leave it to God to do what is best for him."

"Do you feel resigned to God's will?"

"Whatever God decides, I shall accept."

"And if your son were to die?"

"What can I say?"

At this display of Christian resignation, Bisio hesitated a little and then replied, "You'd better stay. Don Bosco has told me that your son is a good boy and is well prepared."

At these words that good Christian mother silently gave vent to her grief. "I'll stay," she sobbed.

And resigned, she witnessed the death of her son on March 16. (*EBM., VIII, 39*).

139. Puf-puf, puf-puf... (1865)

One day in 1865 in the presence of other cabinet ministers, Lanza said to Don Bosco, "Don Bosco, tell us, how can you meet so many expenses? Where do you get the money to feed all those boys? What's your secret?"

"Sir," Don Bosco answered, "I operate as a steam engine."

"What do you mean? I don't quite follow you."

"I keep going puff, puff."

"Yes, but these 'puffs' must eventually be paid. What's your secret for that?"

"I will tell you, Your Excellency. An engine needs fuel..."

"What kind of fuel do you really mean?"

"The fuel of trust in God!" Don Bosco replied. "Without it, empires fall, kingdoms come to ruin, and the work of man is brought to naught."

These words, pronounced as the saint sometimes used to pronounce them, made his interlocutor think (*EBM., VIII, 45*).



BERNADETTE AND THE MYSTERIES OF THE ROSARY

by Luigi Melotti

Few calendars record April 16 as the feast day of St. Bernadette. And yet, that is her day, which corresponds to her *dies natalis*, her birth into heaven on April 16, 1879, at the age of just 35!

A careful reading of the seventeen apparitions of Mary to Bernadette, taking care to order them around certain key ideas, shows us a very transparent correspondence between the major stages of Bernadette's life and her meditation on the joyful, glorious and sorrowful mysteries of the Rosary.

To give greater emphasis to this invitation to meditate on the history of the Apparitions within the framework of the Rosary, we recall that Mary at Rue du Bac (Miraculous Medal) and at La Salette, as well as at Fatima and Lourdes, held a Rosary in her hand. In Lourdes, as Bernadette recited the Hail Marys, Mary, to whom she addressed her greetings, would slide the Rosary beads silently through her fingers. She listened. Bernadette not only revered the radiant Virgin, but throughout her life, now intimately united to Her,

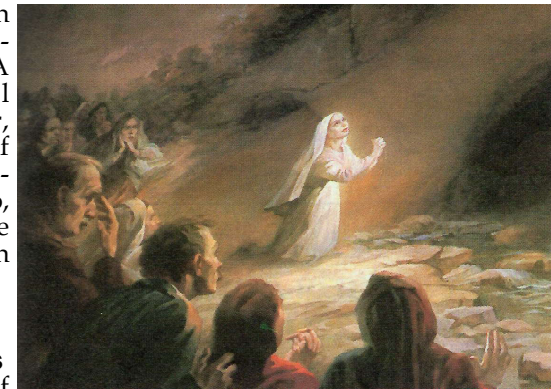
as a pre-teen, and then as a religious, she lived in her flesh and shared with the beautiful Lady her joys, her fame, her sufferings.

The joyful mysteries of Bernadette

From the very first apparition, when, in a sudden and powerful noise of the wind, Bernadette saw, standing bathed in golden light, a beautiful young woman smiling, she was momentarily transported to another world. She was called, she did not answer. Kneeling, pale, her eyes wide-open eyes were as if motionless, ecstatic, gazing at a point to the right, above the grotto. The marvellous vision said to her: "Will you do me the favour of coming here for a fortnight?" By now, Bernadette thought only of the Lady. An invincible force compelled her to think about her. The best of herself was captured by this dream vision. The same invincible force compelled her to return to the grotto of Massabielle.

She would live fifteen days of happiness that no one would be able to steal from her. A happiness

whose source was an "elsewhere" that escaped every grasp. A joy unknown until then, burst into her, beyond the reach of any desire or experience. Only those who, by a special grace, have experienced it can understand it.



Her glorious mysteries

This overflow of happiness plunged Bernadette momentarily, as if by anticipation, into the Glory of the Kingdom. The Lady told her: "I do not promise you happiness in this world, but in the next, yes." Bernadette already experienced, in her mortal body, a kind of foretaste. Bernadette immersed her keen senses into the future world. Her face, according to eyewitnesses, became beautiful, with a superior and alien beauty. Bernadette, with her sparkling eyes, her seraphic smile, the indefinable grace of her person, was no longer the Bernadette of every day. She had become someone else, from "elsewhere," a stranger in this world, totally mobilized in a change which caused her, in a word, to be disappear. A face without a face. Her whole being seemed to be immersed in an ocean of delights that took her over entirely.

She was numb: a large lit candle burned between her fingers and left no sign of burning. Bernadette was contemplating, talking with a young woman of between sixteen and seventeen years of age - who would later claim to be the Immaculate Conception. This young woman wore a dazzling white

dress, fastened at the waist by a blue sash, with a white veil on her head that allowed a glimpse of her hair. On each of her feet, there is a golden yellow rose. How beautiful she was! A beauty that no human tongue can describe. This could not last. It was not to last. The Lady, more splendidly beautiful than ever before, a beauty of *apothosis*, smiled for the last time, a farewell smile, or rather, a smile that meant, "Goodbye, see you in Heaven!"

After the splendour, Bernadette returned to the night. It is her turn to live.

Her painful sorrowful mysteries

No one believed her visions. Her social situation spoke against her: a family of poor, needy people, seven of whom live in a damp hovel, three meters over four, which was called *le Cachot*: an old prison. Her father was considered a good-for-nothing. Bernadette was asthmatic, stunted in her growth, of rather practical intelligence, with a poor memory, scholastically challenged, with little religious knowledge. It was thought that heaven could not have chosen this physically backward and untalented woman to entrust her with

a message. This was what her mother, a woman full of common sense, told her: "You should not have chosen Lent to celebrate your carnival!

That was what the authoritarian parish priest of Lourdes who had her summoned also thought. He took it out on the Lady and in the same terms: "Your white-clad Lady! Your carnival of apparitions! A woman without a name, who does not know where she comes from, who goes to stay in the hole of a rock, barefoot! What a disgrace! To have such a family bringing disorder to the city and giving it to the people! Hold her back, don't let her move," he ordered her aunt Basilia, who had accompanied her to the parsonage.

People speak of hysteria after witnessing a grotesque scene: Bernadette scratched the ground, drank and soiled her face with muddy water, while placing a tuft of grass in her mouth. So, the parish priest, made aware of this, got angry and continued his reprimands: "Now, even a spring! And you ate grass like the beasts! Leave me alone. You haven't seen anything. I will chase you out of here with a broom, and if you return to the cave, I will have you arrested by the gendarmes."

Bernadette withdrew discouraged. Had the gendarmes arrest her! And this she did: she was called to Police Commissioner Jacomet who threatened to have her imprisoned; then to Dutour, the imperial prosecutor. Neither of them could find a contradiction in her stories. It was still the case that "God has chosen the foolish in the world to confound the wise" (1 Cor 1:27).

There was something else: on February 22, the Lady did not come

to the appointment. Was she afraid of the gendarmes? Was she unhappy with the authorities, the crowd, the visionary? On March 3, once again, the grotto remained empty. Bernadette waited in vain, her heart swollen. "I can no longer return: she has not appeared to me, because there are too many people." Later that morning, however, the Lady explained her absence: "There were people here who spent the night in the grotto and who dishonoured her." The sky closed in again. Bernadette's ordeal was about to continue.

We only remember that the eleven years of her religious life would be a continuous state of suffering. The favours of heaven were paid with tears of the heart, with tears of blood. Besides, if we ask ourselves about the mystery of pain, God responds, not with explanations, but by presenting us with his beloved Son: He who was not supposed to die, died an atrocious death. When we would like to protest against His almighty hand, there is blood on His hand, His own. It is so for each of us, depending on our vocation. The joys and sorrows counterbalance each other, balance each other out in a providential measure. The great spiritual joys, the mystical effusions, are counterbalanced by purifying sufferings. Bernadette paid dearly for having been chosen as a messenger of the Immaculate Conception, but it was the price to be paid. Now, she had entered the great silence, the blissful eternity of God. Through Bernadette's adventure, the Virgin of Lourdes tells us, "I do not promise you happiness in this world, but in the next, yes!" and that is what counts. Strangely. □



GOD'S HAND ON YOU GUIDING YOUR LIFE

Fr. Ashwin Mal, sdb

I am the third child in my family and I grew up in a happy and religious environment, thanks to my pious parents. They held the priesthood in the very highest esteem and yearned for one of us to become a priest or join the religious life. But for me, from my earliest years my heart was set on joining the Armed Forces, but God had his own plans.

By the time I reached Std VIII I developed an attraction for the priesthood. After completing my SSC, I expressed my desire to my parents that I would like to join the seminary. They were happy with my decision. At that age, I knew very little, practically nothing about Don Bosco and the Salesian Congregation. My dad was working in Sondwaner Alirajpur (M.P) and he was acquainted with the Don Bosco fathers. He told me that the Salesians were organizing a vocation camp. he said: "You can go there, and if you like it you may join the Salesian Fathers. So I attended a vocation camp at Chhotaudepur and was selected.

But what most attracted me about Salesian fathers and brothers was that they were always with the youngsters. They were very creative, friend-



dly, and easily approachable; I was even more surprised that they played games with us. All the time I was with the Salesians I enjoyed playing games. So, seeing Salesian priests playing with us and being very friendly by nature urged me to want to become like them. From then on, all I knew was that I wanted to be a Salesian priest. Having completed an orientation programme I was sent to the junior seminary in Lonavla.

I made my First Religious Profession on 24th May, 2006, in Nashik. During the initial stages of my formation my biggest challenge learning the

language. Coming from a vernacular background, I faced some difficulty in communicating with others.

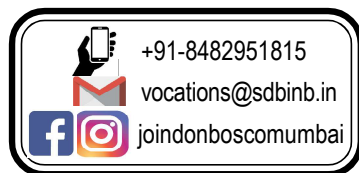
Along with language, there were other challenges too, like: a new culture, new life styles, new people, a new place and the food etc. But what assisted me and persuaded me to go on was my practice of personal prayer, good spiritual directors and especially my companions who understood me and helped me to grow. They accepted me as I was.

After completing my theological studies at Pune, I was ordained a priest on 27th December, 2015. As a priest now, for the past six years, when I reflect on my vocation and my religious life I realize that everything was not as certain as I saw or thought it would be. Sometimes I wonder whether I am really meant for such an awesome task. But overall being a Salesian I feel happy. I see my Salesian vocation as a personal invitation from Christ and a gift from God. I thank God for all the blessings he has showered on me and my family.

What I enjoy most today as a Salesian is the community life which often, is not so easy. Each of us is different and yet we live as one family helping each other to grow. Secondly, it is working with young people, who bring joy to my life. They have a lot to give us and we have a lot to learn from them. From my personal experience, with them I have learnt that the more I love

them, the more love I receive from them. In my life I see God's miraculous hand on me. I strongly believe that if God has called me, he will take care of me and every aspect of my life. As a Salesian priest, my goal is to continue to become a good and holy servant of God in order to my time and energy to young people, especially those are poor and abandoned.

Dear young readers, if you feel God calling you to be his disciple and you want to do something for poor youngsters, join the Salesian way of life. And you will really find immense joy and happiness. I also like to inform all parents, that becoming a Salesian priest or a Salesian brother is a very beautiful vocation and it is a special call of God. As a Salesian, you can touch the lives of many young people and reach out to many more youngsters and they in turn can win their hearts and bring them close to God. So I request you to send your children for the vocation camps that are held every summer at Don Bosco Lonavla and let your children discover what God is asking them to do. And if it is God's will they will surely become good Salesians and God will bless you and your family a hundred fold. □



IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Found Cell Phone

When a customer left his cell phone in my stopre, I scrolled through his saved numbers, stopped at "Mom" and pushed send. His mother answered and I told her what happened.

"Don't worry," she said, "I'll take care of it."

A few minutes later, the cell phone rang. It was "Mom."

"Martin," she said, "you left your at the convenience store."

Parking Solution

A pastor of a two-church parish had to drive every Sunday morning about 4 miles from the 9.30 service at one church to the 11 o'clock at the other. he would often find the parking lot of the second church full, and be forced to park down the road and race to the church on foot.

The problem was finally solved when he selected a parking spot near the side door of teh church and posted a sign that read, - "You Park - You Preach."

Summer Job Hunt

My brother wants me to find him a summer job. He asked me to check with my boss, my friends, my business associates.

Then he asked me to run off 100 copies of his resume, call up the employment agencies, and write an ad for the Positions Wanted section of the newspaper.

I asked him what he wanted to call himself in the ad.

He said: "A self-starter."

Directions

A friend was thinking about buying a new house in the country and asked me to come out and look at it. We found the town, but we

couldn't locate the road. We drove over to city hall, where a community get-together was going on, and asked around, but no one had heard of the road. Even the policeman and fire personnel were stumped.

We went in to city hall and consulted a map, with no luck, until finally one young man came to our aid. He pointed to the map, showing us exactly how to get there. I thanked the young man and asked if he was with the police or fire department.

"Neither," he replied, "I deliver pizzas."

The Congregation Replied

Down in the South, there are many churches known as "answer back" churches. When the preacher says something, teh congregation naturally replies.

One Sunday, a preacher was speaking on what it would take for the church to become better "If this church is to become better, it must take up it's bed and walk." The congregation said, "Let it walk, Preacher, let it walk."

Encouraged by their response he went further. "If this church is going to become better, it will have to throw aside its hindrancis and run!" The congregation replied, "Let it run Preacher, let it run!"

Now really into his message, he spoke stronger, "If this church really wants to become great, it will have to take up its wings and fly!" "Let it fly, Preacher let it fly!"

The Preacher gets louder. "If this church is going to fly, it will cost money!"

The congregation replied. "Let it walk Preacher, let it walk." □

ONE LAST THOUGHT

A JOURNEY BACK TO GOD

Fintan M. Talon

Pure chance had me booked as a passenger on the flight from Dublin to Frankfurt. I had been asked by a former professional colleague to deputise for him at a meeting in that city. My companion had his eyes closed as if asleep. I regretted this, as I like company when I am travelling. However, just after take-off his eyes opened and I learned he was a United States soldier flying via Frankfurt to rejoin his company in Iraq.

He told me his mother, who lived in Dublin, had died suddenly and he had compassionate leave to attend her funeral. His brother had been killed in the Afghanistan conflict and he was the only surviving member of his family. His wife and two children were back in the States. He was sad at the passing of his mother yet; since she was dying of incurable cancer, felt her death was a merciful release. I said that she was probably now in a better place to plead for his safety and he gave me a strange look. "Do you believe in life after death?" he asked.

I replied in the affirmative telling him I was a practicing Catholic and I firmly believed that our life on this earth was merely a passing phase before we reached eternal life. I asked if he had any such belief himself. He shook his head. "No," he replied, "I was born a Catholic and my mother was buried as a Catholic. However, for my-



self I have seen too much evil in this world to credit that there exists a merciful God. If such a God existed, he could never permit the horrors, which permeate the world today.

Quietly I responded that the horrors he referred to were the acts of men misusing the free-will given by God to all. I pointed out the vast numbers who worked for freedom, justice and an equal distribution of wealth, which is the countervailing influence to the evils to which he referred. I asked how his mother had responded to the death of his brother and he agreed she had accepted this as the will of God despite her own grief.

"I wished I could share their belief"

"You are going back to the battlefield in a war, which you believe is being fought for freedom and justice," I added,

"Surely it would be naive to put your own life at risk for an ideal, which without the existence of God has no value?"

He remained silent for a long while before responding.

"Certainly, that is what a lot of my colleagues believe" he said slowly, "and there are very many times I wished I could share their belief, especially when I go out on a mission from which I might not return."

We parted at Frankfurt where he went to the transit lounge to connect his onward flight. Before parting we exchanged names and addresses and he said with a smile: "Just as added insurance, please keep me in your prayers."

Ten days ago, I received a letter from the United States from my travelling companion telling me he had been injured and given a medical discharge from the army. He also told me that he was the only survivor of a party of five who had gone out on reconnaissance.

"I have to admit," he wrote, "that I am becoming more and more convinced that the prayers of my mother and your good self, did have a beneficial effect. I have asked the hospital Chaplain's help to I can restore the beliefs of my childhood!"

Reflecting on his letter, I can see how the journey back to God can come about in a multitude of different, and sometimes frightening ways. □

PREPARING FOR PARADISE

In Paradise we will read the book of life, God, and our soul and body will truly be "recreated," that is, created anew; we will truly be made perfect persons, complete, in whom nothing will be lacking and to whom nothing will have to be added. But, in order for this to happen, we must pray to the good Lord that it may not happen that we believe that we are already heavenly citizens to whom the Redeemer should say: "Hey, gentlemen, these clothes of yours are not wedding garments. They are faded and dusty," so, calling his servants and instead of letting us enter the heavenly Jerusalem, he will command them to put us in the really dark dungeon.

Let us therefore clothe ourselves with the light of our Lord Jesus Christ, donning the very whitest of garments of his purity and righteousness, with the red ribbons of his ardent love in doing good to our neighbour and with garments that will please the citizens below and to those above. (*Don Bosco*)

POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK FEBRUARY 2022

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MARY AND ELIZABETH: WHAT AN ENCOUNTER!

We are on the "threshold of the house of Zechariah," in the town of Ain-Karim. Mary comes to this house, bearing within herself the joyful mystery. She comes to Elizabeth, someone who is very close to her, she comes to share her joy with her. On the threshold of Zechariah's house "a blessing awaits her," which is a sequel to what she heard from Gabriel's lips: "*Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb... And blessed is she who believed in the fulfilment of the words of the Lord*" (Lk 1:42,45).

And at that instant, "there bursts forth that song" which expresses the whole truth of the great Mystery. It is the canticle that announces the history of salvation and manifests the heart of the Mother: "My soul magnifies the Lord..." (ibid 1:46) - *St. John Paul II*

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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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