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Holy Mother,
place your veil
of protection
over my family.
Guard our hearts,
our health, our home.
Wrap us
in your maternal care
and intercede for us
with your Son,
our Saviour.



*The Lord will keep you
from all harm.*

From The Editor's Desk

A NEW YEAR THOUGHT

Not too many years ago, I had a conversation with a friend who had stopped by to see how I was doing. He had always been a restless soul; even during his visit this time, he couldn't sit still and paced back and forth in my office, talking despondently. At that time, he was studying for the priesthood, which came as a pleasant surprise to me—I hadn't expected him to pursue such a path, but God works in mysterious ways. He has since been ordained and serves as a busy priest in a poor region of our subcontinent.

My friend faced a deep sense of helplessness regarding the problems he saw around him. He had a strong desire to bring Christ's love to people, which had motivated him to choose the priesthood. However, over time, he became increasingly distressed about the state of the country and felt as though the world was in decline. In his opinion, his homeland was caught in the grip of dictatorship, experiencing abuses of personal freedom, and many people lived in fear. He was aware of the misuse of funds and widespread corruption, while the majority of citizens struggled to get by on meager incomes.

Looking beyond his borders, he saw little to alleviate his gloom. He perceived the greed and aggression prevalent in much of Western society, where the emphasis on material possessions overshadowed spiritual values. He knew that in government warehouses, food meant for people was being destroyed by rodents, while the rest was being stolen right under the watch of security guards, leaving millions to starve.

Overwhelmed and powerless in the face of such problems, he often asked himself, "What can I do? What difference can I make?" This constant questioning led him to lose heart. Eventually, he decided to share his anxiety with an elderly priest living in the community. The old priest listened in silence before he said, "Come with me; I want to show you something."

The priest led him down the stairs and into the street to an old church. Inside, he took him to a side chapel where a beautiful mosaic of the risen Christ adorned the wall. "Do you see that mosaic?" the old priest asked. "What do you think of it?" "It's very beautiful," the young man replied, gazing at the thousands of small stones that formed the picture. Then, the old priest walked up to the mosaic and removed one of the loose stones. "What do you think of it now?" he asked. The student looked at the disfigured mosaic and said, "It's ruined; it's no longer beautiful." The old man carefully replaced the loose stone and said, "Each one of us is a stone in God's great mosaic."

None of us can solve the enormous problems of our times alone. However, by living our calling—whatever that may be—with honesty, truth, and love, we can each be a precious stone contributing to that great mosaic. God is still creating in our world, offering us a hopeful thought as we enter the New Year.

Fr. Ian Douulton, sdb

THE GIFT OF RECONCILIATION

by Bishop Gianpaolo Dianin

The jubilee just concluded does not pass without touching the painful parts of our lives and at least setting out on a path of reconciliation for us and those around us

In the Bible, Jubilee represented a time when debts were forgiven, enslaved individuals were freed, and everyone was given a fresh start. These were significant and radical actions, even if we aren't certain how completely they were implemented in practice. In the Gospel, Jesus continues this journey of bold choices and presents these ideas to his disciples without reservation.

Jubilee just concluded can serve as an opportunity for courageous acts of reconciliation, including between spouses and families. When love has faded over the years, how can

we revive those memories? If relationships feel impoverished by routine, we must consider the wounds that remain open within and between families. If faith and the Gospel seem unable to heal certain wounds, we need to reflect on whether we truly take Jesus' message to heart. The Jubilee should not pass without addressing the painful aspects of our lives. At the very least, it should inspire us to embark on a path of reconciliation, for ourselves first and foremost, and then for those around us.

How can we not think of the challenging communication

that often occurs between generations, the wounds caused by separations and marriage breakdowns, or the ongoing opposition between men and women? When we consider family relationships, how can we overlook the divisions that frequently escalate into deep-seated hatred over issues like inheritance, unresolved conflicts, and a quest for justice that everyone claims yet no one questions?

Is it possible to heal these rifts? It certainly is possible to take the first step; one can retrace their steps like the prodigal son or open their arms like the merciful father. A jubilee could be the perfect occasion for the elder brother to set aside his anger and choose to join in the celebration. In this context, we also find the sacrament of Penance serving as a space to acknowledge one's sins and embrace the joy of forgiveness.

"Why do you worry about what you will eat? Look at the lilies of the field; they do not toil, yet no one is as beautiful as they are." What do these words of Jesus signify? Are they merely poetic verses from the gospel, or do they challenge us to reflect on our lives, which could be peaceful and reconciled with who we are and what we have? Or are they perhaps overly focused on the accumulation of material goods?

As Christians, we must ask ourselves some important questions: What do poverty, simplicity in life, and care for the poor truly mean? How do we approach material goods? What decisions do we make when it

If faith and the gospel do not heal some wounds, we must ask ourselves if we are truly taking Jesus' message seriously.

comes to our purchases? How can we educate our children about the responsible use of things?

Additionally, we must acknowledge the wounds that families face. The solution does not lie in spending money, but rather in providing what is most precious to a family: love, solidarity, warmth at home, and the joy of sharing meals together.

Families that open their hearts to welcoming, fostering, and adopting children serve as powerful witnesses to the strength of love. They offer the wounded little ones not just shelter, but the soothing oil of love and the warmth of a true home.

We also see the lonely elderly, often our own parents, and the friends around us who bear the weariness of lives that have not met their expectations. Many of these wounds affect us directly, while others surround us and call for our attention. It's not too late, the jubilee just concluded can serve as an opportunity to listen to these silent cries. By embracing the wounds of others, we may find that our own burdens become lighter and can even begin to heal. □



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND PEACE

Michele Nicole'

Advances in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI) are having a profound impact on human activities, personal and social life, politics, and the economy. This was why Pope Francis titled his last message for the World Day of Peace on January 1, 2024, "Artificial Intelligences and Peace."

The use of the plural term "Intelligences" is intentional, emphasizing the need to distinguish and understand these technologies before resorting to futile condemnations or doomsday predictions, as many have done in recent months. Pope Francis encouraged open dialogue about the implications of these new technologies, which possess both disruptive potential and ambivalent effects.

He stressed the importance of remaining vigilant and ensuring that a logic of violence and discrimination does not infiltrate the development and use of these

technologies, particularly at the expense of the most vulnerable and marginalized individuals. Injustice and inequality only serve to fuel conflicts and antagonisms.

The urgent need is to direct the conception and use of artificial intelligence responsibly, ensuring that it serves humanity and protects our shared environment. This ethical reflection must also extend to education and law. Upholding human dignity and fostering a sense of fraternity that is genuinely inclusive of the entire human family are essential conditions for ensuring that technological development contributes to promoting justice and peace worldwide.

The Holy See has always been vigilant about the ethical implications surrounding the use of artificial intelligence, actively engaging as many scientific and technological stakeholders as possible in this discussion and collaborating with leaders from different religions.



On January 10, 2024 the Pontifical Academy for Life promoted the expansion of the "Rome Call for AI Ethics," originally signed in 2020 by companies such as Microsoft and IBM, to include representatives from Judaism and Islam. The goal is to encourage an "alometric" approach—an ethical reflection on the use of algorithms in the context of artificial intelligence. Monsignor Vincenzo Paglia, the president of the Academy, emphasized that while these new technologies have the potential for significant advancement, they also pose the risk of leading to a tragic outcome by suppressing our humanity in a manner that creates a "dictatorship of technology," which could ultimately disrupt the essence of human existence.

The Holy See is consistently committed to addressing the risks and abuses associated with the use of artificial intelligence in military and conflict situations, particularly within major international organizations such as the United Nations. The Pope highlighted these concerns, noting as ear-

ly as 2020 that "from the digital traces scattered across the internet, algorithms extract data that allows for control over our mental and relational habits for commercial or political purposes, often without our knowledge. This creates an asymmetry where a few individuals know everything about us while we know nothing about them. It numbs critical thinking and impairs the conscious exercise of freedom. As a result, inequalities are exacerbated, and knowledge and wealth become concentrated in the hands of a few, posing serious risks to democratic societies."

The 2024 observance marked the 57th edition of the World Day of Peace, initiated by Pope Paul VI in 1967 and the 11th and final one celebrated by Pope Francis. The theme in 2023 was "No one can be saved alone," reflecting on the world in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Previously discussed themes included dialogue between generations, the culture of care, good governance, non-violence, and attention to migrants and refugees. □

From the Message of Pope Francis on the 58th World Day of Communication

"At this time in history, which risks becoming rich in technology and poor in humanity, our reflections must begin with the human heart. [Only by adopting a spiritual way of viewing reality, only by recovering a wisdom of the heart, can we confront and interpret the newness of our time and rediscover the path to a fully human communication. In the Bible, the heart is seen as the place of freedom and decision-making. It symbolizes integrity and unity, but it also engages our emotions, desires, dreams; it is, above all, the inward place of our encounter with God. Wisdom of the heart, then, is the virtue that enables us to integrate the whole and its parts, our decisions and their consequences, our nobility and our vulnerability, our past and our future, our individuality and our membership within a larger community. Without this kind of wisdom, life becomes bland, since it is precisely wisdom – whose Latin root *sapere* is related to the noun *sapor* – that gives "savour" to life."

REASONS TO BELIEVE - 12

by Franco Molinari

Destroy your enemy

Love and work are the two fundamental pillars of Christianity. A Christian is called to love their neighbour as themselves and to work diligently. As St. Paul expresses clearly, "He who does not work, let him not eat" (2 Thes 3:10).

Long before modern psychology, Christ understood the healing power of love. This insight seems almost genius, especially considering that the Old Testament, specifically in Leviticus, encourages us to "love your neighbour as yourself." The Great Architect of the Universe, who established the laws of nature, clearly intended for harmony among His creation.

However, Christ transcends these ancient teachings by extending the call to love even to our enemies. He teaches love that involves pure sacrifice, urging us to pray for our persecutors, bless those who curse us, and to invite the poor and disabled to our meals—those who cannot return the favour. The radical innovation of the gospel lies in this command to love our enemies.

No religious system has reached such an exceptionally high moral standard as the teachings

of Christ. Even the monks of Qumran, who exemplify the pinnacle of Judaic morality, do not achieve this level. The Qumran manual states: "Let the brothers love the sons of light, but hate the sons of darkness." If Christ did not derive his ethics from any earthly school, then he must have drawn them from the Father, with whom he identifies: "Philip, whoever sees me sees the Father."

The idea of loving one's enemy may seem like a weakness, but it is actually the only way to defeat him. When you choose to love your adversary, he ceases to be an adversary. Even if he has caused you deep pain, you come to understand that the person is far more significant than his mistakes. But can one realistically embrace their persecutor? The moment you lay down your defences, you risk



being harmed. The theology of the Qur'an appears more humane, as it acknowledges that war is an enduring part of human history and calls for regulations to manage conflicts. Jewish theologian Montefiore argues, "However sublime it may seem, the precept to love the enemy is unlivable; it does not correspond to the human condition."

Regardless of how harmful and inappropriate the concept of utopia may appear, Christ emphasizes: "Forgive seventy times seven. Be merciful, that you may be children of Him who makes the sun rise on both the just and the unjust."

In the Christian perspective, a saint is someone who loves their enemy. If I cannot embody this, then I cannot mimic the fox looking at the grapes.

Christ and the taboo of women

Ida Magli is not a member of Mary's daughters and, in her book "Jesus and Transgression," she provocatively argues that Jesus liberated religion from the taboos surrounding the sacred, sexuality, and the law. However, she also points out that the Churches later resurrected these taboos, which she describes as a troubling development from a feminist perspective.

Magli, a leading expert in religious anthropology, states, "Jesus is a mysterious figure, an important character who eludes all scientific explanation. Christ's personality could not have been invented, as it was not understood even by those who passed down his memory to us. The Churches and Christians who refer to him have also failed to

understand him."

Her argument unfolds in several key points. She asserts that Jesus is not a product of his time; his message contradicts various aspects of Jewish civilization and does not conform to any cultural context of that period. Let's explore some of these points.

For the Jews, there was a significant taboo concerning the Sabbath. The doctors of the law even debated whether it was permissible to eat an egg laid by a hen on the Sabbath. Some extremists, such as the Essenes, took things to the extreme, avoiding even going to the toilet, among other odd practices.

Jesus challenged the Sabbath taboo by healing the sick on that day and famously stated, "Man was not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for man."

Another major example of the divide between Jesus and the norms of his time is his approach to the concepts of "pure" and "impure." Judaism was preoccupied with the distinction between pure and impure foods, and there was a specific taboo regarding blood: one could not eat animals that had suffocated, as it was believed to be akin to consuming their souls. Jesus addressed this by declaring that true impurity comes from the heart. According to him, the heart is the source of negative thoughts and behaviours, which one should be wary of. He went so far as to challenge the taboo surrounding blood by instituting the Eucharist.

One significant way in which Christ diverged from the religion of his time was in his approach to sexuality. There are two opposing sexual taboos: one is

represented by Khomeini, who had prostitutes, homosexuals, and adulterers executed, and the other is by those who treat sex casually, like drinking coffee, and advocate for unregulated sexual activity. Jesus challenges both of these extreme views and instead presents an ideal of balance for individuals. For him, sexuality should not be a source of anxiety; it must be redefined by the fundamental laws of love: love your neighbour as yourself, do not do to others what you do not want done to you, and love your neighbour even more than yourself.

This brings us to the issue of feminism. Jesus's feminist perspective indicates that his character did not emerge from the deeply anti-feminist Jewish society of his time. Montefiore, one of the most respected scholars of the Israelite world, acknowledges that Jesus's remarkable originality is evident in his treatment of women.

Jesus challenges the anti-feminist culture of his time by choosing Mary Magdalene, a devoted woman, as the first person to witness his resurrection. Furthermore, some of the pious women who accompanied him were former converts with dubious pasts, coming from what is often referred to as the oldest profession in the world. Jesus spends significant time with the Samaritan woman, revealing his true identity to her as the Messiah, despite her being a woman from a pagan and marginalized background.

Additionally, Jesus defends the adulteress whom the religious leaders sought to stone. This act is not a license for adultery; rather, it highlights the importance

of mercy over strict moralism. He famously states, "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone," and then adds, "Go in peace and sin no more."

The story is so remarkable that many early Church Fathers considered it to be a later addition and not genuine. However, critics have since demonstrated its authenticity.

In contrast to the Old Testament, such as in Leviticus where a female slave was valued at half the price of a male, Jesus seems to confront the deep-seated misogyny of his time. He includes women as central characters in many of his parables, like the woman who searches her home for a lost coin, or the wise and foolish bridesmaids. While these scenes may appear in Jesus' time, what we now consider ordinary were viewed as scandalous parables.

One notable example that reflects a *flash* of feminism is the episode of Martha and Mary. Jesus challenges the notion that a woman should be relegated to the role of a kitchen maid, emphasizing instead that Mary chose the better part by seeking the truth, a pursuit traditionally reserved for men.

Additionally, it is important to address the myth of virginity. In Jewish culture, an unmarried or childless woman was often seen as a failure. However, Jesus breaks this taboo. He is not only born of a woman but specifically of a virgin woman, who was humanly marginalized.

In this light, Jesus' message can be seen as a beacon of feminism in a predominantly anti-feminist society. There is no scientific explanation for this phenomenon. □

CARMEN LAVAL

TIME FOR THE SPIRIT

SIX STEPS TO REDISCOVER YOUR ZEST FOR THE FUTURE

Following a path to recovery changes your perspective, abandoning negative beliefs (pessimism, fatalism) and starting a new cycle of life, enriched by your past and confident in your future.

1. Resurfacing

You are no longer in the middle of the storm. Although you still wade through difficult feelings and emotions, the most intense challenges have passed. You've made it through! Have you taken the time to congratulate yourself for this? It's not too late to do so. Take a moment to sit alone in silence, as if you were watching a movie. Project yourself into scenes from your challenging past, then bring your awareness back to the present moment. Feel your body, focus on your breath, and congratulate yourself for navigating this journey, for rising up, perhaps multiple times. Remember, self-care creates a virtuous cycle: the better we treat ourselves, the better we are treated, and the wiser choices we make.

2. You Have Revealed Yourself

Trials often uncover unexplored strengths and abilities within us—coolness, perseverance, endurance, daring, creativity, and, above all, courage. Often, it is others who help us recognize these qualities. They may say things like, "I didn't think you were capable of that," or "I always knew you had it in you," or "I could never have your strength." Take some time to reflect on the qualities you demonstrated while overcoming



ing challenges. Write them down so you can remind yourself of your strengths on days when self-doubt creeps in.

3. Now You Will Do More and Better

Emotional recovery is unique; it resembles the end of a hibernation. This process generates a new and more powerful energy because it is fueled by a conscious or subconscious desire to leave behind discomfort and suffering. As a result, you may find yourself more motivated at work, eager to pursue personal projects, and fully engaged in everything you do. It's akin to making up for lost time. Ultimately, everything you create and accomplish will gain in diversity, creativity, and quality.

4. You Will Choose Your Relationships Better

Along the way, some people have left your life—friends who slowly drifted away and others who may not be who you thought they were. When certain

friendships disappoint, new ones can emerge unexpectedly, providing support and comfort in surprising ways. Every life challenge, whether personal or professional, can serve as a revelation. Now, you have a clearer understanding of whom you can rely on and who you can let go. You will begin to see both your strengths and vulnerabilities more clearly, as pieces of your personal and family puzzle come together.

5. Rediscovering a Zest for Life

Once we move past discouragement and suffering, we can rediscover the small pleasures that give life its richness—our senses, our spirit, and our connections with others. These joys, which may have felt suffocated or buried under the weight of our struggles, begin to blossom again, step by step. Enjoying a meal with friends, curling up with a good book on the sofa, or taking a walk in the mountains or by the sea are all moments that can reignite our love for life. We may also feel a timid desire to make plans and see them through. Gradually, life starts to flow again.

6. Four Steps Toward Optimism

Here are four thoughts to consider as soon as you wake up, helping you to start the day positively:

Thought 1: I Will Do Something Useful Today.

Every day offers an opportunity to do something beneficial for others, whether in your work or personal life. Waking

up with this mindset provides you with a sense of purpose. If you're facing a monotonous day at work, consider taking a Rs. 10 note and giving it to a homeless person. Engaging in positive actions and anticipating them can give you a boost of energy.

Thought 2: I Will Do Something Just for Myself Today.

Every morning, set aside time for a small act of self-care. This could be engaging in a sport, meditating, reading, or connecting with someone you haven't spoken to in a while. Make it something for YOU—something you can look forward to each day. By incorporating these thoughts into your daily routine, you can foster a more positive outlook on life.

Thought 3: I am a good person. The next step is to compliment myself every morning and change the way I perceive myself.

Thought 4: I am alive. This is fundamental. I should remind myself that I am alive and healthy. I live in a country where education and healthcare are accessible to all. □

EVERY MORNING

I adore You, my God, and I love You with all my heart. I thank You for creating me, for making me a Christian, and for keeping me safe through the night. I offer You my actions for the day, asking that they align with Your holy will and bring You greater glory. Preserve me from sin and all evil. May Your grace always be with me and all my loved ones. Amen.



St. Hilary of Poitiers January 13

Ian Pinto, sdb

St. Hilary of Poitiers is probably not a name you might be familiar with but he stands as one of the early Church's boldest defenders of Christ's divinity and a model theologian for those seeking truth with both intellect and faith. Known as the "Athanasius of the West," for replicating in France what Athanasius did in Egypt, that is, sustaining the flame of orthodoxy when much of Europe including France was swept by the tide of the Arian heresy. His life and writings—particularly *De Trinitate*—remain vital reminders that Christian faith is not a construct of convenience but of conviction, tested through suffering and fidelity to revealed truth.

Born to Seek the Truth

Hilary was born to a distinguished pagan family in Poitiers, in southwestern France around 310. His early education in philosophy and rhetoric trained him to reason clearly and argue confidently. Yet, in the midst of classical wisdom, he encountered contradiction: gods who behaved like men, lacking the simplicity and moral consistency his intellect sought. This drove him to the



Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, where he found not many gods, but One—the I AM WHO AM of Exodus. When he discovered St. John's words, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," his search ended, and his conversion began.

Shortly after his baptism around 353, Hilary was chosen by the faithful as bishop of his native city even though he was married—a testimony to his depth of virtue and wisdom. In the early

centuries, celibacy for the clergy was not obligatory. However, many of them willingly embraced it, as did Hilary, after his ordination. As bishop, his pastoral heart and philosophical mind combined to make him both shepherd and scholar, prophet and pastor.

The Arian Tempest

At the time of Hilary's election, Arianism – the teaching that Jesus was only a created human being, and not truly God – had spread like wildfire, fuelled by imperial politics and theological confusion. Eastern bishops and even emperors leaned toward the Arian formula that Christ was 'similar' to the Father, not 'of one substance' with Him. Hilary stood firm amid this storm. Echoing the Apostle Paul's courage before Caesar, he refused to bow under the pressure of political power and sign any condemnation of St. Athanasius or any compromise creed. Enraged, Emperor Constantius II exiled him to Phrygia in Asia Minor in 356. This exile would become Hilary's novitiate in suffering and sanctity. Deprived of home, he became freer; persecuted, he became more powerful.

Soon after he was ordained bishop, Hilary began to challenge the clergy who had accepted Arianism, including the bishop of Arles, Saturninus, who was over all the French bishops and who had the ear of the Emperor. One can imagine what the initial days of his episcopacy might have been like. Despite his inexperience as a clergyman, Hilary took faith as a shield and the Word of God as a sword, and began to

push back heretical doctrine. In the Council of Arles, which was called to decide between Arianism and Trinitarianism, Hilary managed to establish orthodoxy against great opposition. He had all the Arians excommunicated – removed from the Church – including the erstwhile bishop and a few of his supporter bishops.

While in exile, Hilary observed firsthand the destructive marriage of throne and altar. Upon his return to Gaul after years of exile, he wrote three letters to Emperor Constantius. The first two were dignified appeals; the third, a thunderous rebuke: "Thou art fighting against God; thou persecutest the Saints; thou art a tyrant not only in the human, but in the divine sphere." Such words, addressed to the most powerful man in the world, remind us that fidelity to truth often means standing alone. Hilary's courage, however, did not spring from defiance but from charity. He wished even the Emperor's conversion, seeing in error not enemies but souls deceived by illusion. The Church, he insisted, must suffer for the truth rather than yield to power.

The Pen as a Sword

During his exile, Hilary wrote his masterpiece, **De Trinitate** (On the Trinity), a 12-book defense of the full divinity of Jesus, the Son. He approached this task with humility and clarity, aiming to serve truth rather than controversy.

Hilary based his arguments on baptismal faith, beginning with the baptismal formula: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit"

(Matthew 28:19). He emphasized that this formula was a profound theological revelation. He articulated the relationship between the Father and the Son using Latin terms, translating the Greek *homoousios* (same substance) to help define Trinitarian theology in the Western Church. His faith filled in the gaps where language failed.

His arguments rested on three key truths:

1. The Son is fully Divine, born – not created – of the Father.

2. The Trinity is a communion of love, not a hierarchy of power.

3. Denying Christ's divinity denies salvation, as only one who is entirely God can redeem humanity.

In exile, Hilary became acutely aware of the spiritual stakes of heresy. He urged the bishops of Gaul not to let ambiguity stand in for peace and wrote *De Synodis* (On the Councils), tracing the history of creeds and councils while addressing how language and political pressures had obscured true orthodoxy.

Hilary exemplified both intellectual brilliance and pastoral care, seeking unity rather than uniformity. He acknowledged the good intentions of the semi-Arians while urging reconciliation through dialogue. His tone was firm yet charitable, offering a model for modern believers facing confusion in faith communities.

He also absorbed the devotional practices of the Eastern Church, especially hymn-singing, and saw its potential to educate the faithful. Upon

returning to Gaul, he composed theologically rich hymns, including the *Gloria in Excelsis* and *Te Deum*.

Additionally, Hilary wrote commentaries on the Psalms and the Gospel of Matthew, reflecting his mystical yet disciplined mind. His commentary on Matthew stands as the first complete Latin commentary. He read Scripture as both Word and mystery, integrating divine truth with lived holiness.

Legacy

In 368, Hilary died peacefully in Poitiers, having navigated exile, councils, emperors, and controversies. Though his death was quiet, his influence resounded through history. St. Augustine regarded him as "the illustrious doctor of the churches" for his profound impact on the orthodox faith. In 1851, Pope Pius IX named him a Doctor of the Church, honoring his defense of Christ's divinity and the unity of the Trinity.

Hilary, known as the "Hammer of the Arians," was so effective in his opposition that Arian bishops requested the Emperor to end his exile to silence him. His writings are foundational to Western theology, shaping the thoughts of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and numerous saints, including Martin of Tours. Ultimately, Hilary's legacy reflects the inseparable connection between faith and love, encapsulated in his timeless message: "God knows only how to be love; He knows only how to be the Father. Those who love are not envious..." □



THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

by Dinesh Vasava, sdb

Reading: Take a few moments to immerse yourself in the gospel passage, reading it slowly and attentively. The readings for the Baptism of the Lord illuminate the profound identity and mission of Jesus as the Messiah, revealing the deep significance of His baptism in a world yearning for hope and light.

Meditation: As we contemplate these three passages, we come to appreciate the transformative significance of Jesus' baptism. In Isaiah, we encounter a vivid portrait of the Servant, a divine figure poised to bring forth justice and radiant light to the nations. This Servant, clearly recognized as Jesus, embodies a spirit of humility and deep compassion, fulfilling God's grand design to extend salvation to all humanity.

In the book of Acts, we witness Peter's awakening moment as he realizes that God's love knows no boundaries. His declaration emphasizes the all-encompassing nature of Christ's message—a message that reaches into the

hearts of all people. Jesus' baptism initiates His public ministry, marking a sacred moment when He is anointed by the Holy Spirit to heal the brokenhearted, serve the marginalized, proclaim the good news, and liberate those trapped in despair.

Matthew's depiction of the baptism highlights the profound connection between Jesus and the Father. The descent of the Holy Spirit, descending like a gentle dove, and the resounding voice from heaven affirm Jesus' identity as the beloved Son of God. This divine moment not only marks the commencement of His ministry but also serves as a powerful model for our own baptism and our identity as cherished children of God.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What lessons does the image of the Servant in Isaiah impart about Jesus' character and His divine mission?

2. How does Peter's revelation in Acts challenge and expand our understanding of God's uncondi-

tional acceptance and love for all people?

3. In what ways does Jesus' baptism inspire us to embrace our own baptism and the call to live out our faith with fervor?

4. What personal significance does it hold for you to be called a child of God? How does this profound identity influence your daily life?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we express our heartfelt gratitude for the incomparable gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ, and for the revelation of His divine identity through His baptism. Help us wholeheartedly embrace our identity as Your beloved children. May we remain open to the gentle guidance of the Holy Spirit in our lives, empowering us to carry forth our mission of infusing justice, hope, and healing into the lives of others. Let these scriptures resonate within us, transforming our hearts and reflecting Your boundless love. Amen.

Contemplation: Take a moment to sit in serene silence, allowing the powerful words of scripture and prayer to echo within your being. Visualize the scene of Jesus' baptism—the sparkling water, the softly descending dove, and the magnificent voice from heaven. Imagine yourself standing there, immersed in this divine moment. What emotions stir within you? What messages does God wish to impart to you in this sacred stillness?

Action: As we conclude this *Lectio Divina*, invite yourself to embody the noble qualities of the Servant



in your everyday life. Choose one specific action you can take this week to sow seeds of hope, justice, or healing within your community. It might be reaching out to someone in need, eagerly volunteering your time, or simply offering a compassionate listening ear to a friend.

Conclusion: The Baptism of the Lord beckons us to reflect on our own baptism and the profound call to live as beloved children of God. As we ponder these three readings, let us remember that we are anointed by the Holy Spirit to carry forward Christ's sacred mission in the world. May we fully embrace our identity as treasured children of God and strive to be vibrant instruments of His love and justice in our daily lives, within our homes, communities, and the countless souls we encounter. Amen. □

Quiet Spaces

“REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN OUR COMMON HOME

Pope Leo in the Clementine Hall on Thursday, 2 October 2025

Let us begin in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Peace be with you!

You are heeding the call of Pope Francis for academic communities to assist in meeting the needs of our displaced brothers and sisters by focusing on areas that are your competence (cf. *Address to Participants in the Meeting on Refugees Promoted by the Pontifical Gregorian University*, 29 September 2022).

These pillars are part of the same mission: to bring together leading voices throughout a variety of disciplines in order to respond to the current urgent challenges brought by the increasing number of people, now estimated to be over 100 million, who are affected by migration and displacement. I pray that your efforts may bring about new ideas and approaches in this regard, seeking always to put the dignity of every human person at the center of any solution.

As you continue with your gathering, I would like to suggest two themes that you might consider integrating into your action plans: *reconciliation* and *hope*.

One of the obstacles that often arises when dealing with difficulties of such great magnitude is an attitude of indifference on the part of both institutions and individuals. My venerable predecessor spoke of the “globalization of indifference,” where we become used to the sufferings of others and no longer try to alleviate them. This can lead to what I have previously referred to as a “globalization of power-



lessness” in which we risk becoming immobile, silent, perhaps sad, thinking that nothing can be done when we are faced with innocent suffering (cf. *Video Message on the Occasion of the Presentation of the Candidacy of the Project “Gestures of Welcome” to the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, 12 September 2025).

Just as Pope Francis spoke of the culture of encounter as the antidote for the globalization of indifference, we must work to confront the globalization of powerlessness by fostering a culture of reconciliation. In this particular way of encountering others, we “meet one another by healing our wounds, forgiving each other for the evil we have done and also that we have not done, but whose effects we bear” (ibid.). This requires patience, a willingness to listen, the ability to identify with the pain of others and the recognition that we have the same dreams and the same hopes.

I would encourage you, therefore, to propose concrete ways to promote gestures and policies of reconciliation, particularly in lands where there are deep-seated wounds from long-standing conflicts. This is no easy task, but if efforts to work for lasting change are to succeed, they must include ways to touch hearts and minds.

In formulating your action plans, it is also important to remember that migrants and refugees can be privileged witnesses of hope through their resilience and through their trust in God (cf. *Message for the 111th World Day of Migrants and Refugees*). Often they maintain their strength while seeking a better future, in spite of the obstacles that they encounter. As we prepare to celebrate the Jubilees of Migrants and of the Missions in this holy Jubilee year, I encourage you to lift up such examples of hope in the communities of those whom you serve. In this way, they can be an inspiration for others and assist in developing ways to address the challenges that they have faced in their own lives.

With these sentiments, I wish you a fruitful conference and pray that, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, you may continue to work towards finding comprehensive solutions to promote a culture of encounter, reconciliation, and fraternal solidarity for the benefit of all. I willingly impart my blessing to each of you and to all those who are part of your mission. Thank you very much.

Let us pray together as Jesus taught us: Our Father...

OCTOBER MORNINGS

By Pierluigi Menato, Tr. Ian Doulton, sdb

"Hello, Joan, at last!"

Sixteen-year-old Matt, lean and slender like a sapling that had grown too quickly, sat with his legs dangling over the crest of the wall separating the two gardens. He greeted the girl with his teenage familiarity. At that moment, Joan had stopped by an almond tree laden with fruit. She was simply dressed in a little red velvet dress with long sleeves, tucked in at the waist.

She blushed hearing Matt's voice, then replied with a frank

and candid smile.

"You're early today," she remarked, noticing the boy. He pushed back his beanie, which had been sliding down over his eyes and preventing him from getting a good look at her face.

Sounding concerned, he asked: "Do you have a lot to do?"

"As always," she replied, blushing again. "See, I've already collected quite a few vegetables. I especially chose those that Mum and Dad like: green beans, celery, and lettuce. I also added a bunch of flowers to put on Dad's desk. They should brighten up his day. But you, too, Matt, are here earlier than usual. Did you have to study?"

"Oh, generally, I never study," he replied with a grin. "I got up early so I could see you and talk with you. By the time I arrive, you're already back in the house—always."

"I have to help my sisters with the housework..."

"That's fine, but I have to tell you something before I leave for boarding school."

"When are you leaving?" she asked, curiosity evident in her tone.

"Early next week, I'll be gone for quite



a few months, and I won't see you again, dear Joan! You can't believe how sad I will be. I'm leaving everything... everything here. Can you understand that?"

This awkwardly stammered confession sparked a light in the girl's brown eyes. Trying to hide her joy, she murmured lightly, "Is that a lie you're telling me right now, or is it really true, Matt?"

"It's no lie; you know me better than that, Joan. My greatest thrill is seeing you and talking to you. When I can neither see you nor talk to you, I can only think of you. Until a few years ago, when we were still children and played together, I preferred you to everyone else. It was because I loved you very, very much. And now, I have to tell you that I want you even more. I stayed awake for several nights to write a poem. I dedicated it to you. It's called 'To a Cloud.' You know, I'm going to be a poet one day. With my poems, I'll earn a lot of money, and then we'll get married. It will take a few more years, but you are so young."

"Not so young; I'm almost fifteen, and my father calls me 'the queen of the house.'"

"Joan, will you wait for me until I'm in my twenties?"

"For sure, Matt."

He leaned back against the wall, stretching out his arm to shake hands with "his" girlfriend while handing her a letter. "In here is the poem," he whispered. "Read it and then tell me if you liked it. Now I want to recite the first stanza to you:

*'Fair little cloud
that sails in the midst of the heavens,
I marvel!
And you seem so lonely,*

*you shining pearl,
looking like a sapphire...'"*

Suddenly, a sharp call pierced their moment of mutual reverie, echoing from the other side of the wall cruelly pulling the boy back to reality.

"It's Dad!" the young poet exclaimed; his enthusiasm now tinged with anxiety. "I have to go, Joan. I'll be back tomorrow." In a flurry, he rushed down from his perch.

Joan opened the letter with eager anticipation, her eyes racing across the beautifully penned words. As she delved deeper into the verses, her face transformed, radiant with a joy that bubbled up from within her—a giggle ignited by a passion that burned brighter than ever.

She repeated the lines, savouring the rhythm until they were firmly etched in her memory. Once she was confident, she had memorized them, she gently folded the paper and tucked it safely into her dress pocket. Almost breathlessly, she retraced her steps along the familiar path home.

She felt as though she were soaring on a cloud of ecstasy, reminiscent of the one Matt had so eloquently described. On that October morning, the shimmering sunshine around her created an enchanting illusion, making it seem as if April had returned once more.

It was another October morning, a few years later. The sun shone brightly, reminiscent of the day when Joan and Matt's love had blossomed. It was like the illusory spring that returns with its enchanting music, calling for

unspeakable feasts and dreams of eternal, sublime unions, leaving a sense of otherworldliness in the soul.

But spring no longer sang in the heart of the young girl who descended into the garden at day-break after a sleepless night. There was no one on the dividing wall to greet her; the windows of the neighbouring house were closed because it had been sold, and Matt's family had moved to town. For many months, Joan had not seen the boy she had always considered her boyfriend, and perhaps that was for the best. She needed to focus on something else now. There was someone new in her life.

Alec Careni, the 35-year-old son of a large meat trader, was drawn to Joan's simple grace and asked her to marry him. This proposal came as a relief for Joan's family, which had unfortunately lost its patriarch some years earlier. Their house was burdened with mortgages, and her two sisters, married to poor clerks and surrounded by numerous children, created a significant strain on the family. Joan's suitor's wealthy father could help prevent her father's modest property from falling into the hands of creditors and could restore order to her brothers-in-law's financial troubles if Joan agreed to the marriage.

However, Joan initially responded with a firm "no." When she saw the distress her refusal caused within her family, she withdrew her "no" and asked for time to think. Although she tried to develop some affection for Alec Careni, she found it impossible. The memory of Matt

remained too vivid and too precious.

Yet, it was necessary for Joan to forget her childhood friend, just as he had forgotten her, even though she had waited for him until her early twenties. Joan had learned from her married sister, who now lived in the city, that Mattie had not yet settled down and was leading a dissipated life. This news must have been true, as her sister had received it from a relative of her husband, who was also close to Mattie's family. The truth of this was also evident in the letters from the young man, which had grown fewer and shorter over time.

Hurt deep in her soul, Joan often found herself without answers, yet she continued to hope. That was her constant companion because her love for him was so profound. They say, "out of sight, out of mind," but she believed her childhood friend would return one day; she was certain of it.

A sudden weakness overcame her, and she leaned against the wall where, many years earlier, she had first heard Mattie's words of love. How different everything had become since then! She paused for a moment, gently caressing that wall. Suddenly feeling resolved, she stood up and decided to seek solace and counsel elsewhere, in the solitude and silence of God.

She slowly pushed open the gate to the vegetable garden and stepped into the lane that led to the main road. She began to walk aimlessly, driven by a mysterious inner force, until the rows of cypress trees guided her to the place where she felt she "must"

stop—the cemetery.

It was closed, but through the grating of one of the open windows in the front wall, near the entrance, she could distinctly see her father's grave. A small marble headstone adorned it, featuring his portrait enclosed in a bronze locket.

Joan knelt on the step; her gaze fixed on the tombstone as tears streamed down her face. In that silent moment, an intimate dialogue unfolded between those two souls: one liberated and at peace, the other still bound by earthly pain. The towering cypresses stood silently, listening to the exchange in the whispered wind.

"Please forgive me, dad. It's been far too long since I last visited. Life has become so overwhelming!"

"I understand, my dear girl, I truly do. You must find the courage to face it!"

"Tell me what to do, dad. I can almost see you here, your eyes still radiating the deep, unconditional love I remember from you were around. Other eyes once offered me sweet solace, and in them, I lost my heart. Perhaps that sweetness was merely fleeting, but I am desperately searching for those eyes again. Is that hope still possible, Dad?"

"I'm afraid it may not be, my daughter."

"The once strong 'queen of the house' now feels utterly defeated. She longs to go to the city, to seek out her sister, to reconnect with her childhood friend and share how unbearable life has become without him. You know our

struggles... Since you left us, Mom is constantly ill. For two heartbreaking years, we have fought tirelessly to stave off our ruin, seeking every possible strategy... The small and great tragedies weigh heavily on us. We, lonely girls, need hope—we need strength!"

"I understand your concerns, my dear, but let me assure you that Careni's son, though he may not possess the poetic charm you desire, is truly a good, hard-working, honest, and loyal young man. He offers his unwavering support to you and holds deep affection for my 'queen of the house.' With time, I have no doubt that you will come to love him as well. You will see beyond the empty flattery of fleeting dreams and recognize that life often demands we face harsh realities, sometimes requiring sacrifice and renunciation.

Joan was still listening to her dear dad: "In this sacred place, crafted from the earth, my 'queen,' you will begin to grasp that our time here—whether filled with joy or sorrow—can still be vibrant and meaningful when we choose to live not for ourselves, but for the benefit of others, as a sincere and humble gift." The voice then faded.

As a ray of sunshine illuminated the locket on the gravestone, her father's eyes sparkled with an almost divine light, captivating Joan's attention and filling her soul with grace. In that transforming moment, all her doubts melted away: her decision was resolute, and she knew it was final. □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 72

by Michele Molineris

323. I want the money he has in that pocket (1884)

The following anecdote was recounted by Lady Herbert in the authoritative London periodical *"The Month"* in January 1884, in an article entitled "Don Bosco," spanning pages 43-59. The writer, who was related to the Marquis of S. in Turin, heard this story from him.

A young man from a good family had fallen into utter destitution, due to heavy gambling losses. Terrified by the prospect of having to declare bankruptcy, he had called on the marquis for help. This gentleman generously loaned him a substantial sum of money. The young man disappeared without a trace, leaving no hope of the money being refunded.

A few years went by and one day when the marquis was on his way to the railway station at Porta Susa, he unexpectedly ran into the young gentleman in question. The hard lesson taught him by experience had had its effect. He had begun to lead a serious, industrious life and had attained financial security. He had now come expressly to Turin to fulfil his obligation of paying back the money loaned to him.

The marquis continued on his way, but the train had already left the station. He decided then to wait for the next train and thought he would pass the time by calling on Don Bosco. It must be understood that he had not mentioned the matter to anybody. As he entered Don Bosco's room, before he could open his

mouth to ask about his health, the saint said, "I was expecting you! I want you to give me the money you have in that pocket."

So saying, he pointed to the pocket and specified the sum. Quite dumbfounded. The marquis exclaimed, 'How could you possibly know of this? This is money that I only received a short time ago and in a most unexpected manner. Do you know young Count B?'

"No," Don Bosco replied, "but I do know you have the exact amount I need to pay off a debt. You will have it back next week."

"Then take the money, by all means," the marquis said.

Don Bosco then gave him a receipt, and the following week, he returned right on time to repay the debt. (*M.B.*, XVII, 654).



324. Don Bosco reviews the Salesians (1884)

On December 1, 1884, Don Bosco shared a vision with Fr. Viglietti. He recounted: "Four nights ago, I saw a long line of Salesians, each one following the other and carrying a pole. At the top of each pole was a sign with a printed number. Some of the numbers read 73, 30,

and 62, among others. After many had passed, the moon appeared in the sky. As each Salesian came into view, a number not greater than 12 was visible, along with many black dots trailing behind them. All the Salesians I had seen then went and sat down on prepared tombs.

The explanation of this spectacle was as follows: the number on the placards represented the years of life destined for each individual; the number visible on the moon indicated the last month of life; and the black dots represented the days of the month in which they would die.

"Sometimes, I saw the Salesians grouped together; these were the ones who were destined to die on the same day. If I had wished to recount all the incidental details and circumstances of this vision, I would have needed at least ten days to do so." (*M.B.*, XVII, 385).

325. What it means to host saints (1884)

On March 30, 1884, Don Bosco from Navarre visited a castle called Castille, as he had promised the lords of the castle. In their speeches, they all lamented the drought that was devastating the countryside.

"Say a word to the Lord," they urged him. "If you do, He will send us rain."

"Yes, yes," he replied. "I will pray for rain, and tomorrow we will celebrate Mass with this intention."

"Do you really think it will rain?" they asked.

"Yes, I believe it will. The Lord has promised that where two or three gather to ask something of the Eternal Father in His name, He will be in their midst. We are

gathered here to ask the Lord for something; therefore, Jesus is among us."

"But we are too wicked, and that is why the Lord does not hear us."

"Yes, we are very wicked, and we do not deserve to have the Lord listen to us, but Jesus is still with us."

"So, you are saying that it will rain? It hasn't rained for nearly a year now."

"Yes, it will rain. For some days now, the bishop has ordered prayers for rain to be said at all Masses. With so many prayers, the Lord cannot be deaf to our pleas. We just need to make sure we do not prevent Jesus from being in our midst."

After a prayer for rain and a blessing for everyone, the group departed for another castle called the Bastide, which was about half an hour away by carriage. There, they were to spend the night with the Obert family. During dinner, the conversation turned once again to the much-needed rain, and Don Bosco assured them that it would rain. The lady of the house responded, "I would give anything if it rained."

With that, she went to bed. They had just fallen asleep when a loud noise woke Don Barberis and the others: rain was pouring down. It rained throughout the night and continued into the morning. The lady presented Don Bosco with 500 francs, promising additional similar offerings if the campaign went well. A passing priest from Lyons exclaimed, "This is what it means to host saints." (*M.B.*, XVII, 61).

326. If all priests were like you! (1884)

Don Bosco was relieved to



spend some time in familiar conversation with some of his sons, sharing stories about recent events as well as recalling episodes from the past. On June 16, he recounted an important occurrence that had taken place the day before in his room.

A French nobleman, a devoted admirer whom he had recently met in Marseille, had come to visit. He was a skilled lawyer but had withdrawn from practicing due to the sorrowful nature of the times. Despite this, he continued to privately support worthy causes, particularly when it came to funding free schools. For his efforts, the Holy Father had honoured him with the title of Commander.

As the nobleman spoke passionately about his good works, Don Bosco listened intently. Looking at him with affection, he asked, "Sir, do you actually practice the religion that you so honourably support?"

The unexpected question caught the nobleman off guard, leaving him blushing and confused. However, he quickly regained his composure and replied, "Why do you speak to me like this?"

Don Bosco replied that you treat

me with such familiarity and courtesy that I would feel I was failing in my duty if I did not return these signs of friendship and confidence.

He then tried to change the subject, but Don Bosco pressed on, holding the lawyer's right hand firmly.

"Why are you holding me so tightly?" the lawyer asked.

"And why do you want to free yourself? Answer my question: do you practice the religion you defend so passionately?" Don Bosco replied.

"But you, Don Bosco, have already read my heart, haven't you?"

At that moment, Don Bosco felt the lawyer's warm tears on his hands. Through his sobs, the lawyer confessed, "I admit, Don Bosco, I have never practiced it; in fact, I didn't even believe in confession."

"Tell me then, from now on, you will practice it and promise me that the first time I see you, whether in Marseilles or elsewhere, you will be able to shake my hand and say, 'I have kept my promise.'"

"Yes," he replied, "I promise you. I vow that as soon as I get home, I will make my confession and will immediately share the news with you. This will be in a few days. Word of honour... Don Bosco, if all priests were like you, everyone would embrace religion."

"If everyone," Don Bosco corrected him, "approached priests as you do now, there would be no one displeased with us."

This was the lawyer Blanchard, a noble man with a beautiful heart. He certainly kept his word. (M.B., XVII, 161). □



AM I NOT YOUR MOTHER?

by A.B. Bosco,
A Salesian Cooperator

Am I Not Your Mother?

Throughout the ages, the faithful have sought the Blessed Virgin Mary as a compassionate Mother, ready to listen, understand, and intercede for her children. Her love, a powerful blend of gentleness and strength, assures us that she never abandons those in need.

Each New Year, we are reminded of this truth through the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, celebrated on January 1. This ancient feast honors Mary not only as the mother of Jesus but also as the mother of all humanity, through whom salvation came into the world.

As we enter the New Year, let's place our homes, families, and futures in her loving care. Amid joys and challenges, we find comfort in her gentle reminder: "Do not be afraid. I am with you." Embrace her guidance as we embark on this new journey together.

The Mother Who Spoke at Guadalupe

More than four centuries ago,

in December 1531, the Blessed Virgin appeared to a humble Mexican farmer named Juan Diego on Tepeyac Hill, near present-day Mexico City. The people of that land were suffering deeply. The old native culture had been shattered, the new faith was still not understood, and many hearts



were filled with fear. Mary came as a sign of hope and reconciliation between heaven and earth, between faith and suffering.

When Juan Diego saw her, he was awed by her beauty and kindness. She told him that she wanted a church to be built on that very hill so that she might show her love and mercy to all who came to her. Juan Diego went to the local bishop to deliver her message, but the bishop asked for a sign to prove that the vision was real.

In the days that followed, Juan's beloved uncle became gravely ill. Distraught and anxious, Juan tried to avoid meeting the Lady, thinking he should hurry to fetch a priest. But Mary met him on another path and spoke to him with a mother's tenderness. Her words have become one of the most comforting messages ever given to humankind:

"Listen, my little one. Do not be troubled or afraid.

Am I not here, I who am your Mother?"

Those words changed Juan Diego's fear into faith. Mary then told him to gather roses blooming miraculously in winter and take them to the bishop. When he opened his cloak, the flowers fell out, and on the fabric appeared her beautiful image—the same image that is still venerated today in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Through this apparition, Mary revealed that she is not a distant queen but a loving Mother who stands beside her children when they are worried, sick, or helpless. Her message of compassion continues to echo across the centuries: *Am I not your Mother?*

Don Bosco and His Madonna

Centuries later, the same motherly love guided St. John Bosco, founder of the Salesians, who dedicated his life to helping poor and abandoned boys in Turin, Italy. He always relied on the protection of Mary Help of Christians, whom he adored with child-like trust.

One day, a five-year-old boy who was deaf and unable to walk was brought to him. His parents had hoped Pope Pius IX could cure him, but the Holy Father advised them to take him to Don Bosco. Filled with compassion, Don Bosco blessed the child and prayed with deep faith. Encouraging the boy to try to walk, he was amazed when the child took his first steps with his help.

Don Bosco then clapped his hands behind the boy, and to everyone's joy, the child turned his head and heard for the first time. "Now say after me, 'Daddy ... Mummy,'" Don Bosco urged. Miraculously, the boy spoke those words.

Overjoyed, the parents took their child to the Church of Our Lady to thank Mary for this miracle. When asked about the event, Don Bosco simply said, "We do things together—my Madonna and I."

This story illustrates a core truth of the Christian faith: Mary and her devoted children work together for souls. Don Bosco's trust in her intercession revealed God's mercy, showing that Mary never abandons those who call on her with love.

A Mother's Love That Defends

I once read in a newspaper a simple yet striking story that speaks of this same love. A wi-

dowed mother had a grown-up son who had fallen into drinking. He demanded money from her every day to buy liquor. When she refused, he became angry and sometimes beat her mercilessly.

One evening, his drunken shouting turned violent. The poor mother's cries were heard by the neighbours, who quickly called the police. When the officers arrived, everyone expected them to punish the man for his cruelty.

But to their surprise, the mother stepped forward and said,

"Why are you here? Nothing happened. My son sometimes drinks, but he did not harm me. Please, leave him alone."

Even in her pain, she defended her son. Her neighbours could not understand such mercy, but a mother's heart always seeks to protect, not to condemn.

That story reminded me of Our Blessed Mother, who stands before her Divine Son pleading for us sinners. When we fall into sin, we deserve God's justice, yet Mary stands between us and the punishment we have earned. She pleads with tenderness, "Lord, forgive him. He is still my child."

Her intercession does not excuse wrongdoing; rather, it wraps mercy around our weakness and leads us gently to repentance. Just as that mother forgave her son and hoped he would change, Mary believes that grace can still transform even the hardest heart. Through her prayers we find courage to rise again and begin anew.

She Is Our Mother When We Are in Trouble

From Guadalupe to Turin, and even in the simple home of a poor

widow, the message is the same: a mother's love does not give up. Mary's love is not sentimental but strong and faithful. She walks beside us in sickness, sorrow, and sin. When we are lost, she searches for us; when we are afraid, she comforts us; when we are ashamed, she still calls us her own.

Don Bosco once said that every good thing in his life began with a Hail Mary. That simple prayer reminds us that we are never alone. In our daily struggles—when we face family worries, illness, or disappointment—Mary whispers the same words she spoke to Juan Diego: *"Am I not here, I who am your Mother?"*

To honour her on **January 1, the Feast of Mary, Mother of God**, is to begin the year wrapped in her care. The world today is filled with noise, fear, and uncertainty, but her voice remains calm and sure. She points always to Jesus and says to us, "Do whatever He tells you."

Let us, then, welcome the New Year by placing our lives in her hands. Let us ask her to bless our families, comfort the sick, protect our youth, and bring peace to troubled hearts. And when we fall or fail, let us remember that she stands before her Son saying, "Forgive them, for they are mine."

Because she truly is.

She is our Mother—in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in sin, in life and in death.

And from heaven she still assures us with the same tender promise that has echoed through the centuries:

"Am I not here, I who am your Mother?" □



MY VOCATION STORY

BR. JULIAN SANTI, SDB

*Died in Chennai, India on April 30,
2017, at the age of 84
By Nallayan Pancras*

Br. Julian Santi passed away in Chennai, India, on April 11, 2017, at the age of 84. The Province of Chennai has lost a remarkable Son of Don Bosco with the sad passing of our dear confrere, Br. Julian Santi. He was a dedicated missionary who built significant structures and was a great friend to young people and the marginalized. Finding individuals like him is rare. He was the last in a long line of dedicated missionaries who served in our Province, giving everything for the glory of God and the well-being of young people and the poor. Br. Santi had been a Salesian for 65 years and spent 60 of those years in India.

Julian Santi was born on October 23, 1932, into a large family of nine children—five boys and four girls—in Castello di Godego, near Venice, where he was the sixth child. He maintained a close relationship with all his siblings and did everything possible to stay in touch with them. They cherished him and made every effort to support him and his mission in India.

Julian began attending the Salesian Institute at Colle Don Bosco on September 15, 1947, to learn the art of typography. He appreciated the environment of



Don Bosco's birthplace, which was rich in Salesian tradition. The "little house" of Don Bosco was only 200 meters away from his school. The atmosphere on the hill captivated him, and after five years of study, he decided to become a lay Salesian. He made his first profession on August 16, 1952. After this, he returned to Colle for another five years of formation.

In 1957, during a visit from a member of the General Council,

*"Act in every situation
as Don Bosco
would have done."
Br. Santi*

the visitor spoke to the young Salesians about Salesian missions in various parts of the world. After the meeting, during a private conversation, the visitor asked Julian, "Are you ready to cross the seas?" Julian, eager to embrace any opportunity, enthusiastically replied, "Yes."

At Chennai airport, he was welcomed by Fr. Pianazzi, the Provincial at the time, who accompanied him to Basin Bridge, where Julian began working in a local printing shop. When the print shop moved to its current location on Taylor's Road in 1968 and was renamed the Salesian Institute of Graphic Arts (SIGA), Br. Santi also relocated there.

From the time he arrived until his death, Br. Santi remained at SIGA. Notably, of the 60 years he spent in India, he dedicated 56 of those years to SIGA, serving as its Director and Administrator for 31 years. It would not be an exaggeration to say that he play-



ed a pivotal role in building SIGA almost single-handedly, transforming it into one of the most important printing institutes in India.

Br. Santi embraced the famous words that Don Bosco spoke to the youth of Turin: "I study for you, I work for you, I live for you, and for you, I am willing even to give my life." The young people at SIGA understood and appreciated his dedication, demonstrating their willingness to do anything for him. The hundreds of Br. Santi's alumni who attended his funeral, along with the thousands mourning his death across continents, testify to the



"Give him whatever punishment you want, but please don't send him away. If we expel him, where will he go? We are here to support troubled boys, not to push them out."
Br. Santi

authenticity and impact of his life.

Br. Santi's life left a profound impression on every student at SIGA. The secret to his success with young people was his approach to teaching, which he often shared with teachers and Salesians: "Be humble, kind, understanding, and listen to the students with your heart." He had a remarkable ability to connect with troubled boys through kindness and empathy.

Fr. K.J. Louis, the Rector at SIGA, exemplified this approach. On one occasion, a boy made a serious mistake, and the matter was brought before the House Council. The Council decided to expel him, but Br. Santi intervened. He urged the other council members, "Give him whatever punishment you want, but please don't send him away. If we expel him, where will he go? We

are here to support troubled boys, not to push them out."

As a result of Br. Santi's advocacy, the boy remained at SIGA, continued his studies, and has since become a good person, making a valuable contribution to the printing industry. This is just one of many examples that illustrate the deep love and understanding Mr. Santi had for troubled youth.

As a member of the Salesian religious community, he had a strong identity as a consecrated person, dedicated to serving God and others. He held a deep devotion for Don Bosco and was well-informed about his life and teachings. His simple advice to a young Salesian was, "Act in every situation as Don Bosco would have done." He demonstrated exemplary commitment to religious practices, consistently finding time for prayer amidst his busy schedule. He never compromised on this aspect of his life. □



IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

A Baby Girl

This particular Sunday, the Parish Priest was in a most effusive mood. He ushered the Smith family into the Baptistry and began the Rite of Baptism for the Smith's newborn child: "Dearly beloved brethren, let us dwell for a few moments on Destiny and what God has in store for this dear child. For who knows? - this child may become a priest, maybe, or even a bishop; one day, this may this may even be Pope. - And now, what name have you chosen for your child?"

Rather uncomfortably, the parents replied, "Amanda - Jane, Father!"

A Useless Customer

In a countryside town, the petrol station attendant burst out with "Here comes another IWW customer."

A Companion asked, "What is that?"

The attendant explained to him: "A motorish who wants only Information, Wind and Water."

The Thirsty Poet

The late Irish poet Oliver Gogarty had an insatiable thirst, and explained his philosophy in one sentence: "There is no such thing as a large whisky."

Financial Genius

"Father, what is a financial genius?" asked junior.

The father answered: "A financial genius, my son, is a man who can earn money faster than his family can spend."

Three Wishes

Three men lay dying in a hospital ward.

Their doctor, making rounds, went up to the first and asked, his last wish. The patient was a Catholic.

"My last wish," he murmured, "is to see a priest and may my confession."

The doctor assured him he would arrange it and moved on. The second patient was a Protestant. When asked his last wish, he replied: "My last wish is to see my family and say good bye."

The third patient was of course, a Jew. "And what is your last wish?" the doctor asked.

"My last wish" came the feeble, hoarse reply, "is to see another doctor."

Here is a wise observation

Though at first it may seem quite a dumb thing:

When you try to get something for nothing,

You often get nothing for something.

A Fine Trick

Smith: (over the phone) "Are you going to settle that account?"

Brown: "Not just yet."

Smith: "If you don't, I'll tell all your other creditors that you paid us."

They came Together

"They tell me your wife came from a noble old family."

"Not exactly came....she brought it with her." □

THE ACCOUNT

A man, concerned about the meaning of life, the Last Day, and especially the Final Judgement he would eventually face, had a dream.

After his death, he hesitantly approached the great door of the house of God. He knocked, and a smiling angel opened it for him. The angel invited him to sit in the waiting room of Para-dise.

The atmosphere was quite serious, resembling a courtroom. As the man waited, he grew increasingly intimidated.

After a while, the angel returned with a sheet of paper in his hand on which the word "account" was written at the top. The man took the paper and began to read: "Sunlight and the rustling of leaves, snow and wind, the flight of birds and the blades of grass. For the air we breathed and gazing at the stars, the evenings and nights..." The list went on and on.

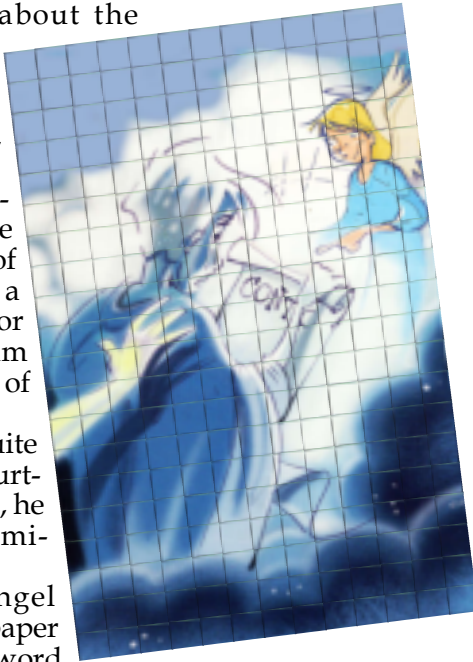
"...the smiles of children, the eyes of girls, fresh water, hands and feet, the red of tomatoes, gentle caresses, the sand on beaches, a child's first word, a snack by a mountain stream, the kiss of a grandchild, and the waves of the sea..."

As he continued reading, the man became increasingly worried. What would be the total cost? How could he possibly pay for all those wonderful things he had experienced?

As he read, his heart racing, God approached him and placed a hand on his shoulder.

"I offered you all of this," He said with a laugh, "until the end of the world. It was truly a pleasure!" □

God only knows the word 'gratis,' which means 'no charge.'



GRATITUDE FROM MARY'S LOVING CHILDREN AND THANKS TO DON BOSCO AND SAINT DOMINIC SAVIO

Our family has been fortunate to own two large properties in Bandra West. We successfully settled the smaller property just before the pandemic, and it is almost complete.

However, the larger property has faced significant challenges, unresolved even by previous generations. Since April, we have been praying the three Hail Marys and added a request for guidance concerning this property.

Inspired by the success of our earlier prayers, I sought the intercession of our Blessed Mother to help us find a developer of her choice. Just yesterday, with her blessing, we finalized the agreement for developing the larger property. The developer has been incredibly cooperative, fulfilling many of our requests, which reassures me that this is indeed Mother Mary's choice.

Denzil Gonsalvez

During a routine health checkup in June, my doctor discovered that my blood pressure was high and at the borderline. The doctors mentioned that if my blood pressure did not decrease, they would need to start me on medication for hypertension, which could lead to a lifelong requirement for medication.

I began praying to Mother Mary to help me overcome this lifestyle disease, especially since I have a family history of it. Last week, when I checked my blood pressure, I was thrilled to find it back to normal, and I no longer need any medication. *Elvis Pink*

Thank You precious Mother for the healing and the relief in my teeth, gums and mouth. I was having a lot of discomfort for a very long time. *A Devotee*

Sincere thanks to Mary Help of Christians and St. Dominic Savio for favours received.

Avina Fernandes

My daughter-in-law was unable to conceive despite going to the best doctors and undergoing several therapies. Thanks to Our Lady, Dominic Savio, St. Jude and St Anthony she delivered a healthy baby boy on 5th September 2025.

Mrs. S. Lobo

POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK

JANUARY 2026

For prayer with the Word of God

Let us pray that praying with the Word of God be nourishment for our lives and a source of hope in our communities, helping us to build a more fraternal and missionary Church.

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MARY IS ALWAYS CLOSE TO US

The Lord has placed Mary close to us. In His divine plan of creation and redemption, He intended for Mary Most Holy to be near us. She stands by our side, offers assistance, encourages us, and, through her spirituality, helps us recognize where we can find light and strength to follow the path of life.

When he was young, Father Maximilian Kolbe wrote to his mother from Rome, saying: "How many times in life, especially during the most important moments, have I felt the special protection of the Immaculate Conception! I place all my trust in her for the future..."

(St. John Paul II

L'Osservatore Romano, August '82)

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The magazine is sent to all who ask for it, even though there is a fixed subscription (Rs 200/- India & Rs 400/- Airmail)). We trust in the generosity of our readers/benefactors.

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

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