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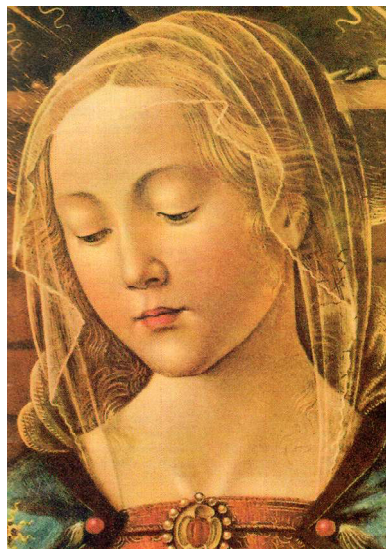
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*Grant, we pray,
 O Lord,
 that we may be
 rightly conformed
 so to honour
 the mysteries
 of your
 Only Begotten Son,
 as to be made worthy
 of his promises.*

*Adapted from the prayer
 on the Feast of O.L. of the Rosary*

From The Editor's Desk

WOW, WHAT A GIFT!

I'm sitting down to write this editorial; I've just come up from the chapel where, as a community we pray "the Liturgy of the Hours." At this point already, I think it is worthwhile reiterating that there is no one ideal way of prayer and each of our life stories is utterly unique. You and I have an individual gift of prayer, through the mystery of God deep within, dwelling in your heart and mine.

One aspect I find very helpful myself is this: my prayer, I know, is never just my own. It is part of the great chorus of all God's people, ceaselessly rising up day and night, in all the corners of the world.

Having said that, however, I want to bring my prayer thoughts very much 'down to earth.' We are blessed with the life we have on this earth. Each day I live and breathe, God comes to me. Each day God is present to me, calling me, guiding me. In dark days and bright days, I can face life's challenges with courage and thankfulness, because I am gifted by the God who calls me 'to live for the praise of his glory' (Eph.1:12). So, every day, I can notice how God comes to me and is present to me. Every day I live has a special meaning. No day is without purpose, even if I feel bleak and useless.

Every morning, we began our Morning Prayer with the Psalm that has the phrase, 'O that today you would listen to his voice! Harden not your hearts' (Ps.95.7-8). As a young student in a Jesuit boarding school in the early sixties, I was told that St Ignatius suggests that twice a day, I should stop, in order to pray and reflect for a little while, to see what has been happening within me and around me. The first time could be around midday or lunch hour, and the second one, naturally, at the end of the day. My time of prayerful reflection could take many forms, and each of us needs to find what suits us best. *Firstly*, I enter into my heart, and into God's presence. I stay there for a moment, asking for light and wisdom to see clearly. *Secondly*, I look at the hours which have passed by already, and review them. What has happened for me? Who did I meet? How was I in myself? In good form, or irritable, able to attend to others and notice things, or maybe somewhat closed in on myself? Perhaps someone's word or gesture upset me, although I was unaware of it at the time? Did a smile or the beauty of the sky touch my heart? *Thirdly*, a prayer of sorrow wells up in me, for I realize how, here and there, I was less than generous, and negative in myself. *Fourthly*, and most important of all, I give thanks for the giftedness of my life, and for the blessings these recent hours have contained. And, *fifthly*, I end by asking God's grace and help for the time ahead.

I only have this day, now, when I breathe and am conscious and aware. All of my life flows together in this one day. And I say it again: the living God comes to me, and gifts me this very day. So, to ponder on my life and see its meaning today as a great gift!

Fr. Ian Doulton, sdb

THE CHOICE OF A CHILD: A DESIRE OR A RIGHT?

by Mons Gianpaolo Dianin, bishop

When two parents think about engendering life, it is appropriate to consider not only their own choice, but also the good of the child and what the child will find when it comes into the world

In February last year, we celebrated the Day for Life. February 5th fell on a Sunday and we marked its 45th edition. This observance originated during times of intense debate surrounding abortion laws, which are now recognized as a legal option in most countries around the world.

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis talks about life as a gift and a blessing. However, he also acknowledges the challenges that can come with welcoming a child: "If a child comes into the world in unwanted circumstances, the parents and other members of the family must do everything possible to accept that child as a gift from God and assume the responsibility of accepting him or her with openness and affection" (AL 166). He emphasizes that no sacrifice is too great to prevent a child from feeling unwanted or worthless.

In Western culture, we observe two contradictory phenomena. On the one hand, there is the rejection of life or the struggle to come to terms with the reality of procreation and childbearing, as evidenced by the mentality and the painful issue of abortion. On the other hand, there is a conflicting desire to have a child, which is often hindered by widespread infertility or sterility. This desire

often leads to the pursuit of having a child through various sophisticated assisted procreation techniques available today.

Two contradictory phenomena exist: the tendency to shut out life and the impulse to embrace life without any limitations. However, are these two aspects truly at odds, or are they closer than they seem on the surface? They share a common thread: in both cases, there is an emphasis, and sometimes an absolute prioritization, of the supposed rights and desires of adults, as opposed to the rights of children, whether they are yet to be born or are being desired.

In cases involving pregnancy termination due to difficulties faced by the couple, priority is given to the woman's self-determination. This means that the woman's problems take precedence over the well-being of the child in her womb when facing difficulties. Similarly, in cases of low fertility or infertility, the couple's desire to have a child is prioritized over the child's rights to be born with two biological parents, to have a father and a mother, or to avoid having a mother who is too old.

We recognize the challenges that couples face when dealing with an unplanned pregnancy, and we acknowledge the deep

and sincere desire to have children. However, we believe it's important to consider the rights and well-being of the child alongside those of the adults. The dignity of the child, from conception to birth and beyond, should be given the same level of importance as the desires of the parents. It is concerning when the reality of the child is overshadowed by the desires of the parents.

We believe that a child is a unique and distinct individual from its parents from the moment it comes into the world. While every child carries traits from their parents and relies on them for a long time, they are also their own separate entity from the time of conception, requiring support and guidance from their parents as they grow towards independence. Even when both parents plan for a child, it is important to consider the parents' capabilities, the well-being of the child, and what environment the child will be raised in.

Instead of focusing on the right "to" a child, it is more appropriate to initially consider the rights "of" the child. In Italy, there is a significant law on adoption that prioritizes the welfare of children. The main objective is not simply to provide a child to a couple unable to conceive, but to offer a family to a child in need. As the most vulnerable party, the child deserves the utmost protection and care. This should not



only be reflected in the law, but also in the awareness and decisions of adults. While the desire for a child, the challenges of parenting, and the complexities of bringing an unwanted child into the world are all important considerations, we must not overlook the rights and well-being of the child, who remains a gift rather than an absolute right.

The words of Pope Francis are powerful: "When speaking of children who come into the world, no sacrifice made by adults will be considered too costly or too great, if it means the child never has to feel that he or she is a mistake, or worthless or abandoned to the four winds and the arrogance of man" (AL 166).

Every child changes the parents' lives, revolutionizes their existence, and requires sacrifices and renunciations. But they also bring intense and profound joy. Most importantly, every child who seeks to enter the world seems to challenge us adults and prompt us to consider what kind of men and women we want to be, as we shape the future generation. □

A KNIGHT IN THE SERVICE OF GOD

by Chino Biscontin

Following an embrace given to a leper, Francis discovered a new, more passionate way of being a knight, and directed his devotion totally to Jesus

Born in 1182 in Assisi to a prosperous merchant of elegant fine fabrics, Pietro di Bernardone, who was often absent from the family for business. Francis was educated by his mother, Pica, from whom he learned the great value of emotions and relationships of affection. This is why he was not attracted to the career as a merchant that his father offered him. Instead, he wished to live according to the values of *'amor cortese,'* (love of the court) which demanded absolute devotion to a lord, respect and protection of women, girls and children even at the cost of one's life, heroic commitment to justice and an undivided faith in God.

To officially practice the love of the court, Francis, as a commoner (albeit a rich one), aspired to become a knight. He joined the army of Assisi in the Battle of Collestrada against the forces of Perugia, hoping to be knighted in the field. However, he ended up in the harsh prisons of Perugia at the age of 20, after paying a high ransom to secure his release. This experience undermined his health and left him depressed, with bewildering behaviour and uncertainty about his future.

He experienced a transformation after embracing a leper, motivated by his love for the Lord. Through this, he disco-



St Francis, tempera on wood, attributed to Cimabue circa 1290, at the Museum of the Portiuncola, near the Basilica of St Mary of the Angels (Assisi)

vered a way of living as a knight that was not focused on worldly pursuits but rather on a more passionate devotion. Instead of dedicating himself to a worldly lord, he directed his devotion to the Lord Jesus, from whom he learned to live for values greater than those of knighthood. His entire focus for the next twenty years became total dedication to Jesus. Out of love for Jesus, he started reading the Gospels with the sole intention of understanding, knowing, and loving Jesus better, and was determined to promptly and faithfully put his teachings into practice.

He taught this "form of the holy Gospel" to the disciples, who came in increasing numbers for his guidance. Towards the end of his life, there were about five thousand of them! Clare, too, was dazzled by Francis' resemblance to Jesus and followed his example, including living in absolute poverty and trusting in the Father, who feeds the birds of the air. She learned that God had created all things through his Son. As a result, she loved and respected all creatures with humility and gratitude, recognizing a ray of God's beauty and wisdom in each of them.

His love for the Eucharist and priests who consecrated it prevented him from following paths that would have led him to break ties with the Church, as had happened to his contemporaries. He asked for and obtained approval for his and his first companions' resolutions at the beginning of his conversion. Later, he obtained the approval of a Rule that he wrote, taking into account the in-

spiration that had led him to conversion, as well as the dialogue with the brothers in the Pentecost Chapters at St. Mary of the Angels, and the experience he had gained.

The writing of the Rule took place in an atmosphere of tensions with the Roman curia and with a considerable section of the friars. However, the experience of those contrasts did not stop him from putting down on paper what he believed to be his mission and that of those who wished to follow him: representing Jesus alive to defend the whole Church from worldliness. Despite the power of those conflicts to frustrate his psychological resistance, which was already weakened by illness, suffering, fatigue, and austerity of life, he persevered.

For two years, he grappled with doubts, wondering whether he had deceived himself and misunderstood the Lord's will, a thought that scared him immensely.

Two years after the Rule was written, during a forty-day severe retreat (the "Lent of St. Michael"), Francis' body was marked by the stigmata. The Lord himself attested that Francis, precisely because he suffered and because he was marginalized and opposed, had come to resemble the beloved and crucified Jesus in everything. He found "perfect joy" and impetus in the mission entrusted to him, to the point of exhaustion. He died in 1226, and his feast day is 4 October. □

NOTHING SHORT OF A MIRACLE

by Anastasia Dias

If someone asked me to name a few memories that I cherish: I would begin with memories I have of being with my roommates in college. About six years ago, I had just started college and I met some wonderful girls. I was only 17, a very young and gullible age, and, had I not met women like them, I would be a very different person today.

Their friendship, love and warmth is something I value to this day.

Now, if someone asked me to name a few challenging times in my life, I would go back again, to about five years ago.

Looking back, what I felt at the time and what I felt was happening to me seemed enormous. Now, it seems trivial.

And, all that I seem to remember is the friendship I shared that left an everlasting impact on me, something I miss to this day.

Isn't it strange that

when we go through challenging times in our life, they seem like the end of the world. But, once they're over they don't look as tough as they seemed at that moment.

I feel the same way.

And, that is when I bring to mind the parable of the Sower. A few seeds were strewn; some were eaten by birds or trampled upon, some fell on rocky soil, some were choked by thorns and the rest blossomed.

The message is this: We are all born with the same amount of love and joy in our hearts.

Each one of us experiences different situations and challenges.

We end up completely focusing on those situations and lose sight



of the bigger picture.

Along the way, we lose our joy and love as well.

What's our response to that?

Oh, life 'happened' to me....

That's my point!

Life has happened to us!

You and I are alive today and that is the biggest and most beautiful thing.

Never has anyone witnessed a bigger miracle than life.

From a caterpillar to a butterfly, from a seed to a tree, pollen to a flower, a single cell to a human being: we are living a miracle.

Sadly, however, we lose sight of this and become lifeless and loveless.

We end up seeking acceptance, validation and love from people.

Recently, I was privileged to go on a retreat: a spiritual sojourn. I found it extremely difficult initially because it was a new place, the weather was not great and I just couldn't be as spiritual as the people around me seemed.

Frustrated, I sat in a corner.

I heard a voice singing and chanting and praying and I didn't know how or why or when, but I started crying.

The voice was so pure and beautiful, it felt as if it was it had a direct connection with God.

In that moment, I stopped thinking about my poor self and thought about every single person who had contributed to my life in some way or other, beginning with the most recent. I thought about those people, their families, their loved ones. This was easy.

Then, came the difficult part. I thought about all the people who didn't like me, people who had said horrible things to and about

me or been nasty to me. That list was small. But those were the ones that needed forgiveness and love.

Those were the ones who had forgotten about the innate love and goodness that they possessed. And, I will never know if remembering them during a silent retreat and forgiving them would ever make them feel the way I did in that moment: forgiven, loved and brand new. But I hope that they can feel what I felt at some point in their lives.

I also had a choice: I could have become like either of those people from the two categories that I mentioned. But, like the main character in a famous movie says: 'It's hard to stay mad when there's so much beauty in this world.'

And, I couldn't agree more.

But I will add, it's hard to be any other way when you're born with so much love.

It's hard to stay angry all the time when you've been forgiven.

It's hard to seek casual relationships when you know you are loved so deeply.

It's hard to live life as casually as a common occurrence when it is nothing short of a miracle.

You and I are coming to the end of another year, let us think about all the people who need our acceptance, forgiveness and most importantly our love.

May we have the courage to reach out to them and show them that we care, not just through our words but also with our actions.

The world needs more people to love, there are already many who do the opposite, let us not add to that list.

Let us love because we were loved first and that's a fact! □

WHERE GOD WEEPS THE SALESIANS ARE THERE

Antonio R. Labanca (Missioni Don Bosco)

If we were to list all the ongoing conflicts around the world today, it would be hard to find a region where there is no bloodshed and where daily murders do not occur with weapons used by enemies. When Pope Francis spoke a decade ago, saying, "We have entered World War III, only it is being fought in pieces, in chapters," it may have seemed like a dramatic statement meant to grab attention. However, today it appears to be an ignored prophecy. If world leaders had taken that statement as one of many moral appeals at the time, it is likely that they would now see it as a realistic and alarming analysis. Last December, President of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella, referred explicitly to the Pope's warning in his meeting with the diplomatic corps accredited to Italy.

Deathly Silence

The pontiff was returning from South Korea. His vision, which had started from the 'peripheries' of the earth, now embraced him in its entirety. It was 18 August 2014, six months into the Russian occupation of the eastern regions of Ukraine. But in ten years, even the most authoritative of these voices have gone unheeded, above all, that of the United Nations Secretary-General, António Manuel de Oliveira Guterres. The dynamics of events seem to be sucked into an unstoppable whirlpool.

Does God listen to the prayers for peace that so much of humanity addresses to him? This is a provocative question often raised in discussions to challenge whether he truly exists and if he stands with the poor, afflicted, persecuted, or victimized. Spiritually sensitive individuals often suggest that God is weeping at this moment. We have diverted our consciences from the inquiry into whether it is a sin to initiate wars, plan and execute terrorism using bombs or even words. For a mature individual, his conscience and intelligence should be sufficient. And yet..."

However, if God mourns, it is not only for the most recent conflicts that are closer to us or more symbolic from a historical and religious point of view, but also for the silence that acts as an accomplice to so many wars. This silence predisposes dictators and merchants of death to immunity and tolerates hunger and persecution.

If we take the time to look at the map, we can identify numerous situations that touch our hearts and call for justice. During his first meeting with a group of new diplomats accredited to the Holy See, Pope Francis mentioned a few specific situations, including Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, Lebanon, Jerusalem, Haiti, and Ukraine.

Sudan: A country situated between the Sahel and the great

Nile, a region that has been a hub for trade for centuries and a natural link between the Red Sea and the heart of Africa, has recently discovered vast potential underground, including oil and precious minerals. However, this discovery has also attracted the attention of armed opportunists. Forced migrations are being imposed on the population, and the conflict has led to mass exodus and ethnic tensions in Darfur. The repercussions of the conflict on neighboring countries are also of great concern.



Refugees in the Congo

Democratic Republic of the Congo: The country's ancient wealth was lost due to Belgian colonialism, which led to the death of 6 million inhabitants. It was then replaced by the domination of foreign companies that exploited agricultural production and, most importantly, the country's natural resources. In recent times, the country has become sought after for its minerals, particularly the "rare earths" used in modern technologies. The government's disengagement from education, lack of paid work, and undernourishment have further exacerbated the precarious situation of health and broken families.



A Rohingya Refugee

Myanmar: The backdrop is the coup d'état that ended a fragile democracy three years ago. The UN organization in charge of humanitarian emergencies, OCHA, has painted a grim picture from the perspective of a population that is resorting to harmful coping mechanisms: Reduced food consumption; Selling personal possessions; Dropping out of school; Fleeing the country even through high-risk means. Furthermore, there has been an observed decrease in the average age of those entering into marriage, with young children leaving home to seek their fortunes, adding their poverty to that of their spouse.

Lebanon and Jerusalem: The current situation is a result of the Oslo Peace Accords in 1993, which had aimed at fostering mutual recognition between Israel and Palestine. However, the unspoken intentions gradually took shape in the form of extremist elements within both communities. It's challenging to unravel the complexities stemming from the creation of the Jewish State and the external oppression experienced by a people who have been historically subjected to anti-Semitism across Europe, both



Haitian boys with their report cards

East and West, after the Second World War. Lebanon is bearing the brunt of the conflicts in the region, as it's hosting millions of Palestinian and Syrian refugees.

Haiti: The situation on that part of the island of Hispaniola is described by those who manage to gather information, as a living hell. People face daily physical threats and live in fear of being kidnapped for ransom. Weapons are as common as, if not more common than, drugs; armed gangs are controlled by soldiers who answer to criminal bosses. This kind of environment often leads to careers as mercenaries, torturers, drug dealers, and gang leaders. All of this goes on under the "unseeing" gaze of international bodies and the most powerful nearby countries, who use the area as a "free port" for their most illicit trade. The electricity needed for daily life has become a luxury, only available for a few hours each day.

Ukraine: Currently, two years into the escalating conflict with Russia, there is no military solution in sight, and diplomacy seems to be lacking. The people of Kyiv are striving to live without the constant threat of missiles. However, on the front lines, both the military and civilians are facing daily challenges such as

death, food shortages, and the inability to cultivate fields. When the war finally ends, there will be a deep division between two Europes, two religious traditions, and between those who were part of the conflict and those who sought peace. Furthermore, there is a renewed threat of the use of nuclear weapons. Additionally, we would like to add a country from Latin America as emblematic of the situation.

Venezuela: The state that used to be the driving force of the South American region has now found itself in an unimaginable situation. The government is taking extreme measures that are plunging the majority of the population into poverty and ignorance. The government has silenced the media, threatened political opponents, and manipulated the judicial system, giving free rein to those seeking revenge for past injustices. Additionally, trafficking (and consumption) contributes to the dysfunctional system.

God weeps for all that is happening in the Holy Land and the world. Raniero La Valle, a respected Catholic intellectual, shared a reflection. Just as we questioned our concept of God after the atrocities of Nazism, today we are faced with the question: What concept of God do we have after Gaza? Perhaps it is a God who inspires people to mourn for Jerusalem and Gaza, who urges Hamas not to kill Jews, and encourages Israel not to stop at the edge of the abyss. Perhaps it is a God who urges all of us to bring the Earth and the dignity of all creatures back into communion, and to avoid inflicting harm. □

Witnesses in & for Our Times



JOHN CAPISTRANO 23 OCTOBER

Ian Pinto, sdb

A SUCCESSFUL MAN

John was born in Cap-istrano, Italy on June 24, 1385. His father was a member of the court of the King of Naples. John seemed destined for a successful life. When he was young, his father died and so his mother took it upon herself to educate him. She taught him as much as she could and when he was old enough, she sent him to Perugia for further studies. There he took up the study of civil and canon law in the hope of acquiring his father's position in the Royal court of Naples. The King of Naples apparently had his eye on John and was keeping track of his progress. He noticed that John was acing his studies and no sooner had he completed his qualification, he appointed him Governor of Perugia. He was just twenty-six years old!

At the time, there were lots of tensions between the king-

doms of Italy. Noble families would vie with one another for political control over territory, strategic trade routes and towns, and resources that could bring economic benefit. In the bargain, plenty of illicit activity would take place. Corruption was rife with each party trying to outdo the other by gaining goodwill or instilling fear. John tried to curb corruption by enforcing strict laws. As is to be expected, there was a lot of opposition to his governance. But John remained



unfazed.

One of his tasks as Governor was to keep the peace. In 1416, the powerful Malatesta family garnered the support of other influential families and rebelled against King Ladislaus. When John attempted to reason with them, they captured and imprisoned him. He was treated badly, fed poorly and chained most of the time. John believed that the King would come to his rescue but to his disappointment, no help came. During this terrible experience, he began to give serious thought to life and particularly to the state of his soul. In the darkness and silence of his jail, John experienced the tender touch of God. He realized that it is of 'no use for a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul' (Mt 16-26). He began to discover that all his wealth, power and authority meant nothing in the final analysis. None of those things could even help him get out of the misfortune he was in, much less would they contribute to his eternal salvation.

A REFORMED MAN

John experienced a transformation. He decided to renounce the world and all its allurements. While in prison, he asked his captors for books on the Catholic faith. This they deigned to provide him and so he began to educate himself in Catholic theology. One night he saw St. Francis of Assisi in a dream. The saint welcomed him into the Franciscan Order and told him that it was God's will that he become a friar. Immediately prior to his imprisonment, John had married the daughter of a rich nobleman but

their marriage had not been consummated. Such was the effect of his dream that after his release, he applied to join the Franciscan friary. Since his marriage was not consummated, he was permitted. On the feast day of St. Francis, he entered the Order; the date was October 4, 1416.

After putting on the Franciscan habit and professing the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, John began his ecclesiastical studies. His teacher was the renowned and saintly Franciscan, Bernardine of Siena, who is recognized as a saint today. John drank in the divine wisdom that emanated from Bernardine's lips and saw him carry out apostolic work. He would often accompany him on preaching tours and would keenly observe his mannerisms and style.

John lived a life of devoted prayer and frequent penance. He avoided meat and ate just one simple meal a day; he slept on the floor and only for a few hours each night. He frequently read and meditated on the Scriptures and spent long hours in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament or a crucifix.

In 1425, he was ordained and initiated his own apostolic ministry that took him across the length and breadth of Italy. Wherever he went, huge crowds would gather to listen to him preach the Word of God. More often than not, Churches would be packed to capacity and there would be even more people standing outside. As a result, he would prefer to preach in public squares. Legends say that when he visited a town, life there came to a stand-

still. People would close their shops, leave their work and entertainment, and gather in the public square to listen to him. On one occasion, in the city of Brescia, he preached to a crowd of 126,000 people who gathered from all the neighbouring towns and cities! On another occasion, he was preaching a mission and over 2000 sick people were brought to him so that he could pray over them and bless them. His reputation as an effective preacher and a powerful healer preceded him wherever he went.

THE FRANCISCAN REFORMER

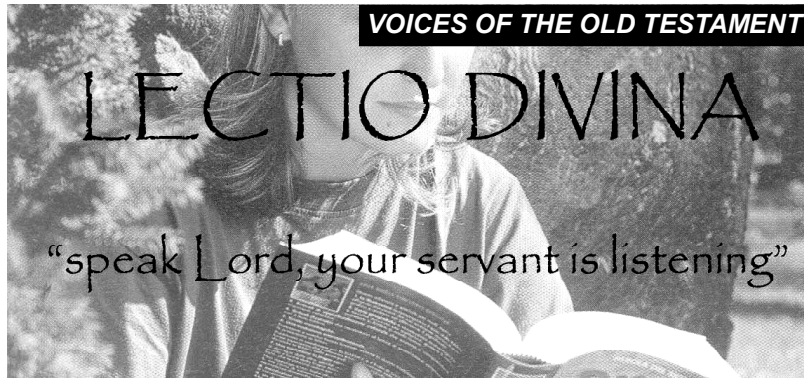
John wasn't a founder of a congregation but he was a reformer. Along with St. Bernardine, his mentor, he was involved in the reform of the Franciscan order. There arose a dispute between the Franciscan Conventuals and the Franciscan Observants. These were the two main branches of the Order existing at that time. The latter insisted on adhering to the rule and way of life outlined by St. Francis; the former, adopted a style that was in keeping with other monastic congregations. Therefore, they were called Conventuals: they lived in community, within a monastery or convent, shared all their resources in common and participated in the common mission. One of the key points of dispute was the holding of property. The Observants opined that in keeping with the spirit of Francis, nothing should be owned. Pope Martin V in 1430 permitted the Conventuals to hold property like other Orders.

Several attempts were made at

broaching an understanding and fostering a union between the branches. The Council of Constance and several popes endeavoured to bring about unity but failed. At the behest of Pope Martin V and with the instrumentality of John, a union of the branches was agreed upon in principle and John even drafted statutes that would govern and ensure the sustenance of the union. However, a short while later, the Conventuals convened a chapter and rejected the union as well as the statutes drawn up by John. Nevertheless, he is counted as one of the four great pillars of Observant reform among the Friars Minor.

Despite this failure, John gained recognition as an ambassador for harmony and was often requested by the Pope to intervene and settle matters of dispute within and without ecclesiastical circles. On one of his missions, John met his end. He was asked by the Pope to preach a mission in those places that had recently obtained freedom from Ottoman rule. Despite being a man of 70, John's eloquence caused him to become a leader of a peasant army that was bent on throwing off the last vestiges of Ottoman rule. This earned him the title of 'the Soldier Priest.' Although he survived the war, he died of bubonic plague which was common on battlefields.

Besides his work of reformation, mediation and preaching, he is remembered for his tremendous writings that opposed heretical teachings and sought to clarify and explain Christian doctrine. He is the patron saint of military chaplains and jurists. □



LECTIO DIVINA

“speak Lord, your servant is listening”

JESUS’ STYLE OF LEADERSHIP

by Dinesh Vasawa, sdb

1. Reading: Spend a few moments reading the Gospel passage slowly and attentively. Pay attention to the details of the story and imagine yourself in the setting. Consider the significance of James and John’s request and Jesus’ response to it.

2. Meditation: Ponder the passage’s message. Consider the importance of James and John’s request to sit at Jesus’ right and left hands in His glory. Let us also keep in mind the Jesus’ response, in which He teaches them about true greatness and the value of service. What does this story teach you about the values of the Kingdom of God and the call to discipleship? Allow me to share my reflection with you so that we can both understand and reflect. In Mark 10:35-45, Zebedee’s sons, James and John, approach Jesus with a request. They ask Jesus to give them honorary positions, one at his right hand and the other at his left, when he enters his glory. Jesus responds by asking if they

are willing to drink from the cup that he will drink and be baptised with the same baptism that he will receive.

James and John confidently affirm their willingness to do so. Jesus then explains that the positions of honour they seek are not his to grant but will be bestowed upon those who have been prepared. This response demonstrates that Jesus’ kingdom is not based on worldly principles of power, authority, and positions of honour.

When the other disciples learn about James and John’s request, they are outraged. Jesus seizes the opportunity to teach them about true greatness in his kingdom. He tells them that Gentile rulers exercise authority and lord it over others, but that his followers should be treated differently.

Jesus emphasises that greatness in his kingdom is defined not by power and authority, but by service. He continues: “Whoever

wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.” Jesus is presented as the ultimate example of servant leadership, as he came not to be served but to serve and sacrifice his life as a ransom for many.

This passage challenges our understanding of greatness and leadership. It teaches us that true greatness is found in selfless service and prioritising the needs of others over our own. Jesus’ call to be servants and slaves to all encourages humility, compassion, and a willingness to sacrifice for the sake of others.

By emphasising his own sacrificial mission, Jesus foreshadows his impending crucifixion, in which he will offer his life as a ransom for many. This emphasises the depth of his servant leadership and the ultimate act of love and redemption that he will perform.

This passage invites us to consider our own perspectives on power, authority, and greatness. It encourages us to follow Jesus’ example of servant leadership and look for ways to serve and uplift others in our daily lives.



3. Pray: Have a conversation with God. Share your thoughts, feelings, and questions about the passage. Thank God for Jesus’ example of coming to serve rather than to be served. Seek the grace to understand and embrace the values of humility, selflessness, and service. Pray for the courage to let go of any desire for power or recognition and embrace the call to serve others with love. Seek guidance on how to carry out Jesus’ teachings in your daily life.

4. Contemplation: Pause for a moment of silence and stillness. Allow the words and images from the Gospel passage to settle in your heart. Imagine you’re one of the disciples, watching Jesus, James, and John talk. Consider how you can let go of selfish ambitions and live a life of humble service. Simply rest in God’s presence and allow Him to speak to you beyond words.

5. Action: Think about how you can apply the message of this passage to your own life. Consider any areas where you may need to let go of selfish ambitions for power or recognition. How can you embrace a life of humble service like Jesus? Consider how you can serve others with love, particularly those who are marginalised or in need. Make a commitment to act on the insights you’ve gained.

Dear Friends remember that *Lectio Divina* is an individual and intimate encounter with God’s Word. Take your time, be open to His guidance, and let the Holy Spirit lead your life. □

Quiet Spaces

THE ICON OF THE FOOL

"The way of folly leads to corruption"

Pope Francis' homily (edited) at Domus Sanctae Marthae on Tuesday, October 18, 2017

Acts 28:16-20, 30-31, Jn 21:20-25

In today's liturgy of the Word," he began, "the word 'fool' is mentioned twice. Jesus says it to the doctors of the law, to some of the Pharisees (Lk 11:37-41); and Paul says it to the pagans: "Claiming to be wise, they became fools" (Rom 1:16-25). Francis however, also referred to a third case: Paul called the Galatians foolish because "they let themselves be misled, bewitched by new ideas." Consequently, "this word said to the pagans and Christians," Francis explained, "is a condemnation". Moreover, "it reveals the way of folly", which in turn, the Pope asserted, "leads to corruption".

The Pontiff proceeded to highlight the nature of **the three kinds of fool** subject to corruption. **Firstly**, the doctors of the law and the Pharisees, to whom "Jesus said: 'you are like graves which are not seen': on the outside they appear beautiful", Francis explained, "but on the inside they are full of bone and rot. Corrupt." Thus, the Pharisees "became corrupt, for they "emphasized only appearances, and not what was inside; they were corrupted by vanity, appearances, outward beauty, exterior justice. They became corrupt because they were only concerned with polishing, making beautiful the external aspect of things; they did not delve within: corruption is within, akin to the graves".

The second kind of fool refers to the pagans whom, in the day's reading, Paul accused of having "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity". In this case too, the pagans "exchanged the glory of God - which they could have known through reason - for idols." Such corruption is one of "idolatry, of many idolatries" Francis concluded, then warned that the corruption of idolatry applies not only to ancient times, but has relevance in the present day, for example, in "consumerism" and "the idolatry of seeking a convenient god."

The third kind of fool refers to the Galatians. Francis asserted that in "allowing themselves to be corrupted by ideologies, they renounce being Christian in order to become ideologues of Christianity". Ultimately, however, the Pontiff concluded that all three of these categories, in their own manner, "end in corruption, by way of this folly".

From here comes the question: "What is this foolishness?" And the Pope's essential reply was that "it is a failure to listen. It is literally a 'nescio', an 'I don't know how'", he said, an incapacity to listen. "When the Word does not enter, I am not letting it enter because I am not listening to it. The fool does not listen. He believes he is listening, but he does not listen. He does his own thing, always, and for this reason, the Word of

God cannot enter his heart and there is no room for love". Or, and this is often the case, the Pope observed, if the Word does enter, "it does so in a distilled fashion, transformed by one's concept of reality".

Therefore, Francis asserted that "fools do not know how to listen and this deafness leads them to corruption. The Word of God does not enter; there is no room for love and finally there is no room for freedom". They became slaves, the Pope explained, "because they exchanged the truth of God with falsehood, adoring and serving creatures rather than the Creator". Indeed, he continued, "they are not free; and this failure to listen, this deafness leaves no room for love or freedom: it always leads to slavery".

Thus, it would be appropriate to ask ourselves: "Do I listen to the word of God? Do I let it enter?" the Pope asked. "The word of God is alive; it is efficacious; it discerns the sentiments and thoughts of the heart; it cuts; it goes inside." He encouraged the faithful to question whether we let the Word enter our hearts, or if we remain deaf to it. Moreover, "do I transform it in appearance?" he inquired. "Do I transform it into idolatry, into idolatrous habits, or do I transform it into ideology", and thus it does not enter? This, the Pontiff cautioned, "is the folly of Christians".

Finally, Francis recommended a further step, that is, "just as the icons of the saints do us so much good", we should "look at the icon of the fools of today" - and there are many of these, he said. "There are foolish Christians and also foolish pastors", those whom, the Pope recalled, "Saint Augustine 'lambasted' vehemently. For the folly of the shepherd harms the flock; the folly of the corrupt shepherd, as well as the folly of the self-satisfied pastor, the pagan, and the folly of the pastor ideologue".

Thus the Pontiff came to his conclusion. "Let us look at the icon of the foolish Christian, and next to this folly let us look at the Lord who is always at the door: he knocks at the door and waits". It is a matter of contemplating "the Lord's nostalgia, when he remembers the good times: 'I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown'; God's nostalgia for the love he had for us at first". In fact, "if we fall prey to this folly and we distance ourselves, he feels this nostalgia; nostalgia for us". Just as "Jesus wept with this nostalgia; he wept over Jerusalem. It was the nostalgia for a people whom he had chosen, whom he had loved, but who had distanced themselves through folly; they had preferred appearances, idols or ideologies" □

THE NAME

By Pierluigi Menato, Tr. Ian Doulton, sb

Francis entered the living room, flinging open the door with one of his jerks, always very cheerful. He was a tall, sturdy, square-shouldered boy. Everyone called him a handsome man. He was pleasant company, liked for his cheerfulness and the tinge of mischief in his character, but his unscrupulousness was without irony and, in the end, without malice.

He was 35 years old, had a degree in economics and commerce, and was the deputy director of an important company, earning a substantial income. Despite his noble lineage from his paternal grandmother, he was not keen on associating himself with high society, unlike his sister Luisa, who enjoyed the finer things in life. Instead, he valued his freedom and spent his time in the woods of the Euganean Hills, hunting with his trusty double-barrel shotgun and his dog. Whenever he had a few days off, he enjoyed the peace of the woods and always returned with game in his bag and a branch of heather on his jacket.

Luisa felt ignored by Francis, but seeing him looking so fresh and cheerful made her anger disappear, and she ended up laughing as well.

When the door opened abruptly, his sister looked up from the book she was reading with great interest and her eyes sparkled with emotion. She greeted him, "Good morning, Francis," then went back to her book.

Francis sat down across from her and absentmindedly turned on the television. He asked, "What are

you reading?"

In a soft voice, Luisa replied, "Abyss."

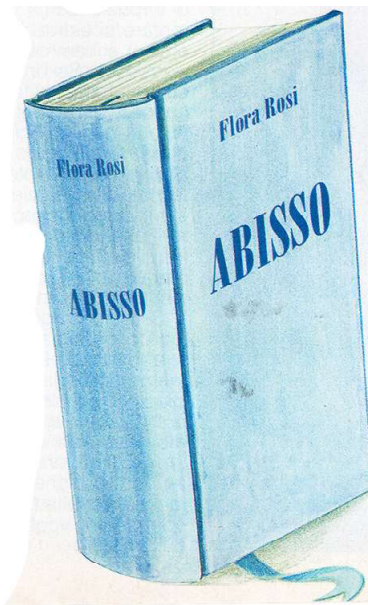
"Holy Guardian Angels, what kind of a romantic title is that? I bet it's a woman's work. Am I right?"

"Precisely," Luisa retorted, a little annoyed, aware of Francis's ideas that did not entirely correspond to how she saw and felt about life.

"Abyss! Can there be a sillier title? What can a writer say that is so overwhelming, if you, my usually affectionate sister, do not even raise your eyes to look at me?"

Luisa closed the book, having placed the blue silk ribbon to mark the page; she lightly laid her hands on it and spoke:

"Francis, it's a beautiful book,



simple, human and down-to-earth. It describes the existence of a man who resembles you, who has, it seems, the same ideas as you."

"You want me to agree with your woman writer," said Francis jokingly. "So be it; I remain the enemy of the literate woman, the knowledgeable woman, and, bit-terly, the woman writer. It seems that she wastes her time when she should be looking after the children, doing housework, cleaning, washing, feeding, etc.: maybe with dirty nails and a bit dishevelled, but a doctor, a lawyer, a poet! No, never, God forbid!"

So saying, Francis got up from his armchair, approached his sister and continued:

"Show me the 'Abyss'."

Luisa handed him the book and suggested:

"Read it!"

"Me? I have other things to do. I would never read a woman's book even if I had to," he said absentmindedly as he opened the pages. His eye fell on two lines that caught

his attention. Not wanting to be seen by Luisa, who was following him with her gaze and staring at the expressions on his face, he closed the book and glanced at the name. "The only thing I like about this woman is the name, beautiful: Flora Rosi. There is the harmony of nature, and that's what I love!"

"Everything is harmony in this artist's soul," Luisa continued. "Her writing is straightforward, without sophistication, without words that sound false. I read one of her first books with apprehension; it seemed dull. I reread it, and I liked it. They are pages of beauty and goodness..."

"Preaching, to make a long story short," Francis laughed. "In any case, despite your goodwill to convert me, I will remain an enemy of literate women, novelists and writers..."

The discussion ended there because his mother summoned because lunch was ready. Francis was surprisingly hungry despite his worries and ate with a great

appetite. Before getting up from the table, he stated, "I'm sorry, but I won't be able to make tonight's appointment. I have an interview with the director that will last until late."

"You are hopeless!" scolded Luisa. "And to think that Milli Salviati was coming just for you."

"For me? If that's what you think, let her know that she's not my type. I could never fall in love with a woman who wears as much make-up as her and has a name like a kitten, or a monkey. Couldn't she be named Emilia?" And with that, he left, laughing.

He returned late that evening, ate alone in the dining room, and noticed that Luisa had forgotten Flora Rosi's book there. Intrigued by his sister's mention of the book, he took it to his room and read almost all of it in one go with the light on until the morning hours. He fell asleep with visions of pastures, peaks, and intoxicating solitudes, secretly willing to embrace those visions without confessing it to his sister.

Of late, Luisa had noticed that Francis was eating less, seemed preoccupied, and spoke very little. She realized that the cause of his change in behaviour was a lady who had arrived in Abano for spa treatment and was staying in the hotel nextdoor. This woman often walked alone, greeted people with grace and reserve, and was happy to chat with the locals. She dressed elegantly but modestly: she was tall, not conventionally beautiful, and had blonde hair.

Francis had fallen in love with her. At the drop of a hat, he managed to find out the woman's name,

learned that she was a young lady, received a lot of mail, and did not want to make acquaintances. She enjoyed the beauty of the nearby hills, leaving immediately after breakfast and returning in the evening, always with her hands full of flowers and her eyes shining with all the light she had imprisoned therein. Her name was Margaret Rigoni.

"Too bad, that she's thirty," said the hotel-manager's young son, "Otherwise, I would have courted her straight away."

Francis also wanted to know her profession. The hotel manager, who was keen to have Dr. Francis among his friends and admirers, all humble and condescending, leafed through the register and read:

"Miss Margaret Rigoni. Teacher."

"Well," Francis said to himself, "She's not a literary woman. She can cook, use a needle, and doesn't get caught up in talking about politics, law, poetry, or those kinds of things." Because he was in love, he felt that female teachers were an adorable category...

But the young lady, who was so solitary and disdainful that she wouldn't even approach guests, left at the end of the month, and Francis was then seized with sadness. The kind hotel manager came to his aid to lighten his soul a little.

"You know, she left her address so that any mail that might arrive could be sent to her home. Francis was all ears: "Margaret Rigoni, Via San Francesco, 23." That was enough.

The city was firmly fixed in his mind. He imagined arriving there with an excuse; then meeting her,

talking to her, being loved, and loving her. It all seemed so easy to him that, a week later, he drove to the place of his dreams in his beautiful car, feeling more joyful than a bird released from prison, using a significant, elegant, and cheerful business as an excuse. However, serious thoughts came over him on the journey. How was he going to show up, and why? His mind was filled with questions like a volcano ready to erupt. Anyway, the important thing was to see her and to speak with her. The rest would come naturally.

The car stopped at 23 Via San Francesco. The street was a side street with a few gardens and a church nearby, dedicated to the Saint of Assisi. Although Francis wasn't much of a churchgoer, he entered and was met by the tranquil silence of the aisles and the beauty of the altars. On his way out, he glanced movingly at the pink building, a little to the left, that bore the number 23 above the doorway.

The following day, summoning all his courage, he sent a large bouquet of roses ahead of him along with a note, in which he requested a meeting with Miss Margaret Rigoni. An affirmative response came back to the hotel where he was staying. It was best to employ some strategy, maintain friendly relations, test the waters, and then ... Always disinterested in refinement, he looked at himself in the mirror multiple times, combed his hair, and adjusted his tie.

Margaret Rigoni welcomed him into a small, elegantly simple living room. She appeared to him so youthful and fresh that Francis's heart, not typically prone to ro-

manticism, softened like that of a child. She asked about his time in the city, eager to hear about the beautiful spa town he had left with regret. Her voice was calm as she spoke to him.

Francis had convinced himself that he could not be more in love than this. He found certain reasons, even some that were a little naive, which compelled him to stay longer than expected. He frequently saw Margaret and confided in her his thoughts about marrying a woman who was neither learned, nor literate, nor presumptuous; a woman who resembled her.

He received a phone call from home, informing him that his presence at the factory was urgently required, and that they would definitely need him there on Saturday. It was Thursday; he needed to gather his courage and reveal that to Margaret...

However, despite never having a moment's hesitation and always being so sure of himself, he felt his heart tremble. When faced with questioning eyes asking him why he was so uncertain, he could only say:

"I want to marry you, Margaret."

"Marry me?"

And she laughed - slightly mischievous and not a little sneery - caressing her hands so fine and delicate, without signs of heavy work or even nail varnish on her nails.

"Think back, dear Francis. You do not know who I am. I will tell you, for I realize you are in the dark. My name is not Margaret Rigoni. That is my mother's name. My name is Flora Rosi. And I am a writer." □

FIORETTI OF DON BOSCO - 57

by Michele Molineris

253. Don Bosco's ears Don Bosco (1880)

"Sister Brambilla, a Daughter of Charity, received her religious habit on 4 September 1880 in Turin and was assigned to the girls' orphanage in Sassari. She journeyed to Sardinia accompanied by two elderly sisters. In a memoir she dictated, she described her departure as follows: 'We departed on 11 September 1880. After taking my seat in the assigned compartment, I chose to place my luggage (bearing my name) under the seat, instead of on the overhead rack like my companions, to keep it out of sight.'

A few minutes later, a gentleman and a priest boarded the train and took their seats directly opposite us. We travelled for a long time in silence. When we arrived at the first stop, Asti, many gentlemen approached the open door and happily greeted the excellent priest by saying, "Cereja Dum Bosch," as they held out their hands, repeating the greeting, "Good morning, Don Bosco!"

I then stared boldly at the holy priest and realized that Don Bosco had done so much good for youngsters, and that those gentlemen had undoubtedly been his pupils. It was a great joy to see him because I had already fixed in my mind the idea that he was a saint.

"Despite the significant influence he had on young people, I had imagined him to be tall,

stocky, and imposing in appearance. However, he was not an extraordinary priest at all. I also noticed, to myself, that his ears were rather large. Once he was back on his way, Don Bosco suddenly turned to his companion and said, "Once I had the urge to have my photo taken, but when the photographer handed me the six small copies, I looked at one of them and, amazed, I exclaimed: "Oh, I thought I was tall, stocky, and imposing, while I'm not at all an extraordinary priest, and also with rather large ears." The poor nun, hearing verbatim what she had only thought in her heart, blushed up to her hair. Then Don Bosco, perhaps to distract her, asked her smilingly, "Little sister, where are you going?"

"I'm going to Sardinia."

"What will you do in Sardinia?"

"I'm supposed to visit a girls' orphanage."

"But what if you have to take care of little boys instead?"

"Oh!"

"Wouldn't you like that?"

"No."

"Yet, so much good can be done with naughty little boys."

"One of the nuns interrupted the conversation, saying, "Don Bosco, send your priests over there. They would have some good to do!"

"For now," he replied, shaking his head, "it doesn't look like Sardinia is for us. We shall see!"

When they arrived at Sampierdarena, Don Bosco greeted his companions and then turned to the nun, Sister Brambilla, acknowledging her hard work with the little boys. Upon arriving in Livorno, the sisters found a letter

at their accommodation instructing Sister Brambilla to go to the men's hostel instead of the women's orphanage. It became clear to her immediately why Don Bosco had given her that advice when he greeted her. The men's hostel was a modest shelter with fifty orphan boys to care for and educate. Out of the five nuns assigned to this service, two had passed away within six months. Sister Brambilla had to share the workload with the remaining nuns. Fifty years later, on the occasion of Don Bosco's beatification, she shared the story of this encounter verbally and in writing with the Salesians, describing it as a precious experience. (from M.B., XIV, 675).

254. Escaping before absolution (1880)

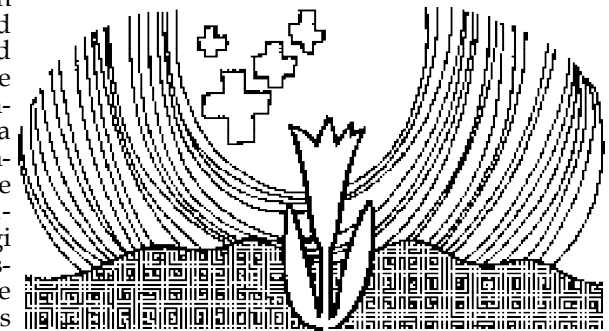
In 1880, a young man was taken out of a non-Christian college and placed in the Oratory against his will. When he went to confession to Don Bosco, he intended not to reveal the essential things, but Don Bosco accurately told him all the sins he had committed without the young man saying a word. This terrified the young man and he ran away without waiting for absolution. He later returned to Don Bosco, received absolution, and decided to change his life. He eventually became a novice at San Benigno, where he shared the incident with Fr Luigi Piscetta. When asked if these were hidden things

that he had never revealed to anyone, the young man said they were sins committed alone, far from the Oratory, and had never been told to anyone else. (M.B., XIV, 678).

255. She suffered from a strange nerve disease (1880)

In 1880, Don Bosco was eagerly awaited by the De Barbarin family in France. They had a 24-year-old daughter named Mary who was suffering from a strange nerve disease and could no longer move. For several years, she had been lying on a bed, unconscious and often appearing as if she were dead, with her mouth open and tongue out.

On that day, Don Bosco promised to bless her; he stopped to share a bowl of soup with them. The entire family waited for him with devotion. He entered the sick person's room, discarded several small bottles containing doctored water, and spoke at length about Mary Help of Christians. When it was time for lunch, Don Bosco invited everyone to pray near the sick woman. Then he said, "Now it's up to you to show what Our Lady Help of Christians can do! Get up and come with us to lunch!"



As everyone looked wide-eyed at each other, they accompanied Don Bosco into the hall and waited for her. To their surprise, the sick girl appeared in the hall and was seated next to Don Bosco. She engaged in conversation, ate, and drank, much to the amazement of her elderly mother, who could only look at her with a mixture of smiles and tears of relief.

"Don Bosco, may I have some wine?" asked the sick woman.

"Certainly!" he replied.

"But the doctors..."

"You were forbidden to have this, is it true? And now Our Lady Help of Christians allows you to do so because it does you good."

"Don Bosco, bless my glass too."

"And why not? Then know that Our Lady loves those who help Don Bosco's poor orphans. If you have seen what she has done today, let us remember that she will do even more until we get to heaven."

And from that day on, the poor sick girl continued to get well – so well that she no longer seemed

the same as before. (Francesia, *La Vergine Immacolata, Don Bosco e i Salesiani*, 77).

257. This Sister is Ripe for Heaven (1880)

On March 29 to April 1, 1880, Don Bosco visited the monastery of the Visitation of St. Mary in Naples at number 2 *Via Confalone alla Salute*. He had a modest meal in the small parlour during his short stay.

While there, he blessed two sick nuns and made two predictions both of which came true. One of the nuns had been suffering from a head ailment, and the other possibly had an internal ailment.

Don Bosco predicted that the first nun would be a companion to Jesus in his crown of thorns, and the second nun was said to be ready for heaven. Both predictions proved to be accurate as the first nun lived until 1920, constantly troubled by her headaches, and the latter nun passed away a few months after Don Bosco's blessing. (*M.B. XIV*, 454) □



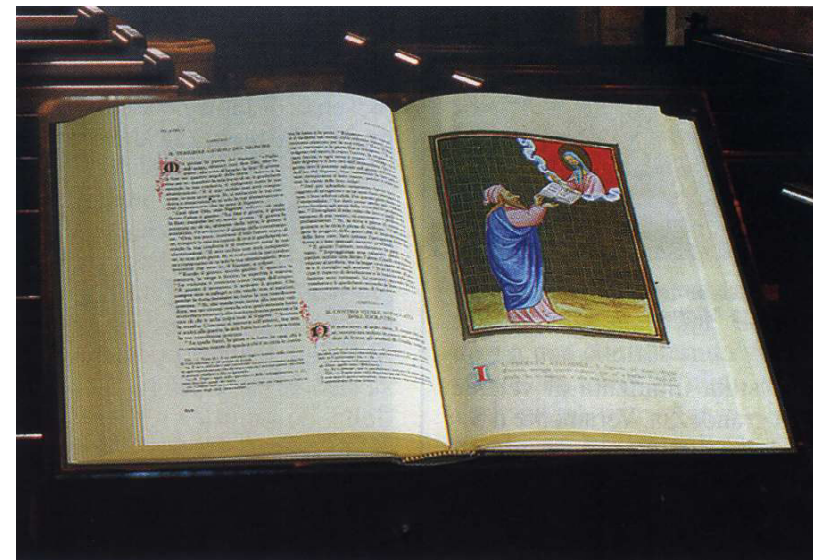
MARY AND HOLY SCRIPTURE

by Giovanni Zappino

The text of *Lumen Gentium* (Chapter VIII) says: "Mary is the one who 'prevails among the humble and the poor of the Lord, who confidently await and receives salvation from Him' (LG 55).

In order to fully understand

this statement, it's important to consider the history of salvation as outlined in the Old Testament. Throughout this history, a particular group of people is identified as the "poor of the Lord," or the "anawim." These individuals, referred to as Israel accord-



Many prophets openly or covertly announced the birth of the Messiah from a virgin, in particular Isaiah speaks of Emmanuel

ing to the spirit, are those who await the coming of the Messiah-Redeemer with humility, poverty, and detachment from everything that is not God.

Examples of such individuals include Joseph, the husband of Mary; Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist; and Simeon and Anna, the two elderly individuals encountered in the temple in Jerusalem according to Luke's account (cf. Lk 2:25-36).

The Gospel of Luke is centred around humble figures, often referred to as 'the poor of the Lord.' This concept of the 'poor of the Lord', influenced by the teachings of the prophets, became increasingly significant during the exile and post-exilic period. The prophets emphasize that through humility, one can find exaltation; through poverty, one can discover true wealth; by detaching from the temporary and human, one can attain the divine and eternal."

According to the prophets, the Lord shows special favour to certain people who are the recipients of His love and kindness. Mary is not just one of those favoured individuals; she excels and stands at the forefront of this group. She is a shining example of the spiritual lineage of Israel and embodies it perfectly, as she was chosen by God to bear and give birth to the Messiah-Redeemer. Prior to the angel's announcement, Mary only referred to herself as a "handmaid of the Lord." In the Old Testament, the

people of Israel are also referred to as "servants of the Lord." Therefore, Mary, as the "handmaid of the Lord," represents Israel and is a servant of the Lord.

She testifies that the Lord, in His divine act of looking upon the humility (tapeinosis) of His servant, recognized Mary's faith. Therefore, the poorest of the "poor of the Lord" became the richest spiritually was none other than "the Mother of the Lord." From an abyss of baseness, she was raised to the summit of greatness. Truly the Lord "overthrew the mighty from their thrones and lifted up the lowly". The "poor of the Lord" have become rich before God, and at the head of these is Mary!

Mary "exalted Daughter of Zion"

The prophets emphasize that through humility, one can find exaltation through poverty, one can discover true wealth; by detaching from the temporary and human, one can attain the divine and eternal.



"And you Bethlehem...least of the towns of Judah..." The prophecy of the Prophet Micah.

The concept of the "daughter of Zion" is first mentioned by the prophet Micah (4:8, 10) and later referenced by Jeremiah (31:22-23) and Zephaniah (3:14-18). The "daughter of Zion" is represented as the chosen people, specifically the community of ancient Israel, and is seen as the place of God's presence. This figure is closely associated with the anticipation of giving birth to the Messiah. In the Old Testament, the daughter of Zion symbolizes the people of Israel. However, in the New Testament, Mary embodies the daughter of Zion as she physically carries Jesus, the Saviour God, in her womb.

The Annunciation story in Luke's Gospel should be read with great care to fully understand the references and allusions

to the Old Testament, especially the echoes of the prophet Zephaniah's words to the Daughter of Zion. According to the evangelist Luke, Mary is the "true Daughter of Zion", representing the ideal Israel and embodying the full meaning of Yahweh's saving presence. Mary's presence in the Bible sheds new light, revealing her as the fullest realization of the Daughter of Zion in the Old Testament. She represents the purest and holiest part of the believing community from the Old Testament, encompassing all the preparation of the Old Law and leading it to the glory of the New Testament.

A speech by John Paul II beautifully summarizes the message I have tried to convey. "Mary, who had the special role of divine motherhood and exceptional privileges that set her above all other creatures, considers herself first and foremost the 'Handmaid of the Lord' and devotes herself to serving her divine Son. Additionally, with great willingness, she becomes the 'handmaid' of her fellow brothers and sisters, as seen in various Gospel episodes such as the Visitation and the Wedding at Cana" (John Paul II Homily of 24 September 2000).

Mary's 'primacy' is based on her 'humility'. It was precisely in this humility that God approached her and showered her with his blessings, *filling her with grace*. Therefore, she acknowledges in the Magnificat: "He has looked on the humility of his handmaid... the Almighty has done great things in me." □



MY VOCATION STORY

FR. MARK PANERO

O. Pori Mecoi

Professor of Moral Philosophy and Advisor to the Apostolic Penitentiary.
Author of *La Tenda del Convengo* a collection of Meditations of spiritual life.

Would you introduce yourself?

I am a Salesian, and I am 41 years old. More than half of my life has been spent in the Salesian Congregation, and I am glad it has been this way. Unexpected needs brought me from my homeland of Piedmont to Rome, where I reside and carry out my primary teaching assignment at the Salesian Pontifical University (UPS).

How did your vocation come about?

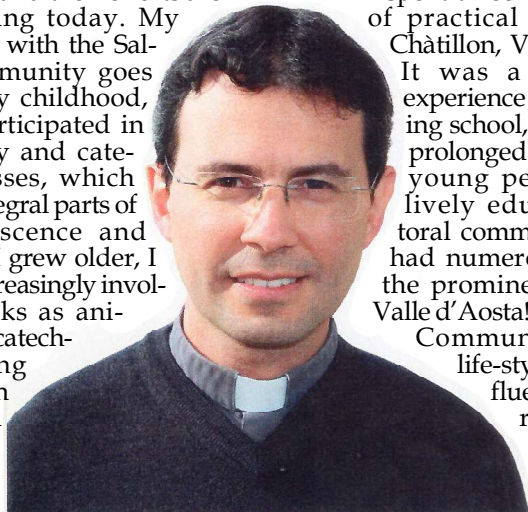
I was born in Bra, a town in the province of Cuneo, where the Salesians have been doing great work since 1959, and their efforts are still thriving today. My connection with the Salesian community goes back to my childhood, when I participated in the oratory and catechism classes, which became integral parts of my adolescence and youth. As I grew older, I became increasingly involved in tasks as animator and catechist. During my high school years, I had the habit of going to

confession once a month, which, in retrospect, I now realize was a crucial factor in developing a personal relationship with Jesus and ultimately discovering my vocation to become a Salesian priest. It's worth noting that no one had ever suggested this path to me. Consequently, at the age of 19, I surprised everyone by announcing my decision on the day I graduated from high school, leaving my classmates and the board of examiners astonished!

What past experiences do you remember most gratefully?

I spent three intense years of practical training in Châtillon, Valle d'Aosta. It was a fast-paced experience at the boarding school, where I had prolonged contact with young people and a lively educative-pastoral community. I also had numerous hikes to the prominent peaks in Valle d'Aosta! The Salesian Community and its life-style deeply influenced me during my formation years.

It was there that I began



to understand the Oratorian spirit and the greatness and beauty of the Salesian vocation through the teachings of Don Bosco. This experience was an essential vocational confirmation for me, which matured gradually.

A person you will not forget.

There are many people to whom I owe so much. One of them is Father Giuseppe Abbà (d. 2020), a Salesian confrere who preceded me in the chair of moral philosophy at UPS and guided me in preparing my doctoral thesis. He was an authoritative and respected teacher in his field, a passionate seeker who knew how to integrate spirituality into a life of study, and effectively linked academic research to noble apostolate. I owe him a great deal; he continues to be both an example and a mentor for me.

Professor of Moral Philosophy and Advisor to the Apostolic Penitentiary: what does this imply?

I find great fulfillment in the Salesian mission entrusted to me. I truly believe that university teaching, especially in moulding the higher education of the younger generation, is a vital aspect of the Salesian mission. It is not a place of seclusion, but an important field for making a positive impact. A well-articulated and well-grounded message can bring about significant positive change in someone's life. Moral philosophy deals with the overall direction of life, the significant choices that define a person's existence, and their multitude of implications. The purpose of philosophical analysis and the study of influential historical figures is to engage young individuals on this profound level. This goes

beyond simply imparting information or evaluating academic performance; it is at this point where knowledge matures into culture and, possibly, wisdom for life. This is the allure of the university.

For nearly five years, I have been serving as an advisor at the Apostolic Penitentiary, a Vatican dicastery (officially, a tribunal) primarily focused on promoting and safeguarding the sacrament of Confession and addressing related issues (referred to as the 'internal forum'). One of the Penitentiary's initiatives is organizing an annual Confession seminar for priests, religious personnel, and lay faithful. We have been pleasantly surprised by the considerable interest and widespread dissemination of the lectures, which are also available on YouTube. Additionally, a recently published volume containing the seminar proceedings can serve as a valuable resource for education and training. (PENITENZIERIA APOSTOLICA, «Ti sono perdonati i peccati» (Mc 2,5). Celebrare il sacramento della Confessione oggi, a cura di K. Nykiel M. Panero U. Taraborrelli, San Paolo 2023, € 18).

Speaking of books: *La Tenda del Convengo...* How did this volume come about?

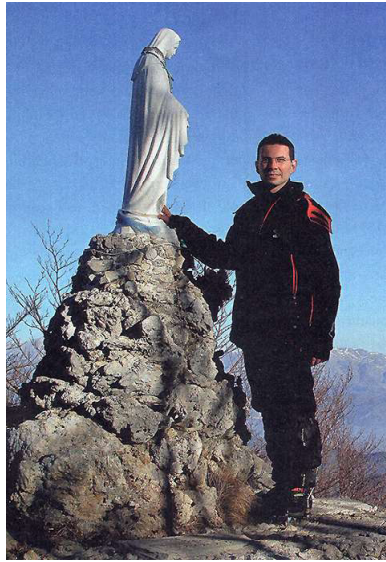
It is a collection of Meditations on the Spiritual Life, centred around a consoling truth of faith: the presence of God in the soul, depicted allegorically through the image of *the tent of meeting*. Our soul is the tent of meeting, where our union with the Lord is realized as He takes up residence within us. This concept is referred to as 'indwelling' in theology, and through these pages, I aim to present it in

an accessible manner, with a focus on the spiritual benefit for the reader. The content of this volume originates from my preaching, which I have revised and presented in an editorial form while maintaining a conversational tone. It is not an 'academic' text, but rather a humble companion written with the hope of nourishing the faith of the reader. If the good Lord uses this tool for His purpose, I welcome its dissemination!

An 'apostolate of good literature'?

Absolutely! It is well known how much importance Don Bosco placed on this form of apostolate, which he practiced and always encouraged. Today, the amount of easily accessible information is significantly greater. However, for this very reason, a reliable source of guidance and the formation of the faith of the people of God is indispensable. The life of faith cannot be assumed in believers; when faith is extinguished or corrupted, apostolic expansion also fails, and charity grows cold or takes on secularized or ideological forms.

It's not about teaching a 'theoretical and abstract doctrine', as Cardinal Mauro Piacenza aptly puts it in his generous preface to the volume. Instead, it's about revealing the depth and beauty of the great truths of faith, their spiritual and moral implications, and their actual impact on existence when they're fully embraced. Every truth of faith, when rightly accepted, has a healing power over the entire believing organism, restoring it in doctrinal and moral integrity. The proclamation can begin anywhere, as long as the seed is transmitted intact; by its virtue, nurtured by grace, it will take root in faithful



hearts far beyond our expectations. Indeed, the Christian faith, with its intangible integrity, is the most valuable gift we have to offer, a promise of hope for the little ones and the poor."

Are there any other books on the bookshelf?

I have been working on a project called "In the Tent of Meeting" in my spare time, along-side my study and teaching commitments. I am aiming to write a commentary on the common prayers of Christians. It seems to be a popular and meaningful topic, which can help us rediscover the precious treasure that we, as Christians, already possess. □

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IN A CHEERFUL MOOD

Qualifications

Daughter: "Yes, true I've got my graduation, but now I must continue with psychology, philology, methodology..."

Mother: "Just a moment, daughter, I'll put you through a course of toastology, pieology, stitchology, darnology, patchology and general domesticology!"

The maker

"Why Charley," said the heckler to a preacher. "You can't even tell me who made the monkey."

"Oh yes, I can."

"Who, then who made the monkey?"

"Why, sir, the same one who made you."

The proof

Patient: "I know that I wasn't dead because I was thirsty and my feet were cold."

Doctir: "How does that prove anything?"

Patient: "Common sense; if I'd gone to heaven, I wouldn't be thirsty, and if I hadn't, my feet wouldn't feel cold."

Thrift

Teacher: "If you were an inventor, Tom, what would you invent?"

Tom: "A machine to do my homework by pressing a button."

Teacher: "And you Mark?"

Mark: "A machine to press the button of Tom's machine."

Free gift

Customer: "What a beautiful sunblind you have got for your shop. It must have cost you a lot!"

Lady: "Oh no, it was practically a

gift. I put a box on the counter marked: 'FOR THE BLIND' and it was full in no time."

Disgrace

The prison chaplain saw a man in one cell undergoing a sentence for burglary, looking very miserable.

"What's the matter, son?" he asked sympathetically.

"Bad news from home, sir."

"Sorry to hear that. What's the matter?"

"It's my brother, sir. He's accepted a diggingjob. The first in the family to disgrace us!"

Be Clear

A schoolmaster was giving back to his class some examination papers he had been marking.

"Does any boy want to ask anything?" he inquired.

"Yes, Sir. I can't read what you wrote at the bottom of the page," said one boy.

The master glanced at teh paper and said: "I have written" you must write more clearly."

Work done

Bookseller: "That's a very good book there. It will do half the work for you."

Student: "Give me two copies then."

Few words

"I am a woman of few words," announced the haughty mistress.

"If I beckon with my finger, it means come."

"Suits me, Ma'am," replied the girl.

"If I shake my head, it means I ain't coming. □

MAIL FOR MARTHA

B.F. Art by Fabrizio Zubani

Marta opened the mailbox and found only one letter. She picked it up and noticed that it had no letterhead or stamp, only her name and address. As she read the letter, she realized it was from Jesus, saying that he would be in her neighbourhood on Saturday and would like to visit her. Martha's hands trembled as she placed the letter on the table, wondering why the Lord would want to visit her when she felt she had nothing to offer. As she thought about it, Martha remembered the empty shelves of her pantry.

"I have to go and get something. I'll buy some bread and something else at least," she said. She put on her coat and ran out. She came back with a loaf of bread, a pound of ham, and a carton of milk. Marta found that she only had eighty cents left, which should last her until Monday. Nonetheless, she took the way home with her humble ingredients under her arm. As she walked, she was so absorbed in thinking about dinner that she did not see the two figures standing in the hallway – a man and a woman, both dressed in old rags. "Excuse me, ma'am,

can you help us?"

"Look, ma'am, I have no work, and my wife and I live on the street. It's cold, and we're hungry. However, ma'am you can't help us, we'll be grateful anyway..." Martha looked at them more closely. She thought they could find a job if they looked for it.

"I'd like to help you, but I'm poor. All I have is a few snacks



and some bread, but I have an important guest tonight and wanted to offer that to Him."

"Yes, of course, yes, ma'am, I understand. Thank you anyway." The man put his arm around the woman's shoulders and walked towards the street. As they were leaving, Marta felt a familiar tug at her heart.

"Please hold on!"

The couple stopped and turned around as Martha ran towards them and joined them on the road.

"Look, why don't you take this stuff? I'll find something to serve my guest..." she said, holding out the food bag.

"Thank you, ma'am, thank you very much!" said the woman, shivering with cold.

"You know, I have another coat in the house. Take this one." Martha unbuttoned her coat and laid it on the woman's arms. Then, smiling, she turned and started home without a coat and with nothing to offer her guest.

When Martha reached home, she was shivering. Now, she had nothing to offer the Lord. She quickly searched in her pocket for the key. As she did so, she noticed another letter in the box. "How strange, the postman never comes twice a day."

She opened the envelope, saying, "Dear Marta, I was glad to see you. Thank you for the delicious dinner and for the beautiful coat. With love, Jesus."

The air was still cold, but even without a coat, Marta didn't notice it. □

"There's certainly mail for you today."

I CHOOSE

to live by choice, not chance
to be motivated, not manipulated
to be useful, not used;
to make changes, not excuses;
to excel, not compete.

I CHOOSE self-esteem, not self pity

I CHOOSE

to listen to my inner voice, not to the random opinions of others.

POPE'S WORLDWIDE PRAYER NETWORK

OCTOBER 2024

For a Shared Mission

Let us pray that the Church continue to sustain a synodal lifestyle in every way, as a sign of co-responsibility, prompting the participation, communion and mission shared by priests, religious and laity.

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FLOWER OF SUPERNATURAL BEAUTY

Mary is described as being "full of grace," meaning she is filled with the Holy Spirit, whose light shines in her with incomparable splendour. We are encouraged to look to Mary and admire her pure beauty, as the images of beauty in this world can often be deceptive and overwhelming. Contemplating such sublime beauty could evoke noble sentiments, a desire for purity, and a renewed spirituality. In our modern times, the example of this Virgin Mother, who radiates with the Holy Spirit, could be extremely beneficial and uplifting for women, as her beauty represents and embodies the authentic values of the Spirit.

Pope Saint Paul VI -16.05.1975

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

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