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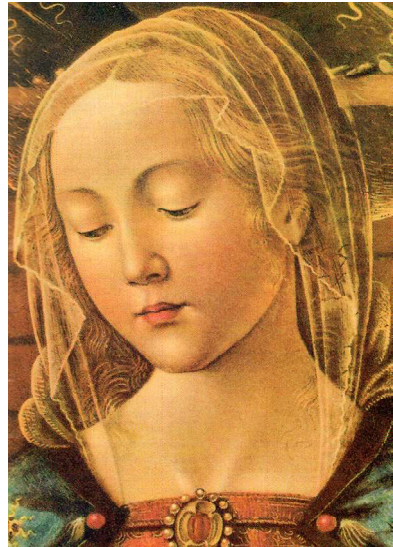
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*Grant, we pray,
O Lord,
that we may
so honour
the mysteries
of your
Only Begotten Son,
as to be made worthy
of his promises.*

*(From the Prayer on the Feast of
Our Lady of the Rosary)*

From The Editor's Desk
CHEWING THE CUD, ALRIGHT

In the course of my chats with several young people, more especially seminarians what comes up is this restless dissatisfaction about the topic of prayer. They seem very apologetic and even mention it in confession. Probably prayer is one of the most important things we do as Christians. Yet it is often the activity we feel least confident about and for which we are in need of the most encouragement. It can be a joyful and strengthening activity where we deepen our relationship with God, nourish faith and through the transforming power of the Spirit grow in Christlike qualities.

I realise that all of us individuals as we are, have our own modes of praying. Some like vocal prayers, others prefer a quieter type of prayer which might start with a short reading of a passage from one of the gospels or a psalm. Never be afraid to experiment with variety in your prayers. I always hold that wise principle which is: pray as you can and never sit in judgment on what happens.

Remember the Prophet Elijah? He hoped his encounter with God would be dramatic like an earthquake or a huge fire and God surprised him by revealing his presence in a gentle breeze that blew across Elijah's face as he emerged from the cave.

Prayer invites our loving surrender to the mystery of God. It is not our attempt to bridle and muzzle God as if we had the power to tame the mystery of God. It is rather, allowing ourselves to be addressed by that gentle breeze of his word, a word of encouragement, assurance, forgiveness. Whatever it is, it is well worth listening with patience.

What can be more restful than stopping on a country walk and watching some cows chewing the cud? They chew slowly and pensively, without any rush or anxiety. Any distracting flies are swept away with a quick flick of the tail. Perhaps this can be a good parable for our prayer. We need to graze on God's word and then recall and savor repeatedly that with which we have been freely nourished. Swish away those distractions and do not let them hinder you from your main purpose.

Someone once wrote that: "If we are generous in giving time to prayer we shall experience its benefits throughout our lives." It will give depth and quality to our various activities. If we cultivate the habit of listening to God and of being true hearers of his word in prayer, this will spill over into our lives. We will be enabled to listen to others, to heed their cries for help, their anxieties and sorrows, and to share their joys. We will have something meaningful to say and also grow in the capacity to discover Christ present in ten thousand places.

As one poet put it: "Prayer is the world in tune!" So never lose heart when you come to pray, but pray continuously (Lk 18:1). Know too that the Spirit comes to help in those moments when we cannot find the right words with which to pray (Rom 8:26).

Fr. Ian Douulton, sdb

THE GOAL IS ALWAYS... A BIT AHEAD

by Mons Gianpaolo Dianin, bishop

Preserving and nurturing the ideals that led to marriage is the best way to prevent inevitable difficulties and manage crises. Ongoing and continuous formation is necessary

The first years of every marriage demand certain necessary steps from the young couple. There are evolutionary tasks which we have already begun to deal with in the previous articles, speaking of the need to purify the motivations of the choice and to come to terms with the experience of limitation and renunciation in a creative manner.

Another indication is the logical consequence of what has been said so far: every life choice requires 'continuous learning' in order to last. It is a matter of ta-

king care of it and prudently managing the situations and circumstances in which it takes place, creating a favourable climate for its growth and maturation.

It is about cherishing one's marriage as a mother and father cherish their child; even marriage at the beginning is like a small child, fragile and in need of care. Dealing prudently with situations and circumstances appeals to the virtue of vigilance; if we want to protect our marriage bond, we must strive to preserve a healthy environment by wat-



hing out for what can harm us. A favourable climate reminds us that in winter each couple must guard the fire that burns and warms their life; and in the hustle and bustle of daily life, we must guard with our very lives our moments of true intimacy.

It is about not taking anything for granted, in the knowledge that the path that led us to get married must continue because we have never arrived. Even if we have experienced a very rich engagement, we cannot expect to live off the land. Preserving and growing the ideals that led to getting married is the best way to prevent inevitable difficulties and manage crises. In the field of education, we speak of lifelong and continuous training.

Christian tradition has given us many tools to do this: prayer, spiritual direction, dialogue, intense moments to find motivation and to face difficulties. These are important aids to understand when something is not going well and to react before fatigue becomes a crisis and this initiates a slow disintegration of our choice of life.

If the choice is realised in history, the possibility of error should not be forgotten. But let us distinguish error from crisis. Crisis, sooner or later, accompanies every choice that is called upon to integrate unforeseen events and necessary renunciations. By crisis we mean an equilibrium that breaks down and calls for choices that lead to adjustment to the new reality and perhaps also to a revision of one's relationship. In this sense, life is constantly going through crises because ev-

ery life choice comes to terms with external conditioning, the decisions of others, and unforeseeable events. Freedom is not the sole and solitary protagonist; every couple must also come to terms with the dramatic nature of existence. We speak of a fully successful life, but happiness also has the other side, which is linked to the tragic nature of life.

When the initial choice is authentic, its continuity must be sought at all costs because it is the condition for remaining the protagonist of one's life and, for a Christian, for living one's response to the Lord to the full. Renunciations may occur and crises are obligatory steps. Fidelity to one's choice of life may demand great sacrifices, cuts and pruning that resemble death, as when it comes to ending an extra-marital relationship full of promise and positivity.

The psychologist Guarinelli recalls that if the relationship with the vocational identity can go into crisis, the vocational identity does not necessarily have to go into crisis: "The vocational identity is the singular way in which the person receives from God and tells his own story of salvation. If the grammar changes, the plot does not have to change, but the story can change, because it will at least resonate in a different form."

Pope Francis adds: "Each crisis becomes an apprenticeship in growing closer together or learning a little more about what it means to be married [...] When marriage is seen as a challenge that involves overcoming obstacles, each crisis becomes an op-

portunity to let the wine of their relationship age and improve. [...] Each crisis has a lesson to teach us; we need to learn how to listen for it with the ear of the heart" (AL 232).

If the choice is wrong in its origin, it cannot oblige the person; however, it is not easy to distinguish error from inadequacy. In both cases, one must ask oneself whether the truth of that choice is attainable here and now despite any initial errors; this is because one cannot undo the path

taken as if it never existed; history does not allow one to start from scratch.

The fact that the lives of two people, sometimes even children, and the sacrament of matrimony are at stake, calls for a bond not to be put in crisis until the error is truly verified and there is no possibility of correcting it. The case is different if one knows that one lacks the emotional and moral strength to continue on the path taken and to correct the possible error. □

THE WORRIED LITTLE SPARROW

There was once a beige and brown sparrow who lived out his days as a succession of anxieties and question marks. He was still in the egg and tormented himself: "Will I ever be able to crack this hard shell? Will I not fall out of the nest? Will my parents feed me?"

These fears passed, but others assailed him as he trembled on the branch to take his first flight: "Will my wings support me? Will I splat on the ground? Who will bring me back up here?"

Of course, he learned to fly, but he began to chirp: "Will I find a mate? Will I be able to build a nest?" This also happened, but the sparrow became anxious: "Will the eggs be protected? Could lightning strike the tree and incinerate my whole family? What if the hawk comes and devours my young ones? Will I be able to feed them?"

When the little ones proved beautiful, healthy and lively and began to flutter here and there,

the sparrow complained: "Will they find enough food? Will they escape the cat and other predators?"

Then, one day, a Master stopped under the tree. He pointed out the sparrow to his disciples, "Look at the birds of the air: they do not sow, they do not reap, and they do not put their harvest into the barns... yet your Father in heaven feeds them!" The beige and brown sparrow suddenly realised that he had had it all... And he had not realised it. □



THE ECSTASY OF SAINT FRANCIS

by Paola Curzu

The body wrapped in the rough habit is inert while the face shines with transfigured beauty

In 1842, Daniel Wadsworth (1771-1848), a traveller, architect and great American patron of the arts, founded the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, his hometown in Connecticut (USA). The collections of this prestigious institution grew over time and were enriched around the 1920s with valuable European paintings, especially from the Baroque period.

On the occasion of the liturgical feast of Saint Francis (4 October), we pause to contemplate one of the most precious paintings in the collection: Saint Francis in Ecstasy by Michelangelo Merisi

known as Caravaggio (Milan 1571 - Porto Ercole 1610). The dramatic events of the short life of this great artist who, having killed a man during a brawl, had to flee Rome to escape being condemned to be beheaded. Thanks to his fame and the protection of the powerful Colonna family, he stayed in Naples, Sicily and Malta, where he left masterpieces that were pivotal to the artistic culture of the area such as the Seven Acts of Mercy and the Beheading of St John the Baptist. Death took his young and troubled life in Porto Ercole on his way to Rome after receiving news of the papal pardon.



The story of St. Francis in Ecstasy is linked to the Roman banker Ottavio Costa who, stricken by a serious illness, arranged in his will to leave the painting (now in Hartford, in the Wadsworth Atheneum) to Abbot Ruggero Tritonio. However, Costa managed to recover and still wanted to pay homage to the abbot by having a copy of the painting made, which is now in the Udine Museum.

In this first creation of religious inspiration datable to between 1595 and 1596, the artist, perhaps inspired by the 'traité de l'amour' of Saint Francis de Sales or the 'major legend' of Saint Bonaventure, expresses the profound innovation of his artistic language with great sensitivity and strength. The dramatic use of light and the original pictorial interpretation of the Saint's intense spiritual experience accompany us as we enter the scene: Francis seems to emerge from ecstasy, his body wrapped in the rough habit is inert, his head is reclined backwards, one eye is half-closed, the other almost open while his face shines with sweetness and transfigured beauty. The arms are half-open to recall the cross of Christ; the right hand, devoid like the left of the signs of the stigmata, indicates the wound in the side. On the right, a kneeling angel, wrapped in a white cloth quivering with a thousand creases and with large wings in shadow, supports Francis to help and comfort him.

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In the foreground, the artist has painted, outlining them with the light and meticulous care we find in his famous still lifes, small flowering plants: perhaps a tribute to the Canticle of the Creatures which was composed, according to tradition, precisely at La Verna, the place of stigmatisation. In the background, the dark sky crossed by clouds is framed by two trees: one lush, perhaps representing life; the other dry, an allusion to death.

Let us join with our prayers to this great declaration of faith expressed by Caravaggio, tormented protagonist and extraordinary innovator of 17th century Italian art. The body wrapped in the rough habit is inert while the face shines with transfigured beauty. □

ACCEPTED AS I AM

by Anastasia Dias

"Another day," he thought to himself as he was awakened by the bright Palestinian dawn light. He wasn't depressed but lately he'd been feeling low and didn't want to get out of bed. He was tired...tired of repeating the same mistakes and toiling for people who were wronging his own.

He freshened up and got dressed. He had to be at work early in the morning. But today he left sooner than usual because if he left any later he would be jeered by people would on the way to his booth. He wasn't liked in his community because of his profession. Unfortunately, he could do nothing to restore his image or make people like him.

"What a shame to live a life like

this," he thought to himself. He was working for people who meant nothing to him and he was hated by the people who meant something to him. But he was paid well and earned a lot by other means as well. He had so much money that he could live extravagantly. However, he never did that because it wouldn't make him happy.

"Another work day," he thought to himself as he sat at his desk. He'd been doing the same job for the last twenty years and was senior-most in the firm. He knew the people who'd come to meet him often and the ones that bribed him. He also knew the people who'd say something good about him to his face and bad-mouth him behind his back.



ECUADOR

Cristian Calderón



'I dream of being a happy Salesian among the people'

After taking part in the 150th Salesian Missionary Expedition in 2019, 25-year-old Salesian practical trainee Alexandre Akilimali arrived in Ecuador to continue this phase of formation in the indigenous community of the Yaupi. That day, he realised a dream: to give his life for others, wherever God sends him.

Alexandre was born into a Catholic family in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo. At the age of 13, he entered the 'ITIG Don Bosco' in his city and got to know the Salesians and the person of Don Bosco for the first time. As a student, he met the then Director, Fr Fermin Kikoli, a decisive figure for his vocation to consecrated life. "He was a person who welcomed students with great affection, a Don Bosco in the midst of young people," recalls Alexandre.

When he finished secondary
October 2022

school, he felt it was time to follow the path of Salesian life, and not enter university as his parents wanted. At first, his parents did not take his decision seriously, but after seeing their son cry for two nights, they let him start his aspirantate.

During his pre-novitiate he felt the call to a missionary life for the first time, but the formators told him it was not yet time to talk about it and to be patient. But this inner voice was persisted over the years and at the end of his post-novitiate he wrote a letter to the Rector Major expressing his availability for missions *ad gentes* (outside his culture) and *ad vitam* (for life). Fr Ángel Fernandez Artime, Rector Major, granted his request and so Alexandre went to Turin-Valdocco to take part in Salesian Missionary Expedition No. 150. One sentence from the preparation journey has remained etched in his heart: "As missionaries, you will learn about new cultures. But do not think you are going there to give something new; on the contrary, first go and learn from others and then share what you have."

Thanks to Honorato

Thinking about his missionary
11 Don Bosco's Madonna

He was used to all of this too.

During the break he took for lunch, he usually went home. He stayed rather close to his place of work. The town he lived in was famous for balsam it produced and trade flourished there.

That particular day was different. There was a huge crowd milling in front of his booth. Because he was short, he couldn't see anything. The only thing he wanted was to go home for lunch. "What's all this noise about?" he asked a man standing near him. "Is that any of your business?" the man who replied gave him a cold stare. Everyone knew who he was: Zacchaeus, the tax collector, disliked by all. "Hey. That's Jesus, the miracle-worker, from Nazareth. Haven't you heard of him?" said a woman, who felt bad for what the man had just said to Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus hadn't heard of Jesus.

Curious to see who this man from Nazareth was, he ran towards a nearby tree and climbed it. Slowly and steadily, he reached the top. From there he saw Jesus. And, Jesus looked up at Zacchaeus. Their eyes met.

Jesus smiled at Zacchaeus. He said, "Zacchaeus, come down. I'm going to eat at your place today." Zacchaeus was taken aback. Suddenly with that encounter with Jesus something shifted in Zacchaeus breast; he promised to give half of his wealth to the poor and return four times the amount of those he'd cheated.

You see, tax collectors were seen as traitors by the Jews in Jerusalem. They were Jews who

served the Roman Empire by looting their own people. So, even though Zacchaeus was rich, he didn't have any friends, no one liked him and he wasn't a happy man.

But, how could one actually blame Zacchaeus? Surely, this man had made wrong choices in his life. He had done wrong things and had been brutally criticized for his entire life. Yet, in Jesus' stare he found acceptance and forgiveness. You and I can relate to Zacchaeus at some point in our lives, right? We make wrong choices at some point in our lives. At times, we do wrong things, consciously or unconsciously. We are judged so often by those around us, including our family and friends. Where then, do we find acceptance and forgiveness? Do we look for it in our relationships or from our colleagues at work? Or do we live unhappily ever after?

Like Zacchaeus, we should give forgiveness a try, forgiving ourselves and others. We needn't climb a tree and look into the distance. We should, instead take a peek into ourselves, into a place where we can understand why we made those choices in the first place. Or, why did we do those things. Then, we must forgive those who've judged us and most importantly forgive ourselves for doing what we did, knowingly or unknowingly.

From that place within, we will find true forgiveness and acceptance, just as Zacchaeus did. Perhaps, we'd even hear the voice within us whispering, "Come on, it's not over, let's begin again." □



many approach me out of curiosity and I take the opportunity to get to know them better, to play in the courtyard and share time together. These first months have taught me the value of patience," says the missionary, who teaches Physics and Phi-

losophy at the community's student residence. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the daily dynamics had changed. He now records content to be broadcast on the radio so that young people can continue to learn from their communities. But on Saturdays he walks through the jungle for an hour and a half to the community of San Antonio de Yaupi. On this walk, he invites children and young people to participate in catechesis and to get closer to God. He currently animates a group of 15 children preparing for First Communion, and another six for Confirmation. "The challenge is to understand our recipients, get to know them better, be close to the communities and give what we have," he declares.

Without knowing much Spanish, he arrived in Ecuador and trained at the La Kennedy community in Quito for a few months. Then he moved to the Yaupi community, a place that caused him much excitement and amazement, being immersed in the jungle. "I could not imagine that such a place existed. in Ecuador!" And to the amazement was added joy when the local children, of Shuar tribe welcomed him with traditional dances and songs.

"I am still settling into the culture, because I am a stranger to them (the young people). But given the country I come from,

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Witnesses in & for Our Times

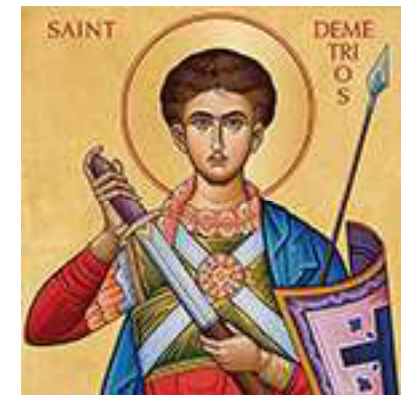


ST. DEMETRIUS 26 OCTOBER

THE GREAT MARTYR SAINT

There is very little information about Demetrius because he lived so long ago. Even though he lived at the end of the 3rd century and died somewhere in the beginning of the 4th century, it wasn't till much later that accounts of his life were gathered and published. Since the records are scanty, it is hard to construct a narrative of his life and to definitively separate the facts from the legends.

According to early accounts, Demetrius was born into an upright Christian family in Thessaloniki, Illyricum in 270. He was attracted by the guts and glory of battle and enrolled himself in the Roman army. His upright ways of dealing and strong sense of discipline helped him rise up the ladder of power. He was made proconsul of his native district of Thessalonika. A proconsul in today's terms would be a governor. Within the Roman political scheme, a proconsul was a civil position and not necessarily a military position. However, a military commander could be appointed as proconsul if the situation demanded it, like for example, if the region was under



threat. Even though the position was not necessarily held by a military officer, it usually was.

We don't know much about Demetrius' social and political life. We cannot even be sure if he ever was a soldier in the first place! Various hagiographic pictures of his life show him to be dressed in senator's clothing. The possible reason for him being associated with the military is that numerous miracles of protection were reported whenever Thessaloniki was attacked. The Slavs coming in from the Balkan region attempted to capture Thessaloniki on more than one occasion but

somehow never succeeded. The people of Thessaloniki held Demetrius in high regard and attributed their military successes to his protection. Probably, this is why he came to be depicted as a soldier.

A popular image of Demetrius is similar to that of St. George in many respects. He is depicted riding a red horse while in the act of spearing a fallen gladiator. The legend goes that the gladiator, Lyaeus was responsible for the killing of many Christians. He was defeated by Demetrius who is shown ready to strike the deathblow. Lyaeus is depicted as lying down, already defeated and shown to be far smaller in size than Demetrius. However, hagiographies reveal that Demetrius was not directly responsible for the death of Lyaeus. The victory was won through his intercession but performed by his disciple, Nestor. There is another similar legend that is narrated by Dimity of Rostov. Demetrius apparently appeared in 1207 in the camp of Tsar Kaloyan of Bulgaria and killed him with a lance. This scene has been immortalized in art and iconography.

There are some depictions of Demetrius riding side by side with George. Demetrius is bearded and riding a red horse while George is clean shaven and riding a white horse. They were both appropriated as patrons of the Crusades. Such imagery arose and gained popularity around that time.

An icon of the 11th century discovered in St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai depicts Demetrius as a civilian. This could also indicate his possible

lifestyle. He was venerated as patron of agriculture, peasants and shepherds in the Greek countryside during the Middle ages. According to historian, Hans Kloft, this patronage was attributed to him after the decline of the cult of the pagan goddess, Demeter. The similarity of names probably led to the spread of devotion in the countryside once Christian influence spread.

Demetrius met his end when the Caesar, Galerius Maximian returned from one of his campaigns. He had the traditional ceremonial games and offered ritual sacrifices to celebrate his triumph. Galerius did not look kindly on the fledgling Christian religion and continued the persecution begun by his predecessors. Demetrius was betrayed by those who were envious of his position and standing in society. He was imprisoned and condemned to die. While in prison he was visited by Nestor, a young Christian disciple who was scheduled to participate in the games as an opponent to the giant Lyaeus. From this encounter we get that famous icon described earlier. Demetrius blessed Nestor who went on to slay his opponent against all odds. This infuriated the Caesar and he had Nestor beheaded outside the city.

A little while later, soldiers came and stabbed Demetrius to death in the prison where he was held. It is said that his servant, Lupus somehow came in possession of his blood-stained tunic and signet ring which he subsequently used to affect a number of miracles. When discovered, he too was beheaded. Demetrius and Nestor were buried together

in a bath where the prison stood. Legend has it that in the 7th century, from the place where his tomb lay, a miraculous flow of sweet smelling myrrh was detected. This gave rise to a nickname – *Mirovlitis* or Myrrh Gusher. Today this place lies within the Church of St. Demetrius in Thessaloniki.

HEROIC WITNESS

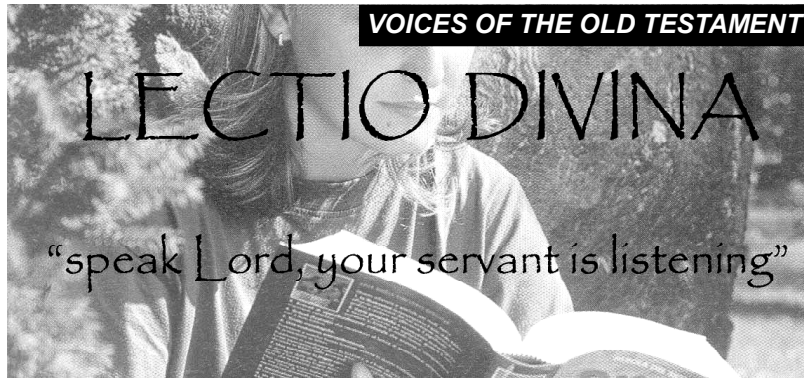
Demetrius seemed to have garnered more fame after his death but the very fact that he was popular after his death implies that he was influential while still alive! As a public servant, Demetrius put the needs of others above his own. He carried out his duties as proconsul to the best of his ability with transparency and integrity. It was religious and political prejudice that led to his imprisonment and subsequent death. It can be surmised that Demetrius was popular as a proconsul, not just among Christians who he would have offered solace and help but also to the others.

Hagiographies say that he spent most of his time preaching the faith like a devout missionary. He organized secret meetings where he would catechize people and offer them courage to face the persecution that targeted them. He is also shown to be involved in the conversion of many people to the Christian faith. Some records state that it was this high conversion rate that brought him under the scanner of Caesar. When he was captured and brought before Caesar for judgement, he is said to have borne witness to the faith by declaring: "Only in Christ do I believe." Even while in prison he did not stop

preaching the gospel. There were many who would come to visit him and get inspired by his faith and courage.

Demetrius stands out as a passionate disciple of Christ. One can see his love for Jesus brim over from his heart and flow out into his actions. Isn't this exactly what St. James alludes to when he says: "I by my works will show you my faith" (Jas 2:18)? Our faith is not a theory to be held but a relationship to be lived. You cannot have a Christian snob or a selfish Christian. The two can never go together. Christian, by its very nature implies community and sharing. Therefore, you cannot have a snob or a individualistic person calling themselves Christian while at the same time holding tight to their un-Christian ways; it's an oxymoron.

Demetrius was on fire for God. He didn't hide his faith so that his life might be spared. He boldly confessed it. How many of us witness to Christ? Everyday we get opportunities to witness to Christ; do we make use of them? We could be sitting at a diner to grab a bite; dare we take a moment to give thanks? We could be stuck in a long line; would we dare to take out our rosary beads and pray? Are we comfortable displaying an image of Christ, the Blessed Virgin or a Saint on our desk at work? All of these are ways in which we express our faith. We need not wait for a dramatic moment like persecution or a death threat to witness to our faith; we can do it in little ways everyday. Remember that Jesus says it is the little things that matter: "Just as you did to the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). □



PRICELESS TREASURE

by Carlo Broccardo

By speaking to us about fields and hidden treasures, Jesus is actually telling us something about the kingdom of heaven: those who have the grace to discover it are willing to give up everything in order not to let it slip away.

One of the characteristics of the Gospel according to Matthew is the very large space it devotes to the teachings of Jesus. In addition to scattered instructions here and there, it brings us five great discourses of the Master, each well-articulated in style and focused in content.

Some times in the course of the year we will be accompanied by the so-called “discourse in parables,” which occupy a large part of chapter 13 of Matthew and is composed of seven of Jesus’ parables. Let us choose two short ones, so that we have time to read them slowly and to delve into every detail.

The first parable is very simple: a worker, ploughing the field for another (we know it is not his because he then buys it), discovers a treasure there. The thing is not far-fetched, quite the contrary. In antiquity, the only sure way to hide one’s treasures, in times of war or political uncer-

tainty, was to bury them (wrapped in bands of cloth or, better still, inside amphorae or chests); once the calamity had passed, one could simply dig them up and retrieve them. It was possible, however, that the person concerned would die and the memory of the treasure, or at least the place where it was buried, would be lost.

Jesus says: imagine a fellow who, ploughing another’s field, discovers there a forgotten treasure. What do you think he will he do? Is it not obvious? “He goes off, full of joy, sells all his possessions and buys that field.” The treasure is so important to that man that the prospect of getting his hands on it fills him with joy, and he renounces all his possessions in order to have it.

Parables are short stories, invented by Jesus to communicate something to his listeners, to get a ‘message’ across. Now that we understand the parable, we

ask ourselves: how do we apply it to reality? Why does Jesus tell this story? The cue comes to us from the first words: “The kingdom of heaven is like...”. By talking to us about fields and hidden treasures, Jesus is actually telling us something about the Kingdom of Heaven: it is superior to everything else; whoever has the grace to discover it is willing to give up everything in order not to let it slip away.

The second story is also not very difficult to imagine: a merchant goes in search of precious pearls; he is probably a jeweller, or at least a person who made a living from trading in precious stones; a profession that required constant travel, in search of rare or particularly valuable pieces. Having found a pearl whose value is inestimable in his eyes our merchant sells everything he has and buys it. Again, as in the previous parable, it is not difficult to understand the message: the Kingdom of Heaven is something priceless; whoever finds it - after a long search - renounces everything in order not to lose it.

The two parables are very similar; some details do not coincide, but the underlying dynamic is the same: the treasure and the pearl are so precious that whoever finds them is willing to do anything to get them! So, it is with the Kingdom of Heaven: someone may discover it by chance (like the farmer), someone else after much searching (like the merchant); but the two, when they find it, will they not give it up for anything in the world? The Kingdom of Heaven is priceless, its value surpasses all else.

To conclude, only one question

remains: but what is this Kingdom of Heaven?

The expression “Kingdom of Heaven” or “Kingdom of God” is an abstract formula for a very concrete reality: God does not abandon us, but takes care of us; like a wise and caring king (in antiquity, this was the most common form of government) he sees the needs of his children and goes out of his way for them. God does not abandon us - he does not forget us; the Old Testament repeats this over and over again. We think of the words of Isaiah: “Zion has said, ‘The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me.’ Does a woman forget her child, so that she is not moved by the child of her womb? Even if they forget, I will never forget you” (Is 49:14-15). His name is “here I am” (cf. Is 52:6).

This image of God as the one who is there, the one who is present in our lives, takes on a face in the Gospel according to Matthew: that of Jesus, the “Emmanuel, which means ‘God with us’” (Mt 1:23). And Jesus the Kingdom of God, it is he who by his word and actions makes God’s presence visible and concrete: he heals the sick, casts out demons, brings a proclamation of joy and peace. “Even today, as a Good Samaritan, he comes to every man who is wounded in body and spirit and pours over his wounds the oil of consolation and the wine of hope” (from the Liturgy, Preface VIII). Whoever encounters such a person in his life, is he not willing to do anything to never lose him again? □

Quiet Spaces

WORK IS THE VOCATION OF MAN

Pope Francis' homily (edited) at Domus Sanctae Marthae on Friday, May 1, 2020

"God created" (Gen 1:27). A Creator. He created the world, He created man, and He gave man and woman a mission: to manage, to work with and bring forward creation. And the Bible uses the word "work" to express this activity of God: He "completed the work He had been doing. He rested on the seventh day... after all His work of creating" (Gen 2:2). And he gives this activity to man: "You need to do this, take care of this and that, you need to work so as to create with me," as if he were saying this, "so that this world might continue" (see Gen 2:15, 19-20). To the point that work is none other than the continuation of God's work: human work is man's vocation received from God at the end of the creation of the universe.

Work makes the human person similar to God, because with work man is a creator, capable of creating, of creating many things; also of creating a family to raise. The human person is a creator, and creates through work. This is his vocation, and it says in the Bible that "God saw all He had made, and indeed it was very good" (Gen 1:31). That is, work had goodness within itself and creates the harmony of things - beauty, goodness - and involves man in everything: in his thought, his actions, everything. Man is involved in work. It is man's first vocation: to work. And this gives dignity to man. The dignity that makes him resemble God. The dignity of work.

Once, a man went to Caritas, a man who had no employment and went to ask for help for his family. An employee of Caritas, who gave him something to eat, said to him, "At least you can take some food home". "But this is not enough for me", was the answer. "I want to earn the food I take home". He was lacking the dignity, that dignity of "making" the bread himself, through work, and taking it home. The dignity of work, which is trampled on, unfortunately.

Throughout history we have read about the brutality inflicted on slaves: they were brought from Africa to America - I think of that history that touches my own land - and we say, "What barbarism!" But there are many slaves today too, many men and women who are not free to work; they are forced to work in order to survive, nothing more. They are slaves: it is forced labour. It is forced labour, unjust, ill-paid, and which leads men and women to live with their dignity trampled underfoot. There are many, many throughout the world. Many. In the newspapers a few months ago we read, in a country in Asia, of how a man had beaten to death an employee who earned less than half a dollar a day, because he had done something badly. Today's slavery is our "indignity", because it takes away the dignity of men, of women, all of us. "No, I work, I have my dignity". Yes, but your brothers and sisters do not.

"Yes, Father, it is true, but this, since it is very far away from me, I struggle to understand it. But they are among us; yes, here among us. Think of the day workers, who are made to work for minimum pay, and not for eight, but for twelve or fourteen hours a day: this happens today, here. Throughout the world, and also here. I think of the domestic worker who does not receive a fair wage, who has no social security assistance, insurance, no pension provision: this does not only happen in Asia. It happens here.

Every injustice inflicted on a person who works tramples on human dignity; and also the dignity of the one who does this injustice. It lowers the level and we end up with that tension that exists between a dictator and a slave. Instead, the vocation that God gives us is so good: to create, to re-create, to work. But this can be done when the conditions are right and the dignity of the person is respected.

Today let us join with many men and women, believers and non-believers, who commemorate Workers' Day, the day of work, for those who fight for justice in the world of work, for those - the good employers - who manage their businesses fairly, even if they themselves lose as a result. Two months ago I spoke on the telephone to a businessman, here in Italy, who asked me to pray for him because he did not want to lay off any of his workers, and said, "Because to lay off one of them is like firing myself". This conscience of so many employers who are good, who take care of their employees as if they were their own children. Let us pray for them too. And let us ask Saint Joseph, with this beautiful image [a statue standing near the altar] with the tools of his trade in his hand, that he might help us fight for the dignity of work, so that there may be work for everyone and that the work may be dignified. Not slave labour. May this be our prayer today.

Spiritual Communion

Those who cannot receive sacramental Communion may make a spiritual communion:

At Your feet, O my Jesus, I prostrate myself and I offer You repentance of my contrite heart, which is humbled in its nothingness and in Your holy presence. I adore You in the Sacrament of Your love, the ineffable Eucharist. I desire to receive You into the poor dwelling that my heart offers you. While waiting for the happiness of sacramental communion, I wish to possess You in spirit. Come to me, O Jesus, since I, for my part, am coming to You! May Your love embrace my whole being in life and in death. I believe in You, I hope in You, I love You. □

THE "LITTLE KID" GROWS UP

By Pierluigi Menato, Tr. Ian Doulton, sdb

His wife was preparing his things: costumes, leather trousers in which he would burst, jackets with studs and fringes, shirts with violent designs. He was about to leave; they had called him to do some gigs. He was going alone; he couldn't bring his wife and children. He never took them. His private life was not to be mixed with his career. It was not a contract clause, but it remained a strict recommendation.

"Why can't we go just once with daddy?" one of the girls protested.

His wife, as always, dodged the question: "We are going to Ferrara to visit your aunt."

"There is no sea in Ferrara."

"But you have many friends."

"I don't want to see old

friends. I want new friends!, I want to go with daddy to the sea."

"We'll go with auntie to the beaches" his wife retorted with worn-out patience.

She appeared at the studio door. "I packed you two shirts." She spoke behind him. He didn't turn around. "And the acidity tablets because in the hotel you get only grilled meat. Insist that they don't sprinkle pepper on it." There was no need to answer her.

"Next thing you know she'll be telling me to carry a bottle of extra virgin olive oil too," he thought. "She's treating me like a child. When you've been living with a woman for a while," he reasoned, "the woman ends up being a mother, a sister, suffoca-



ting you. You don't know who you are anymore."

Yeah, who was he? A singer of pop music. He had been launched through a talent contest for new voices. In terms of age, even then he was not a pious little boy, but his puny, lithe appearance suggested an adolescence yet to be completed.

The talent scout had had a happy intuition, had cast him as a little kid. A copious forelock on his forehead, bushy sideburns on his rounded cheeks, a lean, darting body in his fringed overalls: *the little kid*.

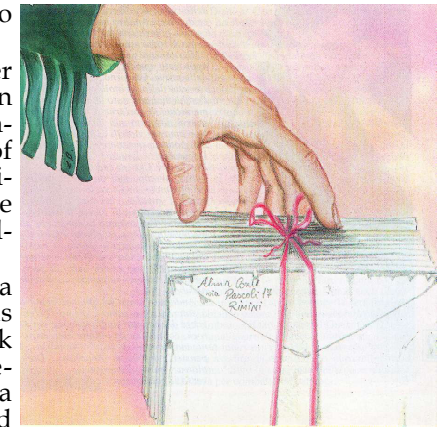
Rock songs written for him, good seasons, a few romances for the tabloids and, further on, marriage and children, but in secret, so as not to damage the image of *the little kid*, free as air.

The fans still wanted him like this and wrote to him all the time, a little less than before, you can tell, but they remembered him and at the evenings they would surround him and give him no respite to brush against him in his swaying suits, holding out their arms begging for his autograph.

"I'm going," said his wife. "I'm taking the baby to the dentist."

He took the kids to school, swimming, to the doctor. She kept her job, did part-time work, forgetting she was the *little kid's* wife. Or she never forgot and that was how she treated him.

He breathed a sigh of relief when he heard the footsteps and voices of the children along the corridor and then the click of the door. He needed long pauses of



silence before each departure. He was not worried about the audience. He had a good repertoire, a consistent voice, a snappy physique.

Why this need for recollection, the need to separate himself from the present? He opened a desk drawer, put his hand among the packets of letters. His wife had kept a kind of direct line to his admirers for some time and a weekly magazine had reserved a page for correspondence with female readers.

Now the page with the readers was not flirty, and his wife listlessly answered letters from female admirers, but collected them in packets that she slipped into the desk. Neat packets, with the year indicated. As the years progressed, the packets became less substantial.

He slipped his finger into the recent flirty packet and immediately recognised Alma's letter. She had been writing to him for years, Alma: she was a loyal follower. Alma was not like the others who dreamt of a magical

night with him or confided secret wishes to him. Oh no. Alma told him about the sea in Riccione, the beach without umbrellas, trips to San Marino, the anguish of the dark, the peach tree that bloomed again in spring. These tales one next to the other took shape, and made Alma a creature who approached him in moments of loneliness.

His mind invented places where he could meet her, words that would cast a spell between them. What was Alma like? And her life? Nothing told him about herself outside of his thoughts. A pretty girl, but not exactly beautiful, his mind suggested, and at times he seemed to distinguish her features and clothes. Her hair was dark and wavy, combed back, and she wore a pink dress with tiny flowers.

He reassembled the package. Jokes of the imagination. He closed the drawer. Distractedly he pulled the other drawer. It was locked. Why on earth had his wife locked it? He looked for the key among the junk, in the various drawers, without any real curiosity, just to engage his attention in some concrete act. It was not there. He stopped looking. Alma's image dissipated. Time to say goodbye to his wife and kids and he would be on his way. Better to travel at night: nice and cool and less traffic.

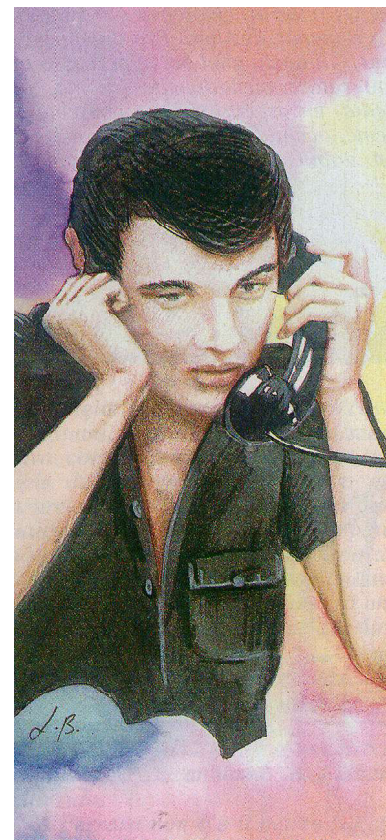
Alma returned to his thoughts along the highway. In a stupendous whim the idea of a meeting invaded him. Between rehearsals there was time for a cup of coffee together in a café by the

sea. As he proceeded towards Rimini, the idea built into an increasingly fervent reality. He would phone her from the hotel. He was already enjoying his surprise. Alma Conti was not in the phone book. Was she was using a false name and surname? It seemed unlikely to him. Her letters had an accent of almost exasperated sincerity. The day was long. Rehearsals were scheduled for late afternoon. The hotel was noisy. The sea beneath his windows invited one to go out. He asked the front desk for a bike. He loved them. The staff on duty took no time in getting him an imposing Honda.

On the bike, who knows why, the anxiety and fear subsided. A sense of invincibility protected him from reality. The sea accompanied him with unnerving gentleness. He left the seafront, took the road inland. The countryside splashed off his hips in colours not yet drained by the heat. Now he knew he had to come to the point of that ride. He headed towards the village of Alma.

A tree-lined avenue greeted him. The sea was not far away, but the village had an agricultural feel to it. Houses surrounded by vegetable gardens and fields. At number seventeen Via Pascoli was a detached house with a terrace and garden. Did Alma live there? Wealthy people, one could tell at a glance. Riding his bike, he looked into the garden, his helmet thrown over his shoulder, his forelock damp with sweat. The adventure did not have any fantastic elements, it reached the edges of a disappointing acquaintance.

The shadow of a pine tree danced above him. He was still standing there, behind the lacquered railing, when a man came out of the house, went round the back, raised the garage door. The husband? Something told him he was Alma's husband. So, she was married. That short walk was enough for him to take a mental picture of the man. Average age, an agile and powerful appearance at the same time, spectacles and a dark bag. A businessman, unmistakably, reluctant to take frivolous rides.



Shortly afterwards the light of the automatic gate came on. The man got out in a Thema. Their gazes met for a moment at the roadside. To his greedy glance, the man countered with a cold scowl. On the tinsel-rich bike, with the Hawaiian shirt and the lopsided topknot, he must have looked positively ridiculous to the man. Yet in his icy confidence the man put on an air of melancholy.

The strangeness of life: never would he have known. Never could he have suspected that he had been robbed by the ridiculous guy on the bike. Robbed of his emotions, of his woman's dreams. In subdued hilarity he let the feeling of melancholic compassion be replaced by a sense of revenge. A thief of dreams! What an exhilarating feeling.

The Thema had turned. The gate closed again, noiselessly, as if by magic. Did the chance to meet Alma begin or end there? The keypad of the bell was only a few centimetres away. His arm tensed, but he fell back. Suddenly there was a rush to leave the stakeout, the country. A shrunken, wispy woman could have come towards him. He intended to remain a thief of dreams. An uninterrupted exaltation without the pangs of disappointment. The roar of the bike cut the silence. Goodbye Alma. In fact, see you soon. I am sure you will write to me.

The avenue was dotted with the shadows of pine trees. The air took on the warmth of sunset. His mind focused on the rehearsal.



sal appointment at the theatre: the dance girls, the orchestra, old motifs to be revived. The pleasantness of the ride took away anxiety and traces of fear. Everything was going well. The voice could only benefit from an inhalation of iodine and saltiness. Certainly, his wife would not have approved of that bike ride before the rehearsal. The last drawer of the locked bureau came back to his mind. Why had it been locked? He had forgotten to mention it. What could his wife have hidden there? Jewellery? She did not like jewellery,

or perhaps she had never been able to afford this passion. Documents? Letters? What letters? Personal ones? Who was his wife? He should never have asked himself that question. Was she just the woman who lay beside him at night and accepted being his stranger during the day? Was she just the woman who packed his T-shirts and pills and took the kids to school, swimming or the dentist? Each of us, he noted with panic, can be a thief of feelings and be robbed of them at the same time.

He went to rehearsal already exhausted. He struggled to synchronise rhythm and action. The dance girls were snorting. The rock moves, tested by endless practice, lacked snap. Annalisa. Annalisa's secret thoughts... From the empty stalls the impresario looked towards the stage with apprehension. He took advantage of the break to go to the phone.

"Annalisa...". It was his wife and already from her tone he must have understood she was upset. "What is it? Are you alright?" Affectionate and obsessive questions, but they got to him with a calming effect. "I'm fine, I'm fine. But you...?" The question was not voiced. It could not be asked. Not there. Not at that moment. Maybe never. He was the *little guy* who didn't want to grow up and she had always known that. Protected. Perhaps loved.

"I...what's it? Antonio... What's going on?"

"I want you here, you and the boys." □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 33

by Michele Molineris

168. I will come, but I will not comfort him (1867)

Count Victor Emmanuel of Cambruzano, one of the most enlightened diplomats of early Piedmont, steadfast in his religious and political convictions, a deputy to the Subalpine parliament in 1857, an eloquent speaker and writer for newspapers and pamphlets in defence of truth and religion, admired by Catholics and adversaries alike for his fine mind, eclectic in doctrine, a frank and loyal spirit, a friend and great benefactor of Don Bosco, had been ill for ten years with cancer.

He had endured the illness with a courage and resignation that can only inspire Christian faith, the hope of a future life and love for the Crucified; and now he was close to receiving his reward. Several times the Countess had pleaded with Don Bosco verbally and in writing that he would wrest from Our Lady the healing of her husband; but such was not God's will, and Don Bosco made no promises.

One day having heard that Don Bosco was at Cuneo, the Countess invited him to go to Fossano, to visit the Count and bless him, Don Bosco replied: "I will come, but I won't comfort him.

This reply chilled the heart of the Countess who welcomed Don Bosco with sadness and accompanied him to the sick man's bed and after five minutes she left him alone with her husband and never came back. Her grief was so great. The saint stayed with the count,

blessed him and spoke to him, as saints speak, of paradise.

To a letter from Prior Maiotti, to whom the Countess had resorted, to put pressure on Don Bosco, the prior replied that she should remember God's goodness to humankind and his providence that destines everything for our best and he assured her that prayers were being said for her and the sick person at the Oratory. But he made it clear to her that she should leave all hope behind. The Count in fact, died on 16th August 1867 (M.B., VIII, 898).

169. They will have the heir, but not the way they want it (1867)

Herewith, I the undersigned was in Rome from 1850 to 1881 secretary first to Cardinal Benedetto Barberini and then to Don Enrico Prince Barberini. I premise this only so that it may be immediately understood that I was naturally intimately known to that family. I therefore knew the great distress of the late Prince Don Enrico, and the much greater distress of his wife, Donna Teresa, born Princess Orsini, because they had no children, although they had been married for many years.

The princess, a most pious lady, therefore did not cease to pray, to have tridiums and novenas celebrated at various famous shrines in Italy, and to commend herself to the prayers of those best known for virtue and holiness of life.

When Don Bosco came to Rome in 1867, for the first time preceded by the fame of his virtues and the holy work to which he had dedicated his life, all the good Romans vied with one another to see him and get to know him. The princess went in person to St Peter in

Chains, where Don Bosco was staying to beg him to come and celebrate holy mass in the chapel of her palace, letting him know why she resorted to his prayers. Don Bosco promised her and on the appointed day he came to celebrate according to that pious lady's intentions.

Only the bride and groom, myself and a few household intimates attended mass. After Mass, they had Don Bosco served coffee in a room, where the excellent gentlemen stayed with him for about half an hour with the doors ajar. When they left, they accompanied him to me, so that I in turn could accompany him to the door.

Left alone with Don Bosco, I said to him: - I am his Excellency's secretary and I know why they have asked you to come and celebrate Mass here. What do you think of this poor lady's wish?"

He immediately answered me with gracious words and then added assertively: "Well, yes, the Lord wants to console her, poor thing! She would like a child, but the Lord only wants to grant her a girl, she must resign herself and be content to have a girl. But she will be her consolation."

I must confess that I was quite surprised to hear these words of his, although he said them to me with all conviction and as if inspired. And my surprise stemmed from the fact that I had previously understood from the house doctor and other doctors who had been called and consulted several times, that the princess was sterile, that she could not conceive, and if it were impossible for that to have happened, she would have died in childbirth. Instead, sometime later she not only conceived, but then gave birth happily after eighteen

years of sterile marriage to a daughter now living, healthy, robust, virtuous to whom they wished to give her only the sole name of Mary.

Having mentioned the above to my friend Fr Joseph Ronchail (Director of Don Bosco's house in Nizza Mare) a few days ago and since he has asked me for a certificate, I gladly give it to him, ready to confirm it with my oath.

In faith, etc. *Roccabruna (Maritime Alps), 20 January 1887.* Can. G. B. Grana, *Doctor in Sacred Theology and in both Laws* (M.B., VIII, 670).

170. Don Bosco and St Blaise (1868)

"It was the year 1868," wrote Fr Giovanni Garino, "and I was in the college at Mirabello Monferrato near Casale, as a teacher in the 4th grade. On the morning of 3 February, St Blaise's Day, I went like the others to have my throat blessed. As I came out of church, I began to feel a terrible sore throat that made swallowing painful. Since Don Bosco came to Mirabello a few days later, I presented myself to him with one of my companions (I think Fr Albera). At a certain point in the talk, he said to Don Bosco: "Dear Don Bosco, do you know that St Blaise gave Garino a great favour; he went to get a blessing that he didn't have a sore throat, and he came out with a sore throat!"

Don Bosco, smiling, told me I should bear it up until the Annunciation (25 March). And so, it was. I continued to do a bit of studying at best, but with much difficulty, when on 25 March of that year, after lunch, while I was lingering with some pupils in the courtyard, I suddenly felt completely free of the inconvenience which had not

left me since St Blaise.

Then I remembered Don Bosco's words and told this to my pupils, who, although already full of admiration for Don Bosco, admired him all the more. (MB IX, 74).

171. Two gravediggers with a coffin (1868)

On the evening of 30 October 1868 Don Bosco told the following dream to the assembled community of students and artisans: "The reason I have gathered you all here, even the people from Asti, is because I want to tell you something. Imagine seeing all the young people in the courtyard having fun. It begins to get dark, the joking and shouting ceases; large groups form, waiting for the bell to give the signal to go to the study halls; there are still a few youngsters walking around; meanwhile the evening is advancing and you can just barely recognise one from another as you walk by.

And lo and behold, two gravediggers are seen entering from the porter's lodge, walking at a brisk pace, carrying a coffin on their shoulders. The young men make way as they pass by. The two men come forward, lay the coffin on the ground, in the middle of the courtyard in front of the administrator's office. The young men stand around forming a large circle, but no one speaks out of fear.

The gravediggers remove the lid of the coffin. At that instant, the moon appears with its bright, silvery light, and slowly makes a first turn around the dome of the Church of Mary Help of Christians; it makes a second turn, and then begins a third, but does not finish it and stops above the church, as if it were about to fall.

In the meantime, as soon as the moon began to light up the courtyard, one of the gravediggers turns around, then moves towards the rows of pupils, gazing closely at the face of each one; until, seeing one on whose forehead was written: *Morieris* (you will die), he took him to put him in the box. "Your turn," he said to him.

He screamed: "I'm still young. I must prepare myself by doing good works!"

"I don't care about that."

"But at least allow me to go and see my relatives."

"That doesn't interest me. Do you see the moon there? It has made a turn, then another, then a little more than half a turn; as soon as it disappears, you will come with me."

Shortly afterwards, the moon disappeared from the horizon and the gravedigger grabbed the young man by the waist, laid him down in the box, screwed the lid on him and without hesitation took him away aided by his companion.

The talk ended there and we know nothing about the fulfilment of that prediction. However, Don Berto tells us: "We were already accustomed to seeing such predictions come true, so it would have surprised us, as an exception to the rule, to see some not come true. I remember only one that did not come true and that concerned young C... He fell seriously ill, but after receiving the viaticum, and perhaps he got better, is still living and is a priest. Don Bosco told me at the time that he was one of those who had to die, but he added: "The Lord wanted to show him mercy because of the prayers that had been said for him, and perhaps because he was not sufficiently prepared." (M.B., IX, 398). □



Eadmer of Canterbury

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION AND THE CHESTNUT

by Roberto Spataro

There has been a lot of talk about the Church in England in recent times, ever since Pope Benedict XVI facilitated the return to full communion with the Catholic Church of those pastors and faithful belonging to the Anglican Communion, established, with a painful separation from Rome, by the English King Henry VIII, in the 16th century. Yet up to that time, England had been a country very much attached to the Roman See and, in the twelfth century was already called the 'Marian century.' It was precisely during this period that among the English that theologians of great standing excelled.

Among them stands out the Benedictine abbot Eadmer, who lived for a long time in the monastery of the Holy Saviour in Canterbury. A gentle and learned man, he was a friend of another great saint and theologian, Anselm of Aosta, whose secretary he was for many years and

whose life he wrote. This master of his, certainly transmitted to him the love for Our Lady, and the disciple was no less than the master!

In fact, Eadmer wrote the treatise 'On the Conception of Mary,' which is a milestone in the history of Marian theology. He takes as his starting point the attempt by some ecclesiastics of his time to



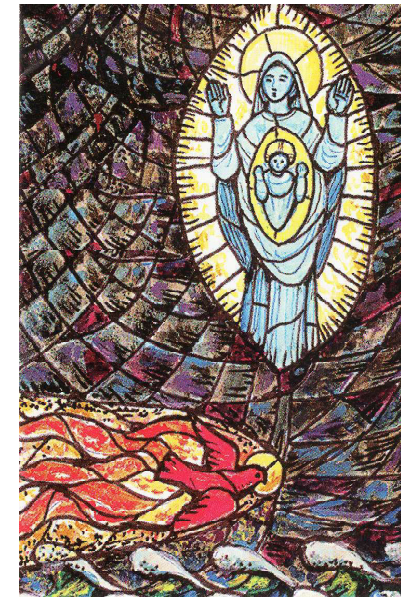
The present Canterbury Cathedral dates back to medieval times. After the proclamation of the sainthood of Thomas Becket, it became a popular pilgrimage destination.

abolish from the liturgical calendar the Marian feast of the 'Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary,' celebrated for at least two hundred years in England on 8 December. Our abbot declared himself in favour of preserving it, giving two reasons.

The 'Sense of the Faithful'

The first: that feast in honour of Mary was celebrated with great enthusiasm by the humble and simple folk, who derived great spiritual benefit from it. In other words, Eadmer recalls a basic principle in the history of Marian piety and theology. This is the 'Sense of the faithful,' i.e., the people of God sense with their hearts, without the need for lengthy reasoning, how important Our Lady is in the Christian life and in the history of salvation. In polemic with the "learned" who opted for the cancellation of the feast, our author writes in his treatise: "Simple people, perhaps unable to provide answers required by the profound reasoning of those philosophers, nevertheless, strengthened in their devout love for the Mother of the Lord, affirm that everything that in terms of human praise is addressed to her dignity and honour, does not seem exaggerated, when compared to her illustrious merits."

The second reason is of an exquisitely theological nature and of extraordinary importance for the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Eadmer explains that the content of that liturgical feast was precisely the absence in Mary of all sin, from



God could and did love Mary to the point of wanting her to be exalted in holiness and, therefore, devoid of original sin as well.

the first instant of her conception, including original sin, which is common to all people. To support his thesis, he offers various arguments.

Being able and willing

First of all, the 'principle of convenience,' that is, the correspondence that exists between the lofty and unique role that Our Lady exercises in the history of salvation, and the privileges with which she is endowed: She alone is Mother of God incarnate, she alone is Queen of heaven and earth; she alone, therefore, is exempt from original sin. And in a sentence as dense and concise as only the Latin language allows,



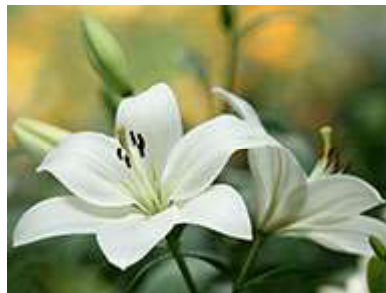
The sins of the world represented by the spines surrounding the chestnut do not prevent the fruit from growing and forming.

he formulates another argument in favour of the Immaculate Conception: *patuit plane et voluit: si igitur voluit, fecit*. Let us translate freely: God could do everything and loved Mary to the point of wanting her to be exalted in holiness and, therefore, devoid even of original sin. Being able and willing, God gave this grace to the Mother of God: her Immaculate Conception. In this dogma of our faith a most luminous ray of the Mystery of God all powerful, wise and sanctifying love, is reflected. To deny the Immaculate Conception, as unfortunately some non-Catholic Christians dare to do, is to diminish the greatness of divine love!

Eadmer is a good theologian and also a good catechist. To illustrate the Immaculate Conception, he resorts to various comparisons. One of them is eloquent and effective: "When a chestnut appears on the tree of its kind about to be born, its shell reveals itself to be completely bristly and surrounded by very dense quills. Think. If God gives the chestnut to be conceived, nourished, and formed in the midst of thorns while remaining immune from

them, could he not grant to that human body, which he himself had chosen as a temple in which to dwell bodily and from which to become a perfect man, to be conceived in the midst of the thorns of sins without being in any way touched by their spines?" Out of metaphor: Our Lady totally belongs to the ranks of Adam's children. She knows our weaknesses and temptations. But she is pure, devoid of the original sin and its consequences that all other men and women experience. A theologian and catechist, Eadmer is also a zealous pastor who invites sinners to have recourse to the patronage of the Mother of God.

And with these comforting words, we complete the presentation of his Marian theology: "It is for sinners therefore that Mary became the Mother of God. O sinful man, rejoice and exult! Your judge, that is, your brother, has taught you to have recourse to the help of his Mother. And she has not denied you her own intervention so that you may not be burdened with the weight of his justice." □



The lily has always been a symbol of purity and innocence.



PIERO RAMELLO A SALESIAN IN PAKISTAN

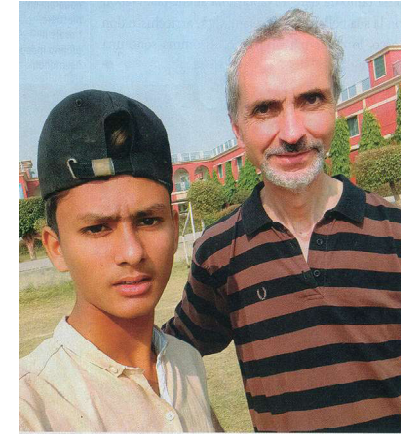
by O. Pori Mecoi

Introduce yourself please?

I was born in a town in the province of Turin in a beautiful, deeply Christian family. From secondary school in Lombiasco onwards, the link with the Salesians is unbroken. I did my aspirantate at Valdocco. After the novitiate, I made my profession as a Salesian coadjutor at the age of 20. When I finished my initial Salesian training, I resumed my musical studies, graduating in Choral Music and Choir Direction, and graduated in Physics.

How did you sense this vocation? Why did you make this decision?

I spent many years of my Salesian life in the school world, an environment congenial to my somewhat reserved character: continuous and prolonged contact with the boys helps to create meaningful bonds even in the absence of exuberance. I owe a lot to the youngsters. Not only do I get on well with them; they are above all a great help. Their freshness and spontaneity, their desire for consistency, and the attitude of many of them in the face of difficulties have always been a great incentive for good. I have known several young people forced to carry burdens disproportionate to their age, burdens due to major health problems or, more often, family disagreements. Their tenacity - and even a bit of sympathy -



made me develop a positive attitude in the face of obstacles.

Why did you end up in Pakistan?

It never crossed my mind to become a missionary in faraway countries, until 2016, when the appeal that the Rector Major makes every year touched me deeply. At first, my superior helped me to understand that for us Salesians, missionary life is a "vocation within a vocation", it is not just making oneself available to the Rector Major's call. I thus began a journey of discern-



ment that lasted several years. At the beginning, some confreres I confronted tried to dissuade me. "You're too old!" "You have difficulty with foreign languages!" Yet it kept seeming to me that the call to missionary life was meant for me. After a week of retreat and talks with some spiritual guides, in February 2019 I submitted my missionary application to the Rector Major, who accepted it, with my destination as Pakistan. After the missionary course in Rome and a few months in Ireland for English, plus several long months waiting for a visa, at 56 years of age, I arrived in Lahore in October 2020.

How do your habits change?

One of the lessons I am learning from Pakistan is readiness for change and precariousness. I learn that programmes can be changed at the last moment, perhaps without the slightest notice. A not too infrequent power cut compels us to reinvent an activity on the spot; the quality of relations with the authorities is linked to the (changing) dispositions of an individual person. In this regard, there is a sense of precariousness lately with regard to the possibility for missionaries remaining in Pakistan. Even in the past, the wait for an entry visa was long, but the annual renewal was granted without great difficulty. Lately the renewal of visas for missionaries is beginning to be refused or, at least, as in my case, arrives very late and lasts seven months.

What is your current task?

As a physics teacher, I honestly have no great satisfaction, apart

from the warmth of the human relationship with the boys. In class, I have a support teacher (not for the boys, but for me!) who translates English into Urdu. I find that the Pakistani school, as I know it, gives too much importance to the mnemonic aspect (just browse through the textbooks) while neglecting the skills. The level of learning is very low mainly because attendance is not taken seriously.

One day there may be twenty-four pupils in class; the next day, perhaps only nine. Every now and then a few new pupils pop up and, unfortunately, someone else drops out of school.

What are young Pakistanis like?

In our school and boarding we have some golden boys, really generous. Among the alumni is Akash Bashir, a young man who in 2015, while on security duty at the parish in our neighbourhood, Youhanabad, did not hesitate to sacrifice his own life to prevent an attacker from entering the church to carry out a massacre.

In Pakistan, the Islamic religion is practised by 96.5% of the population. Christians are 1.5%, half Catholic and half Protestant. Although we are a small minority, since Youhanabad has a high concentration of Christians - perhaps the highest in the whole of Pakistan - we do not feel at all crushed by the Muslim majority. Christians are proud to show themselves as such, and the memory of Akash Bashir is very much alive, also as an expression of gratitude for having saved many lives.

All the people here are very kind to me. Having received so much from them, I hope I can make my own small contribution. □

IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Tennis Ball Lesson

A college professor had the mysterious habit of walking into the lecture hall each morning removing a tennis ball from his jacket pocket. He would set it on the corner of the podium. After giving the lecture for the day, he would once again pick up the tennis ball, place it into his jacket pocket, and leave the room. No one ever understood why he did this, until one day...

A student fell asleep during the lecture. The professor never missed a word of his lecture while he walked over to the podium, picked up the tennis ball and threw it, hitting the sleeping student squarely on the top of the head.

The next day, the professor walked into the room, reached into his jacket, removed a baseball... No one ever fell asleep in his class the rest of the semester.

Ship Movie

On many US Navy ships the movie screen is suspended amid ship so that it can be viewed from both sides. This procedure makes it available to larger crowds at popular movies, but usually the junior officers get a reverse image from 'the wrong side of the screen.'

One evening at dinner time an enterprising young ensign passed the following word over the officers' IMC circuit: "The movie to be shown in the warrdoom tonight for the senior officers is on the right side of the screen - The Right-Handed Gun, starring Paul Newman."

"For the junior officers on the wrong side of the screen - The Left

Handed Gun, starring Namwen Luap.

Advice Sought

A young composer once went to Mozart for hints on how to develop creatively.

"Begin by writing simple things first," Mozart told him. "Songs for example."

"But you composed symphonies when you were only five years old," the man exclaimed.

"Ah yes," answered Mozart, "but then I didn't go to anybody for advice."

Better without

"Papa," asked the little fellow, "If it's polite to let women be first in everything, why did God make Adam before Eve?"

"Well, son," replied the father, "I suppose it's because he didn't want any advice while he was making Adam."

Simple arithmetic

Woman lawyer: "And your age is...?"

Woman witness: "About the same as yours."

No Qualms at All

A very dignified judge was married to a very rich creature, who, unhappily drank a bit too much.

At a party one night, he reproved her: "My dear, that's the fifth time you've gone up to the bar and asked for a double peg of whisky. Doesn't that embarrass you?"

"Why should it?" she replied happily. "I just explain I'm getting it for you." □

THE CHURCH I LOVE TO HATE

Vincent Travers OP

Maybe you have left the Church or stopped attending, or are thinking of returning. Like the fox in *The Little Prince*, you are sitting at a distance and looking at the church out of the corner of your eye. You are wondering if you should give it another try. It seems what they say about the Church, despite all its ills, is true: It's hard to get it out of your system.

Image of Church

The crucifixion gives us a good image of Church: Jesus dies between two convicted criminals. Anyone standing around the cross at the time, and looking at the scene would not have been able to distinguish between who was guilty, and who was innocent. There was simply a shared landscape for all to see: God, in the person of Jesus, on the cross, between two thieves. Here we have the biblical image of Church: *Jekyll and Hyde*, good and evil, grace and sin, holiness and messiness, fidelity and betrayal, all part of the same horizon.

Jesus said, "I have come to call sinners, not the just," (Matthew 9:13). The Church founded by Jesus includes criminals, racists, terrorists, paedophiles, murderers, adulterers, and hypocrites of every description. It also includes saints, the noblest and gentlest, and the finest human beings of every time, country, race and gender. To be a member of the Church founded by Jesus is to carry the mantle of both the best and the worst, because the Church always looks exactly as it

looked at the beginning: God, hanging between two thieves.

We need a good theology of Church. Bad theology causes confusion and conflict, ignorance and misunderstanding. Bad theology adds to the turmoil of the sexual abuse scandal we are painfully striving to deal with, and overcome.

Church is the Body of Christ

We cannot separate Jesus from the Church any more than we can separate body and soul, and remain a living thing. People reject the Church because it is too ordinary, too weak, too corrupt, too imperfect, and hopelessly out of tune with the times we live in. They judge by appearances. They see the human, the sinful, but miss the divine. Yes, the Church fails in its mission and makes awful blunders, precisely because the Church is comprised of human beings, like you and me, who will always fall short of the glory of God. That is the risk God took. Anyone who enters the Church expecting to find perfection does not understand the nature of that risk, or the nature of our humanity. Just as every romantic learns that marriage is the beginning, not the end of the struggle, to make love work; so every Christian must learn that Christ will bring his Church to perfection in his time, and in his way.

Church: God's creation

I remember reading a marvelous defence of the Church against critics who dismissed it because of its hypocrisy, its inability to mea-

sure up to the high standards, put before us in the New Testament. It goes something like this: when the school orchestra attempts to play Beethoven's '*Ninth Symphony*', the result is appalling. Poor old Ludwig is turning in his grave, despite his 'deafness' at the treatment of his great work of art. Someone might protest and say, "Why inflict on these kids the terrible burden of trying to render what the immortal Beethoven had in mind? Not even the best Orchestra in all its splendour can reach that perfection. So why bother? The answer is simple: The school orchestra will give some people in the audience their only live experience of the great '*Ninth Symphony*'. Far from perfection, it is the only way they will ever hear Beethoven's message.

Although musicians may never achieve what the composer had in mind, there is no other way on earth for those sounds to be heard. Perhaps, Jesus had something similar in mind when founding his Church.

Staying with music: The composer Igor Stravinsky wrote a piece of music that contained a difficult violin piece. After several weeks' rehear-

sal, the soloist came to Stravinsky and said he could not play it. He had given it his all but had found the music not just too difficult, but even unplayable. Stravinsky replied, "I understand. What I am after is the sound of someone trying to play it." Perhaps, Jesus had something similar in mind with the Church.

Church: Inclusive not exclusive

No one of us thinks of James Joyce as a Theologian. But he was at his theological best when he wrote in *Finnegan's Wake*: 'Catholic' means – *Here Comes Everybody*.

The Church is always God hanging between two thieves. Nobody should be surprised or shocked at how badly the Church has, at times, betrayed the gospel, even today. It has never done well. We're too frail and fragile. We can only struggle, as best we can to make real the dream and mission of Jesus. At the same time, nobody should deny the good the Church has done and continues to do. It has mediated the grace of God, produced saints, opted for the poor, and made, however imperfectly, a house where God dwells on earth for his people. □

LOVING CHILDREN TO THEIR LOVING MOTHER

Our heartfelt thanks to Our Blessed Mother through the recitation of the three Hail Marys and through the intercession of her Son Jesus we have received graces, blessings and innumerable favours. Please continue to bless and protect us.

Mr. & Mrs. H, Collins

POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK OCTOBER 2022

For a Church open to everyone

We pray for the Church; ever faithful to, and courageous in preaching the Gospel, may the Church be a community of solidarity, fraternity and welcome, always living in an atmosphere of synodality.

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MARY, MOST FAITHFUL OF ALL CREATURES

Mary, who is called the Most Holy by her devotees, detests sin above all other evil, and we, to resemble her, must develop a mortal hatred of sin, fleeing even its shadow as one flees from the sight of a serpent, shunning all occasions by which one easily offends God. Mary was God's most faithful creature, so let us, following her example commit ourselves to observe God's holy law scrupulously, to fulfil our duties diligently, never wavering, as long as we live in God's divine service. Mary was a creature aflame with love for Jesus, so let us, in order to conform ourselves to so perfect a model, love her Divine Son with all our might, turning all the thoughts of our minds to him, devoting all the affections of our hearts to him, always directing all the activities of our lives to him.

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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