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***Grant, we pray,
O Lord, through
Mary's intercession,
that we, too,
may merit to receive
from the fullness
of your grace.***

*(From the Feast of the Presentation
of Our Lady)*

From The Editor's Desk

NEED TO BE NEEDED

As I write these lines, I can still recall some thoughts that came to me as I preached on the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time which fell on the 17th July. I was taken up by the two sisters Martha and Mary. The hospitality of that family in Bethany fascinated me. It was a very simple family and yet, the two sisters' style of hospitality is very different: Mary just sits in Jesus' presence, Martha wants to have everything right for him. Mary gives him nothing but her attention, Martha gives him everything except her attention.

The two sisters (we don't know where Lazarus was) had Jesus all to themselves. They could question him about things they might not dare to ask him in the presence of others. It was not a moment to be missed. But Martha missed it, through her very eagerness to have everything right for him.

It's so familiar not just in our families when I hear versions of it from wives and sometimes from husbands too and very often from young people, especially teenagers. One recognizes here a personality type called 'compulsive helpers,' who don't consider what you want but what *they* want for you. We notice it also in our religious communities. We too aren't spared the simple foibles of ordinary family life either.

Of course, no one knows how much of this applies to Martha, but it applies to people you and I know. This type of person needs to be needed, so they hover, meddle, and control; they want others to depend on them. They have a knack of making others look somewhat helpless. What they fear most of all is that they might not be needed, so any show of independence from you brings out the worst in them. Meanwhile they are peculiarly blind to their own motivation, and they feel overlooked and victimised by others. They need to be needed - but more fundamentally they need to be loved!

The story of Martha and Mary comes directly after the story of the Good Samaritan. No doubt Jesus saw her strengths, and he knew what remedy to apply to her shortcomings.

In the past there was an unfortunate tendency in the Church to see monastic contemplative life as a "higher" form of the Christian life. Every form of the Christian life is beset with its own problems. The ego is able to burrow in anywhere, and the contemplative ego is no better than the active, and frequently worse.

The besetting problem with contemplatives is that they can come to love their own interiority above all else; above their neighbour, and even above the Lord. (It was Thomas Merton who called contemplatives 'introverts') There is no hospitality there, but a terrible staleness; and this is the ego's trademark. For you never know where hospitality will take you. "Let me tell you, that to approach the stranger / Is to invite the unexpected..." (T.S. Eliot)

Fr. Ian Douulton, sdb

THE HEAVY IMPACT ON REAL LIFE

by Bishop Gianpaolo Dianin

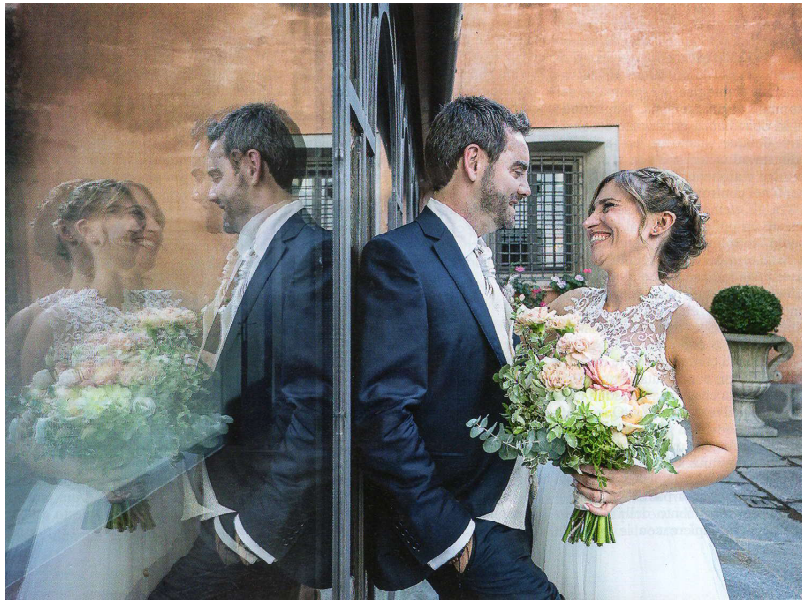
"Despite many years of engagement," many young newlyweds say, "marriage is something else! Everyday life is indeed full of gifts and joys, but it is also difficult and challenging"

No engagement, no matter how well lived, obliterates the challenge of the first years of marriage. Not that the rest of married life runs smoothly either, but the first years are a delicate season because they are the time of joy and enthusiasm, of being able to live together and realise dreams and projects that have been cultivated for so long, but they are also the time of the maturing couple's 'gestation' period.

Pope Francis writes: "It is all the more essential that couples be helped during the first years of their married life to enrich and

deepen their conscious and free decision to have, hold and love one another for life" (AL 217). And he adds: "Often the engagement period is not long enough, the decision is precipitated for various reasons and, what is even more problematic, the couple themselves are insufficiently mature. As a result, the newly married couple needs to complete a process that should have taken place during their engagement" (AL 217).

Pope Francis is right when he reminds us that something may be missing in the engagement,



but it is also true that there are challenges and transitions that can only occur when one is immersed in married life. That is why we started by saying that no engagement, no matter how seriously and deeply lived, can eliminate the challenges of the early years.

This awareness can offer a sense of serenity when the two young spouses face this period while experiencing the grace of new beginnings. This can make the journey smoother. The Italian Bishops wrote: "The first years of marriage are rich in resources because they are the years of enthusiasm, of the joy of seeing each other made for each other, of the serenity of an intimacy sought and lived with balance, of the joy of realising projects and dreams cherished for a long time, of the opening up of new perspectives also in terms of growth in the faith, of the joy and responsibility connected with procreation" (CEI, Directory of family pastoral work, no. 101).

Here are some of the challenges that every young couple faces and on which the growth and maturation of a solid and mature couple and family depends. The first is linked to the impact of real life, which begins with marriage and is marked by everyday life that is full of blessings and joys, but also difficult and challenging. Despite many years of engagement, many young newlyweds say, marriage is something else.

After marriage, there is joy, but also the fatigue of getting that life project, dreamt of and elaborated during the engagement, off the ground. In a more concrete way, the diversity of the two emerges

in defining priorities, the diversity of expectations, the fatigue of managing concrete conjugal life and taking care of relations with the outside world. There is a long process of integration and communion to be taken care of; one touches with one's own hand those character limitations that, sometimes a little naively, one thought unimportant because they were easily overcome.

Couples need to grow in their ability to communicate with each other in a profound way, learning to open their souls, to express their experiences with their emotions and expectations. It is not just a matter of talking, but of sharing those emotional experiences that weigh heavily even when these concern small and trivial things in family life. Nor is bodily and sexual communication taken for granted because intimacy requires time and patience. Communicating also means developing the ability to make decisions together without absorbing the other's diversity into one's own presumed truth.

Being able to ask the other person: "How are you?" without pretending to have it all figured out, is important. But so is taking the first step by saying: "I would like to tell you how I am feeling right now." It takes little to rekindle a somewhat dull flame, just a small step towards the other person to put everything back in its right place.

One of the burdens of real life is the time to be together, which nowadays is very little, so issues that can create conflict are often postponed or put aside and misunderstandings can escalate. When both work, when one

comes home in the evening tired, when days often repeat themselves, even small things can become burdensome. What is needed is the creativity that can focus on the quality of the time shared as quantity may be low.

What is most exhausting, is the management of what we can call interim conflicts, whereby it happens, for example, that communication is either perfect or we

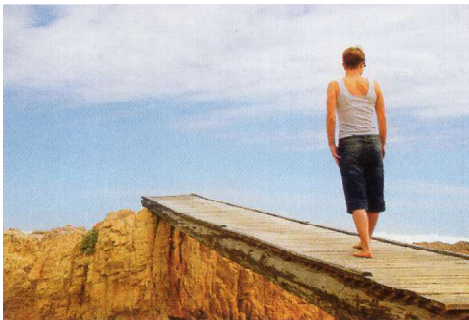
don't know how to communicate; we either tell each other everything or we are not honest? Accepting imperfection, reluctance, my own and my partner's limitations is so important. It is not the big issues that make the couple falter, it is often daily life with its small, but no less painful, conflicts. The impact with real life is there for everyone, in every life condition and vocation. □

THE GREAT CHASM

A man who was always dissatisfied with himself and others kept grumbling to God and saying: "But who said that everyone has to carry his own cross? Is it not possible that there are no means to avoid it? I am really fed up with my daily burdens!"

The Good Lord answered him with a dream. He saw that the life of men on earth was an endless parade. Each one walked with his cross on his shoulders. Slowly, but surely, one step after the other. He too was in the endless procession, and he struggled forward with his personal cross. After a while he realised that his cross was too long and that was why he was struggling to make progress. "It would be enough if I shortened it a little, I would struggle a lot less," he said to himself, and with one decisive cut he shortened his cross by a good chunk. When he started off again, he realised that he could now walk much more quickly and without much effort, he reached what seemed to be the destination of the procession.

It was a ravine: a wide gash in the ground, beyond which, however, the "land of eternal happiness" began. It was an enchanting sight to be seen on the other side of the ravine. But there were no bridges, no footbridges to cross over. Yet people passed over with ease. Each one took the cross off his shoulders, placed it on the edge of the ravine and then walked over it. The crosses seemed tailor-made: they fitted exactly over the two edges of the precipice. They all passed, but not him: he had shortened his cross and now it was too short and did not reach the other side of the chasm. He began to cry and despair: "Ah, if I had known..." □



THE PRESENTATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

by Luigi Melotti

Mary's presentation at the Temple is narrated by the apocryphal Proto Gospel of James, circa 200. According to this text, Mary was presented at the Temple at the age of three. It is a legendary tale, devoid of any historical foundation. And yet, scholars today attach great importance to the apocrypha, because, as Father G. Roschini wrote, the apocrypha "can undoubtedly serve to know the mentality, the piety of the environment and the time in which they were composed, with regard to the Blessed Virgin, the very high esteem that people had of Her, the veneration with which She was surrounded, the faith that was nurtured towards Her because of the singular power of Her intercession."

Therefore, according to G. Garib, in the New Dictionary of Mariology, for the East, the Presentation of Mary in the Temple has substantially the same value as the celebration of the Immaculate Conception has for the Western Church. They are two complementary celebrations that honour Mary's holiness and her lifelong belonging to God. Mary, destined to become the Mother of God, is the true Temple in which God has placed salvation.

Let us now reflect on the Readings that the Liturgy has chosen for this Memorial:

First Reading: Zechariah: 2,10-13: "Rejoice, exult,

daughter of Zion, for behold, I am coming to dwell among you...". This text, along with others, especially Zephaniah 3:14 ff, exhorts the Daughter of Zion to rejoice, to exult, because the Lord comes to dwell in her midst. The Daughter of Zion was the northern quarter of Jerusalem, which comprised the "Remnant faithful" to God, that is, the poor (in Hebrew: the *anawim*) who put their trust in God alone. The evangelist Saint Luke puts into the mouth of the Angel the same words as Zechariah and Zephaniah 3:14 ff, addressed, this time, to Mary. This means that Mary personifies in an eminent way the Daughter of Zion. Mary sums up in herself the biblical images applied to the Daughter of Zion.

To honour Mary, the All-Holy and fully of the Lord, the living Temple of the Lord from the beginning of her existence, is to honour her who personifies the Israel that awaits the Messiah, that



accepts him when he comes.

Gospel: Mark 3:31-35: While Jesus is speaking to the crowd, his mother and some relatives arrive. The announcement comes from Jesus, who replies that his family is larger and that what counts above all is not blood and kinship, but obedience to God's will. "Turning his gaze to those who were sitting around him, he said, 'Behold my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God, this is my brother, sister and mother'". In the Liturgy of the Hours of 21 November, we read St Augustine's commentary on this gospel passage. He asks: 'Did the Virgin Mary not do the will of the Father...? She did, yes, she certainly did the will of the Father, and therefore it counts more for Mary to have been a disciple of Christ than to have been the Mother of Christ'. This text from Mark therefore prevents us from placing Mary's greatness solely on a biological level: without taking anything away from this greatness, we must seek it also and even more in her obedient faith, in her holiness.

The three prayers

Let us now look at the three particular prayers of the Mass of this memorial: **the Collect (the first prayer, the one preceding the Readings):** we pray to the Father so that, through Mary's intercession, the People of God "may share in the fullness of... grace".

Mary full of grace! Mary's holiness is also emphasised here. What we ask in this memorial is to participate in the fullness of grace. We cannot fail to recall Paul VI here: "Devotion to the Mother of the Lord becomes for the faithful an opportunity for growing in

divine grace, and this is the ultimate aim of all pastoral activity. For it is impossible to honour her who is "full of grace" (Lk. 1:28) without thereby honouring in oneself the state of grace, which is friendship with God, communion with Him and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit." (MC no. 57).

Prayer over the offerings: Faith in Mary's perpetual virginity is reaffirmed: Jesus, "being born of the Virgin did not diminish, but consecrated the integrity of the Mother," and one asks to be freed "from all guilt."

"While in the most holy Virgin the Church has already reached that perfection whereby, she is without spot or wrinkle, the followers of Christ still strive to increase in holiness by conquering sin. And so, they turn their eyes to Mary who shines forth to the whole community of the elect as the model of virtues" (LG n. 65).

Prayer after Communion: Here, we pray to the Father that, following Mary's example, "we may faithfully co-operate in the mystery of redemption".

With her Fiat, the Council reminds us that Mary "devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son, under Him and with Him, by the grace of almighty God, serving the mystery of redemption." (LG no. 56). Mary, Mother and Cooperator of Christ! In the final prayer of this Mass, we ask, following her example, to cooperate faithfully in the mystery of redemption. Don Bosco said this in simple form: "Save yourself by saving others." "It has pleased Him (God) to bring men together as one people, which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness." (LG n. 9) □

GRACE IN MEDIOCRITY

by Anastasia Dias

Hey, are you ready? It's the big day, today!" his colleague yelled out to him. "What big day?" he asked, confused. "Don't you remember?" was the reply he received. He shook his head. He couldn't remember anything significant happening that day. "You'll see what I'm talking about." That was the voice of his colleague, gulping down a huge glass of milk.

His life was pretty uninteresting or so he thought. He was living in a foreign country. He had no family there. The only reason he worked there was service to the Empire. After all, they had posted him there.

He'd gone out a few times with his colleagues, who were from his place. He'd tried doing things they told him to do, assuring him that they'd have 'fun.' But, after trying all the things they told him to do, he realised none of it was 'fun.' In fact, he felt worse than he did before. So, he stopped going out with them.

He tried to recollect what his colleague was talking about. There had been a lot of things happening in the city. A lot of noise: screaming, yelling, name-calling. There had been a riot too. He tried to rem-

ember. Yes, it had been centred around a man. The local leaders wanted to get rid of him.

With all this in mind, he started wolfing down his breakfast. His job involved executing criminals of the state, those whom the local leaders thought dangerous as well as those whom the Empire considered enemies. When he first joined, he couldn't sleep for nights after he'd executed someone. Now, he was getting used to it.

Today would be no different, if the man had to be executed. His colleague sensed what he was thinking and whispered, 'It's different today. The man's a miracle-worker. He has a huge following. That's what these people are threatened by. But the Empire has nothing to do with Him.'

Miracle-worker, that's the last thing he needed to hear. There was enough of reality that had hit him hard and he had no time or energy to believe in miracles. He finished his breakfast and walked with his colleague to the Chief's office.

"No news yet. Be on guard. You will be alerted once the man is sentenced." Both the soldiers waited outside the Chief's office.



An hour passed. Another went by. Then, two other soldiers joined them and said, "Hurry up. We've got to go to the hill-top. They're bringing Him in."

They climbed up the hill. The crosses had been fixed, three of them. There was a huge crowd, in the distance. Screaming, swearing, sobbing. He breathed in and braced himself for what was to come. Nothing new. I've done this before, he reminded himself.

Three crosses meant three criminals who'd committed unforgivable crimes. Two out of the three made it there first. Their clothes were removed and he nailed them to their crosses. The third was coming, he could see Him.

Ahead of him were other soldiers, who were mocking him, spitting on his face and slapping his cheeks. "So typical of these bullies," he thought.

As the man came closer, his colleague said, "I'll take care of him." He nodded. The man was in agony. And his face was so badly battered that the soldier couldn't even make out how he looked.

The other soldier nailed him to the cross and raised it up. The man whispered something, underneath his breath, "I thirst." The other two soldiers thrust a sponge in sour wine and then shoved it to his face.

There were men and women weeping at the foot of his cross. The other soldiers continued to mock at him. He could see the Jewish leaders in the crowd, pleased.

The man let out a huge groan. And, he died. Suddenly, there

was an earthquake. The soldier was literally thrown backward to the ground. He looked up and he saw the face of the man covered in blood, set against the heavens.

The soldier found what he had never even thought was missing in his life. Grace.

This is the popular story of the soldier, Longinus, who was converted at the foot of the cross. You see, Longinus had been living a mediocre life before he encountered Christ, at the foot of the cross, the most unlikely of all places to find grace.

He wasn't looking for grace, he was used to the mediocrity. But Longinus discovered grace.

Sometimes, the things we find and the things we discover are things we weren't even looking for. Right?

We've had tumultuous relationships and we've stopped looking for love. But we find love in a person we never even looked out for. We've failed several times and given up. But we try one more time and boom! We find success in a place of despair. We almost gave up on life. But we rediscovered our purpose in a place devoid of hope.

This is what you and I find in the most unlikely places, at the most unprecedented of times.

When we're used to the mediocrity, when we stop looking out for things; we find grace.

As we approach the end of this year, let us remind ourselves that no matter how big our problems seem, there is always grace lurking around the corner. I am sure, like Longinus, you and I will find grace when we aren't searching. □

MARCELLA ORSINI

THE SALESIANS FOR YOU!

AFTER THE TYPHOON

The revival of Salesian works in the Philippines in the aftermath

On 16 December, the Philippines was hit by one of the most powerful and destructive typhoons in recent years, Super Typhoon Rai, locally called Odette, which swept through 38 provinces with average winds of 195 kilometres per hour, with peaks of up to 270 kilometres per hour, and was accompanied by rain so heavy that it caused flooding and landslides.

The government estimates that Rai Odette completely destroyed 370,000 homes and damaged and rendered uninhabitable 980,000, almost 8 million people were affected by the natural disaster, and about 500,000 were internally displaced, people forced to leave their lands and homes of origin due to the loss of all resources. The number of deaths was just over 400, but nevertheless, from the testimonies of humanitarian workers and Salesian missionaries on the ground, we have seen that its impact was far greater than the official numbers indicate.

Salesians in action

There was little media attention given and government figures did not seem to call it a "humanitarian emergency." But international solidarity was needed to reduce the dramatic impact of the catastrophe so that vulnerable families in distress, left without a roof over their heads could have the possibility of returning to productive activities of subsistence.

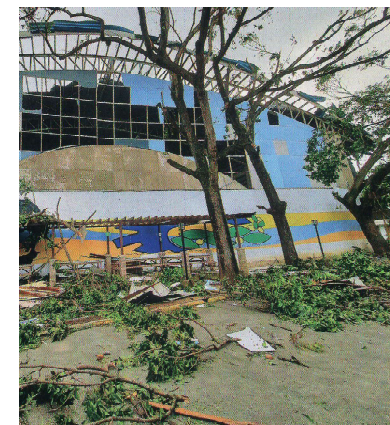
Although it was difficult to

reach the people in the poorest areas the Sons of Don Bosco in the Philippines and the entire Salesian family immediately provided relief through distribution of food and drinking water and they were soon engaged in post-emergency reconstruction.

The Salesians of the Southern Philippines Province (FIS) told this office that the Don Bosco Technical College in Punta Princesa, in the city of Cebu, was among the most damaged works and required the intervention of Salesian organisations around the world to resume activities for the girls and boys most in need.

Watchword: rebuild

Since February 2022, the Salesians of the Southern Philippines Province, through the PDO Planning and Development Office, have been engaged in the planning and coordination of the post-emergency reconstruction



work scheduled to begin in April, establishing priorities and feasibility on the basis of aid from international solidarity.

The medium-term objective is to rebuild and make the educational and training spaces of the damaged Salesian works functional again, the long-term objective is to recreate integrated, post-emergency rehabilitative pathways to recompose a balanced and healthy life order for girls and boys in distress, for their families and for the entire communities of the territories affected by the pandemic and the natural disaster.

During these two years of the pandemic, the Salesian Family had rallied around the most distressed populations to the ends of the earth, and today we want to help rebuild the damaged Salesian works in the Philippines with the same spirit of rebirth that comes from the very vocation of the Sons of Don Bosco, aware that suffering opens the doors of hope.

Brutal blows

We asked Leah Samson of the Southern Philippines Province DOT, coordinator of Salesian solidarity for post-emergency reconstruction efforts, to tell us how strong the need is for girls and boys to return to 'normality', in a time of suffering both from the Covid19 pandemic and the Rai Odette disaster.

In Cebu, online classes resumed at the beginning of February 2022. Teachers started to hold online classes again with their damaged homes. This is still the case for a good number of students, torn between studying and

their families' need to repair their homes.

"Our boys and girls are desperate to return to their classrooms," Leah Samson tells us, but even though in-person classes will already be allowed by the government this school year (which ends in June 2022), it will first be necessary to carry out repair work on the damage to the schools.

In these conditions of lack of access to education and training, the Salesians and the PDO in the southern Philippines were asked to make an effort to adapt, which they do, in an exemplary manner, through some subsidiary activities of great value for inclusion.

The typhoon disrupted communications and destroyed the utility grid in some homes. Even today, not all students can be connected to the Internet, but some Salesian facilities, which have remained accessible, have been made available to teachers for the recording of entire teaching modules that can be accessed by the children when the logistical and structural conditions are right. Teachers also continue to print out teaching materials and personally go to distribute them wherever they are needed, so that no one is left behind.

No aspect was neglected. The school organised individual guidance and counselling sessions for students suffering from emotional and psychological distress and, if necessary, these were extended to parents. In addition, in situations of greater fragility and need, the Salesians make home visits to students who need to be looked after individually or who are experiencing a specific difficulty. □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



ST. JOSAPHAT OF POLOTSK (November 12)

Ian Pinto, sdb

The East-West Schism

It is a sad fact that there exists tension and factionalism within the Church. The tension that I am referring to is not the good tension of alternative viewpoints and approaches to a common goal but genuinely opposing styles of interpreting the Gospel, understanding the Church and defining what it means to be Church. You must be familiar with the two principal forces that exist within the Catholic Church today; they are commonly referred to as the Conservatives and the Liberals or Progressives. Although these terms are generally used to categorize the viewpoints of the Bishops in the upper echelons of Church hierarchy, they are also used as labels for distinguishing Catholics of one ilk from another.

This is seemingly absurd because we profess to believe in One God – the Father, Son and Spirit, in One Lord Jesus Christ and in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. And yet, we seem to understand each of these tenets of our faith so differently. Difference is indeed the spice of life but when differences become subversive then life gets a bit too hot to handle.



The Church is not new to differences of opinion within her ranks. It has been happening since the earliest days. In Acts 15 we find an interesting account of difference of opinion in the early Church. There arose a debate among the Christians with regard to the necessity of circumcision for salvation. We have to remember that the early Christians were mostly Jewish converts and Christianity in the initial

stages was considered to be a sect of Judaism. Paul and Barnabas, among others opined that circumcision was not necessary for salvation. On the other hand, a majority of others including the apostles held the contrary belief. After hearing both sides, the council of Christian leaders that had gathered there decided that it was not necessary to be circumcised in order to be saved; what was necessary was accepting the salvation offered by Jesus, abstaining from participating in pagan rituals and idolatry and living chastely.

While the early Church was successful to a great extent in keeping the flock together despite differences, the latter Church began to struggle to have the same influence. Perhaps it was the presence of the apostles that made the difference. Whatever be the reason, as the centuries rolled by the divisions in the Church began to become more and more evident. In 1054, things blew out of proportion and a major division occurred in the Church. It is known as the East-West Schism. The East refers to the Churches of Eastern Europe and Africa with their centre at Constantinople while the West refers to the European Churches with their centre in Rome. Tensions between these two had been brewing for quite a while. There were a number of factors that went into effecting the break – politics, culture, language and theology all had roles to play. The last one – theology – was the final nail in the coffin. Eastern theology understood the Holy Spirit as proceeding from the Father through the Son while the West taught that it was from the Father and the Son. This is popularly called the Filioque controversy and

was the direct cause of the schism. From then onward we have the Eastern Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church.

A child is born...

Over five centuries after this great division, around the year 1580, Ioann Kuntsevych was born in a part of the Polish Kingdom that falls in present-day Ukraine. Ioann's family were devout Christians who were generous with their wealth and service. From a young age, Ioann displayed prodigious talent. He took a fancy to reading and developed his faith through the reading of spiritual classics. However, it wasn't until later on in life that he really took a serious interest in his faith. He became acquainted with a certain Josyf Rutsky, who was a Calvinist convert to Catholicism. Rutsky earlier came under the Latin Rite but chose to join the Byzantine Rite. He was a strong proponent for uniting the Eastern and Western Churches.

He made a big impression on Ioann who was a young adult at that time. Ioann decided to join the monastery of the Trinity which belonged to the Order of St. Basil the Great. At his profession as a monk, he took on the name Josaphat. He fitted into the monastery like a surgeon's glove. He began to make great progress in wisdom and spirit. After a while, news of his sanctity began to spread around town. He became a priest and was appointed Prior over several monasteries. In November 1617, he was ordained Coadjutor Archeparch (bishop) for the Archeparchy of Polotsk. He took over as Eparch in March the following year.

A Man of harmony

Josaphat used his office to encourage people to accept the union with Rome. However, his first and biggest opponents were priests and monks who feared that the identity and tradition of the Byzantine Rite would be lost under Roman influence. But Josaphat was not one to be daunted. He struggled to win over people by renovating Churches and introducing practices to build up piety. He developed a catechism, composed rules for the priests and appointed deacons to ensure that the rules were adhered to. He organized local synods in the various regions of the eparchy and stood up against political interference in Church matters.

Josaphat never forgot his monastic identity. He lived as austere as before and followed all the practices of piety and asceticism required of a monk. His appointment as bishop did not influence his lifestyle in any major way. He was still every bit the devout monk who professed the vows and desired to follow Jesus radically. He thus led by example and the people took notice.

But matters took a turn for the worst when the orthodox fundamentalists elected a rival set of bishops. The rival bishop of Polotsk wasted no time in spreading rumours that Josaphat was intending a total Latinization of the Church. Unfortunately for Josaphat, the Latin Catholics also turned on him because of his insistence on the continued use of the Byzantine liturgy. The issue became political when the King got involved and ordered for the imprisonment of the fundamentalist leaders and bishops. This caused violence to

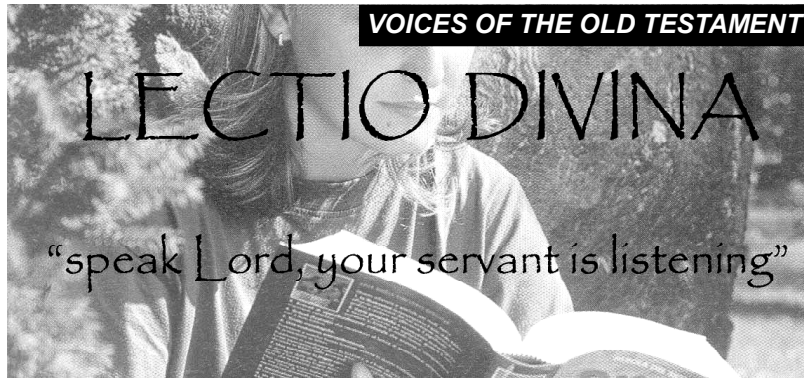
erupt and chaos descended.

Josaphat recognized the danger to his life but continued to carry out his duty unafraid. At a sermon he openly declared, "You people want to kill me. You wait in ambush for me in the streets, on the bridges, on the highways, in the marketplace, everywhere. Here I am; I came to you as a shepherd. You know I would be happy to give my life for you. I am ready to die for union of the Church under St. Peter and his successor the Pope."

One evening a mob trespassed his dwellings and began to beat his friends and servants. With shouts of "Kill the Papist," they struck Josaphat with a stick, then an axe and finally killed him with a bullet through the head. His body was dragged to the river and thrown in, along with the body of a dog who had tried to protect him.

These brutal events turned out to be instrumental in bringing about the union with Rome that Josaphat so desired. The very bishop who had slandered Josaphat now pledged allegiance to Rome. For his heroic life and brave sacrifice, Josaphat became the first saint of the Eastern church to be formally canonized by Rome!

What we can take from Josaphat's life is that unity and harmony are very valuable and necessary for society, even more so for those of us who claim to be followers of Christ. The Church today continues to be plagued with divisions and we need to pray and work for unity. The unity octave is celebrated every year in January, usually from 19th-25th. Let it not be something that remains on paper but a real movement that brings us together as one family. □



VOICES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

LECTIO DIVINA

“speak Lord, your servant is listening”

LIKE WATCHFUL SENTINELS

by Carlo Broccardo

The words of the prophets may be harsh and not very pleasant, but the purpose is to make those who are doing wrong realise their error and change. Not words of condemnation but of warning

It was some time ago that we made our acquaintance with the prophet Ezekiel: exiled among the exiles, from the plains near Babylon he had addressed a word full of hope from God to his fellow sufferers: Jerusalem is now destroyed, but all is not over, for God will make us return home, will revive us (cf. Ez 37).

Today we meet Ezekiel again; but in a different context. It is not yet the prophet who has to encourage a depressed people; it is rather the sentinel who has to warn his fellow citizens when he sees that the enemy is approaching. Let us imagine that we are in a small fortified town or in a camp; we know that there are enemies around us, but not whether they will attack us, let alone when they will do so. Our life goes on, as usual; but for safety, one

of us in turn must stand on the walls or on a raised place to keep watch. As soon as he sees a suspicious movement in the distance, he immediately warns the rest of the people so that they are not taken unawares by the attack.

This is the task God gives his



prophet, Ezekiel: to warn those who are in danger, so that they can run for cover. But it is not so much a military danger (they have all already been defeated by the Babylonians), but rather a moral one, one of behaviour.

Let us take one step at a time, to understand well the words of today's passage. The Lord God wants us all to have life, and to have it in abundance; but he leaves us free to make our own choices. If we want to do the opposite of what he tells us, he leaves us free to make mistakes; but he does not resign himself, he does not say: Patience! Too bad for them! But in every way, he lets us know that we are doing wrong. This is what sentinels are for: to warn us that danger is near; this is what prophets are for: to warn us that we are going the wrong way, that if we continue like this, we will meet death. The words of the prophets can be harsh and not very pleasant: "You wicked ones, you will die!" But the purpose is to make those who are doing wrong realise their error and change. They are not words of condemnation, but of warning.

It is not easy to correct those who are doing wrong. First of all, we must be careful not to fall into the temptation of acting as censors, that is, those who feel invested with the task of criticising everything and everyone, pointing the finger and pointing out every flaw and slightest error of others. We are not asked to be the devil's advocate, always ready to demolish what others build; but rather we are called to be God's advocate, that is, to suffer with Him when someone is on the wrong path and to invite him to

The word of the Lord came to me: "So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked man, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way; he shall die in his iniquity, but you will have saved your life." (Ez 33, 1,7-9)

return to the right path. It takes courage, because sometimes we receive backlashes; but it also takes tact, patience, a firm kindness.

The sentinel sees better than others, because he stands on high; he hears the word of the Lord in advance, because he is proficient in listening and completely focused on the word of God. It is necessary to invoke the Spirit from on high, to be good watchmen. It is necessary to invoke the Spirit of wisdom and intelligence, that He may open our eyes, ears and hearts to recognise the will of God, that is, that it is right; and that He may help us to speak only the words that are needed and when they can do good.

We are not the vigilantes of the night; we are servants of God and his plan for our lives. We are ordinary people, also in need of the Lord sending us someone every now and then to set us straight, to tell us if we are doing wrong. Humility is the first virtue of the sentinel, lest it happen to us - Jesus would say - you see the mote in the other's eye and not realise that there is a beam in your own. □

Quiet Spaces

THOSE WHO STARVE CHILDREN

Pope Francis' homily (edited) at Domus Sanctae Marthae on Monday, October 23, 2017

The Holy Father described 200,000 Rohingya children and all those suffering from hunger today, as being victims of the “idolatry of money which makes ‘human sacrifices’ because this idolatry causes many people to starve to death”. During his homily at Santa Marta on Monday morning 23 October, he said that no one can remain indifferent before these “starving children” who have no medicine, have no education, who are abandoned. The Holy Father warned against the “God of money” that also destroys families who fall into the trap of greed, of personal interests.

“This Gospel passage begins with an inheritance and ends at the gates of another inheritance”, Francis explained, referring to the day’s reading from the Gospel according to Luke (Lk 12:13-21). Jesus “clearly warns: ‘Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions’”. Jesus then goes on to tell the parable of “a rich man who finds himself before the abundance of his harvest and does not know what to do”. But “two actions come to his mind: to expand and to extend”. In other words, the Pope said, he decides “to expand the storage barns and in his dreams, [thus] extend his life: ‘so I will be at ease’, but hands off the harvest; everything must be stored because that money is his god”, the Holy Father continued.

“He expands in order to make more room for his god and he lengthens his life to worship that god in his fantasy: he is a slave of that, isn’t he? He does not know completion”, Pope Francis stressed. Jesus continues his parable saying that the man “continued to gather more goods, more goods and more goods until the point of nausea”. Therefore, the Holy Father asked, “how does this man reason?”. Luke’s passage provides the answer: “he thought to himself: ‘My soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry’. In other words, live the good life, all for yourself, with your god: eat, drink and enter into that exasperated consumerism [which] does not stop, knows no limits”.

However, Pope Francis pointed out, “God sets the limits”: “God said to him: ‘Fool!’ . – How many times is the word ‘fool’ used in the Gospel? – This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have stored up, whose will they be?” In response, the Pope observed, his wealth will end up in the hands of his heirs who will fight over those treasures considered to be like a god.

“This Gospel passage begins with an argument over an inheritance and will end with another argument when the nephews and all these will come: we know what will happen”, he added. But it is “God who puts a limit on this attachment to money”. That “man becomes the slave of money is not a fairytale which Jesus invents: this is the

reality” also today, he stressed.

There are “many men and women who live to worship money, to make money their god: many people who live only for this and life has no meaning”, Pope Francis said. ““So is he who lays up treasure for himself’ – says the Lord in the Gospel – and is not rich toward God””. In reality, the Holy Father said, “they do not know what it means to be rich toward God”.

Pope Francis then shared a personal story. “I remember some years ago, in the other diocese, a case which greatly impressed me: a great and very wealthy businessman had a similar attitude. He had cancer. He knew it. He only had a few more days left to live. In that last week of his life, he was thrilled about a villa and he bought a villa. He thought only about this. He was locked in that thought. When I saw this, I was taken aback. He did not think about the following week when he would have to stand before God”. Even today, he continued, there are “many people, many of these people who have so much”. “Let us just look at starving children who have no medicine, have no education, who are abandoned”. “This is idolatry, but it is an idolatry which kills and makes ‘human sacrifices’ because this idolatry causes many people to starve to death”, he said.

“Let us think about only a single case: [there are] 200,000 Rohingya children in refugee camps. There are 800,000 people there, 200,000 of them are children. They barely have enough to eat: malnourished, without any medicine. This still happens today. It is not something that the Lord says about those times. No, today!”, Pope Francis stressed.

Because of this, “our prayers must be strong: Lord, please touch the hearts of these people who worship... the god of money. Also touch my heart so that I may not fall into that, that I may be able to see”, the Pope prayed. He then spoke about another consequence: “There is war, always, here, family war. We all know what happens when an inheritance is at stake. Families become divided and end up hating each other”.

Pope Francis ended his homily by referring back to the Gospel narrative. “At the end [of the passage] the Lord gently stresses: one who is ‘not rich toward God’”. “That is the only path: richness, but in God”, the Pope affirmed. However, he continued, this is “not contempt for money, no. It is truly covetousness as he says, covetousness”. It is “living attached to the god of money”. Concluding his remarks, the Pope urged that “our prayers must be strong today, these days when the media shows us many, many calamities, many injustices; let us just think of the children: Lord, may you convert the hearts of these people, that they may know you and not worship the god of money”.

A WOMAN'S SMILE

By Pierluigi Menato, Tr. Ian Doulton, *sdb*

Even at eighteen, she was not beautiful considering how youth at this age simply blossoms. But she was liked, because of her mild and amiable manner, her smiling face and that transparent aspect of a great inner serenity in her eyes. Somehow an atmosphere of friendliness exuded around her wherever she went.

Alex also realised this and one day, without any preamble he blurted out: "You're positively the girl for me. With my temperament so prone to pessimism, to despondency, I need a creature beside me who smiles and shows me the good and beautiful side of things, the poetry of life, and who in every storm points out the rainbow for me. Do you want to?"

Martina did not say no, on the contrary, she was happy to welcome, with love, a sweet soothing mission to one who had just chosen her to share his life forever.

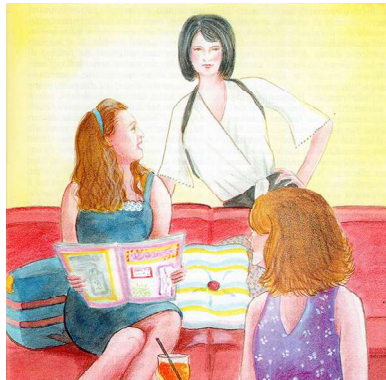
In the early days of the engagement Alex felt her close, active and precious. Everything, shared with her, was much easier and more joyful, seen in a new light of a healthy optimism and hopeful goodness.

"Martina, how do you possess such balance; you're not yet twenty? And tell me, will you be able to smile like this tomorrow too, when both of us will not live like all fiancés do, in a fervent dream, but in the daily reality of serious duties, of family tensions, perhaps even hardships, already foreseeable because of the precarious possibilities of my earnings?"

"Alex, after thinking about your question...let me tell you realis-

tically, about it tomorrow. Will reality, however harsh and painful, be less beautiful than the dream, if we continue to love each other as we do today...more than today? It is love, only a love that's tested by trials, that is very precious and most replenishes us to live heroically."

She herself was a little astonished and dismayed by his words, as if they aroused in her soul a sudden, strange presentiment that she really had to translate into action, nourishing love at the price of maybe losing it. But it was the uncertain shadow of a cloud that was immediately dispersed by the radiance of the sun.



One afternoon Susie and Vanna, Alex's sisters, together with their friends filled the living room with chitchat, sipping a drink and munching pastries. They exchanged rather trivial news: fashions, impressions of cinema and Netflix serials in vogue and the repetition of wise-cracks and gallant banter about the opposite sex. Suddenly putting a new topic on the agenda was Wilma, beautiful and vain, she

pulled out of her bag with a mysterious air the latest very interesting issue, she said of a women's magazine.

"Guess what!... News that I can't keep from you because it's too good! But yeah, you wouldn't have missed it anyway. My photograph is published as one of the prize-winners in the 'Smile Contest.' I was not the first by a few points, but to be *among* the first is a real achievement...". She laughed happily, displaying a perfect set of white teeth between red lips.

"Oh!... let me see." Everyone was around her with childish curiosity, stealing the magazine from each other. And it was the dominant theme for the entire afternoon; observations, comparisons, criticism: this photograph was better than that one; the first runner-up was not such a beauty: she could have done better among so many beautiful competitors... But you know, there's politics everywhere. Wilma, however, was beautiful and...lucky.

It all ended in a resounding applause and the impetuous playing their favourite soundtrack, which the sudden appearance of Alex, with his sullen face, suddenly suspended. "Are you crazy? For a good three hours I've been waiting for this hornet's nest of chatter to subside and allow me to concentrate my work, but apparently the opposite is happening. It's beginning to get dark you'd better leave."

Susie, annoyed at the intrusion, bitterly scolded her brother: "Why do you meddle in our business?" Well, take care of your friends. Get out!"

"Shut up, everyone!" Wilma raised her voice but then said softly flaunting a contrite expression. She

stepped in before the young man. "Alex, the fault is all mine, and this magazine that has stirred up such a commotion. But we didn't think we were disturbing you so much. Will you excuse us?"

Appeased by this, Alex held out his hand to her: "Thank goodness that we can see sense!" Without a second thought, Wilma smiled at him. Their eyes met and it only took a moment for her resplendent beauty to strike him. "My, she's wonderful!" he thought, unperturbed.

Later that evening when they had all gone, crossing the deserted living room where a thin trail of perfume lingered, he spotted the magazine on the coffee table, among the empty cups. He picked it up, flipped through it absent-mindedly, thinking back to Wilma, and was surprised to see, as if by a sudden hallucination her face appeared among so many other faces of smiling girls from those pages.

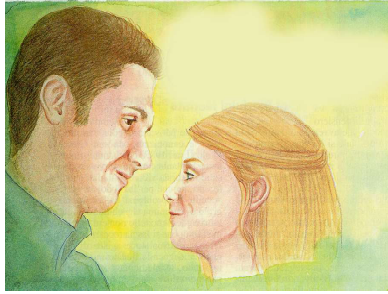
Name, surname, address, prize awarded to the "beautiful smile..."

"Flirtatiousness," Martina would have called them with her directness, dangerous incentives to female vanity. She used to say: "If we girls were pious and serious, everything would be better."

Strange, however, that now Martina's face, in an ideal comparison with Wilma's, suddenly appeared insignificant and faded, her hair too straight, without soft undulations, her cheeks often pale, her lips without the prominence of lipstick. Even the sweet and good smile that had won him over now disappeared almost colourless, without charm.

Did he not have good taste? Or was he too hasty in his choice?

The encounter with a female beauty now disturbed him. Wilma,



Wilma...

He tried to banish the thought of her without succeeding. In the following days he longed to see her again, to hear her voice again; he called her and asked her to come out for a simple afternoon stroll.

They saw each other, and that was the first of other meetings, which day by day drew Alex into this spell of a new love.

Martina, too intuitive not to assume the true reason for that sudden change in Alex, was astonished and distressed. Above all, she was hurt by Alex's attempt to deceive her by concealing his relationship with someone else. Why pretend? Better to be clear and sincere in these matters.

She wanted to dominate the impulse that would have compelled her to a cold and disdainful repulsion, to speak to him with firm dignity and gentleness, without rancour in her heart and on her face, although something inside her was tearing, dissolving into a tormenting disappointment. She asked him to be fair without being afraid of hurting her, if he could deduce from the new choice that he had made, the possibility of a greater happiness for his future.

And that was all.

Alex, superficial and flippant,

could not grasp the generous delicacy of those words, nor assess the full measure of love that inspired them: a true love, driven to overcome selfishness to the point of self-forgetfulness and ready to pay entirely with its own sacrifice for the good of the beloved. "As long as you are happy, Alex, don't be afraid that I'll get hurt...". The wound was cruel and it ached terribly. But Martina could still smile at him through her tears.

The romance with Wilma seemed rosy. Flattered by Alex's courtship, favoured in every way by his condescension that was tinged with weakness, Wilma was a picture of exuberance and hilarity, as if all her joy stemmed from feeling herself an object of admiration, placed on the pedestal. As a smile graced her, she made it an art of conquest, worrying more about pleasing Alex than herself.

The first shadow arose between them when he realised that, apart from the worship of her own beauty, nothing else interested Wilma. With an impressive lightness she evaded any serious and conclusive conversation. How could he regale her with so many things that mattered to him, confide in her plans and hopes concerning his career, the preparations for his marriage, share his anxieties and difficulties?

Sometimes he tried to do so: "Look, Wilma, put that fashion magazine aside for a while: you have already studied it enough; let's talk about our things...".

"Go ahead, I'm listening."

"No, you are not!"

"Is it necessary to hang on your lips to understand? Actually, I'm very anxious to choose a summer outfit to be delivered to the tailor

in a couple of days."

"And let's go for the pattern!"

He grew nervous, pacing the room, not knowing how to hide his impatience. Eventually, he would reluctantly settle down in his armchair, scanning the newspaper or watching television, resigned to saving his confidences for other appropriate moments.

The months passed were interspersed with storms and serenity.

One day they found themselves in completely opposite moods: she beaming at her intimate, secret consolation, he taciturn and dejected.

"What's the matter, sweetheart, why that funereal air?"

Wilma seemed in a tender mood.

"Do you really want me to tell you?"

"Of course. I too have news for you, but the good stuff comes last. So, what's up with you?"

Unfortunately, my supposed promotion at the bank to office manager fell through... A real bummer! To think that I'd been counting on it for a year, both because I thought I deserved it and because I needed to supplement my income in view of my wedding. How am I, in my condition, going to buy you a nice house and a life with as little hardship?"

"The comfortable life... a nice house.... Of course, I would want them. But Alex, for now there's no hurry."

"What do you mean, no hurry?"

"This is precisely what I wanted to tell you: a magnificent project. All that remains is that you don't come in my way, and that you just be patient and trust me. It will be just a matter of time, because I too will have to work my way through

it, but in the end, you will thank me for having freed you forever from a financial burden."

"You? Make your way? What kind of talk is that?"

"Just listen to me."

And Wilma, all bright-eyed and full of verve, told of her lucky break at a friend's house, with an impresario and a director, who agreed that she was delightful, very photogenic and had brilliant screen credentials; so much so that they would have gladly set her up as a film 'star.'

She went on, "I'm a *star*, you see? The dream long cherished, which I never hoped to fulfil; fortune almost assured, perhaps glory...".

Alex listened to her in disbelief. A deep bitterness clutched at his soul from the very first words of that agitated speech. Not a single thought, not a single expression of comfort for him who had just so trustingly confided in her. The ever-dominant self, her own beauty idolised, to the point of sacrificing everything to her without regret, even love, that fatal love, of which he had deluded himself and which only now was revealing itself to him with the cynical and petty face of selfishness.

Ah!... that smile of Wilma's, how it now exasperated him!

He did not even try to dissuade her from her insane project, nor did he want to express his thoughts to her about 'stars,' which, ninety-nine out of a hundred, are not made to light up the house, nor to shine in the orbit of the domestic hearth. With some exceptions, Wilma gave no assurance that she could be part of the small number.

"Don't you have anything to say to me?" she asked, annoyed by that hermetic silence.

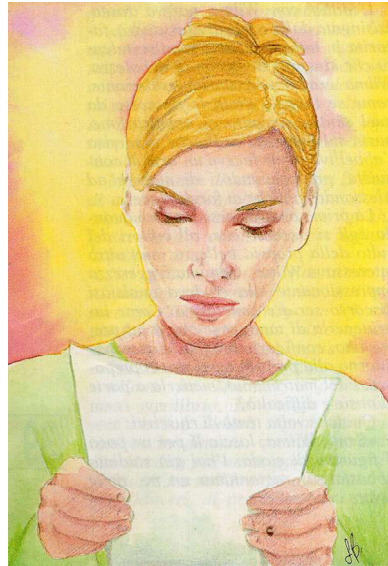
"Nothing. Suit yourself."

A registered letter had arrived for Martina it was from her first love. Alex's handwriting, startled her.

Should he reject her? By now everything was over between them and no thread, however tenuous could reconnect them to the past. Even if Alexa was in pain? What other reason could give her the key to the enigma?

She waited for the anxiety in her heart to quiet down and the will to be generous to sustain her. With trembling hands she took out the paper that said: "Do not be surprised, Martina; it is really me: that foolish Alex who made you suffer so much because he was not worthy of you. If I write, it is not only to ask you to forgive me, if you can, but also and above all to ask you to be fair. Because, you too are a woman, and in your feminine fragility, though endowed with strength, you may feel disheartened, maimed by the apparent contempt of a man who rejected you. But this man, believe it or not, allowed himself to be blinded by the charm of a beauty believed to be true, by the ephemeral light of a smile that, obscuring yours for a moment, vanished like a fatuous fire, leaving him disappointed, alone and lost, in the darkness of the descending road. It is good that you know this, Martina, lest the youthful melancholy of not being beautiful assail you, so much so that you too, for example, could compete for a prize awarded to the 'beautiful smile' ... No!

You are not photogenic, you cannot be photogenic if your smile is merely an expression of an inner beauty that has a name of goodness



and loveliness, and cannot be captured by the lens. The one who has been able to grasp it instead, and doubly appreciate it after a sad experience, is I, who have a nostalgic desire and need for you, for your serene and unalterable sweetness, which silently comforts, revives, sustains, and is the fruit of an intimate strength that is communicated, of a humility that is forgotten, of a patience that endures, of a love that is lavished with everything. What else is a woman's smile worth if it does not spring from these purest of sources? Too late I have understood it, at the cost of my disappointment and your pain, and I know, for this, I deserve nothing. Yet, my Martina, I dare to only hope. Alexander.

Outside, the May sun was shedding its warmth to the homes and gardens while children and grownups were all looking forward to a lively summer filled with fun and frolic. □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 34

by Michele Molineris

172. The days of the Inquisition are over (1868)

Once, in 1868, Don Bosco found himself on a train facing a passenger who loudly defended a priest who, according to him, had been unjustly punished by the bishop, and added: "The days of the Inquisition are over; the priest is now a free citizen too. Who gave the bishop the right to suspend him from Mass?"

Don Bosco interrupted him saying: "You know, that that right given to the Bishop, was given to him by Jesus Christ himself; and if the bishop suspended him, he must have had his reasons. And who appointed you as a judge of the successors of the apostles?"

"But I am told that that bishop is not like the others. He abuses his power and is an enemy of liberty."

"Please answer me: has the bishop forbidden many others from celebrating mass?"

"I do not think so. Only to that one." "And can you tell me why he does not take that privilege away from others?"

He was not able to reply clearly. He just mumbled a few words, and Don Bosco added: "Because all the other priests do their duty!"

Then lowering his voice, so that those around him would not hear him, he went on: "As for your protégé, he knows that the bishop suspended him because he was not one of those priests who frequents the church, he does not sit in the confessional, he never ascends the pulpit. If you want to find him, go to the cafés, you will see him in

cheerful company. He wears clothes unworthy of a minister of God. He was already warned several times by his bishop to change his ways, but he did not obey but did went from bad to worse. And do you, my good sir, take up the defence of such a person? Would you consent to this wretch ascending the altar to offer the divine sacrifice? If so, I would not add another word, for I would be certain that I was not speaking to a Catholic."

He remained quiet for a few moments and then went on: "But I don't really know that priest. What I said is only what I heard from several friends of mine."

"Therefore," Don Bosco concluded, "be more cautious when you speak, specially against prelates of the Church to whom we should owe the greatest respect. You should be aware that they know their business more than we do and they do it conscientiously." (M.B., IX, 76).

173. Every promise is a debt (1868)

Don Bosco recounted this on 27 June 1868: There were two of them, husband and wife in Turin. They had a fortune of several million and yet, after about 25 years of marriage, they had no children. Being very distressed at being forced to leave their inheritance to people outside the family, they had asked the Lord in vain for that grace, through prayers and pilgrimages.

They finally presented themselves to Don Bosco and begged him to give them the blessing, promising that if they were granted it, they would offer the Oratory and the church a substantial sum. Don Bosco encouraged them to live good Christian lives and indeed a

robust, healthy little boy was born to them, who was a delight to behold. They visited Don Bosco, gave thanks, but said nothing about the fulfilment of the promise. Don Bosco did not fail to remind them and that very well-to-do couple excused themselves from the obligation, making excuses.

"I see nothing I can do in this affair," concluded Don Bosco: "Your ingratitude will have its appropriate worthy reward. Remember well, the one who gave you the child, will be able to take him away from you." In fact, a few months later, the child taken away, it died of a mysterious illness.

The parents, overcome with grief, went on for an entire year without visiting Don Bosco. Finally they returned to him, confessing their guilt and begging for another blessing and renewing their promises. Don Bosco was moved by their tears and gave them some salutary advice and promised to pray for them assuring them of the grace they so desired. They did indeed have a second child, but this time they did not even think of going to the Oratory and forgot the boys of the Oratory and Valdocco completely.

Don Bosco waited more than a year and then went to visit them. They received him a little embarrassed and when he came in to say that no one jokes with Our Lady, they declared that bad years, huge taxes, extraordinary expenses and some losses that they had suffered had depleted their income: so they could give him nothing.

Don Bosco withdrew, convinced that such shameful avarice would not go unpunished. And lo and behold the boy fell ill. They ran to call on Don Bosco; but he did not want to go to that house. The child

died and the colossal inheritance passed to those to whom those parents did not want to leave it.

Don Bosco used to often repeat that the generosity and selflessness of the poor is generally what obtains for them the most amazing graces; while it takes extraordinary efforts to convince certain rich people to make some considerable sacrifice (M.B., IX, 298).

174. He doesn't confess voluntarily (1868)

On 4 September 1868 Don Bosco spoke to the boys as follows: "A few days ago at the hospital there was a woman, seriously ill, who did not want to go to confession. The danger of death was growing and they suggested she call Don Bosco. She replied: "All whoever you like; I will not go to confession."

Don Bosco went and when he arrived the sick woman was told: "Don Bosco has arrived."

"When I get well, I will go to confession." "But Don Bosco will heal you." "Let me get well, then I will go to confession."

"Then holding a medal of Mary Help of Christians with a string attached to it, I held it to her. The sick woman took it, kissed it and put it around her neck. The bystanders wept with emotion at the gesture. I asked her how long it had been since she had made her confession and then, she made her confession. With I had finished, she said to me: "How is it I was able to make my confession whereas a little while ago I did not want to at all?"

"Even I don't know," I answered her; "See, it is Our Lady who wants you to be saved." And I left her with exemplary Christian sentiments." (M.B., IX, 338).

175. A unique contract (1868)

The love of money is more deeply rooted in the hearts of the rich than in those of the poor. An 80-year-old lady, very rich, infirm, already comforted by the sacraments, was full of fear at seeing her death approaching. She sent for Don Bosco one day, to ask him for the grace of recovery.

"Yes," Don Bosco replied, "Our Lady will give you the grace, provided you are prepared to make a generous offering to the church being built in her honour at Valdocco."

"And how much must I give?"

"Whatever you wish; see to it yourself. I cannot fix the amount of the offering. Give a sum that, without great inconvenience to you, is really in proportion to your ability, and in such a way that it can be called a sacrifice. "What would you suggest?" "I repeat what I have already told you. Let Our Lady know that you are making an offering with love and selflessness. She understands well that, in this state, as there is nothing more to hope for from men, everything must be expected from God. Consider the severity of your illness and your advanced age. The one who thinks that one is on the point of leaving everything, may well sacrifice something in order to keep everything." "But I would not know what to do for your church." "Since you want my advice, I'll tell you that you could take charge of building an altar in the side chapels." "And how much would this altar cost?" "I cannot tell you exactly, but I think between six and eight thousand lire." "Eight thousand lire is a bit too much; I can't." "I told you what I thought, because you asked me to. I don't

know your finances; do what you can. Even if you give a penny and it is proportionate to your wealth, Our Lady will grant you the grace." "All right; I'll think about it."

Don Bosco left that house with a bad feeling, because of the avarice he had found there.

Meanwhile, the old lady's illness plummeted towards its end and two of her cousins came to visit Don Bosco. She had neither children nor grandchildren to whom she could pass on the inheritance. After the preliminaries they got down to business.

"Forgive me, Don Bosco, but doesn't the sum of eight thousand lira seem a bit steep to you?"

"What do you mean?" "That we have come to beg you on behalf of the lady to grant her the grace for a lower price... a more honest price."

"My good people! Don't you understand that it is not I who beseeches, but Our Lady? I propose nothing, neither eight thousand lire nor one hundred thousand. I only said a word so to speak, because I was begged to. Besides, what is even a hundred thousand lire to a rich woman like that? And do you still want Our Lady to grant such a miserly heart such an extraordinary grace as that of her recovery at that age and in that condition? In any case, the lady is free to do as she pleases; however, from this moment on, I'm longer having any part in it."

Those surprised relatives wanted to object, but Don Bosco gently dismissed them. The next day the old lady died, leaving everything to strangers, for not wanting to give a part of it for a good work (from M.B., IX, 578). □



WHO IS MY MOTHER?

by Pier Luigi Giuducci

Introductory note

The pages of the Gospel are not a news bulletin written to capture flitting attention. Rather, the facts narrated express the Word of God which is continually striving to communicate the Eternal and the Salvific.

This emphasis is important to understand, for example, why no less than three evangelists report an episode where the Jesus-Mary relationship seemed to some to be more an image of relational distance than an example of real filiality.

In this regard, it is worth reviewing the entire dynamic.

The visit of Mary

In the text of Matthew (12,46-50. Cf. also: Mark 3,31-35; Luke 8,19-

21) an interesting fact is reported.

Mary, together with some relatives (called "brothers" according to custom), reach Jesus while He is already busy in His ministry.

The Son is surrounded by several people listening to Him. So, the Mother - and some of those who accompanied her - choose the most practical solution. Not to interrupt the meeting, but to let Christ know of their arrival.

Jesus' response and its historical context

The information reaches Jesus. But he, in turn, replies in a unique way: "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" Then, with his hand He points to His disciples and says: "Behold my mother and behold my brethren; for whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, is my brother and sister and mother."

With this response in mind, it is necessary, in the meantime, to extrapolate some evangelical data.

The first element that strikes one is the historical setting of the response.

Mary is described as the one who does not stay locked in, but

rather

walks the paths of her Son's ministry in order to share His missionary condition.

This means that the Mother's visit does not mark an attempt to selfishly capture an intimacy seemingly effaced by Jesus' specific vocation, but represents a desire for communion within history. That is, participating in a common journey; an arduous exodus. In this context, the response of the Son, who is well acquainted with His mother's steps (cf. e.g., John 2:15; and 2:12), appears visibly inspired by a pedagogical logic addressed to the group of listeners, and not directed to Mary.

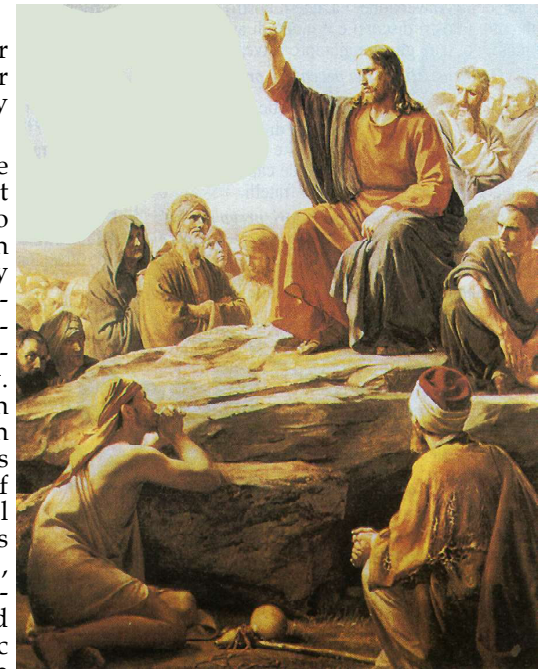
The pastoral setting of the response

It is therefore necessary to deepen the pastoral positioning of the response.

Jesus goes on to develop, through many different encounters, a teaching that has at its base an unequivocal conclusion: whoever chooses the Kingdom must accept a totality of adherence to the Father who is in heaven.

This statement has an essential function in the preparation of the disciples.

Christ, in fact, must gradually make them change their way of



"Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" Then indicating with his hand and pointing towards his disciples he said: "Here are my mother and my brothers. Because anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Mt 12:48-50)

thinking so that they will then change their way of acting.

From a triumphal vision of the Kingdom, it is necessary to lead them to the idea that the earthly experience is only a phase, a "passage." And that this particular instance will soon signal the way of the Cross.

Jesus, therefore, is necessarily demanding. The disciple, in order to bear witness, will have to know the evangelical meaning of the grain of wheat that dies in order to then bear fruit. And to achieve this preparation a whole

reflection on the consequences of every vocational 'yes' is inserted.

From this comes a clear message to those present (sometimes too bound by prestige, rights of precedence, respect for formalities, etc.) and - at the same time - a re-emphasis on the meaning of the Messiah's Presence itself.

Thus, the logic of the Incarnation comes back into focus. And within this logic, the Mother's role does not structure an insistence on her son to demand public recognition, but is simply the transmission of an affection that is such, precisely because she knows how to stay "out of the way" (Mt 12:46).

Therefore, the Mother, is not She who dominates. But she is the one who stands beside. And at certain hours of Salvation even a brief message of presence can secretly communicate the caress of the heart.

The Placement of the Response in the Purpose

At this point, then, the understanding of Matthew's passage acquires a dimension of truth that is a teaching for all.

The Mother conveys a totality of sharing. Begun with the Annunciation and carried through to a Church on its journey.

Christ responds with a filiality that is authentic precisely because it marks autonomy.

Every birth decrees a detachment. But not an estrangement or a rupture of affection. On the contrary, it is in the growth of the subject that the decision to love in the freedom of the will is ex-

pressed. And this also happens in the filial relationship that Jesus establishes with Mary.

The mission of the Son is in concrete terms the most obvious expression of detachment. But, along with this, it is also the harbinger of profound communion.

Because the first communal relationship is not born through a declaration of sentiments, but from holding 'inside' the heart the most cherished realities. Those that cannot be told. Those that sometimes need not even be revealed. Because certain intentions do not respect compulsory explications. But they go, first of all, into the fruitfulness of spiritual union.

Mary is in the Life. Mary knows that her Son's presence always exists. That is why, one day, she will not need to go to the tomb to ascertain the authenticity or otherwise of certain words of her Son (cf. e.g., John 20:1 ff.).

Summary notes

The passage from the evangelist, recalled here, concludes with the key to understanding the entire dynamic: doing the will of the Father is the unifying element of every Christian experience, and therefore of that great family of Jesus that will be the Church.

It is a non-personalistic message that leads, once again, to the characteristics of the Good News: "everything" is written in function of a common benefit.

"Everything" is transmitted so that the universal and salvific mission of Christ remains clear. □



SARAH LAPORTA

MY VOCATION STORY

"I'M DON BOSCO IN KOSOVO"

Fr. Oreste Valle, sdb

How did your missionary vocation come about?

As a boy I was an avid reader of missionary biographies. During high school, I was fascinated by the likes of Fr Cagliari, Fr Fagnano, Fr Lasagna, Fr Balzola, Colbaccini, Versiglia, and Caravario. In the parish of San Paolo in Cagliari, where I was, everything was going well. One day in May I was ready to celebrate Mass at 6pm, the provincial told me he had to speak to me after Mass. He attended Mass. He explained to me where things stood and gave me a page with the names of those I would be leaving with, and the programme to be followed from 13 June until I left in mid-December.

How did you end up in Kosovo?

What I think today, after reflecting on the history of the communities of Ijeli and Betafo in Madagascar, where I have been, 'too much generosity' in work, in a climate that is not always favourable, with an unlimited willingness to meet unquestionable needs, wears you down and exhausts you. I had to return to Italy after a year or so. Back in Italy, for about two years I took care of the Salesian Cooperators in the FMA houses. When I recovered, on 6 January 1992, the Visitor of Sardinia Fr Giuseppe Casti, informed me that the Rector Major had had a request, personally from Pope John Paul II, to

start two presences in Albania. It was an invitation I accepted.

Salesian work in Albania has developed rapidly. The Salesians from Slovenia had worked well in very difficult situations for 32 years, when the Salesians from the southern province took over from them.

I spent three beautiful and fruitful years as assistant pastor but it was not appropriate for us to keep the parish and we anticipated the bishop's request, handing it over to the diocesan clergy. When this happened, Fr Pierfausto Frisoli came on an extraordinary visit in November 2008, with a mandate from the Rector Major to sound out the possibility of creating a new Salesian presence in the Balkans. The situation seemed favourable, and so on the first of October 2009 Fr Dominik Qerimi and I, he from Tirana and I from Pristina, moved to Gjilan to start the new work.

What is the work in Gjilan like?

Gjilan is one of the seven districts (provinces) of Kosovo. In the southeast. It borders Macedonia to the south and Serbia to the east. The city has a population of approximately 70,000. Almost on the border with Macedonia, in a village called Letnicé, there is a shrine dedicated to the Assumption, which is very dear to today's Catholics, not least because Mother Teresa of Calcutta said she had her

first call there. In 1846, a very zeal-ous 'Catholic' who wanted to make a career, made life difficult for his fellow Catholics, and because they did not deny the faith, he sent several hundred of them prisoners to Turkey. After two years, about fifty returned home and they are at the origin of the Catholic faith in three parishes: Letnicè, Binq and Shtubéll. They are 1300 Catholics, very proud of their roots and very fervent in these three parishes. In Gjilan, when we arrived, we found only one baptised person. At various times others received baptism. But now of those only about ten keep some contact with us.

At that time, people felt a great need to live in peace and harmony and Kosovo was held up as an example because the three monotheistic religions lived in peace and collaborated in social works (e.g., the Mother Teresa Association distributed basic necessities to thousands of people). In Gjilan, there were a few mosques, an Orthodox cathedral and no signs referring to the Catholic Church. So, 263 intellectuals wrote an open letter asking civil society in general and the Church in particular for something that referred to the third recognised faith in Kosovo.

What are the young Kosovars like?

In Gjilan we have a pastoral project that includes a middle and high school, an oratory, a religious service for the small Christian community, help for the priests of the area because they help us and because we have the opportunity to meet the Catholic pupils of our school. Each year there have been about



20 of them. Most of the pupils come from Muslim families who enjoy a certain economic well-being that allows them to pay the fees. The vast majority are good and committed, also open to dialogue and easy to create a serene and cheerful environment.

The two big problems, common to both groups, are first of all the desire to emigrate, to escape from Kosovo because 'there is no future here': if you want to work, live in peace, earn a living, study well, have a family and a future, you have to emigrate. And then the religious choice, which cannot be questioned.

Here, a young person who begins to think seriously about his deepest, most human problem, looks around, does his research and his assessments on the 'market of religions'. Here this is not possible! It is all too clear that much of the individual malaise is a consequence of religion, but this



IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Oh, so humble

A Texan oilman some years ago was taking part in a charity drive.

At a large banquet he rose to his feet and said:

"Mah name is James R. Robinson, and mah nickname is Jimmy. Ah have a ten thousand acre ranch and mah brand is JR. Ah run ten thousand barrels of oil a day and ah own outright the Robinson Oil and Gas Company. Ah have a ten thousand dollar blue Cadillac outside, and in it, in gold, are mah initials, JRR. Ah like this charity and ah want to give ten thousand dollars - ah - nonymously!"

Too heavy a price

A Naval recruit lost his rifle on the firing range.

When told that he would have to pay for it, he proteted: "Suppose I was driving a Naval truck and somebody stole it, would I have to pay for that too?"

He was informed that he would have to pay for all Government property he lost.

"Now," the recruit said, "I know why the captain always down with his ship."

Not weaker by any means

King Solomon was taking a walk in his gardens one evening when he spotted two butterflies talking to each other. One was a male butterfly and the other female, husband and wife.

The wife was telling her husband: "See that palace of King Solomon over there. With one flap of my wing I can knock it down. You want me to do it?"

The wise king who understood the languages of the birds and insects, was shocked at this threat. So he ordered his courtiers to capture the female butterfly.

"Did you, or did you not say such and such a thing?" the king questioned the butterfly.

"Did you or did you not say such and such a thing?" the king questioned the butterfly.

"Yes, Your Majesty, I did say that."

"And how did you dare to utter such a proposition?"

"Your Majesty, I didn't really mean it. My husband is always boasting of his strength and bravery, and I just wanted to impress him with my words. How could I ever cause any damage to your mighty palace with my tiny wing?"

Solomon was a very understanding judge. He pardoned the butterfly and allowed her to return home.

The poor husband was weeping in a corner, wondering what terrible punishment his wife was undergoing. In flew the wife, humming merrily.

"Was he harsh, didhe whip you?" asked the sorrowful husband.

"Nothing of the sort," stated teh wife. "The king actually fell on his knees and begged me not to do-it." ☑

ONE LAST THOUGHT

GIVING OF OUR PRECIOUS TIME

Aideen Clifford

It was Bob Geldof that great man and the Bono who used their pop music image to galvanise the performers of the world with Live Aid. He raised a considerable sum for alleviate world hunger. They could easily have thrown a few thousands here and there and go about their merry ways, but they did not. Instead, he took up the challenge presented by international debt, huge debts owed by countries whose people are broken by poverty and ravaged by disease. He presented his case before presidents, prime ministers and international leaders. Though his views may be considered simplistic by many and his efforts might not have been wholly successful, his sincerity cannot be questioned.

What is our idea of charity?

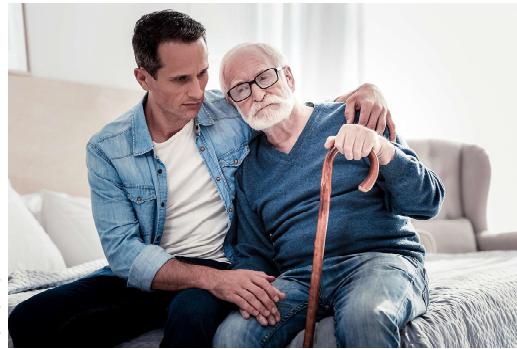
All this and much forces us to examine the ideas we have about charity. Do we, for the most part, equate it with giving, physical giving, dropping a few coins or writing a cheque? Of course we are aware that virtue has wider parameters, that it encompasses the whole world of our attitudes towards our neighbours. You are a decent person and you think have to live and support a family and work to earn your keep. So, you don't kick up much trouble, don't bitch too much about the neighbour, don't

wish harm or ill luck to anyone, don't forget to make an appearance at funerals etc. Then on the positive side, you contribute to worthy causes and you're not slow to put your hand into your pockets. But are you? What about the "charity of time"? How generous are you with your time? You've heard employers tell employees 'time is money' but charity is time too. Perhaps more costly.

My time is precious

In today's cult where the individual is 'respected' one's time is precious. How often have you heard about 'My space, My day off, My privacy, My family time, My night in, My holiday. No interference brooked. How difficult then to give up the day off and go to see that former colleague in that old folks' home.

Much easier send her flowers or a card or buy her a present next Christmas – that won't interfere too much with me and my own time. What about asking in that



recently bereaved friend? No, that's my night for myself.

What about this: Could you spend the day listening to someone? On my holidays? You aren't serious. Or that hard-luck friend who needs a night out, so babysit for her? Giving up my night? Answering the many needs of those bold kids? No thank you. Easier to give them a decent present when their birthdays come around.

More costly to give of one's time

It is more costly on oneself to give of time because it means putting oneself out, discommoding oneself, putting aside for a while the needs and comforts and indulgence of oneself and thinking of someone else. Giving money to charity rarely means going without or having less for oneself. But it helps to salve one's conscience at times. After a day's shopping, 'retail therapy' for luxury items, what better way to assuage any guilt feelings than to throw a note into the Concern box proff-

ered outside on the street. Charitable yes, you are a giver. Easy enough though, far easier than spending a morning going round the shops at a snail's pace with a barely mobile senior citizen – someone who loves shopping but cannot manage on her own. Not easy, because it means putting oneself out, relegating ME to second place.

One would not wish in any way to down play the importance of contributing to the many worthy causes that are around today, as the need is always there for support for the hungry the homeless, the sick; indeed, the magnitude and the multiplicity of those very needs in themselves have forced us to equate charity with monetary donations. Few of us can do little else for such enormous problems as world famine, few are in a position of making the generous gesture of joining organisations that work in the troubled areas abroad but all of us could perhaps be more giving of our precious time. □

THEY ARE GRATEFUL TO OUR LADY AND DON BOSCO

Thanksgiving offered to Our Lady and St. Jude for the special favour bestowed on Marilyn and Suzan for resolving an issue.

Marilyn Carvalho

I'm very grateful to our dear Mother as she granted the grace to my grand daughter to pass in her 10th exams after reciting 3 Hail Mary's for this intention.

Jesilda

POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK

NOVEMBER 2022

For children who suffer

We pray for children who are suffering, especially those who are homeless, orphans, and victims of war; may they be guaranteed access to education and the opportunity to experience family affection.

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THE END OF MAN

Your purpose in this world is to love God and save your soul. Yet many people think of everything else except saving themselves. If I tell a young man that he needs to frequent the Sacraments or to pray a little every day, he tells me: I have other things to do, I must work and enjoy myself. Oh God! And have you no soul? Therefore, whatever you do, say, or think, see to it that it is for the good of your soul, for it would be very imprudent, a great risk to think seriously about things that end soon and to lean very little towards eternity that has no end. Even if I become a great man and very rich, even if I become a famous philosopher and know all the arts and sciences, mechanics and music, what good is it to me if I lose my soul? All the wisdom of Solomon will profit you nothing if you are then damned.

Don Bosco to His Boys

Don Bosco's Madonna, has developed to its present form from a folder published in 1937, by late Fr Aurelius Maschio, on behalf of the Salesians of Don Bosco, Bombay.

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

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

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