



# HERALDS OF THE GOSPEL

Vol. 13, No. 139  
May 2019

*Wisdom, Humility  
and Grandeur*

## *Letter of St. Joan of Arc to the Hussites*

**F**or a long time, I have heard that you who were once truly Christian, have become heretics and, in the manner of the Saracens, have abolished the true Faith and worship; that you have adopted an infectious and baleful superstition, and, bent on sustaining and expanding it, there is no infamy or cruelty that you dare not practise.

You disparage the Sacraments of the Church, truncate the articles of the Faith, demolish sacred edifices, break down and burn images made for the sacred celebrations, in short, you have massacred the Christians who do not accept your beliefs. What rage, madness or fury stirs you? You persecute, you strive to subvert and destroy the Faith, which God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit instituted, ennobled and magnified in a thousand ways, by a thousand miracles.

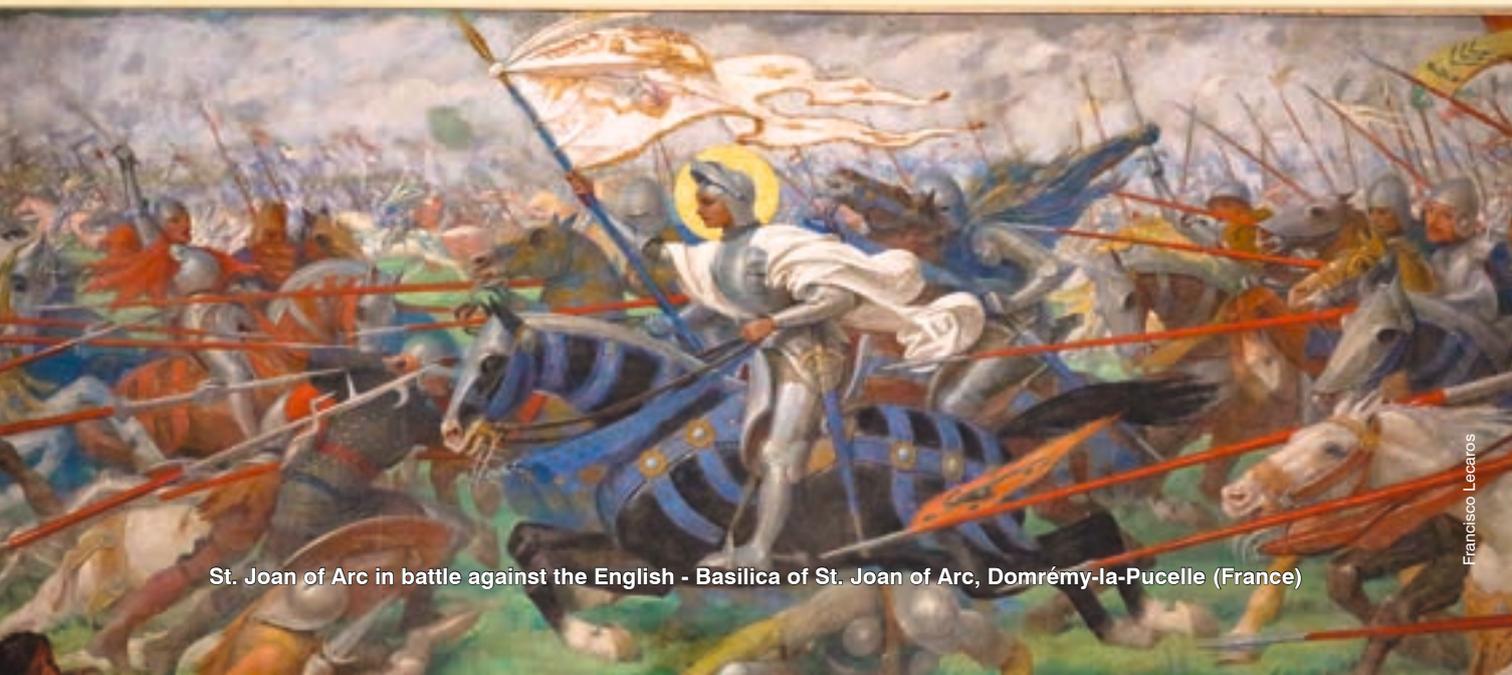
Blind are you, and not those who lack their sight and their eyes. Do you think that you will go unpunished? Do you not know that if

God does not prevent your ungodly violence, if He allows you to remain longer in darkness and error it is because He prepares for you greater chastisements and torments?

I tell you the truth: were I not so busy fighting the English, I would have gone to meet you. But if I be not informed that you have amended, I will perhaps leave the English and advance against you, in order, there being no other solution, to eliminate by the sword your impetuous and vain superstition, taking from you either heresy or life.

Nevertheless, should you choose to return to the Catholic Faith and the primordial light, send me your ambassadors, through whom I shall tell you what to do. If, on the contrary, you choose to kick against the goad, remember your abominable crimes and await my arrival with all the divine and human forces to recompense you for all of the evil you have done to others.

Sully, March 23, 1530



St. Joan of Arc in battle against the English - Basilica of St. Joan of Arc, Domrémy-la-Pucelle (France)



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Vol. 13, No. 139, May 2019

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**Published by:**

Heralds of the Gospel Canada  
P. O. Box 724  
Nobleton, ON L0G 1N0  
Phone: 1-800-674-3410  
Fax: 1-905-939-9778  
www.heralds.ca

**E-mail:** magazine@heralds.ca  
Canadian Publications Mail,  
Sales Agreement No. 40035333

**United States:**

Heralds of the Gospel Foundation  
P.O. Box 42359  
Houston, TX 77242  
Phone: 281-676-8526

**E-mail:** hgmag@heraldsusa.org

**Typesetting:**

Heralds of the Gospel graphic design team

**Printed in India**

at Anaswara Offset Pvt. Ltd., Cochin

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# CONTENTS

Our Readers Write ..... 4



St. Pancras of Rome –  
The Supernatural Strength  
of a Young Christian ..... 32

Three Visits, Two Examples,  
One Choice (Editorial) ..... 5



The Voice of the Popes – The  
Church Is in Constant  
Combat ..... 6



Testimonies – Future  
and Life Project ..... 36



Gospel Commentary – The  
Unmistakable Voice of  
the Good Shepherd ..... 8



Heralds Worldwide ..... 40



The Chaste Brilliance of  
Christian Purity ..... 16



Church and World  
Events ..... 43



Hymn of Wisdom,  
Humility and Grandeur ..... 22



Story for Children...  
The Bridge  
of Confidence ..... 46



The Power of an  
Ejaculatory Prayer ..... 26



The Saints of  
Each Day ..... 48



And then what?... ..... 29



“Death before  
Dishonour” ..... 50

# OUR READERS WRITE



## CARE AND ZEAL IN TRANSMITTING CHURCH DOCTRINE

I wish to convey my gratitude for the kindness of sending an issue of the magazine each month to my parish. In each edition, one sees care and zeal in transmitting the Church's doctrine in a simple and direct way, as well as love for our Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, under her invocation of Our Lady of Fatima.

I encourage you in the challenging task of bringing the Word of God everywhere!

*Msgr. Zacarías Martínez  
Pastor of Sacred Heart of Jesus Church  
Mariano Roque Alonso – Paraguay*

## TIMELY AND NECESSARY FOR OUR DAYS

I would like to express my congratulations to the Heralds of the Gospel for their efforts in publishing this magazine which is so necessary and timely for our days. It shows us Catholic doctrine as it is, without veils, and in a way that is accessible to everyone.

I begin by commending the *Gospel Commentary* of Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, who translates the richness of Sacred Scripture with simplicity and brilliance, placing all of its beauty within our reach. Another section that merits mention is the article that ends the magazine, always covering some elevated aspect of a creature of God.

I have a five-year-old daughter and a three-year-old son, and the stories of the section *Story for Children... or Adults Full of Faith?* captures their imagination. The plot ap-

peals to the innocence of their young age, but also provides many lessons. They always foster good conversations in our family.

To sum up, I have been a faithful reader of *Heralds of the Gospel* magazine for almost ten years, and I can say that, in its own way, it indicates to us the path of the true Faith, of the true Church and who we should follow and trust. I pray for the daily growth of this work and that it may reveal the entire beauty of Christianity, of the Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church, and of Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Most Holy Mother.

*Marina Silveira  
São Paulo – Brazil*

## I LEARNED TO IMITATE THE VIRTUES OF THE SAINTS

Since I received the first magazine from the Heralds I have not missed one, and I eagerly await its arrival. I read it all, from beginning to end. I enjoy all of the articles: those of the Popes, of Msgr. Clá and all the others. I have learned about the lives of Saints whom I did not know, and to imitate their virtues. That is why I am very happy to receive the magazine and I hope that you never stop sending it.

*Francisco Campos  
Woodlake – California*

## VOICE OF GOD RESOUNDING TODAY

*Heralds of the Gospel* magazine has always had excellent content, but in the most recent issues it has been impressively enriched with the articles of Prof. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira. It is the voice of God that continues to resound in our days by the lips of this prophet.

*Denise Maria Lopes  
Campos dos Goytacazes – Brazil*

## INCREASE OF FAITH AND CERTAINTY OF MARY'S PROTECTION

Over the years, I have collected the issues of the magazine to distribute to those who wish to know of your work, the spiritual teachings and the great love of the Blessed Virgin Mary for humanity. When I read it, the Virgin Mary educates me, giving me the gift of patience, tolerance and pardon. Thanks to your magazine, my faith has increased and I know that I am under Mary's protection.

*Ruth Narváez  
Púa – Chile*

## TEACHING APPLICABLE TO DAILY LIFE

The entire magazine is wonderful! The *Editorial* – so well written – summarizes the mentality and Catholic thought of each issue, inviting us to enthusiastically read the other articles, which are filled with edifying teachings applicable to our daily life.

*Maria Lúcia Silveira  
Natividade – Brazil*

## MOTIVATION TO GO FORWARD

I am so happy to belong to your marvellous Association! Above all, I thank God for having placed you along my path, for you have given me the opportunity to know much more about Him, the Bible, the lives of the Saints, and so on.

I thank everyone who labours in this sector, for their kindness, integrity, faith and charism. Thanks to you I have come closer to God and continue to advance towards the goal He has set for me, since your magazine gives me the necessary motivation to go forward.

*Uadira Eliana Martínez  
Sicuani – Peru*

## THREE VISITS, TWO EXAMPLES, ONE CHOICE

In his Gospel, St. Luke narrates the marvellous scene of the Virgin Mary's encounter with her cousin Elizabeth, each expecting a child entrusted to her miraculously. Their dialogue is so sublime that it is not only given occasional consideration in the Liturgy, but it also gave rise to two of the Holy Church's main prayers.

The words of St. Elizabeth were included in the Hail Mary, and the response of Our Lady became the prayer of thanksgiving par excellence. The *Magnificat* is the paradigmatic hymn of perfect restitution to God, with such a wealth of teachings that new treasures are being drawn from it until today.

The meeting of these two holy women also presents an example of perfection in human relations. They are not concerned with what others might think of them; they do not desire to shine in society, have many goods or hold places of high office.

The esteem they have for one another has nothing of the merely human about it; everything is supernatural. Their relationship is based on God. Thus, when Elizabeth judges herself unworthy to be visited by the Mother of her Lord (cf. Lk 1:43), Mary turns her praise to the Most High, who has done great things in Her (cf. Lk 1:49)... Mutual admiration is certainly present, but it is entirely turned toward Heaven!

In the same Gospel we come upon another episode, also a visitation, but a very different one. Thirty-three years later, Our Lord beholds Jerusalem – the chosen and beloved city, the setting for His preaching and where He would soon be put to death – and, weeping, He pronounces this terrible sentence: “They will not leave one stone upon another in you; because you did not know the time of your visitation” (Lk 19:44). For the Only-begotten Son had left the glory of the Eternal Father to visit His people and “His own people received Him not” (Jn 1:11)...

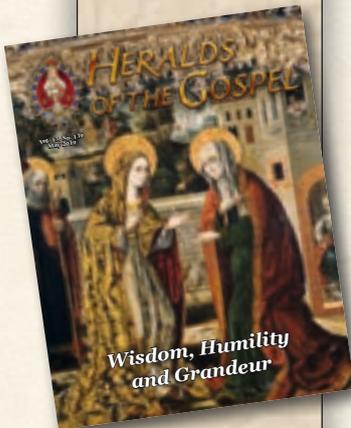
On the other hand, some commentators call our attention to a third visit: that which God wishes to make to the heart of each man. This usually happens through the Sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, but it sometimes takes place in unexpected ways. The visit may be accompanied by joy and consolation, or, on the contrary, it can come with a trial, with illness and suffering.

In Mary's meeting with Elizabeth we have an example of perfection, and in the rejection of the Redeemer by His own people, an example of perversity. In face of these two models, we ought to ask ourselves: how will the visit of God to our hearts be?

It depends on each one of us...

How many visits the Creator offers us at every moment! But the effects of His divine presence will vary according to our attitude in receiving the Guest of our soul. Many reject His visits, others squander them, and few are those who receive Him with joy. When someone hears the voice of the Lord and opens the door of their abode to Him, He enters to dine with them (cf. Rev 3:20).

Let us not be ungrateful, but, like Elizabeth, let us receive the visit of God and the Blessed Virgin Mary with open hearts! ✧



*The Visitation, by  
The Master of  
Perea - Prado  
Museum, Madrid*

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# The Church Is in Constant Combat

Having begun with the life of Our Most Holy Redeemer, the combat under the standard of the Cross will only cease at the end of time. Today, more than ever, the strength of the wicked depends on the cowardice of the good, and the power of satan's reign lies in the weakness of Christians.

**I** am grateful that from your generous heart, Venerable Brother,<sup>1</sup> you desire to see me work in the vineyard of the Lord always under the light of the sun, without clouds or tempests. However, we must both adore the dispositions of Divine Providence who, after establishing His Church here below, permits that She encounter obstacles of every kind and formidable opposition along her journey.

### *Harsh trials and continual contradictions*

The reason for this is obvious: the Church is militant and, therefore, in constant combat. This combat makes the world a battlefield and every Christian a valiant soldier to fight under the standard of the Cross.

Having begun with the life of our Most Holy Redeemer, this fight will only cease at the end of time. Therefore, we must proceed every day like the courageous people of Judah returning from captivity: with one hand repelling the enemy and with the other rebuilding the walls of the

sacred Temple, that is, working for our sanctification.

The life of the heroes whose decrees we have just published<sup>2</sup> confirm us in this truth. They reached glory not only by means of dark clouds and fleeting storms, but also by constant contradictions and harsh trials, until they gave their blood and life for the Faith.

### *An age in which many hold God up to public ridicule*

Nevertheless, I cannot deny my great joy at this moment, for in glorifying so many Saints, God expresses His mercy in a time of such incredulity and religious indifference. In a time of such weakness of character, generous souls who gave their life to testify to their Faith are put before us as models to imitate. [...]

I rejoice because we live in a time in which many feel ashamed to call themselves Catholics, and many others hold God, the Faith, Revelation, worship and its ministers up to public ridicule, filling their speeches with godless sarcasm. They deny every-

thing and turn everything into scorn and derision, without respect even for the sanctuary of conscience.

However, it is not possible that, before these supernatural manifestations, no matter how great their desire to close their eyes to the sun that illuminates them, a divine ray not pierce them and, even though it only be by way of remorse, lead them back to the Faith.

I rejoice because the courage of these heroes must revivify and fortify the faith of timid and languid hearts, fearful at this moment of putting Christian doctrines and beliefs into practice.

### *There will be courage when there is faith in hearts*

In fact, courage is only possible when it is grounded upon a conviction. Without the light of intelligence, the will is a blind power. It is impossible to walk resolutely amid darkness.

If the present generation shows all the vacillation of a man who gropes in the dark, it is a sure sign that it does not take to heart the word of God:

“Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps 119:105).

There will be courage when faith is alive in hearts, when all the precepts imposed by it are practised, for faith without works is as impossible as a sun that emanates neither light nor heat.

The martyrs whom we have commemorated witness to this truth. Do not think that martyrdom is an act of simple enthusiasm, consisting in letting oneself be decapitated so as to ascend directly to Paradise. Martyrdom presupposes a long and arduous exercise of all the virtues, an absolute and immaculate purity.

***The strength of the wicked lies in the cowardice of the good***

Let us speak of her who is the most well known to you, the Maid of Orleans; both in her humble birthplace as amid the licentiousness of the troops, she kept herself as pure as the Angels.

As courageous as a lion amid the dangers of battle, she showed great kindness toward the poor and unfortunate. Simple as a child in the tranquillity of the meadows and the tumult of war, she was always recollected in God and ardent in her love for the Virgin Mary and the Holy Eucharist – like a Cherub – as you so rightly said, Venerable Brother. Called by the Lord to defend her native land, she responded to her vocation to an undertaking that seemed impossible to all, especially to herself; but what is impossible for men is always possible with God’s assistance.

Therefore, let us not exaggerate the difficulties in putting into practice what the Faith prescribes so as to fulfil our duties and carry out a fruitful apostolate of example, which the Lord awaits from each of us: “And He gave commandment to each of them concerning his neighbour” (Sir 17:14).

Difficulties arise from those who create and exaggerate them, those

who confide in themselves and not in heavenly aid, those who succumb to cowardice, intimidated by the world’s mockery. Hence we must conclude that, today more than ever, the strength of the wicked depends on the cowardice of the good, and the power of Satan’s reign lies in the weakness of Christians.

***“Became accomplices of My adversaries”***

Alas, if I were permitted, as the prophet Zechariah did in spirit, to ask the Lord: “What are these wounds on Thy hands?”, the answer would un-



**As courageous as a lion amid the dangers of battle, she was always recollected in God**

St. Joan of Arc at the Siege of Orleans, by Jules Eugène Lenepveu - Paris Pantheon; on previous page, St. Pius X, photographed before 1907

doubtedly be: “The wounds I received in the house of My friends” (Zec 13:6); in other words, by My friends who did nothing to defend Me and who, on the contrary, became accomplices of My adversaries. And from this reproach, merited by the pusillanimous and fainthearted Christians of every country, many Christians of France are not exempt. [...]

Thus, Venerable Brother, upon your return, you must tell your compatriots that, if they love France, they must love God, the Faith and the Church, which is for all of them the kindest Mother, as She was for your forefathers. Tell them that they must have great regard for the witness of St. Remigius, Charlemagne and St. Louis, testimonies that can be summed up in words so often repeated by the heroine of Orleans: “Long live Christ, King of the Franks!”

Only in this way is France great among the nations; under this covenant God will protect and make it free and glorious; under this condition you can apply what is said of Israel in the Sacred Books: “And there was no one that triumphed over this people, but when they departed from the worship of the Lord their God” (Jdt 5:17). ✧

*St. Pius X. Excerpts from the address given on the occasion of the reading of the decree of beatification of Venerables Joan of Arc, John Eudes, Francis de Capillas, and Jean-Théophane Vénard and companions, 13/12/1908: AAS 1 (1909), 142-145*

<sup>1</sup> Most Rev. Stanislas-Arthur-Xavier Touchet, at the time Bishop of Orleans, later created Cardinal. It fell to him to initiate the process of beatification of St. Joan of Arc.

<sup>2</sup> On this day were proclaimed the decrees on the heroic virtues of Venerables Joan of Arc, John Eudes, Francis de Capillas, and Jean-Théophane Vénard and companions.



## ✠ GOSPEL ✠

<sup>27</sup> “Jesus said: ‘My sheep hear My voice; I know them, and they follow Me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of My hand.

<sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father’s hand. <sup>30</sup> The Father and I are one” (Jn 10:27-30).

Above, “The Good Shepherd” - Convent of the Good Shepherd, Zarautz (Spain);  
in the background, flock of sheep grazing on the outskirts of Madrid

# *The Unmistakable Voice of the Good Shepherd*

This Sunday's Gospel contains a serious warning for us. Do we want God to adapt to our defects, or do we seek to eradicate them, so as to be sheep of the Good Shepherd?



**Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, EP**

## **I – NEW DIVISION AMONG THE JEWS**

This Sunday's Gospel is called that of the Good Shepherd, the fourth of the Easter Season. It contains the words Our Lord spoken during one of His last journeys to Jerusalem. We are in the tenth chapter of St. John and, therefore, at this point the Redeemer has already multiplied the loaves, walked upon the water, and operated many cures. In short, He has performed countless and indisputable miracles, and is known by everyone. His fame has spread, and throughout Israel there is uneasiness regarding Him.

The Apostles have already acknowledged Him as the Messiah, but Our Lord has ordered them not to tell anyone. Meanwhile, public opinion is adopting contrasting positions regarding Jesus: some like Him and believe in His Messianic mission; others dislike and reject Him.

### *A parable that divides the waters*

Before the verses chosen for this Sunday's Liturgy, the Evangelist narrates the miracle of the

cure of the man blind from birth (cf. Jn 9), after which the Divine Master engages in a heated polemic with the Pharisees and employs, for the first time, the figure of the Good Shepherd and the sheepfold, clearly applying to His opponents the image of the thief and the mercenary (cf. Jn 10:1-13).

The use of parables, such as the one just mentioned, enabled Our Lord to make Himself understood by His own, while leaving His enemies in doubt as to the meaning of His words.

Upon hearing Him say "I am the Good Shepherd; I know my own and my own know Me" (Jn 10:14), the evil ones conjecture with disdain: "They say that this Nazarene was a carpenter. Could it be that now He has also become a shepherd?" But those who had adhered to Jesus thought: "I need to be part of this flock!"

Thus, "There was again a division among the Jews because of these words" (Jn 10:19). It marked the setting when the Saviour appeared in the Temple for the feast of the Dedication, during the somewhat harsh winter in those regions.

*The use of  
parables  
enabled Our  
Lord to make  
Himself  
understood  
by His own,  
while leaving  
His enemies  
in doubt*

*“If You are the Christ,  
tell us plainly”*

We can imagine Him walking in Solomon’s Porch on a cold morning, His mantle covering His head. Knowledge of His presence in the Holy City had spread quickly and, in light of the situation created, His enemies plotted to take advantage of the occasion to put Him against the wall and oblige Him to declare if He were truly the Messiah.

“How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly” (Jn 10:24), the Jews asked as they surrounded Him. Knowing their evil intent, the Divine Master simply replied: “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness to Me” (Jn 10:25). And He ended the dispute explaining the deepest reason for this refusal: “You do not believe, because you do not belong to My sheep” (Jn 10:26).

Thereby He very clearly demonstrated that there was a division in humanity: on one side the sheep of the flock of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who truly give themselves over to God, ready to conform their lives to Him; and on the other the sheep of satan, who, so to speak, seek a god according to their caprices, so as to continue undisturbed in the terrible state in which they live.

## II – THE VOICE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Having these foregoing presuppositions are indispensable for more readily comprehending the key to the Gospel for this Fourth Sunday of Easter, which aims to teach us what it means to be Jesus’ sheep.

*Figures idealized from all eternity*

<sup>27a</sup> “Jesus said: ‘My sheep hear My voice...’”

Perhaps the reader has never witnessed pastoral scenes and, therefore, finds it hard to imagine how a shepherd is “heard” by his sheep, whether in indicating the plan for the day or the path to follow, or giving them a rebuke for straying. But, for those who have such scenes in their memory, it is a touching example.

Sheep know the timbre of voice of their shepherd very well and, while clustering around him, they show signs of “understanding” what he says to them. If, on the contrary, someone else attempts to fill this role, the flock pays no attention. Why does this happen?

From all eternity, God idealized the figure of sheep and the shepherd to symbolize Himself, so that we would better understand Him. Thus, the relationship between these two creatures can help us to contemplate Our Lord Jesus Christ as the Shepherd of those who believe in Him.

In this sense, the example of pasturing explains well the attitude of the Jews toward the Redeemer. The voice of the Divine Shepherd could not penetrate into those hearts because, to distinguish the unmistakable timbre of His voice, faith was needed!

*The distinctive sign of the  
true sheep*

<sup>27b</sup> “...I know them and they follow Me.”

Let us imagine a shepherd who, by a mere act of the will, could make myriad sheep from noth-

*Sheep know  
the timbre of  
voice of their  
shepherd and  
show signs  
of “under-  
standing”  
what he says*



ing, in accordance with his wishes. The exact notion that this hypothetical shepherd would have regarding his flock would be a pale image of the knowledge that Our Lord Jesus Christ has of each one of us, for He created us with His infinite power.

From all eternity, the Divine Shepherd knows each one of us sheep, even those who do not belong to His flock, and He knows those who will accept His preaching and those who will reject it. Therefore, in the completion of this verse Our Lord affirms regarding His sheep: “and they follow Me.”

In what does this following consist?

Those who listen, understand; those who understand, believe; those who believe necessarily love. And, when one loves, it becomes easy to discern the way required to remain in this love. It may be the renunciation of an illicit pleasure that draws one away from the Shepherd, or the charitable disposition to lead others to Him, or... so many other things!

But those who do not believe, do not understand, and moreover, construct a false reasoning to justify the erroneous path they have chosen. In this case they were those enemies of Our Lord, sheep who did not belong to His flock, but of that other who is not worthy to be called shepherd...

This is the distinctive sign of the true sheep: upon hearing the voice of Jesus, they follow Him! Those who hear but do not follow are outside the flock.

In face of this alternative, we clearly see that there is no third choice, for only two loves move souls: love of God taken to the point of forgetting oneself, or love of self, taken to the point of forgetting God.

Thus, a sheepfold is comprised of those whose love for God supersedes self-love; the other consists of those who let self-love supplant love of God. The first are led by faith, which enlightens the reason; the second, by pure reasoning, stripped of faith. This is the battle, with no possibility of a truce between the two sheepfolds, but only defection from one side to the other.

*This is the distinctive sign of the true sheep: upon hearing the voice of Jesus, they follow Him! Those who hear but do not follow are outside the flock*



“Good Shepherd”, Pio Clementino Museum, Vatican City; flock of sheep on the outskirts of Avila (Spain)

*Grace is the reward that the Good Shepherd gives to those who give themselves entirely to Him*

**Created participation in the Trinitarian life**

<sup>28a</sup> “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.”

Once the difference between the two flocks has been defined, Our Lord goes on to show the reward given to His sheep: “I give them eternal life.” This gift means participation through grace in divine life itself, a supernatural gift that makes us capable of understanding and loving God as He understands and loves Himself.

We can neither understand nor love ourselves entirely, for the Creator has so ordained things to facilitate our relationship with Him and others. If we were not in need of mutual support, we would think ourselves self-sufficient and tend to isolate ourselves.

However, in God, the reality is altogether different. As an infinite Being, with neither beginning nor end, the Father understands Himself with such precision that in this act He begets from all eternity a Person identical to Himself, the Son. In contemplating one another, They love one another with a love that is so profound

and fruitful that from it the Holy Spirit proceeds. This is the Blessed Trinity: three Persons in one God, an ineffable truth that our intelligence cannot grasp and can only accept through faith in Revelation.

Therefore, grace consists in a created participation in this Trinitarian life, and is the complete adherence to it, by means of the rejection of sin and the practice of faith and good works, which prevents the sheep from being lost. This is the reward reserved by the Good Shepherd for those who give themselves entirely to Him: eternal life, the seed of which, received on this earth, will fully blossom in glory.

**No one can take them out of His hand**

Our Lord continues:

<sup>28b</sup> “No one can take them out of My hand.”

Although we may be sheep of Jesus, the devil, the world and the flesh constantly seek to deceive us, saying that happiness is in the ways of pride and sensuality; but we should not fear.

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Once we have heard the voice of the Shepherd and adhered to Him by following His teachings, no one can take us from His hand: the Word Incarnate has promised this and His word is law. Even if every means at hand are engaged for our perdition, He will always give us the strength needed to resist and save ourselves.

From this affirmation of the Divine Master one also concludes that when someone escapes from His hand, this is not His desire, but rather because the sheep in some way refused association with the Shepherd, giving over to that which is contrary to Him. Those who lay the blame exclusively on one or another circumstance for their own decadence are sadly mistaken. Even if assailed by calumny, hatred and persecution, if the person does not abandon Our Lord, He will never let him go.

In this sense, the importance of faith in this life is similar to the situation of a survivor of a shipwreck on the high seas who is thrown a lifeline; he will be saved as long as he grasps it tightly. Our lifeline is faith.

***Following the voice of the Shepherd is to be in God***

<sup>29</sup> “My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father’s hand.

<sup>30</sup> “The Father and I are one.”

Accentuating even more deeply everything that He had said with respect to eternal life, a treasure reserved for the sheep of His flock Our Lord, shows that the link between Shepherd and



The Blessed Trinity  
Cologne Cathedral (Germany)

sheep is not solely with Him. Through the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, this link extends to the First and Third Persons.

Jesus Himself offers the theological explanation of this sublime truth. Due to the intimate union between the three Divine Persons, previously covered, everything that the Father wishes, the Son also desires; everything that the Father does, the Son also does. It is the same with the Holy Spirit. Now, if no one can take the sheep from the hands of the Son, they can ever wrest them from the hands of the other two Persons.

The sheep that hears the word of the Shepherd is, therefore, united to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Despite the desire of the enemies they will never leave the bosom of the Blessed Trinity, unless of their own volition.

*The sheep that hears the word of the Shepherd is united to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Despite the desire of the enemies, they will never leave the bosom of the Blessed Trinity*

*When the sheep refuses to believe in the Shepherd and escapes from divine love, it puts itself at risk; this is what happened with those Jews...*

This doctrine constituted something new for the Chosen People, who considered God as Lord, but not as Father. Having reached the end of His public life, the Son revealed to them in the Temple the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, at the same time that He declared Himself to be God.

### ***A naturalist vision of the Messiah***

The Jewish people who rejected Our Lord did so because they considered Him from a merely human perspective.

They awaited a Messiah in accordance with their worldly criteria, entirely dedicated to resolving the political, social and financial problems of Israel. In seeing the portentous miracles of Our Lord, they believe that the one who would assure their supremacy over all other nations had finally arrived.

They accordingly saw in the Divine Master a justification for their egoistic and delirious yearning for temporal dominion, they would delight with the expectancy that He would declare Himself the Messiah; however, not if they heard Him preaching a spiritual kingdom, that would demand of them a change of customs and mentality. In other words, they desired to build a bridge between the evil in which they lived and the good that is God.

Therefore, it was a problem of faith, not reasoning. Despite their intelligence, they had become incapable of understanding things from on high, for they lacked the virtue of faith. Naturalism had obscured them to the evidence of an entirely uncommon Man, so extraordinary that He could not be a mere Man!

### ***No one lacks the grace to believe***

Once again, it is clear that when the sheep put themselves into the hands of the Shepherd with faith, they are in some sense confirmed in grace. On the contrary, from the moment in which they refuse to believe and escape from divine love, they put themselves at risk. This is what happened with those Jews, who chose to neither hear nor understand His voice, despite being invited.

This is a fundamental theological principle: no one lacks the graces necessary to adhere to the truth. Even a savage, who has never met a missionary, just by contemplating the

order of nature will receive the graces to understand the existence of the God who created him and, as St. Thomas Aquinas teaches,<sup>1</sup> can be saved, for those who encounter something superior to themselves and love it more than themselves, are justified at that moment. The crux of the matter lies in the acceptance or rejection of these graces and the eternal destiny of each one after death depends on this.

In the presence of the Author of grace, the Son of God Incarnate, those sons of Abraham rejected the graces that were given to them and a few days later crucified Him. However, others, seeing the many signs He performed, accepted them and acknowledged that He was the Saviour, thereby joining His flock!

### **III – JESUS CONVOKES US TO FOLLOW HIM**

This Sunday's Gospel contains a serious warning for us. Can we say that we have given ourselves entirely to the Good Shepherd? Or do we act like those Jews who actually wanted a Messiah who would justify their vices, without demanding any spiritual progress on their part?

We should take the care to ask ourselves if we want God to adapt Himself to our defects, or if we seek to eradicate them in order to be sheep who hear Jesus' voice and follow Him? The point is that when we recognize the divinity of Our Lord, we must to change our life!

### ***Pressure to lead a life divorced from eternity***

In this twenty-first century how much pressure is applied to good Catholics to reject this invitation of grace! Pressure from the world, television, the internet, and social interaction... always geared on leading a life without faith; divorced from eternity, a life from which Our Lord Jesus Christ is absent. If we were to attempt to list all of the modern habits that support this there would not be enough paper in the world!

However, aided by the promise of the Divine Shepherd that no one will take the sheep from His hands, I must decide. If, for example, I like watching inappropriate television programs, I must stop doing this! If I socialize with those who lead me to sin, I have to avoid them! If I am not used to keeping custody of the eyes and I



Angelis David Ferreira

*The voice of the Good Shepherd calls us today to listen to and follow Him like docile sheep, wishing to take another step toward holiness*

“The Good Shepherd” - Blessed Sacrament Church, Bronx, New York

make concessions to the immorality so rampant on the streets, I must change now!

***Let us be sheep of the Good Shepherd!***

God desires, He has always desired and will always desire to save everyone and to grant them the eternal life of which Our Lord speaks in this Gospel. But, for this to happen, He imposes a law: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Mt 22:37). All the other Commandments derive from this, and the fulfillment of it makes our daily actions similar to the divine model. This

is the gate of Jesus’ sheepfold and we must enter by it; on the contrary, we will not be numbered among His sheep.

The voice of the Good Shepherd calls us today to listen to and follow Him like docile sheep, wishing to be instructed in Catholic doctrine, to receive the Sacraments, to avoid sin, in short, to take another step toward the goal that He has set for each of us which is holiness! Let us, then, be sheep of Christ’s flock! ✧

<sup>1</sup> ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa Theologiae*. I-II, q.89, a.6.

# *The Chaste Brilliance of Christian Purity*

Having lost our original innocence, the fight against concupiscence of the eyes was mercifully aided by the Supreme Tailor, who, by giving us clothing, granted us a prophetic sign of the heavenly state.



**Fr. Carlos Javier Werner, EP**



**T**he virtue of purity is almost entirely forgotten today. In the misguided attempt to ignore the healthy shame experienced by our parents after the first sin, the contemporary world promotes ways of dressing and of personal appearance that are far removed from the modesty counselled by the Holy Church, the perfect and vigilant Mother.

Regarding this, it is opportune to recall the prophecy of St. Jacinta Marto, seer of Our Lady in Fatima: “The sins that lead more souls to hell are the sins of the flesh. Fashions will appear that will greatly offend Our Lord.”<sup>1</sup>

The prediction of the young girl is astonishing for its insight and accuracy... But could there be a deeper meaning to this prophecy made in 1918, when apparel was so different? To comprehend the scope of the words of the young shepherd, we ought to recall some crucial points of Christian morality.

## *Chastity and purity of the eyes*

Before all else, a brief outline of Catholic doctrine regarding the concupiscence of the eyes, spoken by St. John in one of his epistles (cf. 1 Jn 2:16) is in order.

The virtue of chastity only reigns peacefully in hearts that are protected by that fortified wall that is custody of the eyes. Without this rampart, chastity will be dethroned and the ruin of the soul will be irremediable. History is witness to this, as the following examples show.

David, the king prophet, cast himself into the abyss of adultery and homicide for having looked sinfully at Bathsheba (cf. 2 Sm 11:2-27). His impure gaze enkindled a devouring flame in his spirit. And, as the Book of Proverbs rightly says, “Can a man carry fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned” (6:27)?

At the time of the prophet Daniel, two wicked elders coveted the

chaste Suzanna in their hearts and tried, unsuccessfully, to sin with her by resorting to threats. When rejected by the virtuous lady, they falsely accused her of adultery, but God came to the aid of His innocent daughter. By means of Daniel, He saved her from their perverse plans, and condemned them to the very sentence they had sought to inflict upon the victim of their lustful passion.

These old men deserved to hear the rebuke of the prophet: “You offspring of Canaan, and not of Juda, beauty has beguiled you, and lust has perverted your heart” (Dn 13:56).

How appropriate it would have been for these two miscreants to have put the wise principles of Sirach into practice: “Turn away thy face from a woman dressed up, and gaze not about upon another’s beauty. For many have perished by the beauty of a woman, and hereby lust is enkindled as a fire” (9:8-9).

### *“The eye is the lamp of the body”*

The patriarch Joseph was also the target of concupiscence of the eyes. Having become a slave through the betrayal of his brothers, he was sold to the leader of the king’s guard, Potiphar, in Egypt. The latter, impressed with the Hebrew’s virtue, entrusted the care of his goods to him.

Now, Joseph “was handsome and good-looking” (Gn 39:6) and the wife of Potiphar, taken by a disordered passion, “cast her eyes” (Gn 39:7) upon her husband’s slave and made a proposal that was displeasing to the Lord. Faithful to the Divine Law Joseph rejected the woman’s wicked advances and received calumny and prison in return. The fidelity of the great patriarch was later rewarded by God, who helped him to regain the confidence of the Pharaoh (cf. Gn 41: 42-44).

These episodes demonstrate the profound meaning of the teaching of the Divine Master teaching: “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness” (Mt 6:22-23).

In fact, sight is the gate of the desires, such that “one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Mt 5:28). Concupiscence of the eyes stems from the wound opened in the human heart by original sin, which affected all men and women.

How, then, can we possibly ignore the existence of dangerous ways of dressing that are likely to jeopardize the purity of whoever sees those who present themselves in this way? In contrast, clothing designed

with modesty and grace are an aid in maintaining custody of the eyes.

### *The modesty of our first parents*

With tender candour, Genesis narrates the creation of Eve from the rib of Adam. She was to be the ideal helpmate for the first man, flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones (cf. Gn 2:23).

In her visions, Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich observed that the

couple, created in the friendship of God and adorned with the gift of sanctifying grace, emitted a certain splendour: “Eve was standing before Adam, who gave her his hand. They were like two innocent children, wonderfully beautiful and noble. They were luminous, enveloped in light, as if it were a shining garment.”<sup>2</sup>

Adam and Eve lived in intimacy with God as the sacred author describes, narrating that the Lord appeared at “the cool of the day” (Gn 3:8) to converse with them in Eden. Accordingly, their members reflected the brilliance of the spiritual grace that the Father of all light had impressed upon their souls.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the splendour of grace on their bodies, the gazes of Adam and Eve were limpid. Genesis emphasizes the purity of our first parents in the state of innocence in which they were created was so that they would complement one another and be fruitful, in accordance with God’s mandate when He blessed them and said: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Gn 1:28).

However, this happy state did not last long, and the power of sight was horribly stained after they both gave ear to the mortal enemy of the human race.

### *Consequences of original sin*

In his cunning, the accursed serpent deceived Eve by promising her that if she ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, forbidden by God, her eyes would be opened and both she and her husband would be “like God” (Gn 3:5).

However, reality was the exact opposite: due to disobedience, the human sense of sight became severely damaged, so that, far from being endowed divine acuity, it became similar to the sinister glance of the dev-



*Faithful to the Divine Law, Joseph, rejected the woman’s wicked advances and received calumny and prison in return*

Above, Joseph and Potiphar’s wife, by Friedrich Overbeck - Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin; on previous page, entrance of the Blessed into Heaven, by Giotto di Bondone - Detail from the Last Judgement fresco, Cappella degli Scrovegni, Padua (Italy)

il. Contaminated by original sin, all the fallen children of Eve inherited a vision darkened by the stain of lust, egoism and sensuality.

As a consequence of the fall, their blighted gaze discovered their own nakedness, giving rise to the sentiment of shame – in Latin *pudicitia*, translated as modesty –, which led Adam and Eve to seek a means to cover themselves with all haste: “They knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons” (Gn 3:7).

They no longer saw each other as children of God, made in His image and enveloped in light. Their perception of one another was defiled; lost was the brilliance that had given limpidness to the gaze and a diaphanous beauty to the physical features of the first couple.

The horror they experienced at their own degradation after the fall symbolizes not only an exterior phenomenon, but especially the extinguishing of the light of grace in their hearts. As a result, man tends to regard others with sordid interest, for, due to the intimate relationship between the body and soul, it is from the darkening of the mind that the exterior senses are degraded, including the noblest, which is sight.

***“Divine garment” made by the Supreme Tailor***

Nevertheless, God did not abandon them to their own incompetence, and out of pity for the scanty attire with which they attempted to hide their disgrace, He Himself made “for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them” (Gn 3:21). Although He did not heal the wound of shame, the Lord provided them with a swift and efficacious remedy.

And so would Providence act throughout history. The grace given by God in Baptism does not erase the evil tendencies springing from the first sin, such as concupiscence

of the eyes, but it provides strength to overcome them through asceticism, so as to merit an even greater reward in the glory of Heaven.

The art of dressing with restraint, modesty and elegance is not only a safeguard for the eyes, but also a sign of hope in salvation from above, for the clothing with which the Creator covered our parents is a symbol of the grace that reconciles us with Him and of the glory with which our bodies will be clothed in Heaven.



Baptism administered by Monsignor João Clá Dias in the Cathedral of São Paulo

*The grace given by God in Baptism does not erase the evil tendencies, such as concupiscence of the eyes, but it provides strength to overcome them*

This close relationship between exterior dress and the clothing of the soul by the grace of reconciliation is manifested in the oracle of the prophet Isaiah: “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall exult in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation” (61:10).

In summary, the “divine garment” made by the Supreme Tailor was at once a merciful covering, an antidote for concupiscence, a promise of Redemption and a pledge of the definitive victory in Heaven.

***The breaking of the dawn of an era of modesty***

The virtue of modesty,<sup>4</sup> which teaches the practice of chaste nobility in dressing and appearance, was greatly prized by those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith. In contrast with the pagans, marked by moral relativism which led them to worship their own bodies with vestiges of idolatry,<sup>5</sup> the first Christians distinguished themselves by their high esteem for purity in all its aspects.

In the record of the martyrdom of St. Perpetua, in the year 203 AD, a touching detail is narrated. They put the young woman in the amphitheatre of Carthage together with St. Felicity to be executed as part of the games and entertainment, as was the primitive and brutal custom. They were to be killed by an aggressive wild cow. Perpetua was the first to be tossed into the air by the attacking beast and, as the chronicler narrates, she “fell on her back, but immediately sat up and arranged her tunic so as to cover her leg, more concerned with modesty than with her pain.”<sup>6</sup>

And Saint Agnes, martyr of chastity, gives a beautiful testimony of faith, certain she would maintain her modesty undefiled, when the Roman magistrate wished to induce her to sin: “Do not imagine, Agnes replied, that Jesus Christ so easily abandons His

spouses. He bears for them too much love and solicitude to allow them to suffer with impunity the loss of their modesty, and He is always ready to help them.”<sup>77</sup>

***Ambiences not conducive to the practice of virtue***

Christian decency also restricted the use of the Roman baths which, in the time of nascent Christianity, was a centuries-old pagan custom that was justified by the need for hygiene and recreation.

City life gravitated around these thermal baths – at one time, there were more than three thousand in the city of Rome –, so that avoiding them was tantamount to cutting oneself off from society. Unfortunately, the ambience that reigned there was one contrary to the modesty taught by the Church. At certain points of particular decadence, they became so scandalous as to cause concern to pagan emperors such as Adrian, who decreed laws prohibiting both sexes from frequenting the official thermal baths of the empire simultaneously.

For Christians, such settings were highly detrimental to the practice of chastity – dangerous and seductive occasions of sin. How to react? The Fathers of the Church showed themselves to be admirably zealous and courageous in their preaching, demanding resolute and intransigent attitudes from their flock. Had not St. Paul said that nothing can separate the faithful from the love of Christ?

It would not be the worldly and sensual environment of the thermal baths that would make the children of the Church capitulate! The baptized would not immerse themselves in that climate of softness and sensuality, opening their hearts to the prevailing spirit, so contrary to that of their Lord!

In this regard, it is useful to recall a passage from the treatise of St.



St. Agnes - St. Mary's Church, Waltham (USA)

*The first Christians distinguished themselves by their high esteem for purity in all its aspects*

Cyprian dedicated to virgins: “What to say of those who frequent promiscuous baths, who expose their bodies consecrated to modesty and pu-

rity to curious and sensual eyes? [...] They make of the bath a spectacle; going to places more indecorous than the theatre. All shame is stripped away, along with the clothing, they divest themselves of honour and modesty of body; virginity is unclothed to be observed and contemplated. [...] Attend the baths together with women, among whom the bath is modest for you.”<sup>78</sup>

The courageous intolerance of the shepherds and the decrees of several councils so regulated and limited the use of mixed baths that they eventually fell into disuse. The social influx of Christianity had triumphed thanks to the evangelical intransigence of shepherds that were integral and virginal in the Faith, true to the exhortations of the Divine Innocent One: “And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away” (Mt 18:9).

***“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ”***

The call to modesty was also aimed at worldly and immoral fashions. St. John Chrysostom, in one of his *Baptismal Instructions*, admonishes the immodest woman: “You are greatly fanning the flames against yourself, for you incite the eyes of youth, attract the gaze of the licentious and breed perfect adulterers, and thence become responsible for their ruin.”<sup>79</sup>

But, in addition to teaching decency and propriety in personal appearance, the virtue of modesty encourages elegance and good taste in dressing, for since attire is the symbol of the sanctifying grace received in Baptism and the sign of the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem, it accentuates the dignity of the children of God destined to reign eternally with Him.

Indeed, sanctifying grace is compared by St. Paul to clothing: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). After exhorting the Christians of

Rome to live uprightly, free of vices and censurable passions, he affirms: “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom 13:14).<sup>10</sup> And to confront the battles of the Faith, he advises the Ephesians to clothe themselves with the armour of God so as to resist the snares of the devil (cf. Eph 6:11-17).

The spirit of darkness, on the contrary, foments a sordid affinity with shamelessness. This is seen in the episode of the demoniac of Gerasa narrated in the Gospel: “There met Him a man from the city who had demons; for a long time he had worn no clothes, and he lived not in a house” (Lk 8:27). After Our Lord’s exorcistic action, the same person appears fully clothed, seated at his Liberator’s feet, listening attentively to the divine words (cf. Lk 8:35). It becomes clear that Jesus loves chaste attire and the devil incites immodesty.

### **Wedding garments whitened in the Blood of the Lamb**

This divine preference for clothing is expressed in the parable of the wedding banquet narrated by St. Matthew. The Master sets the scene for His teaching by choosing the wedding feast of a king’s son. It is a clear allusion to the festive gathering of the Saints in Heaven, around the glory of the Son.

Nobles and wealthy people were invited to the wedding, but they declined to accept for trivial reasons. And so the servants of the sovereign went out to the thoroughfares to recruit all the passers-by.

When the hall of the palace was filled, the king entered to greet them and noted that one of them was not properly attired. Speaking to him, he asked: “‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth’” (Mt 22:12-13).

The wedding garment reappears in all its splendour in the Book of Revelation by St. John. In fact, in eternal life all things will be renewed (cf. Rev 21:5) and concupiscence of the eyes will be abolished, along with the sentiment of shame of our parents. The garment, however, will not disappear. Quite the contrary!

In one of his magnificent visions, the Evangelist contemplates an immense multitude beyond counting, “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands” (7:9).

The Virgin Apostle continues: “Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, ‘Who are these, clothed

in white robes, and whence have they come?’ I said to him, ‘Sir, you know.’ And he said to me, ‘These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night within His temple; and He who sits upon the throne will shelter them with His presence’” (7:13-15).

The whiteness of the victors’ tunics is undoubtedly linked to the Roman military custom of having the legions parade, after a military triumph, clothed in white tunics and palms, signs of victory. And yet, in light of the episode of the Transfiguration described by St. Mark, a relationship may also be established between the white tunic of the Saints and the raiment of Jesus Himself which, during the epiphany of Tabor, “became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them” (Mk 9:3).

### **Prophetic sign of our heavenly state**

There was, in the act of creation of man and woman in Eden, in their natural innocence, the purpose of emphasizing the complementarity of the first couple in view of the Sacrament of Matrimony and the multiplication of the species. However, in

<sup>1</sup> DE MARCHI, IMC, João M. *Era uma Senhora mais brilhante que o sol*. 8.ed. Fátima: Missões Consolata, 1966, p.291. St. Alphonsus, in commenting on the sixth and ninth precepts of the Decalogue, makes almost the same affirmation: “This vice [lust] is the most common and copious matter in Confessions, the one by which the most souls fall into hell, and I do not hesitate to affirm that solely by it, or at least not without it, are

all reprobates condemned” (NEYRAGUET, Dieudonné [Org.]. *Compendio de la Teología Moral de Santo Alfonso María de Ligorio*. 3.ed. Madrid: Viuda de Palacios e Hijos, 1852, p.230).

<sup>2</sup> BLESSED ANNE CATHERINE EMMERICH. *Visiones y revelaciones completas. Visiones del Antiguo Testamento. Visiones de la vida de Jesucristo y de su Madre Santísima*. Buenos Aires: Guadalupe, 1952, t.II, p.16.

<sup>3</sup> This mysterious luminosity would return later, in an exceptional way, in Moses: “as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God” (Ex 34:29). And, at the fullness of time, we see it shining in the incomparable glory of the Son of God, Who manifested it on the height of Tabor in a most perfect manner: “His face shone like the sun, and His garments became white as light” (Mt 17:2).

<sup>4</sup> The present *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in commenting upon the Ninth Commandment of the Law of God, defines modesty in the following very precise terms: “Purity requires modesty, an integral part of temperance. Modesty protects the intimate center of the person. It means refusing to unveil what should remain hidden. It is ordered to chastity to whose sensitivity it bears witness. It guides how one looks at others and behaves toward



Heaven, it will not be like this: “For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like Angels in Heaven” (Mk 12:25).

This is the significance of the clothing of the Blessed. It is not to mask shame, the offspring of sin, for this will no longer exist. Rather, it will accentuate the new angelic state of humanity! Thus, clothing on this earth is a prophetic sign of our future heavenly state.

It is hope in eternal life, in part, that gave rise to the good taste in clothing that has characterized Christian Civilization, rich in noble, under-

Adoration of the Mystic Lamb,  
by Jan Van Eyck  
Museum of Fine Arts of Ghent  
(Belgium)

*In eternal life  
concupiscence  
of the eyes will  
be abolished; the  
garment, however,  
will not disappear –  
quite the contrary!*

stated and dignified attire, worn by both rich and poor. In our days, vulgarity, virtually taken to the point of absurdity, dominates fashion and arbitrarily imposes a worn out, torn and scanty style of clothing. Degrading garments are sold at exorbitant prices, and people are willing to purchase them at any cost, so as not to appear outdated...

How much saner and more Catholic it would be to turn our sights heavenward, where Jesus Christ is with His Angels, and, inspired by the desire for eternal life, clothe ourselves decently and modestly, with discreet and chaste grace. ✧

them in conformity with the dignity of persons and their solidarity. [...] Modesty is decency. It inspires one's choice of clothing. It keeps silence or reserve where there is evident risk of unhealthy curiosity. It is discreet” (CCC 2521-2522).

<sup>5</sup> Regarding the rendering of any worship to the body, St. Augustine is very incisive: “It is a crime to render cult to the body or soul in place of the true God, by whose indwelling alone is the soul made

happy. And it is all the more abominable to render cult to them because the body or soul that receives this homage will obtain neither salvation nor human glory!” (ST. AUGUSTINE. De Civitate Dei. L.VII, c.27, n.2. In: *Obras Completas*. Madrid: BAC, 1958, v.XVI, p.494).

<sup>6</sup> RUÍZ BUENO, Daniel (Org.). *Actas de los mártires*. 5.ed. Madrid: BAC, 2003, p.437.

<sup>7</sup> RUINART, Teodorico (Org.). *Las verdaderas actas*

*de los mártires*. Madrid: Ioa-chin Ibarra, 1776, t.III, p.24.

<sup>8</sup> ST. CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE. A conduta das virgens, n.19; 21. In: *Obras Completas I*. São Paulo: Paulus, 2016, p.38-39.

<sup>9</sup> ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM. Catequesis V, n.37. In: *Las catequesis bautismales*. 2.ed. Madrid: Ciudad Nueva, 2007, p.118-119.

<sup>10</sup> The Apostle of the Gentiles also counsels the Colossians: “Put to death there-

fore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. [...] you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator. [...] Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience” (Col 3:5-6,9-10,12).

# Hymn of Wisdom, Humility and Grandeur

The promise made to Abraham was fulfilled: Our Lady carried in her womb the Expectation of the Nations. Inspired by the Most High, She composes this marvellous hymn, an inestimable jewel of God's praises.



Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira

**T**inted by Our Lady upon her encounter with St. Elizabeth, the *Magnificat* is a marvellous hymn inspired by the Most High, in which God sings His own glory through the lips of the most beloved of His children. It is also a beautiful, coherent, logical and serious message transmitted to the people of every age, by the virginal voice of Mary.

## *Exultation in God, her Saviour*

The hymn begins with the word *magnificat* – from the Latin *magnus*, that is, great – to exalt Him who is Grandeur personified. It is thus acknowledged that God merits this superlative degree of praise and honour in His extrinsic glory, which is open to increase, for having wrought in Her, the Blessed Virgin, the fulfilment of the greatest and most auspicious divine promise made to humanity: the Incarnation of the Word.

Her soul hastens to pour out her feeling of profound gratitude, proclaiming how the Lord has thus revealed Himself as the Great One par excellence. And then comes the

joy: “*Et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo* – my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.”

To rejoice is to feel an intense jubilation, not just any contentment, like that which one might experience upon hearing that an investment had returned a little more than expected. This would be a small satisfaction in comparison to that which is expressed by the word *rejoice*. Thus, Our Lady uses it to mean that her soul overflowed with joy in relation to God, her magnificent Saviour.

This happiness seems to become all the more intense, according to

*The attitude of Our Lady shows that it is legitimate for us to rejoice in the grandeur that God may bestow upon us*

the thought completed in the following verse, as She considers her lowliness and notes how God saved Her in an extraordinary and super-excellent manner, not only making Her the Mother of the Word Incarnate, but assigning to Her the admirable role we see throughout the entire life of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

## *Legitimate joy for having been ennobled*

After affirming her elation, the Blessed Virgin expresses the reason for this immense joy: “*Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae* – For He has looked with favour on His lowly servant.”

As a result of the attention that Our Lord has rendered Her, “*ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes*,” behold, “all generations,” namely, all people until the end of time, will praise Her, calling Her “blessed”.

“*Quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est* – the Almighty has done great things for me.” Once again, Mary’s joy at having been the object of a special design of the Omnipotent is



The Visitation, by the Master of Perea  
Prado Museum, Madrid

## THE GOSPEL OF THE VISITATION

<sup>41</sup> And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit <sup>42</sup> and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! <sup>43</sup> And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? <sup>44</sup> For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

<sup>46</sup> And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, <sup>48</sup> for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; <sup>49</sup> for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. <sup>50</sup> And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. <sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, <sup>52</sup> he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; <sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away. <sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, <sup>55</sup> as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever” (Lk 1:41-55).

evident: She, so humble, has become great through His power.

This passage contains an interesting teaching that merits consideration. As She rejoices in the divine grandeur, Our Lady also rejoices in having been ennobled by His condescension, and She knows that this magnitude of hers will make Her worthy of the praise and devotion of future generations. It is a unique glory that fills Her with happiness, and for which, filled with gratitude, She thanks God.

This attitude of Our Lady in accepting, reaping and loving Her own excellence, shows that it is legitimate for us to rejoice in the grandeur that God may bestow upon us. Provided that, like Mary, this joy is grounded in love for Him, realizing that such glory establishes a more intimate relationship between us and the Creator.

“*Et sanctum nomen eius* – And holy is His name.” That is to say, “God has done so with me, and He acted out of holiness.” This fabulous

work that the Lord accomplished in His servant is marked by the infinite perfection with which He models everything that comes from His omnipotent hands.

### *Mercy for those who fear God*

After thus manifesting the grandeur of God and Her own, Our Lady alludes to the aspect of goodness: “*Et misericordia eius a progenie in progenies, timentibus eum* – He has mercy on those who fear Him in every generation.”

The fact that God has done such a great thing with Her redounds as a benefit and a work of mercy for all those who will profit from it throughout the course of history. With one restriction, however: “*timentibus eum* – those who fear Him.”

This is another important lesson to be gleaned from the *Magnificat*. There are two fears: servile and reverential. Servile fear is that which a slave has, for example, in doing the will of his master for the dread of suffering harsh punishments if he does not obey. Reverential fear is that which is shown to another, not out of apprehension for the punishments that may be inflicted, but out of respect and veneration for this person’s superiority and our unwillingness to give any offence, or transgress the obedience that is rightfully due.

We find a marvellous example of reverential fear in the ardent words St. Teresa of Jesus addressed to Our Lord: “Even if there were no Heaven, I would love Thee; even if there were no hell, I would fear Thee.” In other words, even if God did not cast into Gehenna those who revolted against Him, for being who He is who He is and due to the infinite qualities by which He surpasses

us, we would fear not to do His will. This is the highest and noblest form of reverential fear.

Accordingly, to those who love God with such a love as to even fear Him – not only on account of hell, but above all for not wanting to displease Him in His infinite sanctity –, to them is opened the inexhaustible mercy of God: “*Et misericordia eius a progenie in progenies, timentibus eum.*”

It is important to highlight that frequently divine goodness is not bound by this restriction, but surpasses itself in extremes of solicitude towards even those who have little or no fear of God, before their being touched by grace and converted.

*Reverential fear is that which one shows out of respect for the superiority of another*

For example, we can suppose that St. Paul did not have fear of God on the way to Damascus. But, struck by a lightning bolt, he fell from his horse, lost his sight and heard Our Lord’s voice questioning him. When he arose, he was another man, becoming the great Apostle of the Gentiles. An extraordinary action of divine mercy – most likely owing to the supplications of Mary – enveloped a soul that until then did not fear God.

***The fall of the proud and the lifting up of the humble***

“*Fecit potentiam in brachio suo, dispersit superbos mente cordis suis* – He has shown the strength of His arm, He has scattered the proud in their conceit.”

Let us understand what “has shown the strength of His arm” means. It is a metaphor, for God, a pure spirit, has no arm. For a man, however, the arm is a member by which he shows his strength and carries out the decrees of his intelligence and his will. Thus, in referring to the “arm of God,” Our Lady helps us to see that He takes forceful measures against the haughty and proud, those who close themselves to the action of grace and neither fear nor love Him in their hearts. To



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these, God shows the power of His arm.

The thought is completed in the following verse: “*Deposuit potentes de sede, et exaltavit humiles* – He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly.”

Through the Incarnation of the Word, God broke the power by which the devil and his worldly followers tormented the good. Thus, he deposed them from their thrones, and lifted up those that were persecuted.

Someone might object that in the judgement of Our Lord, the opposite happened, since Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate and their ilk were on their thrones when they persecuted and killed Him.

It is true. But this story is not told in its entirety. For what took place after Jesus died was exactly what those powerful men had wished to avoid. He resurrected, triumphed over death and over all of His tormentors. With Him triumphed the Holy Church, the Apostles and Our Lady, the humble who until then were despised. And they will be glorified and exalted forever, whereas Annas, Caiaphas and Pilate will be spoken of with opprobrium and horror. Thus is confirmed the veracity of the statement: “*Deposuit potentes de sedes, et exaltavit humiles.*”

This idea still prevails in the continuation of the canticle: “*Esurientes implevit bonis, et divites dimisit inanes* – He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.”

Our Lady does not intend to allude to material or financial resources here. She refers, above all, to those



Our Lady of Help,  
by Bernardino Mariotto - Museu Civico  
de Morrovalle (Italy)

*Through the Incarnation, God broke the power by which the devil and his followers tormented the good*

who lack spiritual goods, to those poor in heavenly gifts. Out of the infinite abundance of His mercy, God heeds the poor in spirit who humbly beseech these graces. On the other hand, He sends away the “rich” emp-

ty handed, those who, in their pride, see themselves as entirely satisfied; that is, He does not make them participants in the treasure of His supernatural gifts.

***The promise made to Abraham is fulfilled in Mary***

Finally, Our Lady returns to the central point that inspires this wonderful hymn: “*Suscepit Israel puerum suum, recordatus misericordiae suae* – He has come to the help of His servant Israel, for He has remembered His promise of mercy.”

That is to say, the Chosen People will soon receive the Messiah promised for millennia, whom God will send into the world, recalling that His mercy has thus pledged it. From which flows the conclusion: “*Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros, Abraham et semini eius in saecula* – the promise He made to our fathers, to Abraham and to his children for ever.”

The promise made to Abraham, founder of the Hebrew race, and to his descendants over the course of centuries, that the Saviour would be born from his lineage, has been fulfilled. Our Lady carries in her womb the Expectation of Nations. She, a daughter of Abraham, will give birth to the Son of God.

And thus the *Magnificat*, this inestimable jewel, this marvellous canticle of wisdom, humility and grandeur, harmoniously closes by reflecting on the Incarnation of the Word, just as it opens in the first stanza. ✧

*Taken, with minor adaptations, from “Dr. Plinio” magazine. São Paulo. Year VI. N.64 (Jul., 2003); p.21-24*

# The Power of an Ejaculatory Prayer

A few days before the feast of Mary Help of Christians, St. John Bosco invited his students to profit from the power and affection with which the Blessed Virgin Mary helps each one of her children. Below are the touching words that the Saint spoke, as found in his biographical memoirs.

St. John Bosco

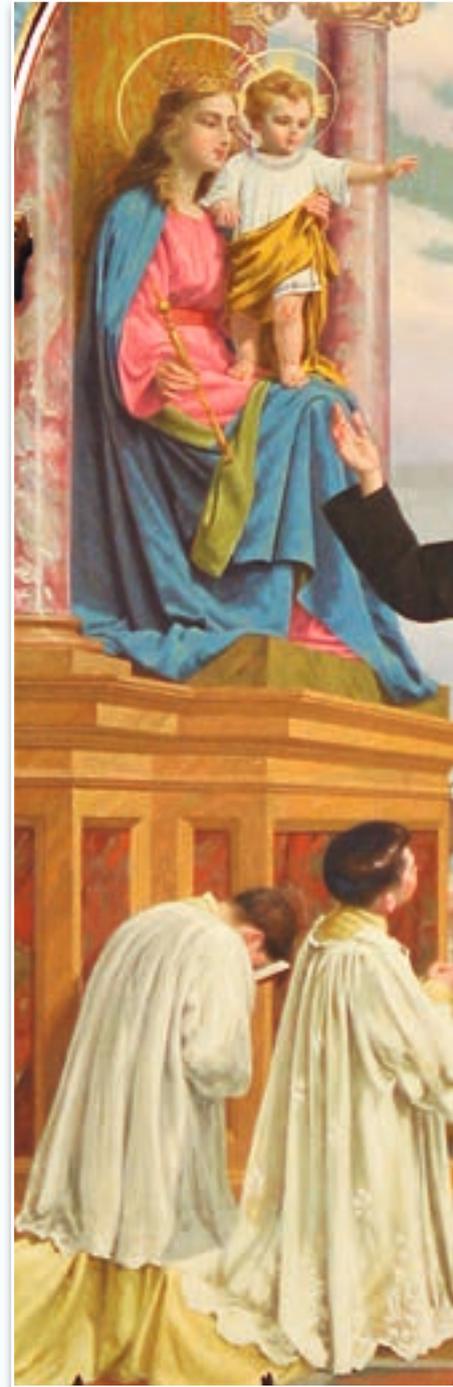
**W**ith my whole soul and being I recommend that each one of you pray to the Blessed Virgin Mary during this novena. This compassionate Mother readily grants the graces we need, especially the spiritual ones. She is most powerful in Heaven and every grace She requests from her Divine Son is immediately granted.

The Church shows us the power and kindness of Mary in the hymn “*si caeli quaeris ianuam, Mariae nomen invoca* – if it is the gates of Heaven you seek, invoke the name of Mary.” If invoking the name of Mary is all it takes to enter Paradise then we can certainly say She is powerful. Her name is depicted as the gate of Heaven and all those who wish to enter should turn to Mary.

*Always invoke  
Mary Help of Christians*

Let us turn to Her and especially to her assistance at the hour of death. In fact, the Church tells us that Mary alone is terrible as an army in battle array, in combat against the enemies of our soul. And, while in the liter-

*Mary alone is  
terrible as an army  
in battle array,  
in combat against  
the enemies  
of our soul*



St. John Bosco spreading devotion  
Basilica of Our Lady Help

al sense of Sacred Scripture these words are applied to the enemies of the Church, the spirit of the Church itself also applies them to our particular enemies as regards the soul. The mere name of Mary sends the demons into hurried flight. Thus,



Victor Domingues

Don Bosco's devotion to Mary among his students -  
Feast of Mary Help of Christians, Turin (Italy)

She is called *Auxilium Christianorum* – Help of Christians, against both external enemies as well as internal ones.

Let us entrust ourselves to Her, especially we who celebrate her feast in a special way, as our own, although

it is a feast of the universal Church. Therefore, I recommend to you as much as is within my ability, to always invoke the name of Mary, especially with this ejaculatory prayer: *Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis* – Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us. It is a short prayer and proven to be very effective. I have already recommended it to many people and everyone, or almost everyone, has told me that they obtained good results. Others, who acquired the custom of praying it on their own, have assured me of the same thing.

We all have miseries, we all need help. Therefore, when you wish to obtain some spiritual grace, make a habit of reciting this ejaculatory prayer. By “spiritual grace” is understood that we will be freed from temptations, spiritual afflictions, lack of fervour, shame in the Confessional, making the confession of sins too heavy a burden. If one of you wishes to resist an obstinate temptation, overcome a passion, escape the many dangers of this life, or acquire some great virtue, invoke Mary Help of Christians. These and other spiritual graces are those that we will obtain in greater quantity and do the most good to souls.

***Prayer must be made with perseverance and faith***

It is not really relevant to cite the many names of those who obtained

*We all have miseries, we all need help; when you wish to obtain a grace, recite this ejaculatory prayer*

special graces by invoking Her with this ejaculatory prayer. We have recommended the ejaculatory prayer *Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis* to so many people. Hundreds, even thousands, from within the Oratory and beyond it, and to all of them I said that if you are not heeded in praying this invocation, come and tell me. And until now no one has come to tell me that they did not obtain the grace. I stand corrected: there was someone who came to me this very day complaining that they were not heard.

But, do you know why? I asked him and he admitted that he had the intention of invoking Mary, but afterwards failed to do so. In this case, it is not the Virgin Mary who failed, but us, by neglecting to pray to Her. It is not Mary who fails to heed us, it is us who do not wish to be heeded. Prayer should be made with insistence, with perseverance, with faith and with an honest desire to be attended.

***A letter to St. Bernard...***

I want all of you to try this and to encourage your relatives and friends to do the same. Tell them on my behalf, if they come to visit you on this feast of Mary Help of Christians, or, if they do not come, write them a letter or send them a message: “Don Bosco guarantees that if you wish to obtain some spiritual grace, you will be attended if you pray to Our Lady using this invocation: *Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis*. It being well understood that it must be prayed with the conditions requisite for all prayer. Anyone who is not heeded, please do Don Bosco the favour of writing him to inform him of this.”

If I were to know that one of you prayed well, but in vain, I would immediately write a letter to St. Bernard, telling him that he erred in affirming: “Remember, O most gra-

cious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession, was left unaided..." However, you can rest assured that I have never thought of writing a letter to St. Bernard. And if it were to occur to me, the Holy Doctor would immediately know how to find some defect in the prayer of the supplicant.

I see that you are laughing at the idea of sending a letter to St. Bernard. However, do we not know where to find St. Bernard? Is he not in Heaven?

Of course, to arrive at St. Bernard's residence, the postal coach would have to travel at high speed and for who knows how long. The telegraph would likewise not solve the problem, for although electric current travels a great distance in an instant, there are no wires to reach there. However, to write to the Saints we have a speedier option than coaches, trains or telegraphs. Therefore, do not fear that they will not receive our letters immediately, even when the courier is late.

In fact, even now, as I speak to you, I soar in celestial space with my thoughts faster than lightning, I ascend above the stars, I travel incomprehensible distances and I arrive at the palace of Saint Bernard, who is one of the greatest Saints of Paradise. Therefore, try what I have suggested, and if by chance you are not



David Ayusso

Our Lady Help of Christians - Caieiras (SP)

*The devil will no longer have any power over you, he will not succeed in making you commit a sin, and he will be forced to retreat*

heeded, it will not be difficult to send a letter to St. Bernard.

***The devil will no longer have any power over you***

All jesting aside, I want to insist that you engrave in your heart these words: *Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro me* – Mary, Help of Christians, pray for me; that you always pray it in every danger, at the time of every temptation and in all your needs; and that you even ask Mary Help of Christians for the grace to invoke Her. And I promise you that the devil will be liquidated.

Do you know what this means? It means that the devil will no longer have any power over you, he will not succeed in making you commit a sin, and he will be forced to retreat. For my part, in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and in other pious practices, I will commend you all to the Lord, so that He may help you, bless you, protect you

and grant you His graces through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. ✧

*Transcribed, with minor adaptations, from: CERIA, SDB, Eugenio. "Memorie biografiche del Beato Giovanni Bosco". Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1932, v.XIII, p.409-411*

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# And then what?...

Even today, everyone without exception asks this simple and realistic question. We only have one life, and it was given to us by God to live as administrators, not proprietors.



Fr. Bruno Esposito, OP

**I** do not know how many readers of these reflections – perhaps intrigued by a title that leaves one wondering what kind of questions and answers it presents and presupposes – have seen the film on the life of St. Philip Neri, interpreted by the great and incomparable Gigi Proietti: *I Prefer Heaven*.

I have watched it at least thirty times in different languages and am not ashamed to say that I felt so deeply moved each time that I have encouraged everyone to watch it, especially those who have received from God the vocation to consecrated life or sacred ministry. Perhaps I am exaggerating, but I am convinced that it contains material for reflection and meditation for an entire course of spiritual exercises.

In some way, this Saint has always been present in my life and my Dominican vocation: from an early age, he frequented the Monastery of San Marco in Florence, which was marked a few decades previously by the presence and work of Friar Girolamo Savonarola; I made my novitiate in this monastery, and during this time I read some biographies of Neri, always sensing an affinity with

him, at the very least due to our common sense of humour!

The film puts this beautiful and touching prayer on the lips of Philip, summarizing his hopes, aspirations, toils and struggles: “O Lord, how can I make them comprehend that You are the sole source of joy and beauty? Without You, I am nothing: why did You choose me to do all these things? I am not worthy! Even though I love them, my greatest joy is to be with You, but, alas, I have time for everyone except for You!”

*“At that moment, what will I have amassed?”*

In any case, allow me to present here some scenes, including the one opening the second part of the film. Some boys that Fr. Philip had taken from the street and gathered in the Oratory to give them material and spiritual sustenance, are now grown up and gather in reunion to celebrate the birthday of their “father” who in a quaint manner reminds them that he has only gained one more year since the last birthday, and nothing more!

Around the table, everyone shares their recollections from the past and their plans for the future. Alexander, having converted, will leave for

the Indies with the Jesuits, which has always been one of Philip’s dreams. Camillus will serve the sick, for he has discerned that in so doing he will serve the Lord. Peter is about to graduate. And finally, Aurelius announces his decision to undertake an ecclesiastical career, although acknowledging that it will not be easy: “I want to be a bishop!”

Perceiving his proud tone of voice and undoubtedly misplaced intentions, Philip asks him seriously and intently:

— And then what?...

A little abashed, Aurelius responds that, having attained the first step, he might be able to get a Nunciature.

— Naturally! And then?... – Philip insists, in a fatherly, but insistent tone.

Under the illusion of having his support, the young man replies:

— Then... I might become a cardinal...

— Cardinal!?!... And then what? Then Pope?

— Perhaps, yes... – Aurelius replies.

At this point, Philip, with a compassionate gaze, repeats the first question:

— And then?... And then?...

— Enough, Philip! Then... I will die – Aurelius responds, lowering his eyes.

Philip forthwith kindly reminds him of the purpose of life and paternally invites him to ask himself: “At that moment, what will I have amassed?”

*And he tossed the hat into the air...*

Unfortunately, Aurelius did not heed St. Philip’s appeal to reconsider the meaning of life, so as not to squander it on ephemeral and fleeting things. Instead, betraying the confidence of his master, he capitalized on his relationship with the saint to spy on his pastoral activities, which were very daring for those times, and to report them to the ecclesiastical authorities. As a “reward” they granted him what he had always wanted – he became a bishop in France!

At the end of the film, Aurelius reappears in sumptuous episcopal regalia, on the spacious grounds of his palace, surrounded by monsignors and administrators who furnish him with information on the solid economic growth of the diocese. And he, sad and pensive, writes a letter to Philip, in which he acknowledges that, despite having obtained all

of his desires, it seems to him that he has nothing.

Reconsidering his life, he finally admits that Philip was right; the most precious prize he had attained was the affection of a gypsy man whom Philip had required that he wash from head to foot – especially the feet! – and the smile of Philip who, although aware of his intentions and betrayal, always loved him as he did all his other “sons”.

It is also interesting to note that, shortly before presenting this intimate coming to consciousness of a man who realizes he has squandered his life, the film focuses on the meeting of Fr. Philip with Pope Clement VIII. The latter asks him what are the rules and objectives of his nascent community. With fear, but at the same time with serene assuredness, Philip responds by saying that since it suffices to have but few rules to be obeyed (ah, if only leaders would take this truth into account...), he had chosen just one – charity!

Deeply moved by the honesty and sanctity of Fr. Philip, the Pope wanted to make him a cardinal. “No one merits this more than you,” he said with emotion. But he who would be called the “second apostle of Rome” took from the Holy Father’s hands

the cardinal’s hat that was to be imposed upon him, and asked with holy mirth: “Your Holiness, I a cardinal? I prefer Heaven!!!” And he tossed the hat into the air.

*We have only one life*

And so... then what?

Even today, everyone, without exception, asks this simple and realistic question about the meaning of one’s own life, the only one given us by God, to live as administrators and not as proprietors.

Today as always, blind ambition, egoism and egocentrism lead and develop into diverse situations, which we should know how to recognize and unmask if we do not want to squander the life that was given to us. Let us never forget: we have only one life, and there is no additional time slated for this combat!

The obsession for power, for pursuing a “career” at any cost, even without the capacity for such, refusing to accept reality and pathological disassociating oneself from it, striving after positions of authority and exercising the prerogatives coming from them with arrogant impunity are situations that we all witness daily. They appear at the moment of boarding a bus or during a medical appoint-



*Aurelius eventually realizes that despite having obtained all of his desires, it seems to him that he has nothing*

Screen capture of the film “I Prefer Heaven”

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ment; in attempting to claim a personal right in a government office, or submitting a simple question or request, only to encounter someone at the other end who – breaking the most basic standards of politeness – does not even acknowledge receipt.

Disparagement, dishonesty, corruption, vulgarity, the lack of respect due each individual as a person, systematic lying, when not outright calumny, making promises impossible to keep and offering favours at election time, shamelessly deceiving the multitudes to get votes. These have seemingly become predictable and even natural modes of behaviour for interpersonal relations today, in every social ambit, bar none. This is serious and very dangerous.

As Pope Francis astutely observed in a recent address after the Via Sacra in the Coliseum, there has been a loss of “shame for having lost our shame” (30/3/2018). I will leave it up to the readers’ memory and intelligence to confront and analyse the context of this sacrosanct, albeit sad, truth.

***We will be judged on our love***

And so... then what?

Nevertheless, those who, like King David, believe that this only applies to others are mistaken: “You are the man” (2 Sm 12:7). How many opportunists do each one of us know or have known, who like Aurelius, will stop at nothing for the sake of their career?

They are people blinded by power and by success, who at times, obsessed with a mania of omnipotence, forget that they are finite creatures and that their own life is not fulfilled in being “served” by others or in “taking advantage” of institutions, but in discovering the authentic joy of putting oneself at the “service” of others, of the



Portrait of St. Philip Neri (19th century)  
Complesso di San Firenze,  
Florence (Italy)

*Our desire is that like St. Philip, we may respond with generosity, knowing that everything is a gift of God*

good of institutions and, consequently, of people. They forget that one day we will be judged on the love present or not in our lives – on this, and nothing more.

And so... then what?

Our desire, transformed here into a prayer, is that this question come to the fore in the conscience of everyone, without exception, and that, like St. Philip, we may respond with generosity, knowing that everything is a gift of God. We must give ourselves to Him in return. Let us not act like Aurelius, who waited too long to discover that, having obtained all that he desired, he had lost what was most

important: that to which he was called to be as a son of God and brother of his neighbour.

However, Aurelius eventually realized that because he had focused too much on visible and earthly things, he ran the risk of not reaping eternal goods. His attitude enkindles hope for each one of us, even when we think it might be too late...

Aurelius’ awakening is nothing other than *conversion*, for which it is never too late as long as we live! The beautiful episode of Christ with the Good Thief recalls expressions of deep and passionate mercy. “Remember me when You come into your Kingdom,” he asked Him. And Jesus replied: “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Lk 23:42-43).

***Let us not condemn ourselves to slavery***

In reading these lines, some will certainly imagine that these are just beautiful words and thoughts that a priest is obliged to transmit, but that reality is another thing altogether, even within the bosom of the Church. This may be so, but precisely for this reason, it is crucial that we be aware of the danger and, above all be convinced that this manner of wasting one’s own life – I repeat, the only one we have – is not worth it.

In the end, we will discover that we have failed and, above all, we will perceive that, in the name of power, success and the desire for omnipotence, we have in fact condemned ourselves to slavery, “for whatever overcomes a man, to that he is enslaved” (2 Pt 2:19).

Let us ask ourselves then in all sincerity, especially if we are making some choice in life, at this moment in which the present is fully within our grasp, as is not the case with the past and the future: “And then what?...” ✧

# The Supernatural Strength of a Young Christian

With astonishing strength of spirit, this adolescent defied the man who held the greatest temporal power of his time. It was not two men who clashed, but rather two beliefs. It was the Mystical Body of Christ in conflict with paganism!



Fr. Arturo Hlebnikian, EP

In his tragicomedy *Le Cid*, the famous seventeenth-century French playwright Pierre Corneille puts these words in the mouth of the protagonist, Don Rodrigo: “True, I am young, but for souls nobly born valour does not await the passing of years.”<sup>1</sup>

This beautiful and inspiring affirmation well describes the state of spirit of Pancras, a Saint who, in his youth, sealed the Faith that he had embraced with his own blood. In Greek, his name means, “invincible, victorious, all-conquering.”<sup>2</sup>

## First contacts with the disciples of Jesus

He was born in Phrygia, Asia Minor, around the year 289, and although memory of him has faded with time, there is ample proof of the devotion he inspired in the Church in the first centuries, for his name and the date of his martyrdom were duly registered in the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum*, in the *Gelasian* in the *Gregorian Sacramentaries*, as well as in other ancient texts.<sup>3</sup>

He was born into a wealthy and upright, albeit pagan family. His mother, Cyriada, died while giving birth to him, and when our martyr was only eight, his father, Cleonius, also departed from this life. However, before dying, he entrusted Pancras to the care of his brother, Dionysius, who assumed the role of tutor to his nephew and who strove to give him a good education.

With the intention of drawing him away from the painful loss of his parents and of giving him the opportunity to become acquainted with his other relatives, around 299 the boy’s uncle took him to the city of Rome, the centre of culture and sciences at the time, where he could also “prepare himself for a military or political career.”<sup>4</sup> However, Providence had much greater things in store for him there: “The truth of the Gospel, Baptism and the crown of martyrdom.”<sup>5</sup>

The ship on which they travelled anchored at several port cities of Greece and the Italian Peninsula, thereby broadening the horizons of Pancras: the world was much larger than he imagined! Along the route, the child

was surprised to see a group of young girls and boys in chains, being sold as slaves. Their faces were marked with suffering yet it seemed that they had done no wrong... Shocked by this sad spectacle, Pancras looked on as someone went up to the prisoners to offer them food and clothing; his uncle explained that he must have been a Christian, for their religion considered slavery an injustice.

Observing the ship passengers, he noted that some, in the evening, took their meal together, then listened to a reading, prayed, made the Sign of the Cross, manifested expressions of mutual affection and ministered to other passengers in need. Dionysius identified them as disciples of Jesus Christ, who had died in Jerusalem and, who according to them, had resurrected and ascended into Heaven, henceforth making Himself present in His disciples through the Holy Spirit.

Pancras was eager to know more about these people and, noting his uncle’s admiration for them, asked that he tell him about Jesus, His life and His teachings. However, Diony-

sus avoided doing so, limiting himself to saying that in his youth he had lived in Rome where he had Christian friends, several of whom had been condemned to death by Emperor Valerian, together with Sixtus II, the Supreme Pontiff at that time, and the famous Deacon Lawrence. Upon returning to Phrygia, he had lost all contact with them, but he assured Pancas that when they arrived in the Eternal City there would be an opportunity to meet with them.

### ***Uncle and nephew become Christians***

They finally landed in Ostia and set out for the southern part of the Eternal City, where the family mansion was located, in the elegant neighbourhood of the Caelian Hill, one of the seven hills upon which the city was founded.

Rome was one of the most attractive cities of the ancient world. It had schools of rhetoric, philosophy, medicine, art and trades. And, as Roman mythology had no dearth of gods, it was littered with temples. The pagan priests, however, were beleaguered with the decreasing number of their faithful, who were leaving in the same proportion as the Christian worshippers increased!

Seeing that the desire to know the disciples of Jesus was growing in the heart of Pancras, his uncle procured information on who was the highest ranking among them, their meeting place, and the best time to arrange contact with them.

Marcellinus, the 29th successor of Peter, was the Pontiff at the time. Ascetic, pious and chaste, he had expanded the most important Christian cemetery of Rome, the catacombs of St. Callixtus, and built tombs there for himself and his family; evidence of the peaceful scenario in which the followers of Jesus lived. Nevertheless, this state of affairs would not last long!...



**“For souls nobly born, valour does not await the passing of years”**

St. Pancras - 13th century oratory  
Bode Museum, Berlin

Dionysius and his nephew were brought to him. The Pope welcomed them kindly and enrolled them in the catechumenate. Awestruck with what he learned each day about Jesus and His Gospel, Pancras felt that his deepest desires were being met. Concomitantly, his horror with the idolatry of the Romans heightened.

The Pontiff spared no effort in providing the two with religious instruction and taught them to make use of their abundant material goods to spread works of mercy. Thus, uncle and nephew learned how Christians should love one another and assist each other in their needs.

When their period of preparation was complete, they received Baptism with admirable devotion and fervour, “probably at Easter in 301,”<sup>66</sup> becoming highly esteemed members of the Mystical Body of Christ, which was now enriched with these two heroes who would shortly reveal the mettle of their souls, winning a great victory for the Church militant.

### ***Persecution begins in the East***

In 285, Diocletian divided the Roman Empire into two parts. He kept the East for himself, with the capital of Nicomedia, present-day Izmit in Turkey, and entrusted the West to Maximian, with the capital in Milan. Both governors called themselves “Augustus” and supported one another in their offices, even though Diocletian held first place.

A few years later, around 293, the diarchy was transformed into a tetrarchy: Constantius Chlorus was appointed “Caesar” by Maximian, and Diocletian did the same with Galerius, in the East. This manner of organizing the governing power – two “Augustus” Emperors, and two “Caesars” subordinate to them – enabled the division of the Empire into four regions, facilitating military operations.

Galerius was responsible for governing the Balkan region. An unyielding pagan, he professed absolute hostility against all monotheist religions, especially Christianity, and had finally succeeded in persuading Diocletian, who was slightly less intolerant, to eradicate the religion of Christ.

On February 23, in the year 303, he proclaimed the first imperial edict imposing heavy penalties on Christians who would not abjure their Faith. The decree prohibited meetings and established the destruction of places of worship and the burning of holy books. The penalties included confiscation of goods, the loss of positions and privilege, and imprison-

onment for the administrators of the State. The very next day one of the first Christian churches, next to the imperial palace was burnt down, initiating a bloody persecution throughout the East.

Several months later, an uprising in Syria and two attempts to raze the imperial palace of Nicomedia served as a pretext for Galerius to reiterate his accusations against the Church and induce Diocletian to publish a second, even harsher edict.

With the prisons teeming, Diocletian issued a third edict, by which he granted liberty to those who abjured and levied a death sentence to those who remained faithful to Christ. Given that he was the ultimate authority in the Roman tetrarchy, his orders held sway throughout the Empire – therefore also in Rome – where denunciations against Christians soon emerged.

### *Implacable hunt for Christians*

Diocletian rarely went to Rome, for he knew that its citizens had not forgiven him for having transferred the capital of the Empire... Nevertheless, he stayed a month there at the close of 303, at the invitation of Maximian, to receive homage for his twenty years of governance.

Pancras and his uncle witnessed the triumphal parade of the two emperors, seated on imposing thrones atop a bier pulled by four elephants, followed by a cortege of vanquished enemies, trophies of war, standard bearers, officers from the victorious legions and magistrates. Dazzled by the pomp, the people cheered.

At the same time, the hunt for Christians was unleashed with implacable fury. Dionysius and Pancras did not belong to the clergy nor did they have any special relevance as laypersons. Notwithstanding, in the spring of 304 a bailiff with an armed escort appeared at the Caelian Hill mansion with a detention order for both.

They had been denounced as followers of Christ and benefactors of His Church.

They appeared before the tribunal with the dignity of sons of God. At the first hearing, which was open to the public, the judge inquired if the accusation made against them was true and they proudly replied: “We are Christians!”<sup>77</sup>

Well acquainted with the content of the imperial decrees, which ordained severe penalties for those who refused to burn incense to the gods, Dionysius declared them to be unjust and reaffirmed his Faith. Sentence was immediately pronounced: he would be decapitated for impiety and hostility to the emperor.

### *The clash of two beliefs*

The judge then turned to Pancras. In view of his young age and social status, he wavered to pass sentence. Suspecting that the youth had expressed Christian convictions due to the influence of his uncle, he decided to suspend the hearing and submit the case to Diocletian himself.

On the morning of May 12, Pancras was brought to the Emperor, who, taken with his noble and youthful appearance, felt kindly disposed to him at the outset. He reminded him that his parents had worshipped the gods, and argued that Christians formed a sect that was hostile to the Empire and urged him to use his nobility and wealth to advantage to acquire a prestigious office. He could accrue honours and enjoy life, and ultimately, be happy... all that he had to do was renounce his Faith.

Pancras promptly refused to acquiesce. Diocletian then attempted intimidation, listing the penalties applied to transgressors: the confiscation of goods, condemnation to forced labour or the death penalty. Nevertheless, taken by a supernatural force the youth reaffirmed that he would always remain Christian.

It was a moving scene. With astonishing strength of spirit, an adolescent defied the man who held the greatest temporal power of that time, and whom he had just seen enter Rome with such pomp! This was not the confrontation of two men, but rather of two beliefs. It was the Mystical Body of Christ confronting paganism! Swept up by the strength that Christ communicates to His Church, Pancras acted as if he were the Church; through his lips spoke the Mystical Bride of the Lamb, against whom the gates of hell will never prevail!

### *Great miracles worked at his tomb*

Similar to Pontius Pilate who wavered in the presence of Jesus in the Praetorium, Diocletian was struck by this show of steadfastness, but his pride prevented him from acknowledging it. Humiliated and vanquished in his attempt to break the faith and joy of a youth of just fourteen years, the emperor declared a death sentence. At twilight of the same day, Pancras was beheaded on the Via Aurelia.

An illustrious Christian patrician, Ottavilla, witnessed the execution and had the head and body of the martyr taken to a nearby catacomb, anointed with balsam and wrapped in precious linen. Pancras was crowned in Heaven with the glories of innocence and martyrdom, and on earth considered a Saint from the moment of his burial. A Latin inscription marks the site of the execution: “*Hic decollatus est Sanctus Pancratius* – St. Pancras was beheaded here.”<sup>78</sup>

Marvellous occurrences and great miracles soon occurred at his tomb as well as from contact with his relics. Less than two centuries later, Pope Symmachus ordered a church built on the site of the tomb, presently called the San Pancrazio Minor Basilica. Devotion to him has spread throughout the world, especially in Italy, France, Spain and in England,



Photos: Tiago Krüger Galvão

**Marvellous occurrences and great miracles soon occurred at the tomb of Pancras as well as from contact with his relics**

At left, facade of San Pancrazio Minor Basilica, in Rome;  
at right, the column upon which he was beheaded and a bust with his relics

where at the end of the sixth century, St. Augustine of Canterbury transformed an ancient pagan temple into a monastery, whose patron is St. Pancras. The famous Saint Pancras railway station in London is named after this convent.

The noble, fearless and steadfast attitude of Pancras deeply marked his contemporaries, fortifying some and transforming others. Through the innocence of this courageous son, the Church expressed her own innocence; in overcoming this youth's weakness she conveyed her strength; and in the determined will of this martyr she transmitted her veracity. Pancras died for the Church, to which he belonged by the Baptism of water; the Church experienced expansion through the Baptism of the blood of Pancras.

***Blood of martyrs,  
the seed of Christians***

Modern historians estimate that fifteen thousand Christians were martyred during the reign of Diocletian. Agnes, Lucy, Sebastian and Pancras are, undoubtedly, among the most famous.

Paradoxically, this great and final persecution had the opposite effect of that desired by its instigators. The blood of the martyrs is the “seed of Christians,”<sup>1</sup> as Tertullian so rightly stated. Instead of extinguishing the flame of love for Jesus Christ, these sanguinary brutalities increased admiration for the champions of the Faith, both in the heart of already professed Christians, and among the unbaptized in whose minds pagan convictions were gradually weakened.

Both in persecutions and in freedom, the sweet odour of Jesus Christ spread to the far reaches of the Roman Empire and conversions were innumerable. Only nine years after the martyrdom of Pancras, in 313, the emperors Constantine and Licinius signed the famous Edict of Milan, giving freedom to the Church.

Ancient paganism had definitively lost its prestige and was defeated just as the dawn overcomes the shadows of night. It is interesting to recall that less than one year after the death of Pancras, a sick and enfeebled Diocletian abdicated his throne, making him the first emperor to voluntarily leave his position. Pancras was victorious! The future gave him his due with the victory of Christianity, which divided history into two eras: before and after Christ. ✧

<sup>1</sup> CORNEILLE, Pierre. *Le Cid. Acte II, Scène II*. Paris: Augustin Courbé, 1639, p.23.

<sup>2</sup> BURRAGATO, Giuseppe; PALUMBO, Antonio. *Sulle orme di San Pancrazio, martire romano: culto, basilica, catacombe*. Roma: OCD, 2004, p.20, nota 5.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. LEONI, Roberto. *S. Pancrazio, martire romano del IV secolo*. Roma: Chiesa di S. Pancrazio all'Isola Farnese, 1999, p.8-9.

<sup>4</sup> PESENTI, Graziano. *San Pancrazio, giovane martire romano*. Gorle: Velar, 2013, p.10.

<sup>5</sup> ST. JOHN BOSCO. *Vita di S. Pancrazio Martire*. Torino: G. B. Paravia, 1856, p.13.

<sup>6</sup> PESENTI, op. cit., p.17.

<sup>7</sup> Idem, p.24.

<sup>8</sup> Idem, p.26.

<sup>9</sup> TERTULLIAN. *Apologeticus*. C.L: ML 1, 535.

## *Future and Life Project*

Members of the Heralds of the Gospel visit schools in many countries, inviting children and youths to open themselves to beauty, culture and art. What result do they hope to achieve with these visits? Above all, to transmit the joy of Christian values.



**Sr. Cristiane Marques e Silva, EP**

**T**hat day started off like any other as the students set out from their homes for classes. They had awoken early, had a good breakfast and gotten onto the school bus, unaware that the programme that morning would be different!

In the meantime, a group of missionaries of the Heralds of the Gospel of that same city gathered in their chapel to consecrate the evangelizing activity they were about to undertake to the Blessed Virgin. There is no such thing as a commonplace day for those who have given their lives to God's service. Each act practised in His honour has something special about it and has a share in the mandate of Our Lord Jesus Christ: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15).

When the missionaries arrive at the school, they are received by the surprised students with evident curiosity. As the children watch them unpack and tune their instruments, there is a ripple of excitement: "Who are these young people in these beautiful outfits marked with such a large cross?" Their teachers soon

announce what it is all about: everyone should head to the gymnasium for a musical presentation.

This is sure to be no ordinary morning...

### *More than a musical presentation*

The event promoted by this missionary ensemble is part of the Future and Life Project, an initiative developed by the Heralds of the Gospel in countries of Europe, Africa and the Americas, as well as in many states of Brazil.

Inspired on the preventive system of St. John Bosco, members of this association visit schools in the municipal, state and private systems, encouraging children and young people to open themselves to beauty, culture and art. They strive, above all, to share the joy of Christian values with them. With this as their goal, they offer a musical presentation interspersed with commentaries and examples that encourage harmony, elevation of spirit and mutual respect.

After the concert, students are invited to participate in music and drama courses and recreational activities held on weekends at the houses

of formation that serve as the base for the project.

Expressions of gratitude for this youth apostolate have poured in from all over. Teachers, administrators, parents and even former students, reminisce about their experiences and participation in the project. They testify to the good seeds sown in the hearts of students, which have borne fruit that will guide them throughout their lives.

For example, teacher Olympia David, from Nova Friburgo (Brazil), comments on the didactic method that is used: "My impression was that of perfection; a commendable approach in which moral values are united with joy. They certainly showed that serving God is enjoyable, and that these sentiments ennoble the human soul. They are always welcome!"

Echoing this note of joy, Gislaíne de Oliveira, a teacher from Maringá (Brazil), adds: "The students were enthusiastic, they were impressed; they were also struck by a joy and kindness they had never seen before."

### *"Discipline, harmony, respect"*

During project activities, the missionaries endeavour to transmit the



Future and Life Project in a school in Maputo (Mozambique), on 20/7/2018

beauty of discipline and conscientious study habits. This captures the attention of many teachers, who notice changes in classroom attitudes in students following the concerts.

Teacher Adriana Horbelt, of Vila Velha (Brazil) observes: “The goal of the project is one that education and teachers desire: that of achieving a level of receptivity that is conducive to learning. The students show a lot of interest and attentiveness during the presentation and they are calm in class after the concert.”

Along the same line, teacher Luana Oliveira, of Brasilia (Brazil), affirms: “The project has a very positive impact, first of all due to the life lessons that it imparts, in discipline, harmony, respect. And our role as educators is to give continuity to these three components. Congratulations on the project, which brought us peace and imparted lessons on how to live in society!”

Going even further, teacher Cele Cristina Sousa, of the same city, says: “Our schools need marvellous initiatives such as this one. Linking music with pedagogy is an excellent method, since it provides the students with a variety of learning

*In addition to offering their activities, they communicate peace, hope, tranquillity and love*

sources. I am enchanted to see how well-executed music can touch us. I would really enjoy more unforgettable moments like that one! Congratulations, you are truly making a difference!”

***Peace, hope and tranquillity for the youth of Africa***

The beneficial results of the Future and Life Project are also felt in other countries where the Heralds of the Gospel are active. While always respecting the uniqueness of each nationality, it is carried out in all places with the same objective and the same keynote – that of instilling joy in the practice of good.

In Africa, for example, the Heralds have been presenting the project with high success in the schools of Maputo and surroundings.

Teacher Armando Eduardo Ti-vane, who teaches French in several schools in the Mozambican capital, expresses his satisfaction in these terms: “I have come to know the Heralds of the Gospel through several of their missions. Outstanding among these is the Future and Life Project by which they transmit something almost impossible to put into words. In addition to offering their activities, they communicate peace, hope, tranquillity and love to the audience. These are points that are sorely lacking in this world, which is losing its ethical and moral values day by day.”

He ends his testimony with an appeal to the promoters of the project: “I cannot neglect to thank the inspirers, coordinators and collaborators of the Future and Life Project for having brought this event to our continent, called the continent of hope. And I ask that they continue to watch over not only our children, but all of us as well, for there are times in our life when we feel like sheep without a shepherd. A

warm and heartfelt *Khanimambo* (thank you).”

***“Mozambique needs projects like these”***

Teacher Armando Pedro Ouana also writes from Africa: “It is with much gratitude that I write to the Heralds of the Gospel about the Future and Life Project, which aims to educate children according to the requirements of Christian morality; it is a project that encourages them to be courteous, respectful of parents and the principles of social interaction; in short, to be prepared for the future.

“It stands out for its music, but it also offers several activities that provide a healthy environment for our students. The project serves as proof that it is possible to live in a globalized world and be able to counteract practices that denigrate society.

“Many students have had the opportunity to gain this experience of a lifetime, with unprecedented results. They began to excel among many others for their respect, their dedication to studies and good habits, among other noticeable improvements.”

“Please God that this initiative never be discontinued and that the

Heralds of the Gospel grow stronger, for Mozambique needs such projects. May God grant long lives to the instructors of the initiative so that they will keep forming children who will not be blind to the evils of society, and who react with wisdom and constancy, serving as a model for others. Well done, Future and Life Project!”

***May Mary be the Queen of our hearts!***

Normally, the principal of the educational centre requests that the Pilgrim Statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary accompany the visit. In these instances, the programme begins with an entrance procession of Our Lady into the auditorium, chapel or schoolyard. The school and the studies are then consecrated to Her.

Touched by the graces received in the ceremony, teacher Maria Lourdes Torres, from Asuncion, Paraguay, comments: “I found it very interesting that they explain the activities and charism of the Heralds of the Gospel, and teach the boys and girls the importance of praying the Holy Rosary and making Mary the Queen of our hearts. Through music, the Heralds bring joy to the hearts of the youth, draw them away from vice, teach

them, help them to express their feelings, emotions and dreams, channel their energies and face their sufferings. I am grateful for the effort, the interest and the time that they dedicated to carrying out this activity in our school.”

Also from Paraguay – this time from the city of Luque – teacher Teresa Giménez writes: “Today’s youth need more projects like this one, to keep them from falling into drug use and alcoholism, and to give them good ways of spending their free time.”

And from Cuenca, Ecuador, teacher Elsa Bermeo testifies: “The joy and motivation that the young people showed after the visits of the Blessed Virgin to our institution clearly shows that there are voids that they need and avidly desire to fill through the love of Her.”

***Benefits for the whole family***

For parents, the education of their children is a constant area of concern. Harmful friendships, bad examples and unsound advice come up frequently in the lives of young people, bringing apprehension to their parents. Thus, many families thank the Future and Life Project for the support received.



Eduardo Pásseiro

*“The Project stands out for its music, but it also offers several activities that provide a healthy environment for our students”*

Future and Life Project in Vinicius de Moraes School, Jaboatão dos Guarapes (Brazil)



*“The joy of the young people after the visits of the Blessed Virgin shows that there are voids that they need to fill through love of Her”*

Future and Life Project  
Agustiniano de Tagaste, Colombia

The following are words of gratitude from Simone Reis. She is the mother of a student who attends the activities of the Heralds in Juiz de Fora (Brazil): “The way the members interact with one another and their relating with the families and children is something wonderful. They awaken in us the desire to be likewise, discovering who we are and what we can be and do for others. I cannot help but say that, if the world had more Heralds, people would be happier and more fulfilled.”

In many cases, the benefits are not limited to the children, but extend to the entire family, as Valdinei Alburguete, from Curitiba, attests: “By a special grace, in November of 2017, we met the Heralds of the Gospel through the Future and Life Project. From then on, everything began to change in our family! We consecrated ourselves to the Blessed Virgin, and the devotion that we already had took on much greater proportions! In the Heralds, we saw love and devotion to Mary, and a respect for the Holy Mass and the Blessed Sacrament which we had never witnessed.”

And he concludes: “Our Lady has helped us each day to renounce what does not come from God and to prac-

tise virtue. The interaction with the families and the environment of the Herald houses was a great aid in this. We thank God for having shown us this way, and the Blessed Virgin for the care and love for our family, and to the sisters and priests for their zeal and dedication, and to Msgr. João who, by his fidelity and obedience to God’s will, has made this experience available to many people.”

*“I will never forget you”*

It touches a mother and a father to see their child take good parental counsel to heart and to mold their behaviour accordingly. Greater, however, is the joy that comes from seeing the child persevere on the right path, so that, upon reaching maturity, the good upbringing received from parents continues to influence their conduct.

A similar satisfaction arises in the souls of Herald missionaries when they encounter people who, after several years, still have fond remembrances of and retain the lessons they received during the short but important period in which they attended the Future and Life Project.

Annatercia Gomes, who participated in activities offered by the project ten years earlier, chose to leave

her testimony on one of the blogs of the institution: “Lately, my heart has been searching for refuge in the arms of Our Lady. And, fortunately, it has found consolation. In one of my desperate searches for texts, prayers and blessed messages, I came across this blog. It is an immense pleasure to once again see this beautiful work, which was part of my life for a brief period, and which marked me deeply. The centre was a blessed place, where I enjoyed games and met incredible people who truly help people grow... It was a place which brought me into contact with God and taught me so much.

“Maybe you don’t remember me, but I will never forget you! From time to time I even sing this song under my breath: ‘Every weekend without fail, in such a friendly place, it seems a dream that we can find a spot so filled with grace. Friends so true, and lots of peace, with songs and cries of cheer! This project is for souls of faith, for all who gather here!’ Unforgettable! Never stop the project. It is fabulous! It seems crazy, but at eleven years of age I came across this magical place and I learned this song, and today, at age twenty-one, I still sing it. With fond remembrances!” ✧



Photos: Sergio Caspedes

## ***Marian Fervour in Espírito Santo***

**S**acred Scripture narrates that after receiving the announcement of the Archangel Gabriel, Mary went with haste to visit her cousin St. Elizabeth who had also miraculously conceived, to bring her the God that She carried in her immaculate womb, and, in this way, to sanctify her.

In her constant desire to benefit souls, Mary Most Holy uses the most varied means to visit us maternally and to benefit us with the presence of her Most Holy Son and her Divine Spouse. One of these are the Mari-

an Missions carried out by the Knights of Mary across all of Brazil.

In the month of March, this missionary unit visited the three parishes of the state of Espírito Santo, in south-eastern Brazil: Our Lady of Graces, in Vila Velha, Our Lady of Penha, in Serra; and Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, in Guarapari. In all of them, Our Lady was received with warmth and fervour as is evident in the photos that accompany these pages. ✧



**Candlelit procession** – In each Marian Mission, Saturday night is reserved for taking the Pilgrim Statue of Our Lady of Fatima in procession through the city streets. Some of the faithful carry torches, others intone Marian hymns and everyone recites the Holy Rosary. At left, the procession in Serra; at right, in Vila Velha.



**Serra** – The Pilgrim Statue was also welcomed with an outpouring of enthusiasm in the Parish of Our Lady of Penha. The highpoint of the Marian Mission was the handing over of eleven new Shrines to their respective coordinators, during a Mass presided by the pastor, Fr. Jones dos Santos Teixeira.



**Vila Velha** – In testimony to their sincere love for the Mother of God, the Parish of Our Lady of Graces was filled to capacity during the Masses celebrated throughout the Marian Mission. During the closing act, Fr. Gudialace Silva de Oliveira consecrated the parish and all parishioners to Our Lady.



**Guarapari** – On the same night that the Pilgrim Statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary arrived in the city, a large number of parishioners, with Fr. Diego Carvalho dos Santos at their head, eagerly awaited Her at Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception Church. Everyone was eager to venerate her up close and offer her a brief prayer.



Photos: Lucia Vu

**Brazil** – On the Solemnity of the Annunciation, 24 youths of various nationalities and states of Brazil received the habit of the Heralds of the Gospel. The ceremony took place during a Mass presided by Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias at Lumen Prophetæ House, in Franco da Rocha (SP).



Photos: Damascene

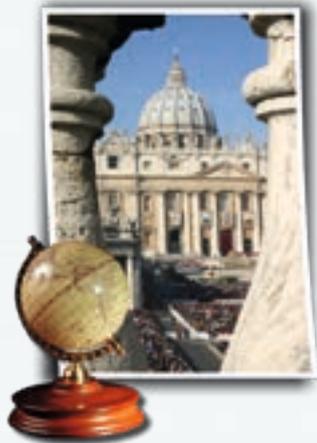
**Rwanda** – The community of Kigogo, situated in the parish territory of the Cathedral of Byumba carried out an official launching of the Shrine Apostolate “Mary Queen of All Hearts” on March 24. The Holy Mass and the handing over of the Shrines was presided over by Fr. Emmanuel Rutsindintwarane, pastor of the Cathedral.



Photos: Stephen Nami

**Spain** – Accompanied by co-operators and Herald missionaries, the Pilgrim Statue of Our Lady visited the Parish of St. Germaine of Constantinople in Madrid on the third Sunday of Lent. After each of the seven Masses celebrated there, the faithful gathered to venerate the Statue with evident piety.

# CHURCH AND WORLD EVENTS.....



## **Number of Catholics worldwide increases**

Between 2000 and 2017, the Catholic Church grew 25 per cent worldwide, according to the *Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae 2017*, an official publication of the Holy See released on March 6.

In the year 2000, the total number of Catholics was 1.050 billion, and at the end of 2017 it had grown to 1.313 billion, an all-time high in the history of the Church. The 263 million increase in faithful during this period represents an average of 15 million per year. To illustrate what this means, it is as if the Catholic Church had received the populations of Norway, Ireland and Costa Rica combined among its members each year.

In 2017 alone, there was an increase of 14 million Catholics, a growth rate of 1.1 per cent, similar to the growth in the world's population.

As the statistics show, the percentage of Catholics in the world's population is now 17.7 per cent. Of this total, 48.5 per cent live on the American continent – where 63.8 per cent of inhabitants are Catholic –, 21.8 per cent in Europe, 17.8 per cent in Africa, 11 per cent in Asia and 0.8 per cent in Oceania.

## **Beatification of seven new Bishop martyrs**

On March 9, Solemnity of St. Joseph, the decree recognizing the

martyrdom of seven Greek-Catholic Romanian bishops, killed between 1950 and 1970, “in hatred of the Faith” was signed. This signals the conclusion of a long process begun in 1994.

The first to be killed, Most Rev. Vasile Aftenie, Auxiliary of Bucharest, died on May 9 or 10, 1950, during “security investigations”. The last, Most Rev. Iuliu Hossu, Bishop of Cluj-Gherla, died on May 28, 1970, under house arrest. He had been secretly named a cardinal *in pectore* a short time previously.

On November 8, 1948, the Greek-Catholic Church was dissolved by a “decree” of the Great National Assembly of Romania and all Catholic properties were handed over to the State, while one of the fiercest persecutions against the Church in the history of the country was unleashed.

The other new blessed are Bishop Valeriu Traian Frentiu, Auxiliary Bishop Tito Livio Chinezu, Bishop Ioan Suciu, Bishop Ioan Balan and Bishop Alexandru Rusu.



Paul McSherry/CNA

## **Scottish Parliament celebrates Ash Wednesday**

This year, the beginning of Lent was particularly auspicious for Catholics of Scotland. On March 6, for the first time in history, the Ash Wednesday Liturgy was celebrated in the Scottish Parliament. The blessing and imposition of ashes was carried out in a committee room of Queensberry House, presided over by Most Rev. Leo William Cushley, Archbishop of St. Andrew and Edinburgh, with the

attendance of parliamentarians and staff.

During his sermon, the Archbishop highlighted the meaning of this rite: “This gesture reminds us that we are dust. It is about acknowledging that we need God’s help, that we are fragile, that we are mortal, that we have been disobedient and that we want to regain our relationship with Almighty God.”

The ceremony was sponsored by Member of Scottish Parliament Elaine Smith, who voiced hopes to repeat it each Lent in the Parliament, as well as the celebration of a Mass during Holy Week, which already took place last year.

## **Traces of St. Aebbe monastery discovered**

An archaeological team from the United Kingdom believes they have found in Scotland vestiges of the abbey of St. Aebbe, a pagan princess who converted to Christianity and had an important role in the spreading of the Faith on the northeast coast of Great Britain, during the seventh century. After her conversion, she became a religious and founded a monastery near Coldingham, of which she became abbess.

After having been destroyed by Vikings in 870, the convent disappeared in the mists of time, and decades were spent looking for its precise location without success. However, on March 8, archaeologists announced they had found a narrow circular trench, called a *vallum*, which probably surrounded the convent.

Maiya Pina-Dacier, head of the team, explained that “these vallums were not necessarily deep, intimidating defensive structures, but more like symbolic markers to show that you were entering a venerated or spiritual place.”

During the excavations, the team also discovered a large quantity of

bones from sacrificed animals, dated by radiocarbon testing between 664 and 864, the period in which the monastery was fully functioning.



**Marian Shrine in Orissa commemorates jubilee**

“We entrust our suffering to Mary”: this was the prayer of over for-

ty-five thousand pilgrims who gathered at the Marian Shrine of Partama, in the Indian State of Orissa, on March 5. On this date, the silver jubilee of the Shrine was commemorated with a Mass celebrated by Most Rev. John Barwa, SVD, Archbishop of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar, and concelebrated by Most Rev. Sarat Chandra Nayak, Bishop of Berhampur, along with seventy priests.

The shrine belongs to Our Lady of the Rosary Parish, located in the district of Kandhamal. According to the Diocesan chronicles, on March 5, 1994, a beautiful Lady appeared to a Hindu widow who was gathering

wood on Mount Partama, telling her to ask the Catholic priest to build a church there in which the Holy Rosary would be prayed for the conversion of sinners. However, the widow was ridiculed when she told this to her acquaintances.

Days later, the Lady appeared again, to a twelve-year-old girl, saying: “I am the Mother of Jesus. Pray the Rosary every day to build up the Kingdom of God.” The parish priest, Fr. Alphonse Balliarsingh, then built a grotto at the site of the apparitions, in which he enthroned a statue of Our Lady of the Rosary. Before long, devotion to Her spread throughout the region.

## ***Nine Seminararian Martyrs Beatified in Spain***

**O**n March 9, nine Spanish seminarians of the Asturias region were beatified. They were martyred between the years 1934 and 1937, during the bloody persecution unleashed against the Catholic Church in Spain at that time.

The ceremony took place in the Cathedral of Oviedo, presided over by Cardinal Giovanni Angelo Becciu, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, and concelebrated by Cardinal Ricardo Blázquez Pérez, Archbishop of Valladolid and President of the Spanish Bishops’ Conference, and Most Rev. Jesús Sanz Montes, OFM, Archbishop of Oviedo, along with seven other prelates and 156 priests. Among the numerous attendees were 130 relatives of the martyrs.

The rite of beatification began with a procession bearing the relics of the new Blesseds, which were placed in the Agate Casket, a precious 10<sup>th</sup> century reliquary kept in the Holy Chamber of the cathedral.

At the time of their martyrdom, the seminarians were between eighteen and twenty-five years of age. The first six were killed on October 7, 1934, after revolutionaries invaded the Seminary of Oviedo and seized them. They were then led through the streets to shouts of “Kill them, they are priests,” and were executed on the spot. The other three seminarians died between 1936 and 1937, in similar circumstances. One of them,

Luís Prado García, twenty-one years of age, died shouting “*Viva Cristo Rey!* — Long live Christ the King!” before falling to the ground riddled with eleven bullets.



**Oviedo Cathedral filled with members of the faithful eager to participate in the ceremony**

Photos: iglesiasdeasturias.org

## ***Penitential Walk in Brazilian State Draws 200 Thousand Faithful***

**D**espite heavy rain, the 34th Penitential Walk of Bahia, Brazil went ahead as planned on March 24, the 3rd Sunday of Lent.

The event began at 6:30 a.m. with a Mass in the seaside Basilica of the Immaculate Conception, celebrated by the Archbishop of Salvador and Primate of Brazil, Most Rev. Murilo Krieger, SCI, simultaneously with another Mass in the nearby St. Vincent de Paul Church.

Processions from both locations headed towards the Largo dos Mares, where a third group of faithful were attending another Eucharist, celebrated by

the Auxiliary Bishop, Most Rev. Estevam dos Santos Silva Filho.

According to estimates on the Archdiocesan website, over two hundred thousand people took part in the event. Two crosses, six metres in length and three in width, were carried along the routes, the longest of which was eight kilometres. Many of the faithful could be seen making the entire walk barefoot, in a spirit of Lenten penance.

From Largo dos Mares, participants proceeded to the Basilica of the Lord of a Good Death, where the pilgrimage ended.



Photos: Igor Gonçalves / Archdiocese of Salvador

Two views of the walk; at right, in the foreground, one of the crosses carried by the multitude

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# *The Bridge of Confidence*



Illustration by: Esther Pinales de Leon

Madeleine stopped for a moment to catch her breath, and seated on a stone, she thought to herself: Was this all just an illusion? However, she soon stood up and carried on. She wanted to reach the golden castle as soon as possible!



**Daniela Haiden de Lacerda**

**I**n a village in the French Alps lived a virtuous girl named Madeleine. Every afternoon she made her way to the neighbourhood chapel to ask Our Lady for special graces, for she wanted to do something grand and glorious. She knelt before the beautiful statue of the Mother of God that adorned the main altar, and wondered, in the serenity of her innocent heart, how her longings could be fulfilled, for she was just a simple peasant girl.

Every Saturday morning, she had a class with a pious woman named Mistress Olga, who taught catechism to the children of the hamlet. One day, the topic was especially interesting; the teacher told them various stories of heroines from across history including Judith, Esther, St. Helen, and the beloved patroness of France, St. Joan of Arc. As can be imaged, Madeleine was filled with enthusiasm as she heard these narratives, for she dreamed of going off and fighting for God as they had.

A week later, when the girl was praying in the chapel, she saw, to her surprise and delight, her Guardian Angel beside the altar! A bright silvery light surrounded him and he

carried a shining sword. In a kindly voice, he said to her:

— Madeleine, God has heard your entreaties and has sent me here to give you this sword, a symbol of your mission! If you want to be a true heroine, get ready to cross the forest with it. On the other side, you will find the golden castle where the Queen awaits you!

Then he disappeared.

Elated with the magnificent apparition, Madeleine took the sword and started out towards home. However, as the villagers saw her pass by they started whispering to one another, commenting that she was not strong enough to handle such a heavy object, or even to hold on to it for much longer... But she paid them no heed. Her soul burned with the desire to find the golden castle promised by the Angel, and if it were necessary to carry that sword until she reached it, she was willing to take it to the end.

For the next few weeks, Madeleine enjoyed the great privilege of seeing her Guardian Angel every day and he stimulated her desire to set off in search of the castle. In one of these blessed conversations, while the little

girl picked strawberries in the woods, a hungry wolf crept out from among the trees, and advanced toward her. Without a moment's delay, she took up the sword and defended herself courageously, finally dealing a deadly blow to the beast.

The next day, the whole hamlet gathered in the village square to pay tribute to a famous hunter of those regions. He had dragged from the forest the carcass of the wolf that had been the terror of the town, and now he regaled them with a gripping tale of how he had killed it. Madeleine listened in silence...

Spring arrived, and one breezy morning as she left her home in the company of her Guardian Angel, he asked her:

— Are you ready to set out to the golden castle today?

— Yes, I am – she responded.

— Then follow me! – ordered the Angel.

And away they went. Upon drawing close to a tree that marked the beginning of a path, the girl saw a sign upon which was written: “Of all of those who were bold enough to set foot on this path, none of them have returned to tell what they saw.”

— This is the way – the Angel assured her.

Undaunted Madeleine entered the foreboding trail straightaway. But as soon as she had taken her first few steps, her heavenly protector disappeared...

She knew she had to carry on, and that is what she did! She met up with all kinds of obstacles, difficulties and challenges: there were wild beasts that wanted to devour her, tangled vines that barred her path and even a steep rock face that would have disheartened an experienced mountaineer...

However, the little girl boldly continued the ascent.

After reaching the top, she stopped for a moment to catch her breath, and, seated on a stone, she thought to herself: “Will I actually reach the golden castle and encounter the Queen? Was this all just an illusion? Where is the Angel that accompanied me? Why did he abandon me? Would it not be better for me to return home?”

Remembering the promise, however, she recovered her energy and courage, stood up, and carried on. Actually, it was her Angel, at her side, who gave her renewed strength, although she could not see him.

At a certain point along the way, Madeleine spied a golden tower, above the leafy dome of trees. She was certain it was the castle! She started to run swiftly towards it, when...

— Oh, no! It can't be true! – she exclaimed.



**“This is the way!” the Angel assured her; and Madeleine fearlessly stepped onto the trail...**

She was only a few metres away from her aspired goal, but between her and the golden castle was a mighty river with dark and raging waters! She neared the bank with the thought of swimming across, but she soon saw that it was full of piranhas and crocodiles. It would be impossible to set foot in that river! Before reaching the other side, she would have to kill

work, an Angel arrayed in a lilac hue approached with a smile, took her by the hand and led her to the other side.

It was thus that Madeleine was able to reach the castle, where, in fact, a Queen awaited her with open arms. When she saw the sovereign, she fell to her knees, expressing her desire to enter her service. The Queen responded:

— My little daughter, this is the attitude that one should have before all of the circumstances of life. In order to reach the Heavenly Palace, one must fight without respite and without fear, but sometimes this will not be enough. Unsolvable problems will arise, situations with no way out. In these cases, it will be necessary to pray to Me. I will send my Angels to construct the magnificent bridge of confidence that will lead you to my Wise and Immaculate Heart! ✧



**She was a few meters away from the golden castle, but first she would have to cross an immense river!**

# THE SAINTS OF EACH DAY

## 1. St. Joseph the Worker.

**St. Peregrine Laziosi**, priest (†1345). After a rebellious adolescence, he entered the Servites, in Siena, and founded a monastery of the Order in Forlì, his birthplace.

## 2. St. Athanasius, bishop and Doctor of the Church (†373 Alexandria - Egypt).

**St. Antoninus of Florence**, bishop (†1459). He founded the Dominican Convent of San Marco where, during his tenure as prior, Blessed Angelico painted most of his famous works. He was later appointed Archbishop of Florence.

## 3. St. Philip and St. James the Less, Apostles.

**Blessed Marie-Léonie Paradis**, virgin (†1912). She founded the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Holy Family in Canada.

## 4. St. Silvanus of Gaza, bishop, and companions, martyrs (†c. 304). Condemned to forced labour and eventually beheaded in the mines of Phéno, Palestine, with thirty-nine other Christians, by order of Emperor Maximinus Daia.

## 5. 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter.

**St. Maximus**, bishop (†c. 350). After suffering torture and condemnation to forced labour for the Faith, he was liberated and became Bishop of Jerusalem.

## 6. Blessed Anna Rose Gattorno, religious (†1900). After the death of her husband, she founded the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Anne, Mother of Mary Immaculate, in Piacenza, Italy.

**St. François de Laval**, bishop († 1708 - Quebec).

## 7. St. Anthony of Kiev, hermit (†1073). Born in Ukraine, he lived as a monk on Mount Athos, Greece. He later returned to his homeland and founded, together with St. Theodosius, the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev.

## 8. St. Benedict II, Pope (†685). Successor of Leo II, he stood out for his love of poverty, his humility, affability, patience and generosity in almsgiving.

## 9. Blessed Mary Theresa of Jesus (Karolina Gerhardinger), virgin (†1879). She founded the Congregation of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Neuenburg, Germany.

## 10. Blessed Beatrice d'Este, virgin (†1226). From a noble Italian family, she restored an ancient monastery near Padua, founding a community there under the Benedictine rule.

## 11. St. Ignatius of Laconi, religious (†1781). Capuchin of Sardinia who collected alms to alleviate the misery of the poor by going through the squares of Cagliari and visiting the inns of the port.

## 12. 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter.

**Sts. Nereus and Achilleus**, martyrs (†third century Rome).

**St. Pancras**, martyr (†fourth century Rome).

**St. Rictrudis**, abbess (†c. 688). Wife of St. Adabald, with whom she had four children who were also Saints: Mauront, Adalsind, Clotsind and Eusebia. On the advice of St. Amand, she founded a monastery in Marchiennes, France, of which she was prioress.

## 13. Our Lady of Fatima.

**Blessed Gemma**, virgin (†1465). Young shepherdess who led a life of prayer and penance in a small cell beside the church of Goriano Sicoli, Italy.

## 14. St. Matthias, Apostle.

**St. Michael Garicoïts**, priest (†1863). Founded the Society of Missionaries Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Betharram, France.

## 15. St. Rupert, hermit (†eighth century). From a noble family of Bingen, Germany, he decided to consecrate himself to God after making a pilgrimage to Rome. He promoted the building of many churches and became a hermit on the outskirts of Mainz.

## 16. St. Andrew Bobola, priest and martyr (†1657). Polish Jesuit killed by a band of Cossacks in Pinsk, present-day Belarus, after suffering unspeakable torture.

## 17. Blessed Ivan Ziatyk, priest and martyr (†1952). Redemptorist religious sent to Ozerlag concentration camp in Russia, where he died.

## 18. St. John I, Pope and martyr (†526 Ravenna - Italy).

**Blessed Blandine Merten**, virgin (†1918). Religious from the Order of St. Ursula, she died in Mergentheim, Germany.

## 19. 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter.

**St. Urban I**, Pope (†230). He faithfully governed the Church for eight years, after the martyrdom of St. Callixtus.

## 20. St. Bernardine of Siena, priest (†1444 L'Aquila - Italy).

**Blessed Maria Crescencia (Maria Angélica Pérez)**, virgin (†1932). Religious from the

Congregation of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Garden; she died in Vallenar, Chile.

**21. St. Christopher Magallanes, priest, and companions, martyrs** (†1927 Mexico).

**Blessed Jean Mopinot**, martyr (†1794). Religious from the Christian Brothers, he was imprisoned on a sordid galley anchored off the coast of Rochefort during the French Revolution. He died there as a consequence of the terrible abuse and vexations he suffered.

**22. St. Rita of Cascia**, religious (†c. 1457 Cascia - Italy).

**Blessed Humility (Rosanna)**, abbess (†1310). At twenty-four years of age, she and her husband decided to abandon the world and enter religious life. Drawn by her example, several young women joined her in the Monastery of St. Maria Novella, of which she became prioress.

**23. St. Guibert**, monk (†962). Abandoning military life, he gave his possessions for the building of a monastery in Gembloux, Belgium, and later entered monastic life in the Abbey of Gorze.

**24. Our Lady Help of Christians.**

**Blessed Joanna.** Wife of Cuza, procurator of Herod, she was one of the Holy Women who followed Jesus and provided Him with material assistance.



**St. Michael Garicoits**  
Church of Santa ai Monti, Rome

**25. St. Bede the Venerable**, priest and Doctor of the Church (†735 Jarrow - England).

**St. Gregory VII**, Pope (†1085 Salerno - Italy).

**St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi**, virgin (†1607 Florence - Italy).

**Blessed Nicholas Cehelskyj**, priest and martyr (†1951). Priest of the Byzantine Rite, he was imprisoned in the forced labour camp of Java, Mordovia, where he died.

**26. 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter.**

**St. Philip Neri**, priest (†1595 Rome).

**St. Andrew Kaggwa**, martyr (†1886). Killed in Uganda, during the persecutions unleashed by King Mwanga, for having preached the Gospel to pagans and catechumens.

**27. St. Augustine of Canterbury**, bishop (†604/605 Canterbury - England).

**St. Julius of Silistra**, martyr (†c. 302). Veteran of the Roman army; he was beheaded in Silistra, present-day Bulgaria, for refusing to sacrifice to idols.

**28. Blessed Mary Bartholomew Bagnesi**, virgin (†1577). Tertiary of the Order of Penance of St. Dominic; for more than forty years she endured atrocious sufferings from a serious illness.

**29. Blessed William Arnould and companions**, martyrs (†1242). For having opposed the Cathar heresy, they were falsely imprisoned and died by the sword in Avignonet, France, while singing the *Te Deum*.

**30. St. Luke Kirby**, priest and martyr (†1582). After suffering many torments, he was hanged at Tyburn, London, during the reign of Elizabeth I.

**31. Visitation of Our Lady.**

**Blessed Nicholas Barré**, priest (†1686). He founded Christian and Charitable Schools, from which St. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle took the inspiration for the foundation of the Christian Brothers.

# “Death before Dishonour”

Pursued by a hunter who encircles it with mud, the ermine chooses to surrender its life rather than soil its coat. Upright souls act likewise when they prefer death rather than wallowing in the mire of sin.



Lucília Rocha de Freitas

If we focus closely on the rugged landscapes of the Arctic regions, we might catch a glimpse of an enchanting creature which, due to its colour and size, could easily go unnoticed – the ermine.

Slender, agile, and small for a mammal (the largest are a little less than thirty centimetres long), the colour of its silky coat helps it to hide from predators. During the summer, it has a chestnut hue that blends well with its habitat, but in autumn and winter, it changes to an immaculate white. Were it not for the characteristic black-tipped tail that gives it away as it darts about, the ermine would be invisible against the snow.

When viewed amid its frosty surroundings, one would wager that this little creature had “fled” from Paradise, for its whiteness and gracefulness do not seem to match with the things of this earth. And that is why it is considered the symbol of purity, worthy of being depicted as such on

the noblest coats of arms. Its fur also adorns the mantles of Popes, Cardinals and kings.

Such refined symbolism, coupled with the untiring combativeness of this tiny creature which is capable of capturing prey ten times its size, evokes the exhortation of Our Lord: “So be wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (cf. Mt 10:16). In fact, the harmonious connection between readiness and candour, sagacity and purity belies the idea so generalized today that innocence is synonymous with naivety and apathy.

“*Malo mori quam foedari* – Death before Dishonour.” The classic Latin adage, inscribed on so many coats of arms of cities and traditional families, is usually linked with the ermine. It is said that when this agile little animal is pursued by a hunter and the latter manages to encircle it with mud, it chooses to surrender its life rather than dirty itself. Upright souls act likewise. When they find themselves in situations in which they may become tarnished, they prefer

death rather than to wallow in the mire of sin.

Would that we, like the ermine, never allow our soul to be marred with the least stain of sin or complicity with the spirit of the world, which is so opposed to Him by whom and for whom we were created. And that, with His grace, we may succeed in uniting purity and combativeness!

However, if we have fallen into the misfortune of staining ourselves, let us turn to Our Lady, Refuge of Sinners. Since She is the omnipotent supplicant, a simple gesture from Her can cleanse us of the effects of any fault, and even instantly transform us into that son or daughter without stain which we would have been had we never sinned.

Let us admire the purity and combativeness that the Creator has placed in the ermine. And let recognize in it that sagacity and innocence so loved by God, aware that these qualities are but pale reflections of the divine perfections that we are called to imitate. ✧



Ermine (*Mustela erminea*)  
in winter coat

Reproduction



Thiago Tamura Nogueira

Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias praying before the Statue of Our Lady Help of Christians of Tabor Formation House, Caieiras (São Paulo)

## ***Abandonment to Her Motherly Care***

*Let us turn our gaze to Our Lady, Help of Christians, who at every instant intercedes for us with her Divine Son. All the gifts that we have received were obtained through her mediation. Now, “She cannot be the Lady of unfinished words. She is the Lady of finished constructions, of great works brought to completion,” expressively affirms Prof. Plínio Corrêa de Oliveira. So it befits us to abandon ourselves to the motherly care of Mary Most Holy, certain that She Herself will assume the responsibility of bringing to its fullness this bold undertaking of making us perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect (cf. Mt 5:48).*

*Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias*