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*Grant us,  
 O merciful God,  
 protection  
 in our weakness,  
 that we, who keep  
 the Memorial of  
 the Immaculate Mother  
 of God,  
 may, with the help  
 of her intercession,  
 rise up  
 from our iniquities.*

*(From the Proper of the feast  
 of Our Lady Of Lourdes)*

**From The Editor's Desk**  
 A JOURNEY SHARED

Practically once a month I take the short train ride to Lonavla from Poona where I presently reside and I am always fascinated by the variety of people sharing the same journey. A typical journey would find that behind me a group of medical students returning from class would be discussing the mannerisms of their last lecturer as he dissected cadavers. Opposite me were two IT engineers on their way to catch the evening bus to a college off the beaten track. From a few seats away I could hear snatches of Tamil, and further along the coach there were some locals in animated conversation. Other interesting people joined us as we stopped at smaller stations enroute, including a young woman who sat beside me, took out her folder to start writing a letter in Urdu. And every now and then a stream of youngsters on their way back from class would pass by, speaking a dialect I barely understood. As time went on, the different groups began to mingle with each other. I learned that the two IT engineers were hoping to crack a code in order to be able to download some rare software. The face of the girl who was writing a letter in Urdu, broke out into a broad smile. She spoke excellent English and strangely she even spoke Italian. Further down the coach I could hear some of the students telling the medical students about their time climbing up to the forts in the nearby hills visible from the train. And with typical freshness the medical students spoke to everyone who would listen. It struck me then how dull life would be without all this variety. How uninteresting it would be if we all spoke the same language, or spoke in the same way. How miserable we would be if we all thought the same thoughts or sang the same songs, or told the same stories, or had the same sense of humour. Variety is indeed the spice of life. What impressed me most of all was the way the atmosphere in the train gradually relaxed, so that, by the end of the journey practically everyone in the coach had made some new acquaintance. Different languages and backgrounds ceased to be a barrier, and became instead a source of conversation. The medical students started advising the school kids what they needed to do to get into medical college. The young girl sitting by my side told me about her love of travel. Most of the medical students amused us all by contrasting hectic Pune with quiet Lonavla. The journey passed in a flash, so that in no time at all we were in Lonavla in high spirits. As I made my way to my destination, I found myself hoping that one day our world would be like that railway coach. I longed for the day when differences would draw nations and races together in respect, instead of apart in suspicion. I prayed that, rather than threaten each other with guns and bombs, we would learn to talk and laugh together; and that we would reverence all men and women as sons and daughters of a loving Father who makes each of us unique, special, and never to be repeated.

*Fr. Ian Douilton, sdb*

## A GREAT HUNGER FOR LOVE

by Bishop Gianpaolo Dianin

*A profound longing for love exists within everyone. As beings created in the image and likeness of God, we have an inherent need for relationships that are both genuine and sincere, similar to friendship, as well as deep and intimate, like love. However, our need for relationships can be influenced by our levels of maturity and immaturity.*

**I**t is not suitable for man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18). When spoken by the Creator, these words hold universal significance. Man, created in the image and likeness of God, inherently possesses a need for relationships that are as genuine and sincere as friendship and as deep and intimate as love.

Jesus encourages us to be proactive in our relationships. In the



parable of the Good Samaritan, he teaches us that we must "make ourselves neighbours" to others and actively seek to build connections with them. The New Testament offers numerous insights for cultivating healthy and meaningful relationships. For instance, St. Paul's famous hymn to love states that love is generous, not envious or boastful; it is respectful, does not seek its own interests, and does not hold onto grievances (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

The need for relationships is intertwined with our maturity and immaturity, and it can lead to feelings of being overwhelmed, submission, and even violence toward others, sometimes to the point of wanting to eliminate them. The issue of femicide, which we have discussed in recent months, highlights this tension between our inherent need for relationships and love, and the manner in which we seek, experience, and build these connections—all of which depend on our level of maturity.

The most significant issue at hand is the comparison between male and female perspectives. This difference is an undeniable reality that transcends discussions about equality and the need to overcome outdated gender stereotypes. Expressions of power and violence can be overt, while the more subtle forms often involve managing and manipulating others.

In this context, there is considerable discussion about the importance of education, particularly the need to implement civic and sex education in schools—both of which are crucial. One essential aspect that must be

emphasized is emotional education. In a society that prioritizes affectivity, feelings, emotions, spontaneity, and the pursuit of self-identity, learning to recognize and manage one's emotional landscape is vital. Someone once noted, in an ironically relevant manner about a famous slogan, "Go where your heart takes you, and then call your brain to go get it."

Alberto Pellai encourages educators to focus on developing "emotional awareness" that helps males move beyond the myth of the "real man" and instead explore what it means to be "the real man." This involves cultivating relationships that balance closeness with healthy distance, as well as intimacy that is mindful of the harmful mindset of possession. A similar message applies to women, who are also invited to discover "the real woman," highlighting the importance of emotional education for everyone.

Emotional education cannot be

achieved in isolation; it requires a collaborative effort that begins within the family. Here, siblings learn to coexist, manage conflicts, and navigate relationships with the guidance and wisdom of patient parents. These parents help their children make thoughtful choices rather than acting purely on instinct. This journey continues in peer groups and during first romantic experiences, where teenagers often find themselves overwhelmed by their emotions and unsure of how to handle them. Growth occurs, especially when a relationship ends, and it is vital to support our teens through their suffering during these challenging times.

The education of our emotions can help us address the "hunger for love" that is a fundamental aspect of human nature. This hunger should evolve into a healthy, though still challenging, "desire for love." Emotional education is essential; we cannot mature in isolation. It is a team effort. □



## FASCINATING AND ENGAGING

Carlo Broccardo

*The first community of believers appeared very united around four fixed points. And this way of life was fascinating. Even today, the beauty of our communities depends on our choices*

The passage we are going to give our attention to this month is set shortly after the one we explored in January: The Ascension took place forty days after Easter, Pentecost ten days after Ascension. Having received the Holy Spirit, Jesus' disciples begin to speak in such a way that everyone understands them; Peter in particular makes a long speech, which moves those present. The result: 'Then those who accepted his word were baptised, and about three thousand people were added that day' (Acts 2:41).

Immediately following this verse is the passage we examine: the three thousand newly baptised individuals who "were devoted to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread,

and prayers." Thus, the first community of believers was centred around four key elements.

The first element is the apostles' teaching, which was accompanied by the miracles they performed. Luke, the author of Acts, tells us that Jesus had instructed them extensively before His ascension to heaven; now it was their responsibility to support the entire community.

The second point is communion. Luke notes that "all the believers were together," which certainly doesn't mean they lived under the same roof, as there were more than three thousand. We could interpret this as "they formed a community." This was done in a very concrete way: they had everything in common; they sold their property and poss-



*Believers came together  
to share a meal,  
and at the end of it,  
they remembered  
and relived  
Jesus' Last Supper.*

essions and shared them with everyone according to each person's needs. The model they followed reflects a sense of charity that does not accept the existence of brothers in need. Individuals gave up their possessions not out of a desire to be poor, but in order to ensure that no one among them remained in need (J. Dupont).

The third and fourth pillars on which the early Christian community was built are prayer and the breaking of bread. We combine these concepts because the phrase "breaking of bread" can also refer to the Eucharist. As Paul mentions in his First Letter to the Corinthians, the Lord's Supper was celebrated during a typical dinner. Believers would gather together to share a meal



and, at the end of it, they would recall Jesus' last supper. This tradition emphasizes both spirituality and community, as we share the table and pray together.

The community described is truly beautiful. To clarify, this is a summary: it's important to note that not everything was easy. The story of Ananias and Sapphira illustrates this (see Acts 5:1-11). However, generally speaking, and aside from a few exceptions, the community lived in harmony, similar to a family. Brothers and sisters shared everything, enjoying meals and prayers together under the leadership of the apostles, whom they referred to as their 'parents.'

This way of life is fascinating to me. Luke mentions that they enjoyed the favour of all the people, meaning that everyone who observed them was impressed by their lifestyle. As a result, new believers were added to the community every day.

The apostles hold an important role, but they are not the only protagonists. They are just one of the four pillars; the other three are the community members who make beautiful choices and have

diverse sharing styles.

This idea still holds true today. While having a good pastor is essential, we must remember that the beauty of our community relies even more on our actions – on the choices we make and how we live our lives. □

## REASONS TO BELIEVE - 2

by Franco Molinari

### The Philosophers' Grip

For someone like Gaddafi and all of Muhammad's grandchildren, God is the sun shining in the midday sky. This great monotheistic religion considers atheism a folly: supreme wisdom is to surrender oneself to the mighty will of the merciful and clement Allah. Only a fool can deny the power of the sun, which darts over your head in the heat of July. Equally mad is he who denies the very evidence: that God exists in the heavens. Yet not all Nobel Prize winners agree to look up. A survey among top scientists documented at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that atheists and believers were five to five.

Scientists are individuals who explore the wonders of creation, from the remarkable perfection of the human eye to the awe-inspiring architecture of the stars. Voltaire, who aimed to challenge the influence of Catholicism, believed in a Watchmaker of the universe. Without this Universal Architect, the harmony of various solar systems cannot be explained.

Freemasonry also requires a belief in God as its foundational ideology; an atheist cannot be a Freemason. However, questions arise about the Architect of the Universe. If He is truly perfect, why does He allow people to be engulfed by earthquakes, tossed by stormy seas, or subjected to the harsh forces of nature? When I experience a painful tumour in my spine, the relief of a narcotic feels far more necessary and helpful to me than faith in God. This leads to a mystery that fosters humility in human reasoning.

The First Vatican Council, held in 1876, established the possibility of addressing the mystery of transcendence using rational



philosophy. However, it did not claim that all people realize this potential.

The ancient philosopher Aristotle demonstrated the existence of God through the concept of motion, arguing that God is the unmoved mover responsible for initiating motion in all things. Following Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas outlined five arguments that lead to the conclusion of a Creator. While the Church acknowledges these philosophical paths as valid, it does not assert that God can be confined within the limits of philosophical reasoning. One cannot encapsulate the Infinitely Great within the constraints of intellectual speculation, as if it were an animal in a zoo.

That evening, a Roman bricklayer pulled over his small car to let his wife and two children out. He said, "Look at this beautiful starry sky! There's no moon, so the stars are more visible. Who do you think created this artwork? Does it have the signature of De Chirico or Picasso, Michelangelo or Raphael? I'm only in fifth grade and don't know how to climb onto a dialectical framework; I only climb up a metal scaffolding. But really, who is responsible for these wonders? Is there an atheist who can explain it to me?"

### I don't believe except what I see

A worker remarked, "I see the machine's bolts and understand their purpose. I do not accept the existence of God because I do not see Him or understand His purpose.

However, Blaise Pascal argued that the true God must be hidden,

suggesting that God's invisibility is an argument in His favour.

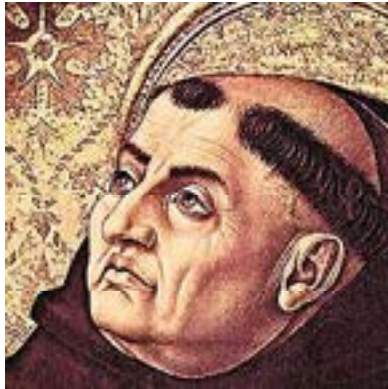
In Manzoni's novel, an unnamed character, on the verge of putting a gun to his temple, exclaimed, "God, if I could only see Him, hear Him, or touch Him!"

Later, Cardinal Federico responded, stating that no one is closer to God than he is because he speaks to God and experiences the joy of a new life and the beauty of mending the past.

If God exists, He must be elusive; throughout history, people have attempted to give Him a face and often ended up distorting it into something monstrous. Voltaire remarked, "God created man in His own image, and man has returned the favour." In other words, humanity has conjured forth a cruel, vengeful, and capricious deity. They have imagined a God whom even the most loathsome creature would be ashamed to emulate: a being who causes floods, kills innocent children in plagues, and punishes both the righteous and the wicked during earthquakes. The true essence of God is far removed from this malevolent caricature that has occasionally been passed off as genuine theology.

Other misinterpretations of human thought have attributed to the Creator power and omnipotence as if these traits were a template. This distortion helps explain why the altar has often rivalled the throne in the establishment of kingdoms; the earthly king is seen as a reflection of the eternal king.

However, when the hidden God reveals His true nature, He identifies Himself as an enslaved person. Jesus, who shocked the



St Thomas Aquinas

Pharisees by equating Himself with God, took on the role of a servant. He girded Himself with a servant's apron, washed the disciples' feet, and taught them to "Love one another as I have loved you."

The hidden God does not reveal Himself as the Almighty who legitimizes the thrones of the powerful, but rather as Love, aligning Himself with the powerless.

In the New Testament, the peak of Revelation is accomplished, yet Jesus remains the hidden God. In Nazareth, He is simply the carpenter's son. On Calvary, He associates with two criminals, one of whom ultimately becomes the first inhabitant of paradise. Even when He performs astonishing miracles, He remains an elusive figure.

After the resurrection, He appears to Magdalene, the repentant sinner, and tells her, "Do not touch me, for I must ascend to the Father."

But why the air of mystery? The answer is more intuitive than it is explainable. It may signify the highest demand for Love. In the

Old Testament, God is portrayed as the inaccessible being whose name cannot be spoken. No one can see the face of God and survive. Even Moses only glimpsed Him from behind. The first principle of Love is discretion — showing respect for freedom and not coercing a person's will.

If God were to appear to us in the dazzling splendour of his power and love, we would be compelled to believe in him; no one could deny his existence. Instead, he presents his invitation of love to me through the humble appearance of a consecrated host. I kneel in affectionate respect, but I still have the freedom to walk away.

The writer J. Guittou suggests another perspective: God remains hidden not only to allow me freedom in my choices but also to better exercise his forgiveness. He provides enough light to justify my "yes" to his covenant while leaving a shadow of ambiguity that makes my rejection possible and his mercy understandable.

Exercise caution when contemplating a visible God. St. Teresa of Avila, a master of realism and prayer, once wrote to a superior: "If a nun has easy, supernatural visions, give her a larger portion of meat because she is too weak." This formidable woman and great mystic adhered to the belief in a hidden God.

In a similar vein, St. Paul states, "Now we see God as in a mirror, in an enigma; we shall see Him face to face only afterward" (1 Cor 13:12).

Both believers and atheists agree that God is invisible. □

CARMEN LAVAL

TIME FOR THE SPIRIT

## BE LOVEABLE LIKE DON BOSCO

Our Lady imparted timeless wisdom to Don Bosco in a dream when he was just nine: "Make yourself humble, strong, and healthy." This guidance laid the foundation for his remarkable character.

Everyone adored Don Bosco for his magnetic charm and natural leadership. John Giacomelli, a lifelong friend, recalls: "I arrived at the seminary a month late, feeling lost and isolated. One day, while sitting alone after lunch, Bosco approached me. He spent the entire recreation period with me, sharing kind words that distracted me from missing home. I learned he had recently been ill, yet he showed me thoughtful gestures that touched my heart. That moment made me appreciate his kindness, as his presence was uplifting."

We can all learn from his example and embrace qualities that make us more lovable.

### 1. Being a positive force

A person who consistently maintains a positive attitude helps us see the bright side and encourages us to move forward. When Don Bosco first visited the dilapidated roof to be used for his Oratory, he had to be careful not to bump his head, as one side was only a meter high. The floor was bare ground, and water seeped in from all sides when it rained. Don Bosco could feel large rats scurrying between his feet and bats fluttering above his head. However, to Don Bosco, it was the most beautiful place in the world. Excitedly, he ran to gather the



young people with him, exclaiming, "Courage, my sons! We have an Oratory that is more stable than before! We will have a church, a sacristy, classrooms, and a recreation area. On Sunday, we will go to the new Oratory in the Pinardi house and show them the place!"

### 2. Genuinely Caring for Others

One of the traits of genuinely attractive people is their sincere care and concern for others. It goes beyond simply asking someone how their day went and listening to their response. It involves actively listening, empathizing, and showing a true interest in the lives of others. Don Bosco mourned deeply at the death of Fr Calosso (his first spiritual director and confessor) and Luigi Comollo (his first real friend), as well as at the sight of the first boys behind prison bars.

### 3. Being a Good Listener

A good listener stands out in a world where everyone seems to be talking all the time. Listening to someone is one thing, but truly listening — absorbing and understanding — is another. Being a good listener means more than

just staying silent while the other person speaks; it's about actively engaging in the conversation, asking thoughtful questions, and displaying genuine interest.

#### 4. *Be Approachable*

You can truly measure your goodness by how consistently others seek your advice and encouragement. Don Bosco exemplified this by always keeping his door open for everyone. The essence of a good person is hard to define, yet easily recognizable—like a beautiful fragrance that evokes deep feelings.

This connection often appeared when a young man listened to Don Bosco, captivated and reluctant to leave. Many would wait at his door, gently tapping to enter, eager not to carry sin into their sleep. Such is the transformative power of a genuinely good person.

#### 5. *Be Authentic*

In the digital age, authentic individuals hold great importance. They do not boast or try to fit into a specific mould. Instead, they are comfortable with who they are and are unafraid to express it. They share their thoughts and feelings with complete honesty, without worrying about others' opinions, thereby creating an environment of trust and acceptance.

#### 6. *Being Resilient*

Life is full of unexpected challenges that test our strength and determination. In these moments, resilience becomes essential; it represents the mental and emotional strength to rise above adversity and keep moving forward. We admire resilience because having someone who embodies

courage can be profoundly inspiring. Monsignor Cagliero observed, "In the 35 years I was with him, I never saw him discouraged or troubled by his debts. He would often say, 'Providence is great, and just as it looks after the birds of the air, it will care for my young men.'" This mindset not only motivates us but also reminds us to trust in the support around us.

#### 7. *Be Humble*

Humble people do not seek constant praise or recognition to feel good about themselves, and they do not feel the need to prove their worth to others. Additionally, they maintain an open mind and are always willing to learn from others, regardless of their status or position. Don Bosco was never ashamed to ask for alms. He embodied humility and strength, as his teacher had encouraged him to do, holding his head high in the presence of everyone.

#### 8. *Spreading Kindness*

Kindness is what truly matters. How you treat others, the compassion you show, and the love you spread define who you are as a person. Acts of kindness can be as simple as a smile, a word of encouragement, or an outstretched hand. The goal is to help others feel valued and loved. Don Bosco's boys often remarked with heartfelt consistency, "He loved me." One of them, Luigi Orione, wrote, "I would walk on hot coals to see him again and say thank you."

***This was how Don Bosco preached about God:*** as always present and alive. God embodies the scent of life. This is how children perceive God, in contrast to adults. □

## ST GABRIEL OF OUR LADY OF SORROWS

February 27

Ian Pinto, sdb

### TRAGEDY STRIKES EARLY

The town of Assisi is best known because of its holy son, Francis, the *poverello* (poor one) who went on to live a life of striking witness and found one of the great Congregations in the Church, the Franciscans. A few hundred years after Francis, a little boy was born into a wealthy though devout family, the Possenti. March 1, 1838, was the day when Sante and Agnes welcomed their eleventh child; a boy whom they had baptized on the very day he was born, in the very same font where Francis of Assisi had been baptised all those years ago! The boy was named Francis or Francesco (Italian Pronunciation) and he would grow up much like his namesake; Francesco took pride in his looks and in his possessions and had a rather flamboyant social life once he was old enough.

Francesco's father, Sante, was an accomplished lawyer who was appointed Governor of Umbria when he was hardly twenty years of age. He went on to become Grand Assessor (something like a District Collector) of Spoleto. Francesco's mother, Agnes came from a distinguished family in Civitanova. Despite their tremendous wealth and family prestige, they lived a pious family life and nurtured great devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.



Francesco began his schooling with the Christian Brothers and then came to study under the Jesuits in the town's college. According to biographers, he was a brilliant student and excelled in his studies. But he was no stranger to a good time. As mentioned earlier, he loved a good party and would spend most of his nights at some or the other club. His good looks coupled with his impressive dance moves made him



a popular figure and earned him the nickname 'the dancer.'

While to an observer, he seemingly had everything one could ask for, Francesco suffered a painful childhood. According to some biographers, he spent the first year of his life away from his family; he was cared for by a wet nurse who provided him with all that his mother could not. Though the biographies don't specify the reason for this, it is possibly because of his mother's ill health. She went on to have two more children though we are not aware of what care was given to them and by whom. However, when Francesco was three years old, his youngest sibling died at just six months of age. This was the first major tragedy among the series of tragedies that shook up the Possenti family and tested their faith and threatened hope. A little after that, his nine-year old sister, Adele, died, and a few days later, his mother followed. In 1848, one of his brothers, Paul died and five years later, another brother, Lawrence took his own life. Another of his sisters, one of the older ones, Mary Louisa, who had looked after Francesco when he was an infant, was one of the victims of the deadly cholera epidemic. Thus, the Possenti family was thrown into crisis.

In 1851, Francesco fell seriously ill. He was at the point of death. In a desperate attempt to grab God's attention, he promised to offer his life to God and become a religious should he recover his health. Though he did recover, he went back on his promise and returned to his loose living. A few years later, he was once again stricken by a terrible illness, this

time of the throat. Once again, he turned to God in desperation and once more, the Lord was gracious to him. This time however, Francesco became serious about his spiritual wellbeing. He had prayed through the intercession of a recently beatified Jesuit, Andrew Bobola, for his healing. Since he received the grace, he wanted to join the Jesuits. But since he was too young, they did not permit him to join immediately.

### HEARING GOD'S CALL

After the Cholera epidemic had been curbed, the clergy of Spoleto along with the civil authorities, organized a Marian Procession through the city. They processed with the ancient icon of the Virgin Mary that was housed in the Spoleto Cathedral. Francesco participated in the procession. He noted that as the icon passed by, he felt an inner voice calling him to dedicate himself to God. This experience reminded him of his flitting promise to God after his illness but this time he took it seriously. After being turned down by the Jesuits, he consulted a local priest who directed him to the Passionist Congregation. The Passionists or Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ were founded by Paul of the Cross in 1720 and are strongly devoted to spreading the love and devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. They also venerate the Blessed Virgin under the title of 'Our Lady of Sorrows.'

The Passionists did not have a house in or around Spoleto and so Francesco would have to go far away to be a member. This upset his father who did not want his young son to be far away from his

paternal care. Despite persuading Francesco and asking other family members to intervene, he was unsuccessful in changing his son's mind and finally resigned himself to offer up another son to the Church—two of Francesco's brothers had become priests, one a Dominican and the other a diocesan.

On 19 September 1856, he began his novitiate and a few days later received the Passionist habit and took on a new name, 'Gabriel of Our Lady of Sorrows.' The inclusion of the title of Our Lady of Sorrows into his name reflects the childhood trauma he underwent. Gabriel gave himself entirely to the Lord and made great progress not just in his academics but also in his spiritual life. While still a student preparing for the priesthood, Gabriel contracted acute tuberculosis. At the time, tuberculosis was fatal. Gabriel accepted his illness but did not reduce his spiritual and academic fervour. He became a model for other students, many of whom volunteered to look after him even after he was confined to his bed. His superiors praised him for being an exemplary religious, an ardent devotee of the Mother of Sorrows and a perfect follower of the Passionist Rule.

Early in the morning on 27 February 1862, Gabriel passed away, surrounded by the community and holding an image of Our Lady of Sorrows. He was a religious for five years and was just twenty-three years old. Those who were with him when he died claim that he sat up in bed and his face became radiant as he reached out to someone who none of them could see entering the

room and standing at the foot of his bed. His spiritual director suggested that he was reaching out to the Mother of Sorrows who came to accompany him from 'this vale of tears' to the joy of eternal rejoicing in heaven.

### PATRON OF YOUTH

Pope Benedict XV canonized Gabriel and declared him the patron of youth, students and those studying to the priesthood. Every year, thousands of people especially young people visit his tomb and ask for his divine assistance in their study, work and health. According to a tourism report, his shrine is one of the 15 most visited sanctuaries in the world, with an average of 2 million visitors per year.

Pope St. John Paul II exhorted, "By the shining example of St. Gabriel, you, dear young people, draw the courage to be faithful disciples of Christ." Gabriel lived a hard life; hard not in terms of physical or financial struggle but in terms of emotional setbacks. Sickness and death troubled his family and finally claimed his life too, but through it all, he chose to have faith and to live out that faith in love and service to others. Despite his short life and the limitations of his religious formation, Gabriel became a beacon of hope to others. His life is a testament that faith is greater than any challenge the Evil one places before us, be it sickness, loss of a loved one, an addiction or some emotional or psychological affliction. We need faith because it is faith that is capable of bringing us through the tough times. □



## THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

by Dinesh Vasava, sdb

**Reading:** Take a few moments to allow the words to sink in and listen to what God may be speaking to you through this text, Luke 2:22-40

### **Meditation:**

Today is the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord which revisits the Christmas season while focusing on the person of the Lord. Jesus is portrayed as a child and presented to the priests according to the Law of Moses.

You may recall that the final plague inflicted on the Egyptians to force them to release the children of Israel was the killing of the firstborn of the Egyptians. The Angel of Death arrived in Egypt but passed over the children of Israel. Because the firstborn of the children of Israel were spared from the plague, they were regarded as belonging to the Lord. (*Exodus Ch. 13*)

In Jesus' time, parents whose first child was a boy, would go to the Temple with the appropriate offering to present their child to the Lord. This is why Mary and



Joseph went to the Temple. This occasion was the cause of celebration. Every child is loved and celebrated, but the first child brings the couple – husband and wife – together as a family.

Beyond being a second Epiphany, it reveals rich symbolism through the Temple scenario. The Child Jesus' first significant act is visiting the Temple, God's dwelling place, where the Holy of Holies represents His presence among us. Today we celebrate a remarkable encounter between the Divine and the human, as the Holy One visits His earthly sanctuary.

His presence in the Temple is powerfully symbolic. He reveals Himself, and Simeon and Anna recognize Him. Simeon's reaction – a prophecy and heartfelt prayer, "My eyes have seen your salvation" – captures the moment beautifully.

Furthermore, the meaning of the young and the old underscores the value of fidelity. Those who have persevered in faith are ultimately rewarded with the realization of their hopes, reminding us of the enduring nature of belief and the beauty of God's timing. In their old age, they meet the eternally young Son of God. At a time, when there is so much justification for euthanasia, and it is assumed that they in their advanced age are worthless, unless they perform some useful function, it is encouraging to see the elderly so highly valued in the Scriptures. Human life is sacred, and our worth is determined by who we are rather than what we do.

Simeon and Anna may be unable to do much in their old age, but they can pray and despite their failing vision, see what no one else can.

The priests certainly do not rush to welcome Christ into his own Temple; however, these weak and frail elderly people who have devoted themselves to God's service for many years recognize Christ even though he is only a tiny baby.

Let me offer you a few suggestions for your reflection:

1. The Presentation in the Temple: What does the act of presenting Jesus in the temple signify for you?

2. Simeon's Prophecy: Reflect

on Simeon's words about Jesus being a light for revelation to the Gentiles. How does this message of light resonate in your life?

3. Anna's Devotion: Consider Anna's dedication to prayer and worship. What role does prayer play in your life?

4. The sword that Pierces: Simeon's prophecy includes the foretelling of suffering. How do you understand suffering in your own life?

### **Prayer:**

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of Your Son, Jesus, who was presented in the temple and revealed as the light of the world. Help us to recognize His presence in our lives and share his light with those around us.

### **Contemplation:**

Spend a few moments in silence, allowing the words of Scripture to resonate within you. Rest in His presence and listen to His voice.

### **Action:**

- *Present yourself to God:* Take time this week to decide on a specific moment or activity to praise God.

- *Be a light:* Identify one way you can be a light to your community this week.

- *Commit to a moment of prayer:* Consider setting aside a regular time for prayer.

The feast of the Presentation of the Lord invites us to reflect on the significance of recognizing Christ as the light of the world.

May we be inspired to present ourselves to God, to seek His light, and to share that light with others in our daily lives. □



# Quiet Spaces

## THOSE WHO OPEN THE DOORS

*Pope Francis' Homily (edited) at Domus Sanctae Marthae on Tuesday 13 May 2014*

**P**ope Francis commented on the day's Readings from the Acts of the Apostles (11:19-26) and the Gospel of John (10:22-30). The Pope introduced his remarks by noting that the Readings "reveal a diptych: two groups of people".

In the passage from Acts we first meet those "who were scattered because of the persecution that arose" after the martyrdom of Stephen. "They were scattered", but "they carried the seed of the Gospel everywhere", the Pope said. However, they only addressed the Jews. "Then, in a natural way", the Pontiff continued quoting Acts, "some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch, spoke to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus". And thus slowly they opened the doors to the Greeks and to the pagans".

When news of this reached the Church in Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas to Antioch "to make an onsite inspection" and to verify in person what was happening. The Acts of the Apostles states that he was glad and that "a large company was added to the Lord".

In short, the Pope explained, "these people did not say: let us go first to the Jews, then to the Greeks, then to the pagans, then to everyone"; rather, "they allowed themselves to be led by the Holy Spirit: they were docile to the Holy Spirit". In so doing, "one thing led to another" and then "to another and to another still", and "ultimately the doors were open to everyone". Even "to the pagans who, according to their thinking, were unclean".

"The Pope spoke about the first group of individuals depicted in the diptych, highlighting their docility to the Holy Spirit and their natural progression, similar to Paul. Sometimes, the Holy Spirit inspires bold actions, as when He prompted Philip to baptize the Ethiopian and guided Peter to Cornelius. Other times, He leads gently. True virtue comes from being open to this divine guidance, trusting that "the Holy Spirit is actively working in the Church and our lives today."

You may wonder, "I have never experienced this!" It's important to notice what happens around you and the thoughts and feelings that arise. If they are good, that's the Spirit inviting you on a journey. However, it requires a willingness to be receptive to the Holy Spirit.

The second group of people presented in the Readings of the day is made up of "intellectuals who draw near to Jesus in the temple: the doctors of the Law". They are men who "always have a problem because they never arrived at understanding: they always came back to the same point, because they believed that religion was a thing of the mind, of laws, of making commandments, of keeping commandments and nothing more. They

could not even imagine that the Holy Spirit even existed", the Pope said. Thus, as we read in the Gospel of John, "they gathered around Jesus and said to him, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? if you are the Christ, tell us plainly'. To which Jesus replied: "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness to me"; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. It is as though he had said: "Look at the great miracles, look at the things I do, the words I speak!". Instead, these men were looking "only at what they had in their own heads". For them, "everything was about the mind, everything was a matter of the intellect".

The Pope remarked that "these people had no heart or love for beauty and harmony, only a thirst for explanations." He noted that even when provided with answers, they would remain unconvinced and continue questioning, ultimately leading to their role in the apprehension and killing of Jesus. They fail to open their hearts to the Holy Spirit and believe that understanding God's ways is purely an intellectual exercise. They are so proud that even witnessing a miracle, such as a dead man coming to life, wouldn't sway them.

In the Gospel, Jesus questions their lack of belief, stating that it stems from their detachment from the people of Israel. He explains that their self-proclaimed purity prevents them from believing and closes their hearts, likening them to their forefathers who killed the prophets when they received uncomfortable truths.

The Pope emphasized that the real problem is their disconnection from the people of God, which hinders their faith. He stated that "faith is a gift from God" that comes from being part of the Church and community, not from isolated beliefs. They created a system of commandments that pushed people away from the Church, which reflects their resistance to the Holy Spirit.

"Two groups of people", the Pope repeated: "those who were gentle, humble, open and docile to the Holy Spirit"; and those who were "proud, smug ... who were detached from the people; the intellectual aristocracy that closed doors and resisted the Holy Spirit". And "this is not just stubbornness", the Pope remarked. "It is much more: it is having a hard heart", and this is "more dangerous".

"As we consider these two groups, let us ask the Lord for the grace of docility to the Holy Spirit in order to move forward in life, to be creative, to be joyous", the Pope concluded. "Let us ask for the grace of docility, and that they Holy Spirit may help and defend us from this other evil spirit of self-importance, pride, and closed heartedness to the Holy Spirit". □

# TOGETHER FOREVER

By Pierluigi Menato, TA/ID

On a hill overlooking the stream and the rushing mill canal, where the water slipped silently through the trees, two small houses stood facing each other, separated by a path hidden in lush green grass. Both houses featured low windows adorned with blooming begonias and window boxes filled with vibrant carnations on one side, and geraniums on the other. Each house had a door that led into a garden enclosed by a wooden fence.

Inside the houses lived two mothers and their children: a strong, robust boy with bright eyes in his rosy face and curly hair, and a pale, blonde girl with a braid that was always untidy, hanging loosely over her slender shoulders.



The two children were always playing together in front of the houses: he made doll whistles while she cradled a poor rag doll with maternal innocence. They never left each other. Sometimes, Bertie would amuse himself by pulling Jacqueline's hair, which would cause the little girl to cry as she buried her head in her lap, shaking her frail shoulders. When Bertie heard her sobbing, feeling regret for his rude act, he would approach her. Straightening up, barefoot with his hands in his pockets and his handsome head bowed, he asked, "Why are you crying, Jackie?"

When she didn't answer and continued to sob, Bertie sat beside her and ran his hand through her hair in silence. Then she would suddenly plead:

"Sorry Jackie," he said.

The little girl raised her tear-streaked face, her eyes shining with emotion. She whispered softly, "I forgive you because I love you so much!"

In his childish naivety, he felt a sense of glory in that love. Woe to anyone who dared to speak rudely to her! He would use his strong fists to defend her, his whole face pale with a mix of anger and joy at the thought of protecting her.

They blossomed like two flowers on the same shore, nourished by the magnificent Colorado sun.

\*\*\*

Jackie's mother had spent the day washing in the canal, with her little girl beside her. As the sun began to set and the first shadows fell, she lifted the heavy laundry basket



and started down the lane toward home, warning her daughter not to lean over the water's edge. The mother's song lingered on the balcony when a sharp cry pierced the air, and Bertie's frantic rush gave her the horrifying certainty that something terrible had suddenly happened to her child. Jackie had tried to pick up a handkerchief that had fallen into the water from her mother's hands. She stretched out too far, and a momentary distraction caused her to fall into the canal, where the rushing water had the power to sweep her away.

Oh, her Jackie! Bertie had watched in horror as she plunged into the water like a helpless creature. He turned pale with anxiety and grief. Without a moment's hesitation, he rushed in, grasping the wooden railing with one hand while reaching out to grab the little

girl by her hair with the other. His energy, heightened a hundredfold by the fear and torment of not being able to save her, made him feel like a giant.

Five minutes later, he leapt onto the grass, cradling his little friend in his arms. She was unconscious, her wet hair and pale cheeks giving her face the appearance of death. Yet Jackie was revived by the companion who had saved her. He never pulled her pigtailed but instead always looked at her with a smile, his large eyes shining with joy.

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Years went by, and the window-boxes were adorned with splendid begonias, while the darkened balconies showcased vibrant collections of carnations and geraniums. In the two little houses, filled with the fragrance of every flower, Jackie and Bertie experienced their youth.

With youth came love, a bond nourished by innocent dreams that blossomed into beauty, song, and fulfillment. Bertie intended to marry the petite blonde, whose soulful depth gave her face the brilliance of dawn, once he completed his military service.

However, fate took a turn when America called its sons to fight against the Vietcong in Vietnam. Bertie was among the first to answer the call. His love for his homeland, as well as the memories of their flowery cottage, were not enough to quell his sense of duty and generosity.

As the farewell approached, the beautiful Jackie, pale from sleeplessness and anguish, gently stroked the hair of her strong Marine.

"May God protect and save

you, my Bertie," she said. "My love must not hold you back, for my heart tells you to go where your conscience and sense of duty call you."

He gazed at her as if she were from another world; the delicate flower of his life guided him towards the stars.

"I commend Mama to you," he said with a huff, then turned away, carrying the memories of his blossoming home and Jacqueline in his heart.

The war took him far away to the fetid banks of the Mekong River, a place filled with malaria, traps, and misery.

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As months and years passed, Bertie's mother and his girlfriend waited in vain for his return. No one remembered him, and no one could provide any news. One day, the pastor of the parish of St. Louis took the brave step of offering words of comfort and resignation to Bertie's distraught mother. He suggested that the Marine was undoubtedly dead, like so many other unsung heroes of that endless war.

A terrible heartache surged through the old woman, and a profound yearning overwhelmed her entire being. A wild cry escaped her lips, shaking her frail body. After enduring so much suf-

fering, her reason faltered, and in a final gasp, she became paralyzed. Only the sweetest name emerged from her poor, bleeding lips: "Jackie! Jackie!"

As time passed, that young flower of the family absorbed the weight of two sacrifices but remained unbroken. Her soul drew from a divine source of resignation deep within her.

Like a shadow, she moved between the two houses: her own, where she stayed with her mother, and Bertie's, rushing to answer the calls of the poor, demented woman. She poured herself into caring for her, filled with anxious trepidation, always remembering her son's last words: "I commend Mum to you..."

She resembled a sorrowful nun, disconnected from the flattery of the outside world because her true sanctuary lay in the memories of the past and her hope of being reunited with her distant love when the Lord deemed it time.

Bertie's mother passed away peacefully one evening in May after six long years of dementia. The house was now silent and closed; only two pots of red carnations bloomed on Jackie's balcony, like a flame of remembrance in her heart.

She devoted herself to the wellbeing of the people in her neighbourhood. You could often find her at the bedside of the sick and dying, standing at the threshold of every hardship, wearing a gentle smile that seemed to heal every pain. She did all of this for Bertie, hoping to pave the way to Heaven beside him.

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She was returning one evening from one of her compassionate

visits when she encountered the son of the County Sheriff. The boy's heart was in his throat, and his voice was strained as he spoke:

"At the Town Hall, they brought in a man—a missing soldier from Vietnam—who had been wandering for nine years. He says nothing except, 'I've been walking for nine years: Jackie! Jackie!' My father sent me to search for her."

She felt a dreadful abyss opening before her, as if she were falling backward; her soul whispered to her that it was her love returning.

Gathering up all her scant energy, she commanded her heart to be silent and ran toward the Town Hall. She leaped into the room where a ragged man, dishevelled from suffering, misery, and hunger, could only utter one name, just like his poor mother.

What miraculous power enabled her to stand upright? She recognized in that frail face the marks of wandering, misfortune, and the horrors of life that had destroyed her Bertie's countenance. He was returning to the tiny house, to the heart of his faithful woman. What did it matter if he was battered, thin, or troubled? She would heal him.

In a voice filled with anxiety and deep love, she lifted his face in her warm hands and called out to him as she once had, "Bertie! Bertie!"

The man began to tremble, experiencing a long, continuous shiver that shook him all over. Then he closed his eyes and surrendered himself, sobbing on her weeping chest. The joy that returned illuminated and renewed their hearts, much like the brightest and loftiest stars in the night sky. □

## FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 61

by Michele Molineris

### 270. Don Bosco's room broken into (1880)

Fr Ghione affirmed that in 1880, Don Bosco said that after four days in Marseilles, even though he permanently closed his room, he always found his biretta, pen and other objects he had touched, missing. "I complained to him of such thefts, and he told me to keep it closed, adding: "What can you do?"

But once I told him they had even taken the sheets from his bed, he seemed upset... The thieves were brothers and others from the house who did this to please some benefactors.

"Everyone, in fact," continued Monsignor Cagliero's deposition, "wished to have a memory of the servant of God, and I saw many cutting up his cassock and cloak. The crowd's persistence was such that protests and repulses were of no avail, so Don Bosco had to leave battered in his robes and change them in the houses of Saint-Cyr and Navarre.

After finally managing to break free from the immense crowd, the two of us found ourselves alone in the car, enroute to Aubagne. In a moment of humility and reflection, the servant of God, Don Bosco, expressed his awe at the Lord's mercy. In his infinite wisdom, he marvelled at how the Lord chose a peasant from the Becchi to move so many people and work his wonders. (*Vita*, II, 174 ).

### 274. Holiness and health!

(1881)

In Toulon, Mary Help of Christians honoured her servant. A young woman, around eighteen years old, who lived near the city suffered from severe liver pains. Despite trying various remedies and cures, nothing worked.

A devoted Salesian Cooperator, she had wished to attend Don Bosco's conference. However, her condition worsened significantly at the beginning of March, confining her to her bed. "If only I could see Don Bosco!" she lamented. "Perhaps his presence would do me good."

Upon hearing of her wish, Don Bosco felt compelled to help her. When he arrived, he urged her to put all her trust in Mary Help of Christians, blessed her, and as he was leaving, he said, "God grant her holiness..." He paused as if hesitating to finish his thought. The mother, fearing that this reticence signalled an announcement of death, burst into tears. Don Bosco then continued, "...and health." He left, reminding both mother and daughter to trust in Mary Help of Christians.

Her confidence was not in vain. Eight days later, the saint was giving another lecture in the church of St. Isidore in Sauvebonne, a parish in Navarre, and among his listeners was the perfectly healed young man. (*M.B.*, XV, 63).

### 275. Anything for a cat (1881)

Grasse is a main town located above Cannes, about forty kilometres from Nice. In his book "*Dom Bosco*," Dr. D'Espiney recounts that the saint spent a few

days in Grasse in 1881, where he received many visitors and healed an elderly woman.

She approached him to ask for a blessing. "Of course," Don Bosco replied, "but you must kneel." The woman explained that she could not kneel because one of her knees had become stiff and sore due to a fracture that had troubled her for eight years. Nonetheless, Don Bosco encouraged her to try. She obeyed, knelt down, and after receiving the blessing, she stood up without any difficulty.

Afterwards, she pleaded with him to finish the work and grant her a few minutes of his time. He agreed. As they moved into the next room, the worker was fully engrossed in sharing her troubles when, suddenly, two cats began to playfully chase each other, jumping on the furniture with vigour. The woman sprang to her feet and pursued them. Her agility made Don Bosco smile, and he remarked, "It seems to me that you are not as impeded as you wanted me to believe."

"That's strange!" the woman replied. "My leg feels much better now."

"Well, you will heal, but not right away," he said. "It is better for both of us that Mary, Help of Christians, doesn't grant you that grace too soon." (*M.B.*, XV, 69).

### 276. A trick rewarded with a miracle (1881)

Miss Flandrin from Marseilles had been seriously ill for some time and now seemed to be at the end of her rope. Every day, her mother visited St. Leo, where Don Bosco was staying in 1881, hoping to persuade him to visit

her daughter. However, Fr Bologna, for reasons unknown, deemed it inconvenient for Don Bosco to go there. When he communicated this to the saint, he did so in such cold terms that Don Bosco did not take action.

Meanwhile, the day of departure arrived. To avoid the crowd that would be waiting for him at the station in Marseilles, it was arranged for Don Bosco to take a carriage to Aubagne, just as he had the previous year. Even at the last moment, Mrs. Flandrin continued her efforts. This time, she pleaded with Abbot Mendre, urging him to use all his influence to ensure that Don Bosco would visit her daughter.

The abbot, who recognized the lady from having seen her many times before in the Oratory, could not resist her tears. He promised her that if he had the good fortune to travel with Don Bosco as far as Aubagne, he would have the carriage diverted to the sick person's home and ask Don Bosco to visit her and forgive her for his earlier indiscretion.

They departed in the early evening. The abbot thought Don Bosco was unsure of the route, so he interjected when he suddenly heard Don Bosco exclaim, "But it seems we are changing direction!"

At that moment, the coachman was secretly following Mendre's directions, as he alone understood the change in route. Without answering the question directly, Mendre replied, "You, Father, are traveling under my responsibility. Please leave it to me so we can reach our destination safely."

Don Bosco fell silent. He then

stopped the carriage at the Flandrin house and yielded to prayer. Her mother welcomed him into the sick woman's room while the abbot waited in the adjacent room.

For fifteen days, the young woman had her throat so tightly constricted that she could not swallow anything, except for being fed artificially. A burning thirst tormented her. Her father, a civil servant, had already gone to the office, believing that when he returned, he would find her dead; she had recently received the Holy Anointing.

As he approached her bedside, Don Bosco asked her, "Would you like to drink some water?"

"She cannot," her mother was ready to answer.

"Let us pray," said Don Bosco.

Then, all present knelt and prayed for a few moments. Afterward, Don Bosco blessed the sick woman and instructed her, "Now drink."

She began to sip freely, and as she drank, she felt infused with new life. After she had pushed the glass away, she cried out, "I am cured!"

Inside, chaos ensued: people were shouting, crying, and rushing in every direction; it felt as though everyone was going mad. Abbot Mendre rushed in and encountered Don Bosco, who emerged smiling and calm. The servant of God made his way to the carriage, followed by his companion, who appeared dazed.

Meanwhile, the dying woman dressed herself and went out onto the landing of the staircase to wait for her father, who would be returning shortly. As soon as she heard his footsteps, she ran to him, th-



*The Church of St. John Bosco, Paris*

rowing her arms around his neck. "I am healed, Dad!" she exclaimed. "Don Bosco has cured me!"

The poor man, taken aback, staggered and fell. A doctor was hastily summoned, and he worked diligently to bring the father back to his senses, with the daughter assisting her mother in tending to him.

In the meantime, the two travellers were quite a distance away. Once back in the carriage, Abbot Mendre contented himself with clasping Don Bosco's arm and saying, "Well, Father, now he will no longer say that Don Bosco does not work miracles!"

Don Bosco responded calmly, "God be praised! God be praised!"

The abbot recognized that it would be indiscreet to press the matter further; therefore, he refrained from discussing it again until they reached Aubagne. (M.B., XV, 58). □



## THE LESSON OF LOURDES

*by Sergio Pellini*

**L**et us joyfully and gratefully relive the wondrous event of February 1858 in the grotto of Massabielle, as St. Bernadette recounts in simple and touching words.

"...A beautiful young lady, with a striking beauty I had never encountered before, appeared at the edge of the hollow, above the bushes. She looked at me, greeted me with a slight nod of her head, and smiled warmly. She extended her arms slightly away from her body, opening her hands. A rosary hung from her right arm, and she gestured for me to come closer, as if she were my mother. I blinked several times, closing and opening my eyes, wondering if I was imagining things. Yet, the lady remained, smiling gracefully and encouraging me to approach, making it clear that I was not deceiving myself. Without thinking much about it, the impulse to pray came over me. I reached into my pocket, took out my rosary, and knelt down. The lady nodded in approval and also took the rosary from her right arm, pass-

ing the beads between her fingers as if to pray. She left me to pray alone while she continued to pass the beads through her fingers without moving her lips. At the end of the decade, she joined me in saying, "*Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto.*"

After I finished praying the rosary, she greeted me with a smile, stepped back into the niche, and disappeared in an instant."

The White Lady appeared seventeen more times to the fortunate maiden. In the sixteenth apparition, which occurred on March 25, the Feast of the Annunciation, the Immaculate Virgin revealed her name: "I am the Immaculate Conception." Then, on July 16, during the Feast of Mount Carmel, the Immaculate Virgin bid farewell to Bernadette.

The apparitions at Lourdes, accompanied by extraordinary miracles, have captivated the world and transformed Lourdes into a city dedicated to Mary, where she shares the treasures of her maternal goodness. Listening to the

testimonies of those who have experienced Lourdes is not only intriguing but also extraordinary. The atmosphere of prayer, combined with the sight of profound suffering and great faith, leaves a lasting impression on everyone and instills a sweet longing for heaven, where we will eternally enjoy Mary's loving presence.

Lourdes is not only known for its remarkable miracles and the display of beautiful Christian virtues, but it is also recognized as a city dedicated to the Blessed Eucharist, to which Mary continually guides us as the source of life. It serves as a heavenly school that offers valuable and timely teachings, with the Mother of God being our teacher.

At Lourdes, Mary performs many wonders to awaken and revive faith, which is essential for pleasing God. The greatest miracle, however, is the calm and joy-

ful acceptance of God's will, for which Mary Most Holy intercedes for everyone, especially for the sick.

By renewing faith, Mary also strengthens the hope for eternal goods, a reminder highlighted by the apparitions at Lourdes. Furthermore, Christian charity receives a significant boost from Mary's maternal intervention at Lourdes. This reflects the love with which the Virgin, from her place in heaven, watches over us and, through her unwavering prayer, seeks to fulfil the number of the elect.

In Lourdes, everyone embraces one another as siblings, embodying the spirit of a typical mother with an extraordinary outpouring of charity towards the sick.

Through Bernadette, Our Lady teaches us to live according to the principles of the Beatitudes. In her daily life, Bernadette lived in

poverty alongside the poor; she was spiritually destitute—hungry for the essential material sustenance to survive and longing for God in her heart. She exemplified true humility, embodying the essence of a “handmaid of the Lord” rather than displaying false modesty. Bernadette felt deeply, shedding tears of compassion; once, she confided in a friend, “I cry when the Lady cries.” She remained steadfast in her mission, enduring persecution, threats, and slander from those of mediocre character who accompanied her on her journey, much like Jesus during His journey to Calvary.

As it happened for Bernadette, so it also happens for us today: Mary takes us by the hand and leads us to Jesus. She supports us in our difficulties and comforts us in our distress. She helps us continue the struggle against the evil she has fought since her conception, allowing us to proclaim daily, “Today, the head of the ancient serpent was crushed by Mary.”

Above the heavens, the divine promise against the serpent of evil is written: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed. She shall crush your head.”

We must cultivate a sincere love for the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the Heart of Jesus in our contrite hearts so that, when we stand before the final judgment, the Lord may reassure us by saying, “I have heard my Mother speak well of you.”

Let's be honest: our world needs conversion. Consciences



have become darkened like those of the first sin, no longer able to distinguish between good and evil. Many people no longer recognize what sin is and are afraid to know it, as if this awareness could threaten their freedom.

It remains challenging to persuade the world today about the severity of its sins and the salvation that God continually offers through the reconciliation achieved through Redemption. Yet, the sinless Virgin calls us back to this fundamental need for conversion. She urges us, as she did with Bernadette: “Pray for sinners; come and wash yourselves; purify yourselves to embrace a new life! Repent and believe in the Gospel.” She brings new significance to these initial words of Jesus in the Gospel.

Let us ask Mary to affirm the purpose of our conversion. □





**MY VOCATION STORY**

**José Pastor Ramírez**

JESUS JURADO

*Coordinator and Delegate of the Salesian Family*

*José Pastor Ramírez was born in the Dominican Republic. He met the Salesians in Jarabacoa, his home town. He attended the oratory from the age of seven to fourteen. He entered the Novitiate and, after philosophical and theological training, he specialised in spiritual theology, clinical psychology, systematic family therapy and transactional analysis. For the past ten years he has been World Delegate of the Past Pupils of Don Bosco based in the Generalate in Rome.*

**Fr. José, how did you come to your current position?**

At the end of my service as Inspector in 2008, the Rector Major Emeritus, Fr. Pascual Chávez appointed me as the Coordinator of the Salesian Family and the World Delegate for the Past Pupils of Don Bosco. My assignment concluded on June 15 of 2016.

**Who are the Past Pupils of Don Bosco?**

The Past Pupils are the result of the Salesian mission, representing the richness that the sons of Don Bosco contribute to humanity as a powerful force for positive change in the world.

**Are they also born from Don Bosco's heart?**

We know how deeply Don Bosco loved his pupils. Once their education was complete, he continued to follow them closely. He invited them over, welcomed them, provided further guidance,



and admonished them, when necessary, always showing concern for their well-being, especially their spiritual well-being. He would say, "By your presence, you assure me that the principles of our holy religion, which I have taught you, remain strong in your hearts and serve as the guide for your lives."

On another occasion, while

speaking to the Past Pupils, he advised: "One thing I recommend to you, my dear children, more than anything else, is this: wherever you are, always show yourselves to be good Christians and righteous individuals. Many of you already have families; share the education you received in the Oratory from Don Bosco with your loved ones."

**What is the global reality of the Past Pupils?**

The reality of past pupils around the world is as diverse as the nations, provinces, and regions where the Association is present. There is no uniformity among them.

**What are the current challenges?**

Among the main challenges faced by past pupils is the need to develop their identity as responsible laypeople in the Church and society. They must work to promote and defend human and Christian values through social, political, and economic engagement. Additionally, it is important to strengthen local unions, implement educational and solidarity projects, and rejuvenate the Association by encouraging the registration of new generations of pupils. Currently, there are about 100,000 registered alumni associated with approximately 50 federations.

**What is the role of the World Delegate for Past Pupils?**

According to the statutes, the Delegate represents the Rector Major of the Congregation and the spiritual leader of the World

Confederation, particularly the Confederal Presidency and the Confederal Executive Council. The Delegate carries out this role through correspondence, personal interactions, and visits, during which they assess various local life and work situations. Special attention is given to younger individuals. This work is conducted in collaboration with the Regional Councillors and other qualified laypeople in their respective regions. The Delegate focuses on the formative themes of the World Assembly, which convenes every six years, as well as the Executive Council, which meets four times a year. Additionally, the Delegate participates in significant celebrations in the Provinces.

The Delegate is also responsible for four leadership schools located in Europe, Asia, and America.

**What does your formation plan entail?**

A good formation plan should be cohesive and well-structured. For this reason, over the course of nearly eight years of service to the Past Pupils, I have developed an educational itinerary consisting of 31 themes divided into ten modules.

**In which areas have you focused your training efforts?**

I have concentrated on the relationship between identity and mission, as they are two interconnected dimensions that support and enrich each other. It is essential for them to coexist in a fruitful complementarity. Being true to one's identity and mission is increasingly urgent today, es-



Farewell moments with Fr Jose as Delegate of the Past Pupils and the confreres of the Generalate

pecially in a time marked by confusion and relativism. Past Pupils with a clear sense of identity and mission within the Church and society fully embrace Don Bosco's invitation to be "honest citizens and good Christians."

### What should a Past Pupil of Don Bosco be like in everyday life?

A pupil who leaves the Salesian house should feel equipped with a powerful tool: the education they have received. This education serves as their key to navigating the present and the future, instilling the conviction that their commitment and responsibility, despite any difficulties, will change the world, starting with themselves and their families. Based on the education received, a Past Pupil of Don Bosco should embrace the value of solidarity as a way of life. They ought to be a builder of "social charity" or "political charity," for it is only through charity that we can change

the world.

### What challenges lie ahead in the coming years?

In my opinion, the key challenges include gaining a thorough understanding of the new Statute of the World Confederation, effectively assimilating and organizing a strategic plan at both the global and local levels, and strengthening the Schools for Leaders. Additionally, there should be an increase in local unions and national federations, as well as effective communication between the central authority and the federations, and among the federations themselves. □

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## IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

### Make it Natural

"Your composition will be good if you make it simple and natural. Do not attempt flights of fancy. Write what is in you" the teacher had concluded after a talk on how to write a good composition.

One of the pupils wrote: "I ain't gone to rite no fancy flys only what is in my natural my stum-mick my lunks, my livver and kidnees and for this morning a piece of cake and too apples thats all so far your lovely pupil John."

### Good Suggestion

A boss called his employees together and said, "Whenever I come into the shop I want to see every man cheerfully at work. I am placing a box here and I should like anyone who has any suggestions to just put them in here."

The next day he saw a slip of paper in the box. It said: "Take the rubber heels off your shoes."

### Caught

Two ladies, encountering Samuel Johnson soon after the publication of his Dictionary, complimented him for having omitted indecent and indelicate words.

"What, my dears!" said Johnson. "Have you been searching for them?"

### Money

A few moments after his daughter announced her engagement, the father asked, "Does he have any money?"

"Oh, you men are all alike," replied the girl. "That's just what he asked about you!"

### Too late

"How do you think I could save on electricity and fuel oil for some time," asked the man.

"Well," replied the other, "you might move in with your wife's folks for the duration of the emergency."

"Too late," sighed the inquirer. "They thought of it first and they are already with us." □

### And for a Good Thought

- The Lord prefers common looking people. That is the reason He makes so many of them (*Abraham Lincoln*).

- Middle age is when your brain says: "Go! Go! Go!" - while the rest of him is saying "No! No! No!" (*Robert Orben*)

- I always prefer to believe the best of everybody - it saves so much trouble. (*Rudyard Kipling*)

- In youth we want to change the world. In old age we want to change youth. (*Bob Brown*)

### Look for the reference

Ben Hecht once found several hundred copies of a technical book on a remainder counter. The book was over 1000 pages long, hopelessly dull and carried no index. Hecht mailed copies anonymously to his most egotistical friends, with a typed note inside that read: "You will be amused, although possibly slightly offended by the references to you in this volume." The hunt, they say, went on for days.



### WHERE IS GOD WHEN WE NEED HIM MOST?

The surgeon said, "I'm sorry. We did everything we could." The mother understood but had no more tears. Bitterly, she asked, "Why do children get cancer? Is it that God does not care about them? God, where were you when my son needed you?"

The mother requested the nurse to accompany her as she said a final farewell to her son's remains. She gently stroked his hair with her hand. The nurse then asked if she wanted to keep one of the curls as a memento. The nurse cut off a curl, placed it in a plastic bag, and handed it to her.

He explained, "It was Jimmy's idea to donate his organs. He said he could help someone else, and that's what he wanted. At first, I said no, but he told me, 'Mum, I won't use my body after I die, and this way, I will make a child stay with his mum for one more day.' My Jimmy had a heart of gold; he always thought of others and wanted to help them as much as possible." That night, she cried until sleep overtook her, hugging Jimmy's pillow. She woke up around mid-

night and found a folded piece of paper next to her. She opened it, and it said: "Dear Mummy, I know you won't see me again, but don't think I've forgotten you or stopped loving you just because I'm not there to tell you I love you. I will think of you every day, Mummy, and I will love you more and more each day. One day, we will see each other again. If you want to adopt a child so that you are not so alone, he can live in my little room and play with all my things." If you believe she is a



little girl, she may not like the things that most children enjoy, and you might end up buying her dolls and toys intended for young girls. Please don't feel sad when you think of me; where I am now is incredible. My grandparents were there to greet me when I arrived, and the angels are very friendly. Jesus looks quite different from the images I saw on Earth, but I recognized Him as soon as I saw Him. Jesus took me to meet God the Father! Can you imagine, Mummy? I felt like I was part of a family, and I was able to speak to Him. He listened to me patiently and told me that I am a very important little person. I told God I wanted to send you a little letter to thank you and to share everything I've read, even though I knew it wasn't allowed. God gave me the paper

and His pen to write this letter. I think His name is Gabriel, and he is the angel who will send it to you. God told me He would respond to your question when you asked, "Where was He when I needed Him?" He said He was in the same place He was when His other Son, Jesus, was agonizing on the cross. Mother, He was right next to me, comforting me and giving me strength and encouragement, just as He does for all His children. I no longer feel pain; the cancer has disappeared. I am happy about that; I could not have endured the pain any longer. Above all, God could not bear to see me suffer like that, so He sent the Angel of Mercy to take me. The angel told me that I was a Special Charge!

Signed: with love, God and Jimmy. □

#### LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

My heartfelt thanks to dear St. Dominic Savio for giving me a baby boy on 10.10.84. I am very grateful and most sorry for the delay.

*Francesca*

The small town of Ratnagiri has barely 35 Catholic families and the miracle is that Our Lady is visiting their homes and many of them have reported receiving graces through her powerful intercession.

*Godwin Noronha, Ratnagiri*

#### POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK FEBRUARY 2025

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### **MARY WAS THERE**

Over the last 43 years of my life, we have witnessed the miraculous mercies of Mother Mary through her Son, Jesus. My wife, Martina, has a hectic travel schedule for her job, and Mother Mary refreshes and supports her, allowing her to continue her hard work.

When Juan faced early health problems, it was through their mother's intercession that he was healed and given the strength to grow into adulthood. Mother Mary also helped Jace build confidence at school and in his studies.

Additionally, our grandmother gained daily strength and was able to survive her battle with cancer.

*Sunil Gonsalves, Vasai*

**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.

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