Heralds of the Gospel

Vol. 17, No. 186
April 2023

Failure: Gateway to Restoration

These Are Precious Gifts!

May the perfect love of God reign in our hearts.

Please do not think that the distance between us and my apparent silence mean that I have forgotten your charity towards me and the charity I owe you. Your letter tells me that your wishes are just as strong and eager and as persistent as ever. This is a sure sign that they are from God. So you must put your trust in God.

Be sure of this, that you will obtain from Him even more than you think. Heaven and earth would pass away before God would break His promises and allow anyone who hoped in Him to be frustrated in their hopes.

I feel that you are still asking God that by crosses, humiliations and poverty I may acquire divine Wisdom. Be brave, my dear daughter, be brave. I am grateful to you; I feel the effects of your prayers, for I am infinitely more impoverished, crucified and humiliated than ever. Both men and demons in this great city of Paris are waging against me a war that I find sweet and welcome. Let them slander me, scoff at me, destroy my good name, put me into prison; these are precious gifts, tasty morsels, great and wonderful things. They form the accoutrements and retinue of divine Wisdom, which He brings into the lives of those in whom He dwells.

Lúcio César Rodrigues

St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort - Private collection; below, the Calvary of Pontchâteau, designed by the Saint

ST. LOUIS-MARIE DE MONTFORT.
Letter to Louise Trichet, 24/10/1703.
In: "God Alone: Collected Writings".
Bay Shore: Montfort Publications, 1988, p.21

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HERALDS OF THE GOSPEL

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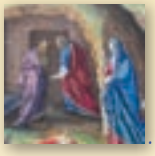

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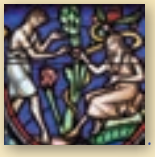

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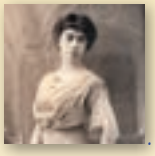

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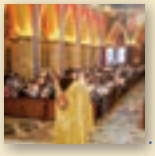

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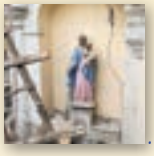

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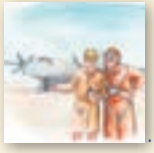

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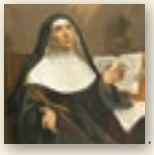

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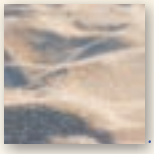

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Our Readers Write

A Gospel Commentary with truth, wisdom and faith

I have been a reader of *Heralds of the Gospel* magazine since its inception. With each new issue it surpasses itself, and is always a pleasant surprise. The section I most enjoy is the *Gospel Commentary* by Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias; reading the January issue, I was amazed by the author's truth, wisdom and faith.

Once again I thank and congratulate you for preparing and disseminating the best Catholic magazine in the world. I wish all the Heralds many blessings.

Antonio Modernell
Mercedes – Uruguay

A Heart that is ours, depending on our surrender

In the text of St. John Eudes entitled *Return to My Heart, Which Is All Yours*, he teaches us to accept the Heart of Jesus for our salvation, which depends on how much we are willing to give of ourselves.

Luiz Gavilanez
Via revistacatolica.org

To be of God or the world...

Reading the article *The Society of Jesus in Face of Persecutions – Resistance and Reaction!* I had a shudder of admiration, thinking of the Society of Jesus and its heroic struggle against the defamations and persecutions of the time. Many people have marked the history of the Church by their heroic virtues.

Thus, we Catholics of the 21st century should follow their examples in this world of sin, so far from God, raising our standard of integral and upright intentions, being a light in the streets, at work, or wherever we go, fighting evil and defending the truth of Our Lord Jesus Christ, even with our lives, if necessary. Either we belong to God or we belong to the world!

Carmen Pardo
Madrid – Spain

Wisdom in commentaries and faith in hearts

Just a few lines to express my wish that God may keep the Heralds of the Gospel, this blessed Association, for years to come, so that you continue to spread worldwide the love of God and of His Holy Mother of Fatima.

I wish to express my most sincere gratitude to you for sending me punctually each month the excellent *Heralds of the Gospel* magazine. I attentively read all the articles that the Heralds write, of great interest to all Catholics. They comment with such wisdom and with an intense faith in their hearts! We, readers of this magazine, are touched by your holy words and have a greater belief each day. We want to encourage you to continue publishing this monthly gift from Heaven.

Antonio Díaz
Madrid – Spain

Example of a woman, wife and mother

Dona Lucilia is an example of a woman, wife and mother, as we can see in the article *Incomparable Maternal Solicitude*. All these examples help us today to be better as women, wives and mothers.

Elizangela Alexandrino
Via revista.arautos.org

Request for a magazine

Praise be God Now and Forever! Our Lady of Victories, pray for us.

How can I buy a copy of the *Heralds of the Gospel* Magazine, February 2023 edition with His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI? I would very much like to have one. Thank you for your consideration to my inquiry.

John knipper
Via catholicmagazine.news

Proud to help the work of the Heralds

I take great pleasure in being able to write to you to offer my modest opinion on your activities. I rejoice in the work you do: I am proud to help with a small annual contribution your and our association, which puts Christian values, support, hope and love into practice. It is not my place to urge you to continue on this path, but I reiterate my great esteem. Thank you very much.

Agostino Perri
Italy – Via e-mail

Prayer full of gratitude

A beautiful reflection in last December's article entitled *Regal and Victorious Presence of the Divine Infant*. My Child Jesus, help my family. In a special way I ask for the conversion of my husband and to correct all my defects. Help me to preserve my family, and deliver us from enemies. Blessed Mother, cover us with your holy mantle. For my children, I ask that they always preserve the Faith that I pass on to them. I pray also for all families throughout the world!

Victoria Bearzi
Via revistacaolica.org

Let us pray the Rosary daily

The Blessed Virgin tells us that the Rosary is the best weapon we can carry, as the article *The Holy Rosary – Efficacious Weapon against God's Enemies* reminds us. And She advises us to pray it daily and always to carry it with us.

Rafael Maria
Via revistacatolica.org

The "Chinese River"

Among various metaphors that Dr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira used to describe the journey of the human being on this earth, the one he called "Chinese river" holds a special place of prominence.

As is known, due to the irregular topography of China, its waterways follow particularly winding paths. Sometimes, the tributaries even seem to be returning to their source, when, in reality, they are only bypassing obstacles and gathering momentum to discharge into the main river and follow their course towards the sea.

Something similar happens in our lives, pervaded by apparently unsolvable impasses, if not distressing stagnations in a veritable "valley of tears", as the *Salve Regina* prayer reminds us.

Sometimes we delude ourselves into believing that rapid straight-line progress along the river is synonymous with success along the path we have chosen; in the end, however, we may find ourselves at a dead end… In this regard, St. Augustine warned: "*Bene curris, sed extra viam* – You run well, but off the path." It is no use to run much; we need to run on the right track. Indeed, in the activist world in which we live, we are tempted to think that our success is measured by the intensity of action – or feverishness. However, choppy waters do not reflect the heavens above! What is more, the noisiest machines are generally the least productive…

That said, in our daily navigation, we do not always know if we are on the right track. How should we proceed? Even amid the storm and with Jesus "sleeping" in the boat, we must trust that He has the rudder in His hands (cf. Mk 4:35-41).

The Lord allows us to go through misfortunes precisely to test us. At these crossroads of life, let us not be like the disciples who, in the midst of that storm, cried out: "Teacher, do You not care if we perish?" (Mk 4:38). Jesus' answer sums up what our state of mind should be in crisis situations: "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" (Mk 4:40). We need, first of all, courage and confidence.

In fact, the Saints were forged in docility to the designs of the Most High and in the certainty that He was guiding the ship of their lives. For some theologians, the essence of holiness does not consist simply in the constant practice of virtues or in the state of perfection – although these are fundamental conditions. Rather, it is summed up first of all in abandonment to Divine Providence or, in other words, in the conformity of our will to the divine will. After all, as the Apostle stresses, nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God" and, "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Rom 8:39, 31).

This was precisely the attitude of the holiest of creatures: Our Lady. Faced with the impasse created by the Angel's annunciation, with the Redemption of all mankind hanging in the balance, Mary entrusted herself entirely into the hands of Providence: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38).

Confidence in God must be such that, if necessary, the "Chinese river" can even be detained, as as the Red Sea once was, to protect the chosen people. Let us not forget, however, that the waters also "returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen and all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not so much as one of them remained" (Ex 14:28). Thus will the Chinese rivers continue to follow their course in history. ✧

"Descent into Limbo", by Fra Angelico - San Marco Museum, Florence (Italy).

Photo: Reproduction

Our Participation in the Passion of Christ

At Lourdes, the Virgin teaches the redemptive value of suffering. It imparts courage, patience, resignation; it lifts the interior gaze to the true and complete happiness that Jesus has prepared for us beyond life and history.

On this very special day on which we recall the first apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Lourdes, let us too raise to the Lord, in her own words, the hymn of joy and gratitude: "And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation" (Lk 1:50). […]

The first reading offers us a reflection on the words of the prophet Isaiah who comforted the people of Israel in exile with the prospect of the return to Jerusalem, the Holy City, and with the certainty that, despite all the painful vicissitudes they had experienced, God had not abandoned the people of the covenant and always remained their joy and their comfort: "As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice" (Is 66:13-14).

Recalling the apparitions of Our Lady at Lourdes, we can also apply the words of the ancient prophet to ourselves and to our history: God willed that the Blessed Virgin Mary appear eighteen times to the young Bernadette, from February 11 to July 16, 1858, to leave a message of consolation and love for the Church and for all humanity.

The meaning of earthly life is its heavenly goal

In fact, these apparitions have an ever-valid meaning, which we should preserve as a precious heritage. In the middle of the last century, while rationalism and scepticism were spreading insidiously, Mary, She who believed in the Lord's word, came to help and confirm the family of believers in the authentic and genuine Christian Faith.

At Lourdes, Mary reminded the world that the meaning of life on earth is its orientation towards Heaven. Like the people of Israel, humanity too is on a journey, and its goal is the heavenly Jerusalem. The words of the prophet Isaiah are valid for people of all times; they are also relevant for us: "you shall be comforted in Jerusalem." The perennial temptation for man, a temptation which modern progress makes especially subtle and alluring, is to limit all his expectations to earth, concentrating his efforts on building an earthly dwelling that is ever more secure and comfortable.

> *The meaning of life on earth is its orientation towards Heaven, from where man should draw his guidance and hope*

Certainly, Faith does not condemn striving to improve living conditions on earth. Rather, it teaches that such efforts must be seen and interpreted in the perspective of the duty to subdue the earth, entrusted by God to man from the very beginning of his history. What the Faith does not allow is that man consider the earthly stage as the definitive phase of his existence, since it is only a provisional phase to be lived in relation to the true destination, situated beyond time, in the realm of eternity.

Our Lady came to Lourdes to speak to man about "Paradise" so that, while actively working to build a more just and welcoming world, he would not forget to raise his eyes to Heaven to draw from it guidance and hope.

Gustavo Kralj

Reproduction

The Grotto of Massabielle - Lourdes (France); inset, St. Bernadette Soubirous on18/10/1864

The redemptive value of suffering

The Blessed Virgin also came to remind us of the value of conversion and penance, by presenting anew to the world the core of the Gospel message. She said to Bernadette in her apparition on February 18: "I promise to make you happy, not in this world, but in the next." She then invited her to pray for sinners, and on February 24 She repeated three times: "Penance, penance, penance!" At Lourdes, Mary points out and underlines the reality of humanity's redemption from sin through the cross, that is, through suffering. God made Man chose to die, innocent, nailed to a Cross!

At Lourdes, the Virgin teaches the redemptive value of suffering; it imparts courage, patience, resignation; it sheds light on the mystery of our participation in the Passion of Christ; it raises our interior gaze to the true and complete happiness that Jesus himself has assured us and prepared for us beyond life and history.

Bernadette, who understood Mary's message perfectly, became a nun in Nevers and, being seriously ill, answered those who suggested that she go to the grotto of Massabielle to be cured: "Lourdes is not for me!" Stricken with severe asthma attacks, she would reply with simplicity to the novice nurse who asked her if her suffering was great: "It is necessary!"

During her illness, Bernadette answered those who suggested that she go to the grotto to be cured: "Lourdes is not for me. I must suffer"

Invitation to humble and confident prayer

Finally, the message of Lourdes concludes with an invitation to prayer: Mary appears in an attitude of prayer, She wants Bernadette to pray the Rosary on her own beads, She asked for a chapel to be built on the site and for people to go there in procession. This recommendation, too, is valid for all time. Our Lady of Lourdes came to tell us, with the authority and goodness of a mother, that for those who effectively want to maintain, strengthen and spread the Christian Faith, humble and confident prayer is necessary. […]

We read in St. Bernadette's biography that she received her First Communion on Thursday, June 3, 1858. She was asked which pleased her more: to see Our Lady or to have made her First Holy Communion. She replied promptly and intelligently, "There is no point in making comparisons; I only know that both graces filled me with happiness!"

May you too, brothers and sisters, be serene, or rather, happy like Bernadette, because you are sustained by the strength of faith and united to the Eucharistic Jesus and to Mary Most Holy! […]

May Mary Help of Christians be at your side in every circumstance of your life, to keep you on the path that Providence traces out before you day by day in a loving plan whose outcome will be the cause of joy for all eternity. ✧

Excerpts from:
ST. JOHN PAUL II.
Homily at the Mass for the sick,
11/2/1987

St. Peter and St. John before the empty tomb - Monastery of San Millán de la Cogolla (Spain)

Francisco Lecaros

Gospel

[1] On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. [2] So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put Him." [3] So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. [4] They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; [5] he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in. [6] When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, [7] and the cloth that had covered His head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. [8] Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed. [9] For they did not yet understand the Scripture that He had to rise from the dead (Jn 20:1-9).

Gospel Commentary –
Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord

The Marian Dawn of the Resurrection

The Liturgy invites us to share in the joy that filled Our Lord at that most glorious of all moments, when He reassumed His Sacred Body. If we wish to have an idea of this joy, we can contemplate its most faithful echo in the Heart of Mary.

Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, EP

I – Scrutinizing the Secret of Mary

The joy of the Lord's Resurrection is an inscrutable mystery for ordinary men. How can we measure the height, the extent and the depth of the almost infinite joy that pervaded the Heart of Jesus in recovering His Body and raising it to the glorious state, triumphing definitively over sin and death? This is a reality so sublime that it greatly surpasses our feeble intelligence. Although He is truly Man, Our Lord sets the roots of His personality in the Person of the Word by the grace of hypostatic union. Thus, His identity is fully divine and, as a result, His feelings and emotions reach such a height of perfection that they become somehow unattainable for us.

Thus, to know as closely as possible the jubilation experienced by Jesus in the Easter triumph, Divine Wisdom gave us the Virgin Mary, Mother and closest companion of the Redeemer. Our Lady was a most faithful echo chamber of her Son's ineffable delight, for She was closely linked to Him throughout the entire epic of salvation.

The perfect congruity of Mary's Co-redemption

The Blessed Virgin is, in the highest sense of the term, the Co-redemptrix of sinners. Although her cooperation in the Passion of Christ was not *per se* necessary, it was made so by the will of the Father of Lights, who in His divine designs determined to give the New Adam a faithful companion, in opposition to the first prevaricating woman who dragged Adam into the abyss of sin. For this reason, the most ancient Fathers of the Church designate Mary as the New Eve, entirely holy, immaculate and obedient. Her cooperation made reparation, in the most beautiful way, for the fault of the first couple, guilty of rebellion and the cause of humanity's misfortunes.

St. John, in his Gospel (cf. Jn 19:25-27), is keen to emphasize the compassionate role of the Virgin Mother in the shadow of the Cross. She stood fast during the sacrifice of the Lamb of God and, in a priestly spirit, offered Him up to the Heavenly Father in an act of supreme submission. The harrowing sorrows of the Son were shared by the Mother, who immolated herself at His side with an ardent desire to snatch from Satan's filthy clutches the souls bound by sin and enslaved by death.

United in sorrow, inseparable in victory

Consequently, the suffering Hearts of Jesus and Mary, united as they were by the same afflictions and the same charity, were rightly to experience in unison the consolations of the Resurrection. This is why many Saints claim that it was

How can we measure the joy of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in His definitive triumph over sin and death?

Our Lady who was the first to meet Our Lord on that dawn abounding with the blessings of the true Easter.

But our filial piety takes us further. Because of the close supernatural bond between them and the gift of the permanence of the Eucharistic Species, the Blessed Virgin certainly accompanied, step by step, all the episodes of her Son's Passion and Resurrection. Following this, She must have received a visit from Jesus full of life and joy, which filled her maternal spirit with the most sublime joys.

It is in contemplating the jubilant Heart of Mary, sweetly embraced by her triumphant Son, that we can ascend to the height of the great event we recall today.

In the Heart of Mary, we can behold faithfully reflected, as in the purest of mirrors, the splendours of the Resurrection of Our Lord

II – The First Signs of a Foretold Victory

The Gospel for this Easter Sunday succinctly describes the first signs of the Resurrection, which were difficult for the disciples and the Holy Women to perceive. In fact, their hearts were too earth-bound and as yet imperfect, not yet ready to open themselves to the radiance of the greatest event in history.

This hardness of heart becomes clear in St. Mark's account of the episode of the Transfiguration (cf. Mk 9:2-13). After His manifestation on the mountain, Jesus had imposed secrecy on the three witnesses chosen until He had risen from the dead.

The Apostles obeyed the Master, without, however, understanding what this reference to the resurrection of the dead meant. Later on, in the same Gospel (cf. Mk 9:31-32), the Lord reveals His future Death and Resurrection to all the disciples. They do not understand what is announced to them and are afraid to ask.

It is, in all certainty, thanks to their association with the Co-redemptrix that St. Peter and St. John, like the other disciples, will open their eyes, clouded by sadness, to the divine wonder that has just taken place. However, their limitation will serve us as a stepping-stone to the perfection of joy that moved the depths of the Immaculate Heart of Mary with irresistible impetus.

A fiery but imperfect love

[1] On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb.

St. Mary Magdalene is a personage of extraordinary richness. A repentant sinner after sad relapses (cf. Lk 8:2), she shows ardent humility and love in bathing the feet of Jesus with sincere tears and sweet perfume (cf. Lk 7:37-38). In Bethany, she was the protagonist of the episode recounted by St. Luke in which Our Lord rebukes the agitation of Martha, her sister, preoccupied with serving the guests, and praises Mary for having chosen the better part (cf. Lk 10:38-42).

And crowning her many unforgettable moments with the Redeemer, she witnesses the resurrection of her brother Lazarus, who, dead for four days, emerges from the tomb walking by himself before numerous witnesses, awe-struck at the power of the divine miracle-worker.

It is she who, still covered by the cloak of night, goes with haste to the sepulchre, impelled by her fiery and chaste love for Jesus. And while this attitude is admirable, we are amazed that Mary Magdalene did not even suspect that the Master could not remain in the claws of death, having defeated it many times over. The flame of charity was burning in her soul, but in an imperfect way, because her faith was but a flicker.

This virtue, on the contrary, shone with serene and vigorous splendour in the Immaculate Heart of Mary. As the Liturgy recounts, Our Lady remained faithful at the "altar of the Cross,"[1] sustained by the hope of the Resurrection. Her faith in this circumstance, the most dramatic that the centuries have known, can be called dauntless.[2] It was a faith multiplied by faith, a culmination of certainty in good success in the midst of the deep and dark valley of apparent failure. It can well be said that the darkness of Good Friday was defeated by the Marian light that shone within Her, confirming Her in the absolute conviction of a coming, resounding and complete triumph.

This daring faith made Our Lady the most courageous Lady in history. The providential women of the Old Testament – such as Judith, Esther or Deborah – and even the most fearless martyrs, who have illuminated the firmament of the Church with their bravery, owe their splendid gift of fortitude to the intercession of the Virgin of Virgins, who with Jesus vanquished the prince of this world and his henchmen.

Reproduction

"The Resurrection of Christ", by Fra Angelico - National Museum of San Marco, Florence

Even the boldness of St. Joan of Arc, the virgin-warrior of Domrémy, surrounded by shining rays of blue and silver, is but a share in the fearlessness of Her who is "fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array" (Ct 6:10).

Thus the sight of the stone removed from the entrance to the Sepulchre, which so stunned Mary Magdalene, would in no way shock the crystalline and luminous spirit of Our Lady. Comforted by the visit of Jesus, who consoled Her by showing himself more radiant and filial than ever, her soul exulted with a joy incomparably greater than the bitter sorrows of the Passion.

Without the light of faith, all is darkness

[2] So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put Him."

It is surprising that Mary Magdalene went to look for St. Peter and St. John, and not for Our Lady. For some mysterious reason, the Blessed Virgin lived the events connected with the Resurrection in relative isolation. Perhaps the disciples' incredulity prevented them from seeking her presence and asking her advice.

The Magdalene's lack of faith meant that everything was darkness for her soul. The fact that the Sepulchre was open, instead of being a sign of Christ's victory, seemed to her the proof of a sacrilegious theft: they must have taken away the Body of Our Lord and left it in an unknown place. The feverish agitation with which she ran to communicate the news to the Apostles is a consequence of this state of mind.

At this moment Our Lady remained in an ineffable peace, illumined by a sacred and elevated joy. Perhaps She was conferring in her Heart the prophecies about the Death and Resurrection of her Son, which had been admirably fulfilled, and which now formed in her spirit a marvellous stained-glass window pierced by the rays of the authentic undefeated Sun.

When the radiance of hope does not illuminate souls, everything is darkened and no earthly power is able to dissipate the gloomy sadness of hearts. Let this be a lesson for us, immersed in a world taken with the ephemeral comforts and securities offered by so many scientific and technological advances – a world that has turned its back on any prospect of eternity.

To live without faith is to reduce humanity to a new stone age, in which artificial forms of light deceive a multitude of individuals ensnared by the myth of progress. However, the increasing levels of psychological illness resulting from anxiety, depression and delirium show how much the human will aspires to an infinite love that only God can bestow.

Before and after Mary

[3] So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. [4] They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first…

The two disciples set off in haste toward the Holy Sepulchre, without the slightest reflection. They were in some sense to blame for the blindness of the others, since St. Peter had been made Prince of the Apostles, and St. John had inherited the care of the Virgin. Both of them were only capable of seeing the concrete reality; the optics of faith did not shine in their hearts. They, who should have been standard-bearers of hope, allowed the fever of their informer to spread to them, and they set out

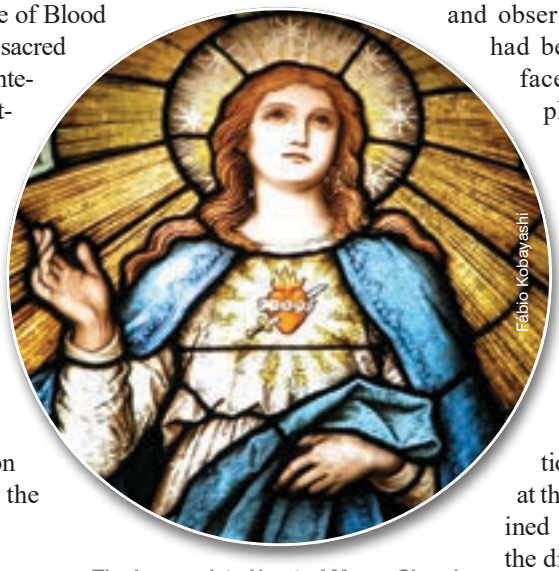
The sight of the stone removed from the entrance to the tomb, which so astounded St. Mary Magdalene, would not have shocked Our Lady

running, to see with the eyes of the flesh what their interior gaze could not contemplate.

Here the providential role of Our Lady as the torch-bearer of certainty at the moment of the terrible trial stands out. When the pillars of the Church were shaken by the cruel contradiction of the Cross, one flame was burning with admirable intensity: it was the Blessed Virgin who, with adamantine fidelity, guarded intact in her Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart the admirable deposit of Faith. She was the venerable ark which, in the midst of the deluge of Blood on Calvary, sheltered the sacred fire of truth, which on Pentecost became an irresistible blaze, spreading to the four corners of the earth.

When the pillars of the Church were shaken by the cruel contradiction of the Cross, the deposit of Faith was guarded in the Heart of the Virgin

Thus we see to what degree we must consider a before and after Mary in the history of the Church. It is only through Her that the Son willed to pour out His best graces upon the Apostles and upon the whole Church.



The Immaculate Heart of Mary - Church of St. Cecilia, São Paulo

Hierarchical charity

5 ...he bent down and saw
the burial cloths there, but did not go in.

St. John knew how to honour the venerable age of St. Peter and, above all, his condition as head of the Church. The fact that he did not wish to enter the Sepulchre before him indicates a respectful attitude, which underlines the hierarchical character of Christian charity which, contrary to egalitarian demagogy, excels in observing the order instituted by God in all created realities and, in a special way, in the Mystical Body of Christ.

Without doubt, this attitude won for the Beloved Disciple preliminary graces of faith in the Resurrection. In it, we can perceive the influence of Mary Most Holy, who in her profound humility delighted in honouring every type of superiority, forgetting herself and her sovereign prerogatives.

The first sign of the Resurrection

6 When Simon Peter arrived after him,
he went into the tomb and saw the burial
cloths there, 7 and the cloth that had covered
His head, not with the burial cloths but
rolled up in a separate place.

Finally, St. Peter caught up with St. John and, without hesitation, entered the tomb, an action forbidden to Jews. He sees the linen cloth that wrapped the Body – a "large cloth", according to more recent translations of the Greek originals, which makes it possible to identify it with the Shroud of Turin – and observes that the cloth that had been placed over Jesus' face is laid in a separate place.

Now, if thieves had stolen the Body, they would not have taken the care to remove the linen cloth or to fold the burial cloth. What did all this mean? Peter considered these details, but did not find in them the first indication of the Resurrection. If at that moment he had examined the Shroud, on seeing the discreet but unmistakable marks of the Divine Master he would have fallen to his knees and from his lips would have sprung the most beautiful confession of faith. However, his soul was paralyzed by the fear that this confusing situation caused him.

Our Lady's attitude would have been entirely different. Prompt to adore any trace of her Divine Son, She would have venerated those relics with torrents of enthusiasm and, before her eyes, the extraordinary secret that the Shroud contained would be revealed. Only those minds that allow themselves to be carried on the wings of the conviction of victory can fly!

The flame of faith is kindled by the influence of Mary

8 Then the other disciple also went in, the
one who had arrived at the tomb first, and
he saw and believed. 9 For they did not yet
understand the Scripture that He had to
rise from the dead.

The disciples did not understand why they lacked the main tool for analysing the Scriptures: the virtue of faith. What hardness of heart this lacking indicates. Jesus had clearly revealed how His life on this earth would end, emphasizing that He would conquer the devil and death forever. However, the desire to consider the Divine Master in accordance with the murky influences of the prevailing Public Opinion deafened them to the prophecies of the Son of God. Lack of faith generates superficiality of spirit – a vice to which pusillanimity is inevitably added.

John, the Marian Apostle par excellence, was the first to believe. Those signs served as a divine spark to rekindle the flame of faith in his soul. He saw and believed, doubtless because of the beneficial influence of Our Lady's spiritual motherhood, which exercised itself in a special way over the Beloved Disciple since he had received Her as his inheritance on Calvary.

III – Easter in the Light of Mary

Our Lady was always a sea of deep, transparent and virginal recollection. She treasured and pondered in her Heart every gesture and word of her Divine Son, with an infinite thirst to understand and love the meaning of the most varied nuances regarding Him that were revealed to Her. In this way her spirit became persevering, strong and resilient. She remained standing by the Cross, accompanied only by the Holy Women and St. John, who bore a filial affection for Her. The other disciples remained distant and fearful.

Only Mary could in the truest sense suffer with the Immaculate Lamb and unite herself to Him in the sacrifice that He made of himself. Our Lady was in some way a victim with the Supreme Victim and a priest with the Divine Priest. It was not a question of a sacramental priesthood, like that of bishops and priests, but of a direct participation in the very priesthood of Jesus, Supreme Pontiff of the New and Eternal Covenant, which, in this very special case, gave Her the prerogative whereby, consenting to every step in the Passion of her Son, She herself in a certain sense offered Him up to the Father. This made the Blessed Virgin a Co-redemptrix with the Redeemer, a glory surpassed perhaps only by the Divine Maternity.

And if the struggle was arduous, the prize was sublime and the joy unspeakable. Contemplating this Marian joy that was enkindled at the precise moment when the Lord of glory reassumed His Body, we can ascend to the boundless happiness that flooded the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus forever on the most beautiful Sunday in history.

A Marian Church

In view of this Gospel and the discreet reference to the faith of the Blessed Virgin discerned between its lines, a question of capital importance emerges regarding the future of the Church.

If the role of Mary, Mother of God and ours, was crucial at the Passion, Death and Resurrection of the Lord, in the sense of manifesting with unique splendour the virtue of hope, so dimmed in the spirit of the disciples, what will her mission be in the current situation, in which revealed truth is forgotten, ridiculed and even trampled underfoot by wolves disguised as shepherds?

Moreover, if Jesus wanted the precious gift of faith to be preserved by His Mother when all others were vacillating, has He not entrusted to Her the task of safeguarding with maternal care the integrity of faith of the Apostles of the Latter Times, heralded by prophets of the stature of a St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort? And how will this virtue be in men and women called to hope against all hope? In view of the considerations made above, it is possible to foresee a faith which is entirely Marian, and therefore a bold, invincible and glorious faith; an ardent faith which will set the world on fire and renew the face of the earth, inundating it with exultation.

From this faith will be born a Marian Church, capable of irresistibly attracting all souls who will be converted before the imposing manifestations of the mercy and justice of God; a Church which, like Our Lady, will be an indomitable warrior and, with the strength that will come to her from the Holy Spirit, will cast Satan and his followers into the bowels of hell; a Church radiant with holy joy, animated with divine enthusiasm, which with the smile of the Virgin-Mother will irresistibly illuminate the whole universe. ✧

With Our Lady's help, the faith of the Apostles of the Latter Times will transform the earth, giving rise to a Marian Church

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[1] THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS (I) Prayer Over the Offerings. In: CONFERÊNCIA EPISCOPAL PORTUGUESA. *Coletânea de Missas da Virgem Santa Maria. Missal*. Fátima: Secretariado Nacional de Liturgia, 2014, p.74.

[2] Cf. BENEDICT XVI. *Act of Veneration to the Immaculate at the Spanish Steps*, 8/12/2007.

Mary's Counsel

She has pity on the disoriented and obtains for them assistance, an interior light, a special discernment… In moments of doubt and apprehension, Mary Most Holy always has a word to say!

Sr. Diana Milena Devia, EP

Adorned with the most exquisite graces, Mary was and will always be the object of filial admiration. Indeed, the faithful of all times contemplate the charms of her most holy soul, the unfathomable scope of her virtues and the magnificence with which the Lord has crowned Her, bestowing on Her – truly without measure – every gift.

Among the most beautiful titles that Catholic piety attributes to Our Lady is that of Mother of Good Counsel, which expresses a sublime reality: in addition to having begotten the "Wonderful Counsellor" (Is 9:6), She was filled with the admirable effects wrought by the Holy Spirit through the gift of counsel.

How did this gift operate in Her who was perfect from conception and worthy to be called "full of grace" (Lk 1:28)?

Gifts and virtues on the path of sanctity

Man was created to know, love and serve the Lord on this earth, and to give Him glory in Heaven for all eternity. Called to share in the divine life, he is raised by the Sacrament of Baptism to the supernatural order and admitted as a child of God into the bosom of the Holy Church.

Together with sanctifying grace, Baptism infuses into the Christian's soul the theological and cardinal virtues, which incline him to perform good works.[1] However, considering that after original sin man's will has become weak and the virtues are not sufficient to achieve sanctity, the Most High also grants him the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: understanding, wisdom, knowledge, counsel, fortitude, piety and fear of God, which are infused supernatural habits that act upon the virtues, strengthening them and leading them to their full development.

Through the gifts, the soul receives not only a supernatural invitation to do good or avoid evil – as is proper to the virtues – but a special motion of the Holy Spirit that impels it to do God's will.[2] Thus, the gifts call for docility rather than activity, in the manner of a sailor who can use oars, or be carried along by the force of the wind that billows the sails of his ship. The virtues help us to move forward, but with labour and difficulty, while the gifts impel the soul to promptly obey the least inspirations of grace.

Each of the seven gifts, in turn, is related in a special way to the perfection of some virtue. Thus charity is perfected by the gift of wisdom; faith, by the gifts of knowledge and understanding; hope and temperance, by the gift of fear; prudence, by the gift of counsel; justice, by the gift of piety; the virtue of fortitude, by the gift of fortitude.

The gift of counsel

The gift of counsel is a supernatural habit which gives the soul the ability to judge quickly and certainly, by a kind of intuition, what is the right thing to do, especially in difficult situations. Its proper object is "the good guidance of personal actions."[3] It enables us to reconcile simplicity with shrewdness, firmness with gentleness, and helps us on our way towards God.

This gift is, in sum, a discreet light to guide us among the obscurities of faith, and it makes our souls merciful to the extent that they are purified by sufferings, by their own defects and weaknesses, and even by the experience of human malice.

Counsel in Mary

Since they are supernatural habits, the gifts of the Holy Spirit follow in proportion to grace, so that the more elevated a soul is, the more intense is the action of the gifts in it. Consequent-

Gustavo Kralj

Through the gift of counsel, Our Lady transformed the most sublime insights She had received in contemplation into concrete acts

Our Lady of Good Counsel - Shrine dedicated to Her in Genazzano (Italy)

ly, in Mary Most Holy they reached an exalted degree, as Fr. Philipon notes: "After Christ, the Mother of Jesus, Mother of God and of men, Mother of the total Christ, was the soul most docile to the Holy Spirit. […] Each of her conscious acts proceeded from Her and from the Holy Spirit, and displayed the deiform modality of the perfect virtues under the regime of the gifts."[4]

By the gift of counsel, Our Lady clothed even the most insignificant actions with perfection, and in everything She acted – under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – in the manner most conducive to the glory of God and the fulfilment of His salvific designs.[5] In short, She transformed into concrete acts the most sublime insights She had received in contemplation.

This is why these words of Scripture can aptly be applied to the Blessed Virgin: "Counsel shall keep thee, and prudence shall preserve thee" (Prv 2:11).

A life ruled by counsel

In analysing Mary's life, we find several occasions in which the light of counsel illuminated her actions in a more striking way. For example, in her presentation in the Temple, it was the gift of counsel that led Her to discern that it was God's will that She make a vow of virginity from her infancy;[6] and at the Annunciation, before giving her consent, it gave her the desire to know the divine dispositions, so as to offer herself completely to the Lord.

At the Wedding at Cana, likewise, it was the gift of counsel that inspired Her to have the humble audacity to contradict the apparent desires of her Son, and to solicitously urge the servants: "Do whatever He tells you" (Jn 2:5). As Fr. Gardeil observes, "She commands the servants to do whatever her Son says, and the miracle takes place. Her counsel prevailed, because it was in essence the counsel of a love inspired by the God of mercy."[7]

Mary: wonderful Counsellor!

Finally, the gift of counsel made Mary the perfect Mother of the Incarnate Word, She who fully realized His plans, the new Eve, resplendent with fidelity and virginal purity. Our Lady manifesting herself to the world as "Wonderful Counsellor", by revealing the divine plans in the *Magnificat* and showing man the way of salvation: to fulfil the will of her Divine Son. She sustained the Church at the foot of the Cross, permitting it to pass through the agony of the Passion and strengthening it for the coming of the Consoler Spirit.

Encouraged by these considerations, in times of trial, suffering and uncertainty, let us have trusting recourse to this Good Counsel called Mary, and never doubt her powerful intervention! ✧

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[1] Cf. CCC 1803.

[2] Cf. ROYO MARÍN, OP, Antonio. *La Virgen María*. 2.ed. Madrid: BAC, 1997, p.306.

[3] ROSCHINI, OSM, Gabriel. *Instruções marianas*. São Paulo: Paulinas, 1960, p.176.

[4] PHILIPON, OP, Marie-Michel. *Los dones del Espíritu Santo*. 2.ed. Madrid: Palabra, 1983, p.357-358.

[5] Cf. ROYO MARÍN, op. cit., p.319.

[6] Cf. ROSCHINI, op. cit., p.176-177.

[7] GARDEIL, OP, Ambroise. *Les dons du Saint-Esprit dans les Saints dominicains*. Paris: Victor Lecoffre, 1905, p.192.

Equilibrium, Faith and Humility

Even more than being a herald of the Virgin by her words, Bernadette was so configured to her calling that her existence was as effective a call to conversion as the waters flowing from the Grotto of Lourdes.

Fábio Henrique Costa

It is impossible to think of the city of Lourdes today without associating it with the striking image of the shrine, overflowing with faithful who come there to implore a favour or a grace from God through His Blessed Mother. But the reality was quite different on February 11, 1858, when Our Lady appeared for the first time to Bernadette Soubirous.

The hard lot that usually accompanies the lives of those invested with a supernatural mission is that incomprehension and ingratitude are the coin in which they are paid, on this earth, for carrying out their charge. After all, what criminal endured more interrogations, as exhausting as they were endless, than the timid and vulnerable child that was Bernadette? What dramas, setbacks and struggles did she not have to undergo in order to make public the call to conversion and the practice of penance, according to the express wish of the Lady dressed in white who visited her in the Grotto of Massabielle?

The letters, personal notes and copies of various texts of St. Bernadette reveal to us a little of her "spiritual way", that is, the sinuous inner paths along which Providence led her in order to accomplish a sublime mission. Once we have drawn back certain veils from this soul so dear to God and Our Lady, we will be able to get to know her more deeply, so as to better imitate her virtues.

St. Bernadette Soubirous

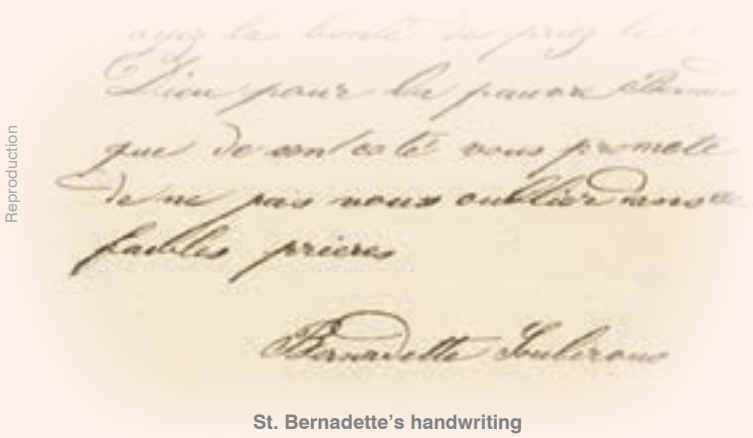
The spiritual way by which Providence led the seer of Massabielle was marked with adversities, setbacks and struggles

Psychological characteristics of Bernadette Soubirous

As a starting point, let us focus our attention on a detail which, to anyone endowed with an incipient sense of graphology, causes surprise and admiration: the psychological aspects outlined in her very regular and stable handwriting, characterized by the constant pressure of the firm and slanted pen, which does not fail to form the words elegantly.

At one and the same time, St. Bernadette's handwriting expresses various qualities which, a *contrario sensu*, contradict a certain unilateral and erroneous vision which aims to stigmatize the young woman as an inept or ignorant person. If her writings were dotted with grammatical lapses until the end of her life, this did not prevent her decisive and balanced character from finding expression in her writing. Thus, a sense of setting high ideals for herself, along with self-criticism is latent in her beautiful script.

In addition, Bernadette's handwriting reveals her affective inclination, that of someone overflowing with generosity and love for others, very sensi-



Reproduction

St. Bernadette's handwriting

St. Bernadette's script reveals her affective inclination, and the determined and balanced character with which she drew up her plan of life

tive to the treatment she received. It is no wonder that, at the sight of a child, a bond was immediately established that encouraged them to approach her, to the point where little ones would flock around the seer…

Finally, her penmanship does not belie a penchant for solitude, perhaps because she did not find in others the models of virtue and rectitude she set for herself and sought after with such determination.

A plan of life expressed in her personal journal

It is worth pointing out that sanctification is not only the fruit of a divine gift; the conquest of holiness involves a constant struggle, from which not even the great mystics are exempt. On the contrary, God requires of his friends an uninterrupted and generally very difficult renunciation. When properly analysed, the spiritual itinerary of these chosen souls turns out to be so – one might say – "normal", and "ordinary", that it fills everyone with hope.

In one of her little notebooks of personal reflections, the title of the book sums up the plan she had outlined: "Always do what costs more."[1] In this light, Bernadette traced out for herself some goals which show her seriousness and persistence in the search for perfection, beginning with points related to the interior life:

"1) Never be discouraged; see God's holy will in everything that happens to me, thank Him for everything, thinking that it is for my greatest good that He permits it.

"2) Work to make myself indifferent to whatever my superiors or my companions say or think of me; detach myself from everything, to dedicate myself solely to pleasing God and saving my soul. To remember often this saying: 'God alone is good, and from Him alone do I expect my reward';

"3) Never make personal friendships, love all my sisters only to please God."

"A good nun must ask God…"

Thanks to this virtuous conduct, embraced from the time Our Lady confided to her the first yearnings at Massabielle, the seer was able to sum up holiness in a few short phrases, pervaded with both theology and charity, and applicable to any baptized person who aspires to reach Heaven:

"A good nun must ask God for:
More humility than humiliation,
More patience than suffering,
More will than works,
More love than actions,
More surrender than orders,
More acts than words,
More application to sanctity than to health."

And still in this vein, with the aim of clarifying for herself – and for the future – the axis around which the daily life of a consecrated soul must revolve, the Saint would affirm:

"A religious must live in mortification like a fish in water; it is not the same when a religious is not mortified. Serious application to all duties necessarily leads to the exercise of continual mortification at all times. If one does not mortify oneself, duty is lacking. Where do the violations of the rule and the vows come from? Where does the laxity of some communities come from? They come from not putting into practice or not maintaining the exercise of mortification. […] In my opinion, [a mortified sister] could enter Heaven without passing through the flames of Purgatory!"

Drawn to a humble and hidden life

As for her humility, an illustrative fact occurred between her and a certain sister of in the same community, Josephine. Since Bernadette, due to her temperament, reacted strongly in everyday relationships and conversations, she ended up by offending her. Having left the said sister, she realized her imperfection in not being more careful of the latter's "sensitivity" and returned to apologize to her with the following note:

"My good Sister Josephine,

"I beg your pardon for the bad example I have given you, as well as for all [my] unedifying actions.

"Please forgive me and pray a little for me; you see how poor I am in virtue."

This search for true humility grew stronger throughout Bernadette's earthly life, as a certain prayer she wrote in one of her personal notes proves:

"My Divine Spouse gave me an attraction for the humble and hidden life, and often told me that my heart would stop only when I had sacrificed it to Him entirely. And to convince me, He often inspired me that, in the end, at the hour of death, I would have no other comforter but Jesus, and Jesus crucified. He alone, faithful friend, I will carry between my icy fingers in my tomb. O madness of madness, to cling to anything but Him."

St. Bernadette in Saint-Gildard Convent, Nevers (France)

Lessons from the transcribed texts

It is interesting to note a certain custom that Bernadette adopted, of unknown origin but nonetheless praiseworthy: amidst her innumerable writings, she took pains to copy entire books of meditations! It would seem that, given her regime of religious poverty, she could not keep in her possession the books belonging to the convent library, so the Saint found no better solution than to copy them…

Among these texts artistically transcribed by the French Saint, there is a letter of St. Jeanne de Chantal to St. Francis de Sales: "O Lord Jesus, I have no choice, play on the strings of my lute what pleases You; always and forever only this one harmony will sound: Yes, Lord Jesus, no *ifs* and *buts*, and no *exceptions*… *Fiat* in all things and in me."

In fact, from her *fiat*, Providence chose Bernadette, though unknown and shut away in a convent, to be a living and valuable lesson of what Lourdes was to mirror for the whole world: the miracle of accepting pain, suffering and even defeat and failure, if necessary.

> *God chose Bernadette to be a living lesson of what Lourdes was to mirror for the whole world: the miracle of the acceptance of suffering*

If we are astonished to learn that a young girl had been chosen to be the spokeswoman of the Immaculate Conception, to found the world's most prolific pilgrimage site for miracles, we should be equally enthusiastic about her austere life, punctuated with so many privations of licit things.

But that is not what seems to happen. When we look around us and consider the miseries of human nature fallen through original sin, we realize that such an act of self-giving and abnegation is far removed from our selfishness, causing us only a timid admiration, or even a certain aversion.

We would rather be led to believe that the sanctity of Bernadette and of so many other holy people was rather a purely divine gift, alien to the concourse of the disciplined will and to the exercises of virtue.

It is clear that sanctification is a gratuitous favour from God, but this should not give rise to the false idea that He does not desire our active participation in its attainment, since life is warfare.

Spirituality full of light and equilibrium

Therefore, if Bernadette's private notes clearly reveal her confidence, and the copied writings suggest her preferences and profound choices, her letters deserve special attention. They touch the soul deeply, for they express the dominant virtues of this spirituality full of light and equilibrium: humility and faith.

One example will suffice to prove it: the letter addressed to Pope Pius IX, at the request and insistence of a prelate, Bishop Ladoue, dated December 17, 1876:

"Most Holy Father,

"I would never have dared to take up the plume to write to Your Holiness, I, a poor, little sister […]. I was afraid, at first, of being too indiscreet; then it occurred to me that Our Lord likes to be bothered by the little

as well as the great, the poor as well as the rich, and that He gives himself to each one of us without distinction. This thought gave me courage, so I no longer fear; I come to you, Holy Father, like a poor child to the most tender of parents, full of abandonment and trust.

"What can I do, Most Holy Father, to bear witness to you of my filial love? I can only continue to do what I have done up to now, that is, *suffer* and *pray*. Some years ago I made myself, though unworthy, Your Holiness's little Zouave[2]; my weapons are *prayer* and *sacrifice*, which I will keep until my last breath. Only the weapon of sacrifice will be left behind, but the weapon of prayer will follow me to Heaven, where it will be much more powerful than in this land of exile."

Who could doubt that the spiritual path of St. Bernadette was summed up in these two verbs, to suffer and to pray?

Her life attests to the fact that only prayer and suffering were capable of guaranteeing her stability in the practice of virtue, even when she was met with misfortune and misunderstandings over the course of her earthly pilgrimage.

The testimony of a life: the greatest miracle of Lourdes

It is not without reason that one of the criteria of prudence adopted by the Church in verifying the authenticity of particular revelations, such as those which Bernadette received, consists in carefully and meticulously analysing the conduct of the seers: the decisive testimony will be that of their life.

Even more than being a herald of the supernatural and a herald of the Virgin by her words, Bernadette took on her mission to such a degree, configuring herself to it, that her life became a call to conversion at least as effective as the miraculous waters that bathe the Grotto of Lourdes; her death, an invitation to penance; and her body, almost untouched by the decomposition caused by the evils of original sin, a sign of the glory bestowed on her once the threshold of her earthly pilgrimage was crossed.

Bernadette configured herself to her mission to such a degree that she became a call to conversion as effective as the miraculous waters of Lourdes

Thus, from April 16, 1879, the day of her death, until the present day, St. Bernadette remains for all Christendom an instrument of the maternal tenderness of Mary "and of the merciful power of her Son, to restore the world in Christ through a new and incomparable outpouring of the Redemption."[3]

St. Bernadette, pray for us! ✧

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[1] All quotations from the seer transcribed in this article were taken from the work: SŒURS DE LA CHARITÉ DE NEVERS. *Les écrits de Sainte Bernadette et sa voie spirituelle*. Paris-Lourdes: P. Lethielleux; Œuvre de la Grotte, 2003.

[2] The expression evokes the dedication and sacrifice of the Papal Zouaves in the struggles for the Papal States in those decades of the 19th century.

[3] PIUS XII. *Le pèlerinage de Lourdes*, n.10.

Hugo Grados

The incorrupt body of St. Bernadette - Saint-Gildard Convent, Nevers (France)

facebook/Santuario de Nuestra Señora de Lourdes

"And I shall be whiter than snow"

Dennis Jarvis (CC by-sa 2.

The water that wells up at the Grotto of Lourdes expresses the invisible reality of what Our Lady wants to work within us, communicating to us graces that are entirely Marian, which invite us to a change of life.

Sr. Cássia Thaís Costa, EP

Throughout the centuries, Catholic piety has bestowed beautiful titles upon the Blessed Virgin, carefully collected by the Holy Church and preserved to this day. Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Mother of Good Counsel, Help of Christians and thousands of other invocations express, each in its own way, Mary's countless prerogatives and the most varied nuances of her mercy.

Among these, the Immaculate Conception stands out for its importance and sublimity. It was Blessed Virgin who presented herself to the world as the holder of this august privilege, manifesting her desire to be invoked in this way by the faithful. Now, what is the underlying cause of Mary's desire?

The word *immaculate* means *without stain*. Applied to Our Lady, it indicates that She was preserved from every defilement, including that of original sin, with which men have been conceived since the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Terrestrial Paradise. Predestined to be the Mother of the Word of God Incarnate, and therefore of Purity in essence, She could not be touched by the faintest shadow of evil. The Virgin was always holy, by virtue of the holiness of the fruit of her womb.

Praying to Mary Immaculate consists, then, in imploring Her, from the depths of our miseries, that She who is pure par excellence not only cleanse us from all faults, but also tear away once and for all the evil tendencies and faults that we carry within us, making us pure like Her; in short, it consists in asking Our Lady to communicate to us her own "immaculateness,"[1] in the eloquent expression of St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe.

Particularly profound graces in this regard are poured out in profusion at a shrine famous throughout the world: Lourdes. There, where "the Immaculate Conception" deigned to appear to a simple young girl, the most varied and impressive physical and spiritual healings take place, leading us to believe that Heaven has truly descended to earth.

Why a spring?

Since 1858, the year of the apparitions at Lourdes, faithful from all over the world have flocked to the Grotto of Massabielle, desirous of drinking from the miraculous spring and imploring deliverance from their ills. Those cold, rough stones, made so attractive by the presence of Our Lady, are "witnesses" to the countless miracles of grace worked for pilgrims.

Despite the countless number of lame, blind, deaf, disabled and sufferers of every kind who have been cured, the most beautiful miracle worked by the Blessed Virgin is the transformation of hearts. In fact, even more abundant than the miraculously cured are those who have been "washed from within" and have had the love of God and the life of grace restored – or even established – in their souls.

Here we see the symbolic reason why Our Lady made a fountain gush forth from the grotto: just as water cleanses and purifies the body of its stains, so grace whitens the inmost soul of those who draw near to Mary.

An unbeliever reborn to grace

"A healthy body that guards a sickly heart will never find true hap-

piness!"[2] once said the beneficiary of a miracle, Vittorio Micheli, more content for his ardent faith than for the recovery of his health. Indeed, not a single pilgrim healed at Lourdes returned home with the soul less favoured than the body.

A moving illustration of this truth occurred in 1901 with Gabriel Gargam.[3] After the train in which he was travelling had collided with an oncoming express, he was left paraplegic and with all his bodily functions compromised; he carried with him the fateful diagnosis that his condition was irreversible and that he would probably not live long. His weight was down to thirty-six kilos, he was being fed through a tube and his feet were covered with purulent wounds… In this difficult situation, Gargam was told that he would have to undergo a complicated surgery. Not wishing to submit to a procedure, which he considered useless, he then had to accept another proposal, only slightly less unpleasant for him, which his mother made: to participate in the national pilgrimage to Lourdes. The patient did not believe in miracles and agreed reluctantly, simply because it was the only way for him to leave the hospital.

When he arrived at the grotto, however, and received Communion there – more out of formality than faith – he noticed a slight tingling in his hitherto insensitive legs. A change took place in his heart, and tears welled up in his eyes. It was undoubtedly Our Lady inviting him to believe in the impossible! Hours later, when he was submerged in the pool, he who had once doubted began to pray ardently. An inexpressible inner peace invaded his soul.

Gabriel Gargam's stretcher was then taken to the place where the procession of the Blessed Sacrament would pass. However, the fatigue of the journey and the emotions of the day had consumed the last of his strength: he soon lost consciousness and those accompanying him even thought he was about to expire. Suddenly, however, he opened his eyes and saw that the procession was approaching. Encouraged by an irresistible force, he whispered: "Help me! I feel I can walk!" He arose from the stretcher and walked after the Blessed Sacrament! He was cured, but above all he had become a fervent Catholic.

In recognition of the many favours he had obtained, Gargam joined the staff of the Lourdes Hospital where he worked, as often as he could, for fifty-one years.

The resurrection of a living corpse

To persevere when all seems lost and to trust in a divine intervention: this is what the Virgin of Massabielle asked of Madame Savoye to cure her daughter. Suffering from infectious rheumatism and heart disease that rendered her clinically beyond hope, the young patient Marie Savoye was twenty-four years old and weighed only twenty-five kilos! For six years she lacked the strength to get out of bed, to eat or even to speak.

In a desperate attempt to obtain a cure, Madame Savoye decided, contrary to all medical opinion, to travel to the Grotto of Lourdes to beg for a miracle. To human eyes, it was real madness: the effort expended in travelling would certainly hasten the death of the already weakened Marie. Hoping against all hope, that mother set out from Cambrai with her daughter. On arriving in Lourdes, Marie's condition had worsened dramatically: She was coughing up blood and was as pale as a corpse.

At dawn on September 20, 1901, Madame Savoye and Marie are in the grotto, awaiting a miracle. The Eucharistic procession is about to pass. As the Blessed Sacrament advances, acclamations are heard from the sick who manage to get up from their stretchers. The procession continues, with slow, solemn steps, stopping before each sick person. Madame Savoye prays with redoubled fervour, while Marie, lying in bed – one might almost say dying – also raises her prayer to the Virgin. It is the prayer of the leper of the Gospel which is repeated: "Lord, if You will, You can make me clean" (Lk 5:12) and He wills it! Upon receiving the blessing, Marie leaps from her bed and exclaims, "I am healed!"

Hours later, Dr. Perisson, one of the doctors at Lourdes, would say, "It is not a miracle. It is a resurrection!"[4] As the months passed, Marie grew ten centimetres and gained

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None of the pilgrims healed at Lourdes returned to their homes with their soul less favoured than their body

A procession of the Blessed Sacrament in Lourdes, in 1930. Previous page: the spring of the grotto of Massabielle; inset, the statue of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception that is found at the grotto

thirty-five kilos. Seven years later, in gratitude, she resolved to dedicate her life to the care of the sick.

"Why would He not heal me?"

An analogous fact happened to the young French girl Esther Brachman who, only fifteen years old, carried with her the sad prognosis of an imminent death: she had been stricken with a tuberculous peritonitis that in two years had destroyed her body. She decided to go to Lourdes to ask for a miracle, inspired, perhaps, by the numerous facts that attested to the magnificence with which the sick were cared for there. "Why not me? Why shouldn't He heal me?" the girl asked herself.

Once again, the Blessed Virgin would demonstrate the omnipotence of her intercession by receiving little Esther in her waters, as if in her arms. As she emerged from the pool of Lourdes, the miracle she had been hoping for took place! She had no more pain, her stomach, which until then had been hugely distended, immediately returned to its normal size and she recovered her strength, able to walk normally. She was completely healed!

A singular favour at the grotto

Another very moving event, which took place at the feet of Our Lady of Lourdes, happened to a little boy of twelve, named Martin Renaud.

His parents, tired of the endless and deep disagreements in their marriage, told him that they were going to divorce. The boy, however, was distressed by this news and decided to appeal to Our Lady for help. He begged his parents to grant him at least one last family outing: he wanted to visit Lourdes.

Arriving at the grotto, Martin fervently implored the Virgin Mary not to allow his family to fall apart. And what was his surprise when, looking back, he saw his parents crying, holding hands and completely reconciled. His family was saved!

"Lavabis me, et super nivem dealbabor!"

Through these and thousands of other miracles, physical and spiritual, worked by the Virgin Mary in the Grotto of Lourdes, Our Lady makes us see how pure and inexhaustible her love for humanity is, and invites us to reconsider our lives and our relationship with God.

Let us therefore be docile to her voice. In the Old Testament, David pleaded with the Lord: *"Asperges me hyssopo, et mundabor; lavabis me, et super nivem dealbabor* – Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Ps 51:7). In our days, paraphrasing the king-prophet we could well pray: "My Mother, who is Immaculate and can do all things, wash and cleanse me, and I shall be whiter than snow!" Whatever our situation, She will answer in the depths of our hearts, "Come, my child! I will restore you!" ✧

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[1] ST. MAXIMILIAN MARIA KOLBE. Unpublished Writings. Immaculata. In: *The Writings of St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe*. Lugano: Nerbini Internacional, 2017, v.II (e-book). Regarding this topic, see also: Letter to the Seminarians of the Order of Friars Minor Conventual, 28/2/1933. In: *The Writings of St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe*. Lugano: Nerbini Internacional, 2017, v.I (e-book).

[2] SELETA MILAGRES DE LOURDES. Santa Maria: Biblioteca Católica, 2021, p.139.

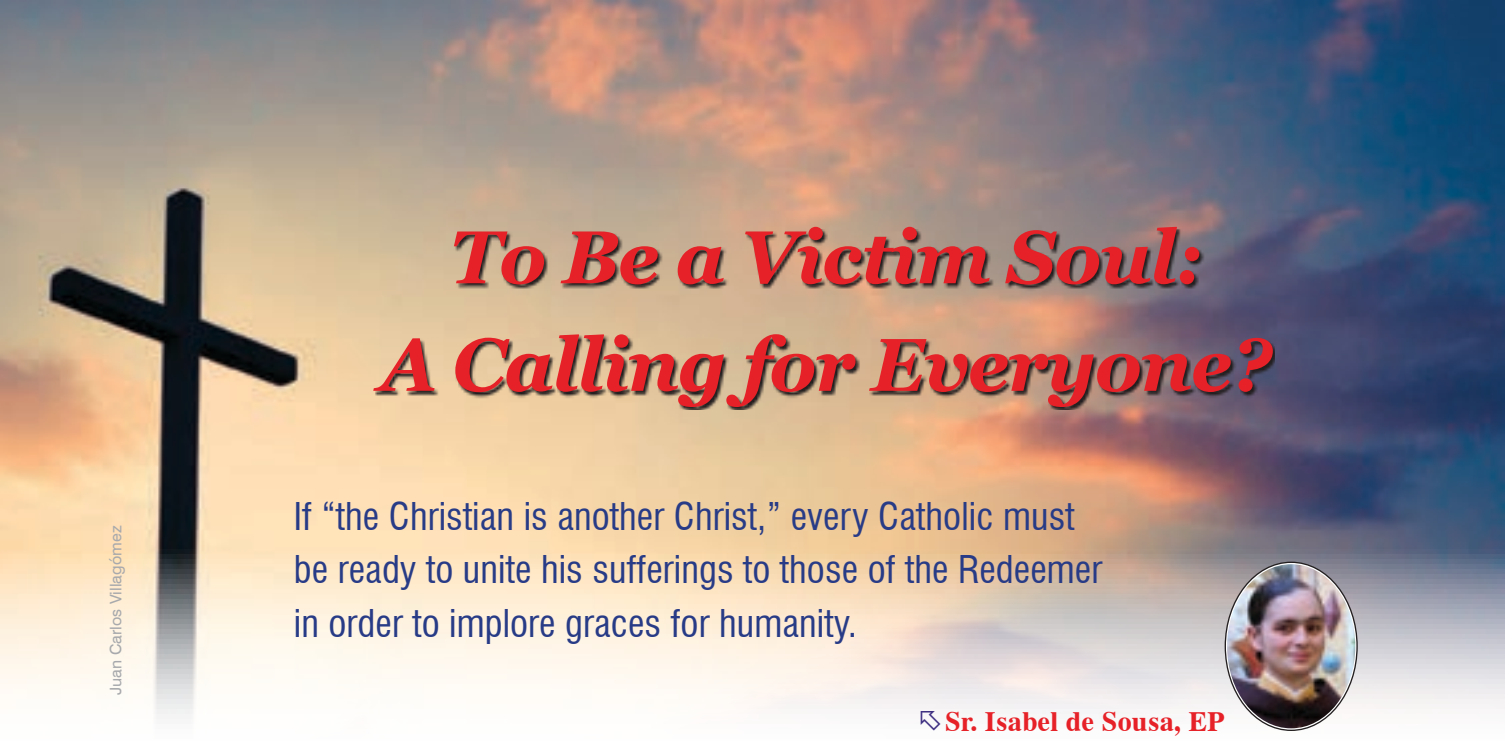
[3] Cf. REBSOMEN, André. *Notre-Dame de Lourdes. Album du pèlerin*. 5.ed. Paris: Spes, 1925, p.95-111.

[4] SELETA MILAGRES DE LOURDES, op. cit., p.56.

Jan Hager (CC by-sa 4.0)

In Lourdes, Our Lady makes us see how pure and inexhaustible her love for humanity is

View of the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Lourdes



Juan Carlos Villagómez

To Be a Victim Soul: A Calling for Everyone?

If "the Christian is another Christ," every Catholic must be ready to unite his sufferings to those of the Redeemer in order to implore graces for humanity.

Sr. Isabel de Sousa, EP

"Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13). In this sublime teaching, the Divine Master invites us to imitate His own example, for He came to earth to give His life as a ransom for many (cf. Mt 20:28).

In fact, although the Redemption had multiple effects, the principal aspect of Our Lord's mission consisted in His being the Victim of propitiation for our sins, as the Apostle wrote: "The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim 1:15). Isaiah had already prophesied this when he said: "he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. […] with his stripes we are healed" (53:4-5).

Now, "*christianus alter Christus*" – the Christian is another Christ. Every Catholic is also essentially a victim, and must be ready to unite his sufferings to those of the Saviour, in order to implore graces for the world.

It is Jesus Christ who suffers in us

In view of this, many have wondered whether the most excellent Redemption wrought by the Divine Lamb has definitively purchased all the graces necessary for humanity and for all creation, or whether there is some deficiency in this supreme sacrifice which we must make up for.

To answer this question, we should first recall the words of St. Paul: "in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of His Body, that is, the Church" (Col 1:24). All of us who have been baptized have been formed from the flesh of Jesus and from His bones; the grace that made Him our Head is the same grace that made us His members; His life is our life.[1] Our sufferings, therefore, are accepted by the Father as coming from His own Son. Thus, in no way do we have to make up for any "deficiency" in the Sacrifice of Calvary, but, *by virtue* of this supreme offering which divinizes our souls and our acts, and by a divine design, our sufferings become meritorious.

> *As baptized people, our sufferings are accepted by the Father as coming from His own Son, who wishes to suffer in us so as to continue the Redemption*

For this reason, it is of great benefit to the Church that we unite ourselves to the mystery of Redemption and bear our sufferings with courage, for the Saviour, who in His glorified humanity can no longer suffer, desires to suffer *in us* in order that He may continue in this way to save souls.[2]

How does this happen?

There are degrees of being a victim

The Gospel states that in the Father's house "there are many mansions" (Jn 14:2[DR]) because, although the Kingdom of Heaven is the same for all the just, there are different ways leading to it. In an analogous way, even if the call to be a victim is common to all the baptized, it has its degrees and is carried out in different ways.

The ordinary way, to which all are called, requires only that the soul fulfil its baptismal duties with rectitude: "The Christian who observes only, but faithfully, the Commandments of God and of the Church and lives, therefore,

truly united to Our Lord, lives the life of a victim."[3]

Indeed, great courage and patience are needed to face the struggles inherent to this valley of tears, and this spiritual effort rises to God as a sacrifice of pleasing odour. To this path of holiness we are invited: "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Rom 12:1).

The special way of consecrated persons

Standing out from the general number of the faithful, there are certain souls who are not content with the simple practice of the Commandments and who generously set out on a more arduous path, desiring to attain greater identification with the Divine Master. These are the priests and those consecrated to God who, through the practice of the evangelical counsels, have the mission of embracing more especially the state of victim:

"To tend toward union with the adorable Victim is indeed an essential duty of the Christian, but to tend toward the perfection of union is an essential duty of the religious."[4]

Impelled by great love, these resolve to carry not only a portion of Our Lord's Cross, but to carry it entirely, not counting the cost or thinking of their own fatigue, nor even of the merits they may acquire. Their only aim is to console and relieve the Heart of God.

The consecrated soul submits itself to an "immolation without reserve, without any hope of one day leaving the altar of sacrifice,"[5] and renounces personal will, criteria and sentiments in a veritable unbloody martyrdom which does not end life but rather renews death with Christ each day (cf. 1 Cor 15:31) in order to rise with Him to a supernatural life.

St. Therese of the Child Jesus

The consecrated soul submits itself to an "immolation without reserve, without any hope of one day leaving the altar of sacrifice"

The simple daily life of these souls draws down to earth the most profuse heavenly blessings and obtains for sinners efficacious graces of repentance and conversion. The example of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, who with her small sacrifices – laden with the loftiest intentions – was harvested by the Good Lord as a victim of holocaust to the merciful Love of Jesus, provides wonderful proof of this.

Consecrated persons are thus the heart of the Church, charged with pumping the life-giving blood of grace to all her members.

Specific call to expiation

The third and most excellent degree of being a victim corresponds to particularly chosen souls, called to express to the Father "the sentiments of Christ Jesus."[6] They are those known as expiatory victims.

For this path of perfection there is a reservation: "Although strictly speaking one can offer oneself as a victim to give God joy and glory by voluntary sacrifice, yet for the most part God leads souls by that path only when He intends them to act as mediators: they have to suffer and expiate for those for whom their immolation will be profitable, either by drawing down graces of forgiveness on them, or by acting as a cloak to cover their sins in the face of divine justice. It stands to reason that no one will on his own initiative take such a role on himself. […] He himself chooses these persons, and because they are free. He asks them for their voluntary co-operation. Those who accept put themselves at His mercy, and He then makes use of them as by sovereign right."[7]

In giving themselves entirely to God's will, they become "finished copies of the Crucified. […] the Passion of Christ, after marking them with its sign, *passes through them*, in order to bring about in the sinner for whom they suffer the graces of the sacrifice of Calvary."[8]

Victim souls know that even their most ardent acts of faith and their best resolutions have no substance or strength if they are not corroborated by suffering. For them embracing the cross is a demand of their

fidelity to God, and it sums up their existence.

Living crucifixes

The Jesuit priest Monier-Vinard, in the introduction to the book *The Way of Divine Love*, on the revelations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to Sister Josefa Menéndez, beautifully describes the vocation of an expiatory victim:

To draw back souls fallen away from the Faith, "Christ will seek to reach [them] through other souls whom He makes use of as channels of His mercies. They are the most fruitful of all the branches of the mystic vine. Loaded with the sap flowing from Christ Himself, [...] in them and by them, grace is communicated. They are victim-souls.

"How intimate must be their identification with the Crucified if they are to carry out their part of the contract fully! Full union with Him is implied, whilst He on His part imprints on their souls, hearts, and bodies the living image of His sorrowful Passion. All His sufferings are renewed in them: they will be contradicted, persecuted, humbled, scourged, and crucified; and what man fails to inflict, that God Himself will supply by mysterious pains, agonies, stigmata, which will make of them living crucifixes. […]

"They are thus co-redeemers in the full sense of the word; love for their neighbour urges them on, their mission is different from that of others. […] It is the love of the Sacred Heart Itself, communicated to them, with which they love sinners; love which gives them a superhuman endurance."[9]

Those who feel within themselves the clear call to be expiatory victims must prepare themselves for an authentic mystical espousal with suffering, but also rejoice in the certainty of being able to truly console God, who will see in them the image of His own unconditional love.

Will we suffer like Jesus or like the damned?

And here we have a summary of the three paths of victim souls, at least one of which we will have to travel during our days on this earth as baptised persons. Frail by nature, we have a real horror of suffering, and we shudder at the sight of the smallest sacrifices that come our way. But pain is inevitable in our current state of trial, and faced with this reality there are only two paths to take: either we suffer in union with Our Lord Jesus Christ, exercising our role as victims – in accordance with our personal vocation – and obtaining merits for eternal life; or we will suffer like the demons and the damned, embittered by rebellion and on our way to hell.

However, since we are incapable of walking the path of sanctity on our own, let us know how to turn to Her who, with a simple smile, can give us strength for everything, and let us say to Her: "O most holy Mary, sorrowful Queen and my Mother, I want to embrace the cross with all the energy and with all the joy of my soul. However, I am not moved to do so… Give me the grace that one of the tears that You shed during the Passion will have been for me. Thus I shall have my soul transformed from a poltroon into a true hero of sacrifice!"[10] ✧

The path of holiness consists in suffering in union with Our Lord Jesus Christ, each of us in accordance with our personal vocation

Our Lord carries His Cross - Collegiate Church of the Divine Saviour, Seville (Spain)

Gustavo Kralj

[1] Cf. GIRAUD, MS, Sylvain-Marie. *O espírito e a vida de sacrifício no estado religioso*. 2.ed. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1951, p.17.

[2] Cf. LEHODEY, Vital. *Le saint abandon*. 7.ed. Paris: J. Gabalda, 1935, p.74.

[3] GIRAUD, op. cit., p.20.

[4] Idem, p.63.

[5] Idem, p.28.

[6] MONIER-VINARD, SJ, H. Introdução. In: CHARMOT, SJ, F. *Apelo ao amor. Mensagem do Coração de Jesus ao mundo e sua mensageira Sóror Josefa Menéndez*. 4.ed. Contagem: Líttera Maciel, 1998, p.12.

[7] Idem, ibidem.

[8] Idem, p.15.

[9] Idem, ibidem.

[10] CLÁ DIAS, EP, João Scognamiglio. *Meditação sobre a Última Ceia* [Meditation on the Last Supper]. São Paulo, 1/3/1994.

Converted by the Beauty of the Church

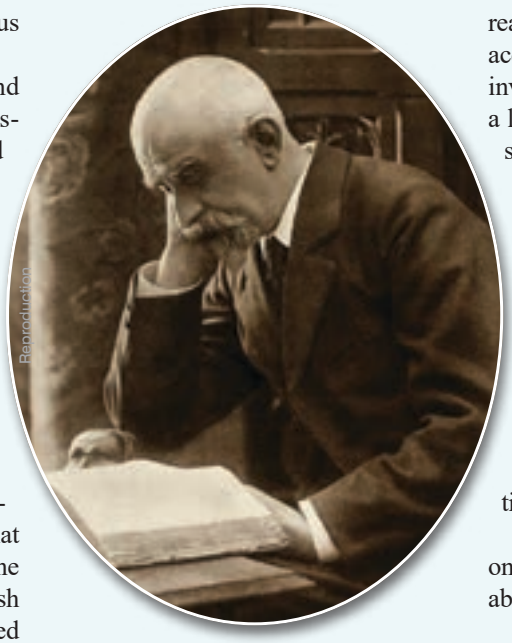
The conversion process, at once sublime and spectacular, of a great French writer demonstrates the perpetuity and power of the graces emanating from the Holy Church, capable of attracting souls to sanctity.

Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira

The literature of our days, bound to sensuality, is in a clear thematic crisis. This crisis is truly the most serious problem that all modern literati have to struggle with. The cinema, the novel, the novella, poetry – in short everything is beset by a tremendous crisis in storylines.

Plots revolve endlessly around love affairs. Now, the amorous aspects of life, however modernized we may be, can only give rise to four combinations: Either two married people abandon their respective homes to build a third home together on the ruins of their first spouses' happiness; or a married person falls in love with an unmarried one, the passion culminating in a rupture of the conjugal ties; or the rupture does not take place, but the unwanted spouse conveniently dies, so that the widower or widow may, upon the closing of the deceased's coffin, rush into the open arms of their beloved and be happy ever after; or two unmarried persons whose mutual love is barbarously opposed by an implacable father-in-law.

These cases obviously include some variants. Either crime cuts the Gordian knot of a superfluous life which threatened to last too long; or the brutal adultery puts an end to an uncomfortable situation; or the superfluous spouse discreetly commits suicide to make way for his or her happier successor.



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An admirable writer, at a certain point in Huysmans' life, he was plunged in a tremendous existential crisis

Joris-Karl Huysmans

Evidently, however, these combinations are also limited, and are exhausted after some time, so that those who devote themselves assiduously to reading novels for five years become acquainted with the entire amorous inventory of our bookshops. And with a little shrewdness, he will be able to see, on reading the first few pages, what the outcome of the story will be, an outcome that depends on the author's inclinations and the feelings and attitude he attributes to the characters in the novel.

An author who [manages to break] this vicious circle, to enter a new field, is plainly a Christopher Columbus of the spirit, who opens to the intelligence new continents, unexplored worlds.

This is the case with Huysmans, one of the strangest and most admirable writers of the last century.[1]

His merit was that of having confected the most astonishing literary [plots] that can be imagined, abstracting entirely from amorous complications.

Intellectual crisis that leads to anti-Catholic mysticism

J. K. Huysmans, a naturalist writer living in Paris, found himself at a certain point in his life plunged into a tremendous intellectual crisis. Lucid enough to abhor his century, but devoid of any sentimental support from any solid friendship or deep family affection, Huysmans, while isolating himself more and more from the conviviality of all, created within himself a tremendous vacuum.

Having abandoned all his friends, destroyed all his former illusions, lost all his relatives, he lived isolated in Paris, in a small room, where he spent endless days, in the company of a cat, forever bemoaning the nineteenth century.

It was then that he met a pseudo-medical man, Des Hermies, a nobleman, *déclassé*,[2] who frequented circles of spiritists, sorcerers, astrologers, etc., in the cancerous *basfond*[3] existing in Paris.

At first, he was seduced by the original and mysterious nature of his life. This seduction became more pronounced as he became acquainted with the people closest to Des Hermies, all of whom were plagued by an anti-Catholic and pathological mysticism that exuded the miasmas of the most absolute spiritual putrefaction.

Driven by his dilettante inclinations, Huysmans did not retreat at the sight of such an environment.

A salutary reaction to the horrors of a black Mass

On that occasion, under mysterious conditions, he received an invitation to attend a black Mass, celebrated in honour of the devil by a priest divested of his holy orders.

His curiosity aroused, he accepted the invitation and was led to a strange place, crowded with women and men laden with the weight of every vice and baseness. On the altar, there was a Christ grinning in an ignoble and outrageous rictus. A bell rings, the priest enters. The Mass begins, amid the contortions of the assembly. At the moment of the Consecration, the priest pronounces the sacramental words, bathed in sweat, his voice filled with hatred, his gaze charged with strange diabolical effluvia. He distributes the Holy Eucharist to those present, who profane it abominably. Satanic laughter, dreadful blasphemies, implacable insults, nothing is spared to the adorable Body of Our Lord.

Nuno Moura

Seeing the hatred of the wicked for the Consecrated Host, he ascertained the veracity of the Catholic Church and began a difficult conversion

Monstrance with the Blessed Sacrament

Clearly diabolical manifestations erupt on all sides. It is the triumph of Satan, glorified by those present in a delirium of abjection and infamy. Sickened, feeling his few remaining sentiments wounded, Huysmans slips out the door and flees in terror.

Starting from that moment, a great disquiet seized his mind, and eventually brought him submissively to the feet of the Church. He had seen the devil; he had seen the spirit of darkness, spewing forth the most horrific insults against the Holy Eucharist.

He reflected: if the devil, whose existence I can no longer doubt, hates the Host consecrated by Catholic priests, it is because it really is the Body of Christ. Therefore, the Catholic Church is true.

A painful and laborious conversion ensues, prolonged by untold struggles – endless battles waged against the flesh, rebellious against the injunctions of the will, and the spirit, rebellious against the demands of the Faith.

Ecstasy in face of the beauty of the Liturgy and Catholic churches

When he enters a church, he becomes ecstatic with the beauty of the Catholic Liturgy. His soul soars to the feet of God at the sound of the organ, at the grave and cadenced flow of the sacred music. Few souls have experienced the beauty of plainchant like his […].

Assiduously frequenting the churches of Paris, he visits them all in his most intense moments of sentimentality.

At times it is Notre-Dame de Paris, retaining in its centuries-old ogives some remnants of light filtered through the stained-glass, while slowly and sadly the setting sun disappears on the horizon. At another moment it is a working-class church where he observes at length the impoverished women, the beggars, the exhausted workers, the wretched of the suburbs of Paris, who come to address endless

Jorge Láscar (CC by 2.0)

Huysmans was transported by the beauty of the cathedrals and the splendours of the Catholic Liturgy

Interior of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris

prayers to God after a day of intense labour, while, from within the tabernacle, the invisible Lord consoles them by mutely repeating the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are those who mourn, those who suffer, those who thirst for justice…"

Yet Huysmans has not yet dared to approach the Sacraments. He falls back into sin with such ease that he does not even venture to approach the tremendous tribunal of Penance. […]

Flashes of the supernatural in the life of the Church

Brought by circumstances into contact with an intelligent and virtuous French priest, Huysmans begins to attend Catholic religious ceremonies. These awaken indelible impressions in him, which he passes on to us through his masterly prose.

His descriptions of the tenebrous sadness of the *De profundis*, the ardent supplications of the *Miserere*, the exultant joy of the *Magnificat*, are literary pages which glorify the language in which they were written.

Moreover, Huysmans' work constitutes a most interesting application of artistic naturalism to religious matters, an approach that fills it with originality.

From a strictly religious point of view, of particular interest to me was the new genre of apologetics that Huysmans tried to institute.

He is not concerned with philosophical arguments, with scientific disputes in which syllogisms for or against faith clash. The French poet had already said that, *à force de raisonner, on perd la raison*.[4]

He gives an objective material description of the Church, through which he tries to bring out with inimitable skill the flashes of the supernatural, which emerge from the magnificent Liturgy, enriched with moving symbolism, from the stupendous chant, in its vehement entreaties, in the tumultuous outpouring of its contrition, in the eruption of its surges of confidence in Divine Providence, and in the harmonious weeping of its services for the dead.

He is particularly impressed by Religious Orders, in which he rightly sees the crystallization of the evangelical spirit.

The penances of the Carmelites, the implacable austerities of the Benedictines and Sacramentines, the rigours of the monastic rules in general fascinate him.

Among all these, however, one Order attracted his attention for the stupendous beauty of its constitutive principles: the Trappists.

Spurred on by the advice of his priest friend, he decided to make a retreat of a few days in a distant Trappist monastery.

Thus begins the most interesting part of the book.

Moral beauty of the contemplative Orders

It must be said that, like the ancient Christians, who forbade pagans to attend the sacred mysteries, we feel the desire to prevent the reading of what follows to unbelieving spirits, who, confronted with the incomparable moral beauty of the Trappist life, will probably proffer the silly laughter or the witless pun with which a backwoodsman comments on a complex – and for him, useless – modern mechanism, the working of which is beyond his comprehension.

According to the dogma of the Communion of Saints, which the Church obliges all the faithful to accept, the sufferings of one soul can be applied in expiation for the sins of another. With divine justice thus satisfied, mercy can incite the sinner to conversion.

[Hence] the importance of Religious Orders which, in contemplation of God and in ceaseless penance, enclose (we should say *bury*)

creatures for a lifetime in humble convents, to thereby atone for the ignominies of the sinful world, [and which] participate, therefore, in all the moral elevation of the Holy Sacrifice of Calvary.

It is certain that the sybarites, so numerous in the twentieth century, perturbed in their delights by the sight of so much self-denial and suffering, will want to describe such a course of action as inhuman savagery.

It is certain that to some people, for whom gold is the only ideal of life and who consider man solely according to what he produces, the Trappist is useless because his activity "yields no profit".

Their judgements profane such matters. It would be better if they kept silent on questions beyond their comprehension!

Proof that the Church has not lost the lifeblood that nourished the martyrs

Such were the considerations that occupied Huysmans on his journey from Paris to the Trappe.

His impression, when he became accustomed to conventual life, was one of true amazement.

Placid and austere monks, invariably dressed in white, devoted themselves, within a perpetual seclusion, to manual work, and especially to prayer and penance, which consumed their lives. Their bed was a wooden plank. The nourishment, extremely rigorous, was exactly what was necessary to prevent the monks from falling seriously ill from hunger. Everywhere, silence. Only one voice spoke: that of contrition and reparation, expressed through every attitude and every action.

The Trappe constitutes the most masterly response to those who claim that the Church has lost the lifeblood that nourished the martyrs of the first centuries of Christianity. If it is true that superhuman heroism is required for someone to be subjected to the torments of the Coliseum, it is also true that the agony of an entire life, slowly drained away between sackcloth and mortifications, constitutes a torment that surpasses all others, by the rigour and the trial they impose on the perseverance.

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The recollected and austere life of the Trappist monks touched him deeply and helped him to reconcile himself with God

"The Carthusian Cloister", by François Marius Granet - Provence Art and History Museum, Grasse (France)

Reintegration into Catholicism

One night, Huysmans was restless and could not sleep. He got up and went to the chapel, which he thought was deserted. As he entered, he vaguely glimpsed, through the dim light that filtered through the skylight of a cupola, the white figures of the Trappists who robbed from their few hours of sleep the time needed to nourish their spirit in prayer.

Some, bowed by humility, prostrated themselves on the ground. Others, like candle flames reaching upwards, lifted themselves into an upright position of ardent petition, of vehement supplication, that only Huysmans' pen could describe. Others, finally, overwhelmed by the enormity of the sins of the world which they had to expiate, in an attitude of deep contrition, moaned a *Miserere*.

Slowly, morning penetrates through the skylight. The white shapes become more defined, still bathed in the soft clarity of dawn. At last the sun rises. All the Trappists head for the pews. The bell rings and the *Salve Regina* radiantly bursts forth.

The observation of these scenes had a profound effect on Huysmans, who, finally resolved to confess his sins, prostrated himself at the feet of a Trappist, to whom, in deep contrition, he confided all his offences against God and men. The next day he received communion. Having thus integrated himself into Catholicism, he left the Trappist monastery with everlasting memories. ✧

Taken from: *O Legionário*. São Paulo. Year VI. N.93 (Jan. 31, 1932), p.1; N.94 (Feb. 21, 1932), p.2

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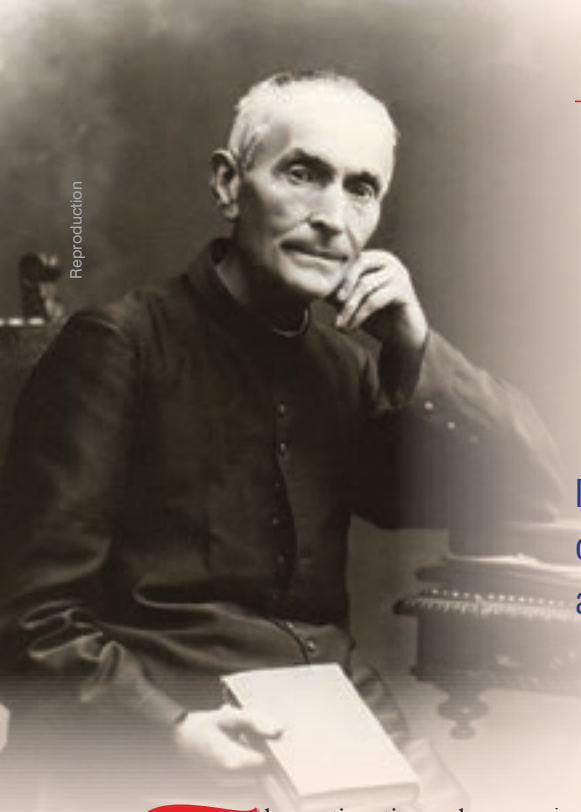
[1] Having written this article in 1932, Dr. Plinio refers to the 19th century.

[2] From the French: having fallen in social rank.

[3] From the French: dregs, underworld of society.

[4] From the French: By dint of reasoning, we lose our reason.



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Blessed Michael Rua

The Victory of Don Bosco

Much more than a disciple, a friend, a son or a successor, God gave St. John Bosco another himself to expand his work.

Sr. Mariana de Oliveira, EP

The continuation and perpetuity of a Religious Order depends to a great extent on the actions of its members and their fidelity towards the person chosen by the Holy Spirit to establish a new charism in the Church. Accordingly, throughout the history of foundations, God does not fail to raise up men who are excellent reflections of their masters and who continue their work.

Like the tower of a church in a metropolis, forgotten amidst the gigantic skyscrapers and dreadful cacophony, but which announces its presence by the tolling of the bell it houses, in this way the founder sees projected and perpetuated, through his disciples, the providential mission to which he was called.

We encounter a beautiful proof of this reality in the life of Blessed Michael Rua: he was like the bell that reverberated far and wide the spirit and mentality of St. John Bosco, founder of the Salesian Congregation.

In fact, a Capuchin friar who knew him once said: "I have seen a miracle: Don Bosco is risen! Rua is not only the successor of Don Bosco, he is another Don Bosco. The same gentleness, the same humility, the same simplicity, the same grandeur of soul, the same joy that radiates around him. Everything in the life and works of Don Bosco is miraculous. However, this perpetuity of himself in Don Rua seems to me the greatest of all miracles."[1]

The early years

Turin was the birthplace of Michael Rua. Born on June 9, 1837, the last child of John Battista Rua's second marriage to Giovanna Maria Ferrero, he was the youngest of a family of fervent Catholics, as attested by his Baptism, which took place only 48 hours after his birth.

After the death of his progenitor, little Michael Rua met another John, who would be a true father to him

John Battista was a hardworking, honest and very intelligent man, which is why he had a good job at the Royal Armaments Factory in Borgo Dora, a small district of the Piedmontese capital. Within the factory complex itself, he procured a home for his family. It was here that little Michael grew up and studied, with a chaplain as teacher and catechist and the children of the other workers as his companions.

At the age of eight, the boy was ready for his First Communion. However, a cloud overshadowed the blue sky of that family: on August 2, 1845, that excellent father and faithful husband died. Curiously – or providentially! – a month after the death of his progenitor, the young orphan met another John…

Memorable encounter

The Oratory founded by Fr. John Bosco, dedicated to the education and religious formation of poor children, was already well known in the populous Turin of the time.

One day Raimondo Battista, one of Michael's companions in the little school at the Royal Armaments Factory, was wearing a beautiful tie that he had bought at a party at the Oratory.

This led to an enthusiastic conversation about Don Bosco, that blessed place, the games and the boys… And Michael was quick to accompany his friend the following Sunday.

When he arrived, the Saint approached to greet him, and after some warm words of welcome, he invited Michael to frequent the Oratory. The famous priest was held in high esteem and, notwithstanding his jovial character, everything he did had profound meaning. Everyone knew that!

On one occasion in 1847, little Michael, barely ten years old, approached the Saint to receive the medals and holy cards that he used to distribute to the boys. Don Bosco, in no hurry to hand them over, pretended not to understand the request and merely smiled and joked, placing his biretta on the young boy's head.

But Michael insisted:

"A holy card! A holy card, please!"

At that moment Don Bosco held up a holy card in the palm of his left hand and with his right he marked out the middle of the card, as if he were dividing it, and smiling he said:

"Take it, little Michael, take it! We two will go 'halves'"!

The scene was repeated several times, and young Rua wondered what that gesture and those words meant…

First pillar of the Salesian foundation

From these first encounters, St. John Bosco mysteriously discerned that little Michael was destined to be his principal helper in the congregation he was to found. A relationship that would last forever had begun.

Rua became Don Bosco's secretary, a fact that allowed him to closely follow the laborious life of his spiritual father. His fascination and admiration led him to take notes, like an amanuensis, of his every word and deed, so that nothing would be overlooked.

Thanks to these notes we can learn how the great Saint of Turin, in the manner of the Divine Redeemer, was concerned with outlining the Salesian rule first in souls, and only afterwards on paper.

The young Michael conquered Don Bosco's heart early on, and eventually become a living perpetuation of his spirit

This is what Michael Rua wrote in January 1854 when he was still an adolescent: "Rocchietti, Artiglia, Cagliero and I gathered in Don Bosco's room. He proposed that we undertake a trial in the practical exercise of charity toward our neighbour. Afterwards we would make a promise in this regard and then a vow. Those who complete this trial and those who make it later will receive the name of *Salesians*."[2]

This was how the Salesian Congregation began, and Don Rua seems to have opened the way for those who would pass the "exam". On March 25, 1855, at the invitation of Don Bosco, he alone took the vows of obedience, chastity and poverty. Officially, the Salesian society had welcomed its first child! Upon that eighteen-year-old young man, the Founder laid the foundations of his work.

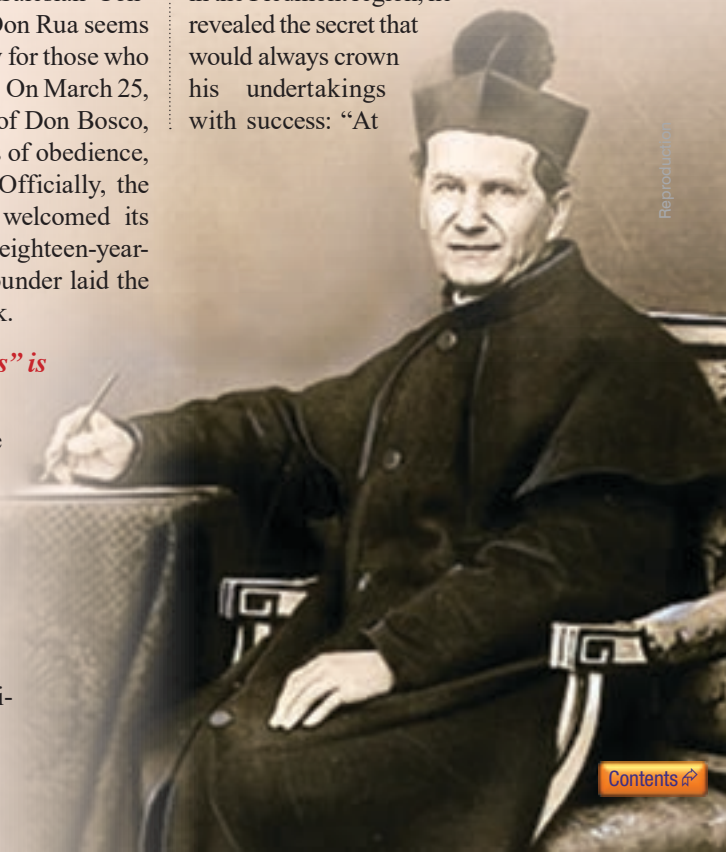
"We two will go halves" is fulfilled to the letter

If it were possible to recount the prodigious work of Don Rua at Don Bosco's side, pages upon pages would be filled.

From the time he was a young frequenter at the Oratory, Michael was entrusted, on the initiative of St. John Bosco, with the care of the other boys. As he grew older and was formed, these responsibilities only increased. Each day he became more and more the *longa manus* of his spiritual father.

When it was necessary to revive the Salesian spirit somewhere, Don Bosco sent Don Rua. When it was necessary to undertake a journey for the benefit of the institute, to found a new house, to revitalize or reorganize those already existing, the task also fell to him. Little by little, the Saint was passing on to his beloved son the tasks that were his exclusive responsibility as founder, in order to show everyone with whom he wished to leave his commander's staff.

Don Rua, for his part, gifted with great energy of soul, and above all, with an ardent love for the master that God had given him, took on all that was entrusted to him with a boundless readiness. From his very first mission, the foundation of a Salesian house at Mirabello Monferrato, which was also in the Piedmont region, he revealed the secret that would always crown his undertakings with success: "At



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Contents

Mirabello I will try to be Don Bosco."[3] And so it was!

Don Rua in Don Bosco's estimation

"If the Lord told me that I was going to die soon and that I should choose a successor, requesting on his behalf all the qualities and virtues that I wished him to have, I assure you that I would not know what to ask God, because I can see that Don Rua already has all of this."[4] The charismatic founder of the Salesians uttered these words when his disciple was only thirty years old. He was proud of that son. Don Francesia – a contemporary of both at the Oratory – wrote that the young man conquered Don Bosco's heart from an early age.

It is amazing that a founder could make such statements about a member of his spiritual family. God rewarded the great Don Bosco by giving him not only a son, a follower, a disciple and a friend, but "another himself".

Blessed Michael Rua's personality

How true is St. Paul's affirmation that "star differs from star" (1 Cor 15:41). Although Don Rua was acclaimed by his contemporaries as another Don Bosco, some of his personal characteristics were very different from those of his master. In this sense his mission also consisted in completing him. In fact, the distinction between the two did not separate, but unite them in view of the realization of God's plan for them and for the Salesian work.

There is unanimous recognition of the qualities of Michael Rua: a man of noble character, upright conscience, acute intelligence and a prodigious memory, a gifted organizer, but above all, of a humble soul overflowing with faith.

His countenance was cheerful, his presence discreet, his spirit perpetually serene. His heart, however,

St. John Bosco and Blessed Michael Rua on May 3 of 1886

> *Some of Don Rua's personal characteristics were different from his master. In this sense his mission also consisted in completing him*

was ardent and his horizons vast! His ability to manage and simultaneously carry through a series of undertakings gave him a marked note of determination.

His good humour was also evident, even in the most difficult moments. On April 2, 1910, for example, four days from death – and therefore in serious condition and probably suffering atrocious pain – Don Rua asked those assisting him:

"When I die, where will I be laid?"

They were at a loss to respond to this disconcerting question, until the spiritual director of the congregation, Don Pablo Álbera, spoke up:

"We don't think about that. We are asking for your cure and for you to continue doing all the good that you do."

Rua insisted, but, realizing the discomfort of his interlocutor, he explained jokingly:

"I asked this question so I would know where I should go to collect my poor ashes when the Universal Judgement comes. I might look for them in the wrong place, and then start going around in circles…"

That is how Don Rua was: so different from and at the same time so much another John Bosco!

A bond that even death respected

It was 1868. The famous Salesian Congregation was growing, the work was only increasing and the influx of members of the Institute on the occasion of the inauguration of the Church of Mary Help of Christians was immense. Rua was not in good health. Making little of his illness, he carried out his duties as usual, always repeating the phrase that had become famous on his lips: "Everything for the Lord! May His holy will be done!"[5] One day, however, the illness showed signs of winning the duel: he seemed to be at death's door, and his spiritual father was absent.

On hearing of the grave condition of his beloved son, Don Bosco said, in an almost light-hearted tone, "Don Rua, do not leave without my permission."[6] And he calmly went to supper. Afterwards he went to the bed of the sick man who in a weak voice entreated:

"Don Bosco, give me your blessing and the Holy Oils without delay, for my last moment has come."

"Be at peace! Are you thinking of departing without my permission?

There are still many things for you to do."

As the sick man insisted, he repeated:

"Do not worry, my son, for you well know that Don Rua will do nothing without Don Bosco's consent."

Against all human hope, the illness vanished. Little by little, the physical vigour returned to the disciple who was soon able to resume his active routine for another forty-one years.

Rua died on April 6, 1910, at the age of seventy-two. After taking over the direction of the Salesian Congregation in 1888, he saw its members grow from a little over seven hundred to four thousand, spread throughout thirty-three countries.

The most outstanding virtue in Michael Rua

At the end of these considerations, it is inevitable that we should want to identify the primary virtue practised by Blessed Michael Rua – the one that sums up his days on this earth. His very life, however, answers this question: admiration for St. John Bosco!

This virtue was his lifeblood: on the wings of admiration he soared in the immense heavens of his father and founder's soul; through it he loved and understood him; impelled by it he worked tirelessly for the salvation of the young; because he possessed it he remained serene in trials, determined in struggles and constant in victories; by its means, finally, he came to be a complement and support to his master.

Not without reason a biographer comments on Michael Rua and his fundamental support for Don Bosco: "Present from the beginning of the Salesian work, Don Rua captured its intrinsic potential for growth and developed it with coherence and creativity. The intuitions of the charismatic founder were converted by Don Rua into an institution. Don Bosco 'dreamed' big, and Don Rua realized his dream. Don Bosco 'revealed', and Don Rua gave the practical instructions. […] Don Bosco 'invented' his Oratory, and Don Rua enriched it with new modalities. Don Bosco introduced the Salesians to works specifically for young people, and Don Rua led them along new paths."[7]

Don Rua's admiration for his founder was the bell that enabled the Salesian tower to call out to the society of the time

In effect, the admiration of Don Rua was the bell that made it possible for the Salesian tower to call out to the society of his time. Without hesitation, one can believe that Don Bosco was victorious because he had a Michael Rua! ✧

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[1] ARAGÓN RAMÍREZ, SDB, Miguel. *Beato Miguel Rua. El salesiano número uno*. Madrid: CCS, 2012, p.20.

[2] Idem, p.58.

[3] Idem, p.83.

[4] Idem, p.222.

[5] Idem, p.229.

[6] FRANCESIA, SDB, Juan Bautista. *Memorias biográficas de Don Miguel Rúa, primer sucesor de Don Bosco*. Buenos Aires: Colegio Pío IX de Artes y Oficios, 1912, p.95.

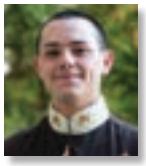
[7] ARAGÓN RAMÍREZ, op. cit., p.21.

Evening in Prato (Italy)

Yavir - Pixabay

The Grandeur of Failure

Is it possible that failure is one way chosen by the Creator to restore humanity's original grandeur?



Fabricio Avila Paniagua

The 21st century. A time in which man's existence has been made easier on all fronts by the overwhelming progress of science; almost all his needs are met simply and quickly. However, there is one inevitability that technology, however advanced, cannot prevent: failure! It is impossible to find a man who has not failed at some point in his life.

Nevertheless, the word can cause fear, even panic… In a world that has forgotten God, it is hard to understand that mistakes, suffering and trials can be a means for Him to manifest His love for us.

But why did the Creator choose this instrument? What benefit can man derive from disaster? Is it really possible to find grandeur in something so repulsive to our nature as failure?

The original grandeur of the first man

To throw light on this question, let us go back to the beginning of humanity. God created man to reign (cf. Gn 1:26). He enthroned him in Eden (cf. Gn 2:8) to govern all beings, who were subject to his command.

Now we can conjecture that Adam perceived this imperial harmony within himself and contemplated in nature the reflection of the generous magnificence of the Almighty. This interior sensation produced in his spirit a lawful delight in the grandeur that God had placed in him. He felt himself to be the *minor* monarch of the order of creation and took comfort in being a ray of this divine attribute.

What was the source of Adam's grandeur? It was the union he possessed with God, for he had been created in His image and likeness (cf. Gn 1:26). Therefore, magnificence was an integral part of Adam's vocation, since he represented, in a special way, the grandeur of the Most High in the material universe.

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In the midst of his dark night of the soul, Adam forgot about his relationship with God and, feeling abandoned, began to live a routine independent of his Creator

The creation of Adam - Museum of the Cathedral of Milan (Italy)

Imagining a process of decadence

Contemplating the predilection that the Lord placed in the first man, and seeing how he nevertheless offended Him, it is difficult not to surmise that there had been a previous process that predisposed Adam to sin. To live intimately with God every day and then suddenly fall into a very serious fault does not add up. How did this decadence occur?

Scripture is quite brief in the description of original sin, and offers no indications as to how the fall of the first man began. We are therefore free to raise hypotheses, based on the various processes of spiritual decadence catalogued throughout history. We could speculate, for example, that Adam was going through a dark night of the soul.[1]

Adopting this hypothesis, we might imagine the father of all humanity wandering through Paradise, praying and asking God to manifest Himself. However, the more he begged, the less he seemed to be heard, because the Creator no longer descended in the paradisiacal dusk to converse (cf. Gn

3:8), no longer spoke to his heart, not even by sensible inspirations of grace. There was nothing to console his soul.

Adam was completely desolate and disoriented in the midst of his affliction, without knowing where to turn. God had "forsaken" him!

No longer having the comfort of the Lord's perceptible company, man began to inhale the "fragrance" of the presence that He had left in nature. Creation was like a photo album that reminded him of God and of the countless graces he had received in his relationship with Him. In this way he sought, in a certain sense, to overcome the tremendous sense of isolation that he was experiencing.

How the devil would have taken advantage of this

The devil – as a consummate psychologist – diagnosed the state in which the first man found himself and, no doubt, tried to take advantage of it.

He worked on his external and internal senses with the intention of sharpening his sensibility with regard to the wonders of the order of creation.

At first, he must have dazzled Adam by emphasizing the natural aspects of the beauties of Paradise, relegating God the Creator to a secondary place, and then, as time went on, inciting him to put Him aside altogether from his thoughts. And that is what probably happened… Our first father no longer admired the divine reflections in the world, but delighted in the splendours of each creature in itself, as if these qualities reflected him, man, and not God.

The ground was fertile for the devil to prompt him take another step towards the forbidden fruit.[2]

Self-sufficiency leads to mediocrity

Adam began to live a routine independent of God, of "practical atheism", we might say. He believed in God and even prayed to Him, but he did not keep Him present in his affairs during the day; he did not recall the graces received; he fostered more and more confidence in himself, which gave him the sensation of self-mastery, fortitude and superiority.[3]

In short, Adam had found a middle position between rejecting God and living the great vocation he had been given. In a word, he had fallen into mediocrity.[4]

The devil only presented the forbidden fruit to Adam when he saw that he had become accustomed to a state of predisposition to sin, that is, of confidence in himself, lack of vigilance and a naturalistic outlook.

The temptation was "tailor-made" for Adam, and the forbidden fruit was the "consolation" that the devil offered to ease his trial and answer to his aspirations: "You shall be as Gods" (Gn 3:5). In other words, it was the quintessence of a life in which Adam would no longer need God. Sufficient unto himself, he would become the model and master of creation. And we all know how the story ends…

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The forbidden fruit was the "consolation" that the devil offered to ease his trial and answer to his aspirations: "You shall be as Gods!"

Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit - Cathedral of St. Michael and St. Gudula, Brussels

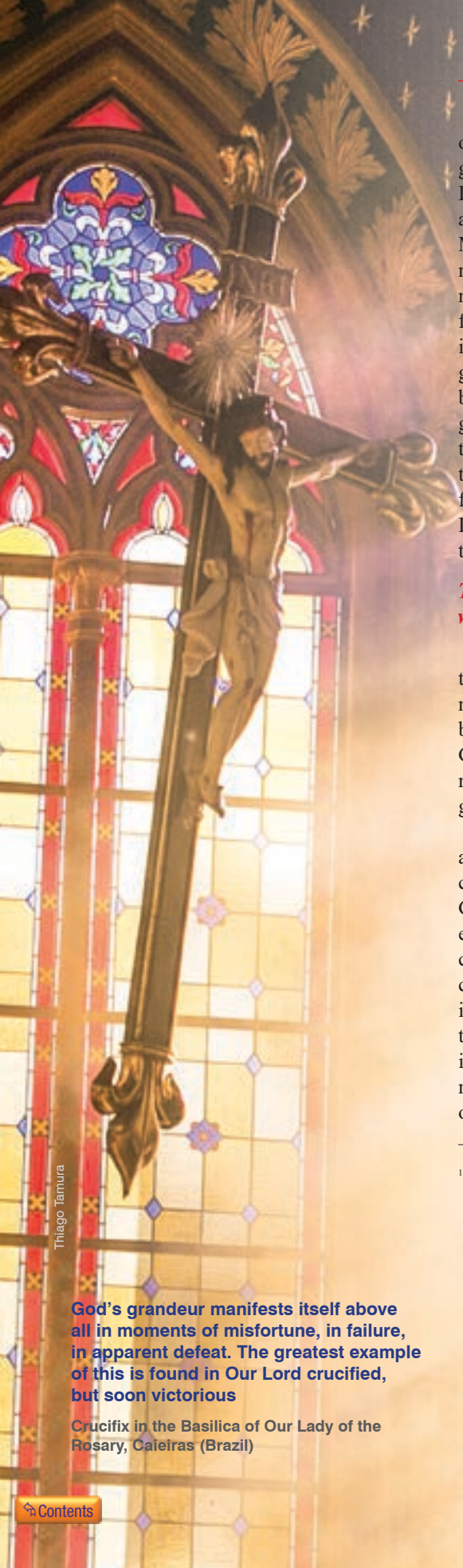
What was Adam's fault?

In what, then, did Adam's sin consist?

It would be ridiculous to believe that, simply because he ate a piece of fruit, all humanity saw the gates of Heaven closed to it. It is clear that there is a deeper sin behind it. The material act, represented by the eating of the forbidden food, was a mere consequence of this previous disposition.[5]

There can be no doubt that if "pride is the beginning of all sin" (Ecclus 10:15[DR]), this was ultimately the cause of our first father's fault. This, moreover, is a common opinion among the Fathers of the Church.[6] However, there is another aspect to be stressed in this chapter of the origin of humanity.

When Adam consented to this execrable offence against his Father, he completed the process of forgetting the Creator which he had already begun: he explicitly refused to be son and slave, in order to be master; he refused to be assumed by the grandeur



Thiago Tamura

God's grandeur manifests itself above all in moments of misfortune, in failure, in apparent defeat. The greatest example of this is found in Our Lord crucified, but soon victorious

Crucifix in the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary, Caieiras (Brazil)

of God, in order to display his false grandeur; he refused the uncreated Light, in order to manifest his personal brilliance. He desired to equal the Most High, appropriating the gifts received, in order to live off the magnificence he thought was his. Therefore, he formalized his supposed independence from God in order to go his own way.[7] Now, we saw at the beginning of this article that Adam's grandeur came to him from the fact that he was truly a representative of the Creator in the universe. Therefore, by refusing this union with the Lord, his sin directly undermined that grandeur.

The grandeur to which we are all called

Humanity could be divided on this basis: those who recognize their nothingness and allow themselves to be totally taken up by the uncreated Grandeur, who is God; and those who reject it, in order to realize their own grandeur.

All men are called to be great, according to their conditions and according to the vocation of each one. Grandeur is not the exclusive privilege of monarchs or of those called to carry out a prestigious mission in society. To possess it cannot be delimited to wearing rich clothing and participating in pompous ceremonies; it is not the equivalent of conquests made by intrepid generals at the head of invincible armies.

Nevertheless, grandeur acquires its full stature only to the extent that man is united with God. All human glory, apart from this divine relationship, is an ephemeral fireworks display which initially makes an impression, but which the winds of events cause to vanish from the skies of history.

God's grandeur is perennial and manifests itself above all in moments of misfortune, in failure, in apparent defeat. Often what appears to be a disaster to human eyes is a triumph in the divine sight, "For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor 1:25).

The greatest example of this reality is found in Our Lord Jesus Christ, Grandeur incarnate, rejected and crucified, but soon victorious.

We can say that the Creator chose failure as a means to restore and recover the grandeur that man originally possessed, because it is in the crucible of the holocaust that the quality of the human soul is revealed; it is in the throes of suffering faced with magnanimity that true grandeur shines forth.

Grandeur is manifested in our weakness

Moreover, when human weakness appears, favourable conditions are created for the manifestation of supernatural grandeur, as St. Paul states: "It is sown in dishonour, it

[1] This is a trial to which specially called souls are subjected, whom God wishes to raise to the highest peaks of sanctity and union with Him (cf. ROYO MARÍN, OP, Antonio. *Teología de la perfección cristiana*. 4.ed. Madrid: BAC, 1962, p.409). St. John of the Cross gives a detailed description of the terrible spiritual sufferings that accompany it. Here is a small sample: "it [the soul] feels very vividly indeed the shadow of death, the sighs of death, and the sorrows of hell, all of which reflect the feeling of God's absence, of being chastised and rejected by Him, and of being unworthy of Him" (ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS. Noche oscura. L.II, c.6, n.2. In: *Obras Completas.* 2.ed. Madrid: BAC, 2009, p.530).

[2] Concerning the disposition of soul which preceded Adam's sin, St. Augustine says the following: "'For pride is the beginning of sin.' And what is pride but the craving for undue exaltation? And this is undue exaltation, when the soul abandons Him to whom it

Glorious Mark of Faithful Souls

The most virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph consisted, above all, in an exchange of hearts by which the graces that inhabited the interior of the one were lived by the other, allowing them to share the same desires.

While the Glorious Patriarch profited from the font of grace found within the Immaculate Heart of the Virgin, She drew from her husband the strength, determination and confidence that pulsated in his fiery heart.

The grandeur of a soul is measured not so much by success achieved in undertakings, but by serene humility in submitting the will to God's designs and by the determination to advance with confidence despite personal failures, considering them the best path to attaining God's victory. Serenity in the face of misfortune is the glorious mark of truly faithful souls.

Our Lady and St. Joseph are the most august example of this fidelity – this unpretentiousness and sublime disposition to carry out God's will, even when it demands acceptance of tragedy and defeat. And only those who are willing to tread this path with generosity, patience and constancy, shouldering all the setbacks and absurdities that the Lord wishes to send them, will follow in the footsteps of the Most Holy Couple.

The failure that God asks us to face today always foreshadows tomorrow's great victory. Those who, in the cold and darkness of the night of trials and inner struggles, know how to keep the fire of their hearts burning with the warmth of confidence and the light of certainty of victory will be worthy to contemplate, at dawn's breaking, the splendorous gleam of the Morning Star. ✧

CLÁ DIAS, EP, João Scognamiglio.
Mary Most Holy: The Paradise of God Revealed to Men.
Nobleton: Heralds of the Gospel, 2022,
v.II, p.334-335

[the body] is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power" (1 Cor 15:43).

It is of enormous benefit to us, then, to experience our own weakness, for in this way we prepare ourselves to recognize more easily that the great deeds accomplished do not come from our personal qualities, nor even from the virtues we may practise, but from a sharing in God's omnipotence, as the Apostle once again declares: "I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor 12:9).

Every man carries within himself the tendency – intensified by the effects of original sin – to cling to what he possesses and, unfortunately, even to what he does not possess but only thinks he has. And this distorted concept is often manifested in the spiritual life, even among the most fervent. A method is conceived, effort is applied and, as a result, sanctity is thought to be attainable by one's own merit, one might almost say "naturally".

According to this conception, prayer enters into the "production" of progress in virtue as one more element among many others. Now, to remedy this "virus", God allows monumental failures which oblige us to realize that without Him we can do nothing (cf. Jn 15:5).

For this reason, our life on earth, for each according to his measure, is an alternation of triumphs and failures, so that, once the risks of appropriating divine gifts have been diminished and the conditions created for recognizing our own weakness, we may serve as effective instruments for God's great interventions. ✧

ought to cleave as its end, and becomes a kind of end to itself" (ST. AUGUSTINE. The City of God. L.XIV, c.13, n.1. In. *Obras Completas*. 6.ed. Madrid: BAC, v.XVII, 2007, p.101).

[3] "He committed, we would say today, a sin of 'naturalism'; not wanting to receive from God the norm for his own life, he thought he could suffice himself (self-sufficiency), living his life freely and happily" (BARTMANN, Bernardo. *Teologia Dogmática*. São Paulo: Paulinas, 1962, v.I, p.450).

[4] "Magnanimity is a virtue that leads one to undertake great, splendid and honourable works in all kinds of virtues. It always implies greatness, splendour, eminent virtue; it is incompatible with mediocrity" (ROYO MARÍN, op. cit., p.547).

[5] "For the evil act had never been done had not an evil will preceded it" (ST. AUGUSTINE, op. cit., p.101).

[6] Cf. BARTMANN, op. cit., p.448.

[7] St. Thomas Aquinas explains that Adam's pride consisted in wanting to resemble God in two ways. One of these coincides with the one we present: "he [the first man] sinned by coveting God's likeness as regards his own power of operation, namely that by his own natural power he might act so as to obtain happiness" (ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa Theologiæ*. II-II, q.163, a.2).

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Excellent Educator, Loving Mother

Elevation and sweetness are two qualities that the modern mentality sees as mutually exclusive; someone who loves the sublime will tend to be unapproachable and severe. However, Dona Lucilia was an example of the opposite.

Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, EP

Dona Lucilia's words were never empty of meaning and appeal. However, even more than by her words, it was through her attitude and way of being that she instilled in others, especially in her children, the desire to do good and to follow the path of moral perfection. A living example of the virtues she practised, her very presence spread a discreet but powerful consolation, light, and peace.

A serene gaze, a smooth voice, a luminous smile

Her serene eyes were of a very dark brown; their luminosity varied, depending on the nature of what they communicated. When her gaze was joyful, out of fondness for her interlocutor, its light was soft and warm; if circumstances demanded a serious attitude her look became profound, penetrating and defined. Her eye movements, always controlled, revealed an absence of inner agitation, reflecting her temperance.

Those who knew her will never forget the pleasing sweetness of her melodious voice, which she adjusted according to the topic at hand and the mood of the other. Her inflections were mild, rich, and cordial.

Sometimes she emphasized her words with noble and discreet gestures. Her hands were slender and well-proportioned with long fingers and skin as white and soft as ermine. She knew how to apportion the exact degree of friendliness she wished to convey; the simplest greeting was truly meaningful.

All of these facets of her personality – her serene look, small gestures, soft voice, bright smile – revealed a soul imbued with faith, and which dwelt permanently on a peak of high reflections and perspectives. Her way of being flowed from these heights, conferring an attitude, that made it unthinkable for anyone to approach her without much respect.

Elevation and uprightness with much sweetness

This enchanted her son, when, for example, he went to her room to say good morning or good night and to request her blessing. Her quarters were spacious and high-ceilinged, and the bed was of carved wood with a canopy, from which two lace curtains hung, almost to the floor.

Plinio, always prone to making correlations, saw how this piece of furniture was perfectly suited to her soul, whose elevation called for dignified and well-arranged surroundings. The boy's innocence also discerned a similarity between his mother's liking for the canopy and her taste for an order of things based on logical principles, flowing like a cascade down to the smallest details.

Another reason explaining Dona Lucilia's fondness for this noble covering above her bed was that it lent a feeling of protection, an impression that corresponded to a facet of her mentality.

In Dona Lucilia, there was a combination of two apparently opposite qualities: alongside this elevation and uprightness – indeed, elevation is but an excellence of uprightness – there was sweetness. She was elevated because she was sweet, and sweet because she was elevated.

The modern mentality, in contrast, conceives these two qualities as being mutually exclusive; a person who loves the sublime will necessarily estrange others and tend to be severe rather than sweet. Dona Lucilia was an example of the opposite.

Rosée and Plinio were able to continually enjoy this happy blend of qualities in their mother, in all the circumstances of everyday life and in the thousand measures she took to provide for their education in the best possible way.

A visit to a great statesman of the Empire

Dona Lucilia, as a descendant of illustrious lineage – as was Dr. João Paulo – would never let an appropriate opportunity slip by to draw the children's attention to their duty to follow the example of their forefathers, some of whom had stood out in the service of country. She would do this in her habitually appealing manner, telling them stories from the family's past that inspired the children and made the long evenings pleasant.

One of the most celebrated among these was Councillor João Alfredo Corrêa de Oliveira – Dr. João Paulo's uncle – whose Monarchist statesmanship had raised him to the highest government offices.

Since the Councillor was of advanced age, and the opportunity of visiting him in Rio de Janeiro where he lived had come up, Dona Lucilia wanted the children to benefit from the opportunity of meeting him personally.

She believed that the visit would mark their memories forever, encouraging them to follow in the footsteps of their illustrious granduncle whom they had met in their childhood.

The visit was a cordial event and made a deep impact on the youngsters.

Such encounters were frequent, and stamped with the formality of social norms of the time – precious remnants of bygone splendours. They were woven into the fabric of the daily life of persons from high-society families who were linked by blood, marriage and business ties.

Attention to proper attire

Today it is difficult to grasp the importance that people gave to dress in those times. Society was hierarchical, and it was considered normal and obligatory for each person to dress with dignity, according to his social status.

Conscientious in everything, Dona Lucilia lovingly adhered to this duty, with regard to her own dress as well as that of her children. She clearly understood how her choices could contribute to creating an ambience around her that favoured high-mindedness while shunning vulgarity.

Furthermore, the axiom "*age quod agis*"[1] was Dona Lucilia's constant guide; without agitation, but with gentle and persistent attentiveness in all her thoughts, words and deeds. It was within this context that her attention to dress should be understood – as a way of showing respect for the reflection of God in human dignity. For what St. Paul says of an apostle can be applied to all: "We have become a spectacle to the world, to Angels, and to men" (1 Cor 4:9).

Some years after his beloved mother's death, Prof. Plinio would say: "I often watched her as she finished readying herself. Fully dressed, she would sit at a dressing table to arrange her hair. Then she got up, put herself in order, and stood before a larger mirror where she regarded herself with close attention, but without vanity. While carefully attending to what she was doing, her mind was on higher things. I would look at her and think, 'What perfection!'"

In those days, quality clothing was never purchased off-the-rack; dressing well was an art in its own right, demanding considerable skill. Dona Lucilia, who had both imagination and good taste, chose her fabrics and designed her own wardrobe as well as Rosée's, drawing her inspiration from French styles. She had a seamstress come to the house to fit them, which was quite an event in the domestic routine. ✧

The thousand measures Dona Lucilia took were fundamental for the proper formation of her children

Plinio and Rosée photographed in Paris, in 1912; previous page, Dona Lucilia on the same occasion

Taken, with slight adaptations, from: *Dona Lucilia*. Città del Vaticano-Nobleton: LEV; Heralds of the Gospel, 2013, p.169-174

[1] From the Latin: Do [well] what you are doing.

1

2

3

Photos: Ronny Fisher

Mexico – On February 19, faithful of the Lebanese community received the Pilgrim Statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary at the Lebanese Club, for a Mass celebrated by Most Rev. Georges Miled Saad Abi Younes, OLM, Bishop of the Maronite Rite Eparchy in Mexico, and concelebrated by Archbishop Joseph Spiteri, Apostolic Nuncio to Mexico (photos 1 and 2). This month, the Virgin of Fatima also visited the Parish of Our Lady of Hope, in the capital (photo 3).

Photos: Guillermo Castillo

Honduras – Families in the city of Intibucá had the great joy of receiving the Pilgrim Statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in January, during a Marian Mission carried out in the region. Upon arriving in each home, the statue of the Blessed Virgin was crowned, followed by a moment of prayer.

Marlon Castellanos

Estevão Mezquita

Guatemala – Since February 11, six new oratories of the Immaculate Heart of Mary have been circulating among the families of the Parish of the Holy Kings and the Christ of Esquipulas, in the municipality of Cuyotenango. The oratories were distributed during a Holy Mass, before which the Pilgrim Statue was carried through the streets of the city in procession.

World Day of the Sick

On February 11th, World Day of the Sick, Masses in honour of Our Lady of Lourdes were celebrated in the houses of the Heralds of the Gospel in Brazil and around the world. After the Eucharist, a procession with the Blessed Sacrament was carried out, with a blessing asking for health. The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick was also administered to those in need. The photos below show scenes of some of these ceremonies, held at the Basilica of St. Joseph and the Sacred Heart in Mexico City; at the Church of St. Teresa and St. Joseph in Madrid; at the Mother of Good Counsel Church in Ypacaraí, Paraguay; and in the houses of the Heralds in Lima, Peru, and in the Brazilian cities of Salvador and Ponta Grossa.

Timothy Ring

Xavier Jacob
Paraguay

Ronny Fisher
Mexico

Xavier Jacob
Paraguay

Guilherme Abili
Ponta Grossa (Brazil)

Eric Salas
Spain

Xavier Jacob
Paraguay

Charles Batista
Salvador (Brazil)

Jano Arabena
Peru

Photos: Amish Coelho

Caieiras (Brazil) – With his words of wisdom, Emeritus Bishop of Lorena Benedito Beni dos Santos enriched the opening of the academic year of the St. Thomas Aquinas Theological Institute and the Aristotelian-Thomistic Philosophical Institute of the Heralds of the Gospel, on January 28. His Excellency spoke on the priesthood, the Eucharist and clerical celibacy.

Roberto Hernández

1

Flávio Grossi

2

Charles Batista

3

Sacrament of Confirmation – Young people and adults prepared by the Heralds of the Gospel received the Sacrament of Confirmation in February. Above, ceremonies held at St Helen's Parish, in San Salvador, El Salvador, by Archbishop Luigi Roberto Cona, the country's Apostolic Nuncio (photo 1); at Our Lady of Graces Parish, in Mairiporã (Brazil), by Most Rev. Sérgio Aparecido Colombo, Bishop of Bragança Paulista (photo 2); and at the house of the Heralds in the city of Salvador (Brazil), by Most Rev. Valter Magno de Carvalho, Auxiliary Bishop of this capital of Bahia (photo 3).

Photos: Délio Almeida

São Sebastião (Brazil) – In order to help the thousands of families left homeless due to the heavy rains that hit the north coast of São Paulo in February, the Heralds of the Gospel organized the collection of drinking water, food and clothing, which was distributed to the needy through the local parish.

Photos: Jano Aracena

Peru – On January 6, the Heralds of this Andean nation received the visit of Archbishop Paolo Rocco Gualtieri, Apostolic Nuncio to Peru, accompanied by Most Rev. Rastislav Zummer, Counsellor of the Apostolic Nunciature. On this occasion, the Cooperators' choir performed a musical performance in honour of the prelate.

Maria Fernanda Aguiar

1

Jovismar Peixoto

2

Fernando Machado

3

Omar Garcia

4

Valdeci da Silva

5

Spiritual retreats – Taking advantage of the Mardi Gras holiday, several spiritual retreats were held for cooperators and friends of the Heralds of the Gospel. In addition to lectures given by Herald priests and periods of meditation, participants had the chance to enjoy blessed encounters with Jesus in the Eucharist. The above photos offer scenes of the retreats preached in the Brazilian cities of Maringá (photo 1), Nova Friburgo (photo 2), Rio de Janeiro (photo 3) and Campos dos Goytacazes (photo 5), as well as in Bogotá, Colombia (photo 4).

Profile of newly professed religious in the US

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has published the results of a survey on the profile of American religious professing perpetual vows during the year 2022. The analysis was carried out by Georgetown University's Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, gathering revealing data on trends among young people embracing consecrated life today, demonstrating the importance of Catholic formation received in the family as the first impetus towards a religious vocation.

According to the survey, which interviewed one hundred and fourteen individuals from among the total of eighty men and eighty-eight women professed, the average age of the newly consecrated is thirty-three years. Of those interviewed, 84% declared they were children of Catholic parents, 91% were brought up within a united marriage and 30% had a priest or religious in the family. Furthermore, before embracing consecrated life, 70% of them prayed the Holy Rosary frequently and 77% participated in Eucharistic Adoration. As for education, 48% attended a Catholic school and 36% a Catholic university.

Fatima receives almost five million pilgrims

Throughout the year 2022, the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima in Portugal received a total of 4,937,294 pilgrims, which is an increase of 481.9% over 2021. The significant rise in number is largely due to overcoming the effects of the covid-19 pandemic.

According to the shrine's statistics, among the countries sending the most devotees are Spain, Poland, Italy, Ukraine, Brazil and the United States.

Reproduction

New prefect of the Vatican Library appointed

Fr. Mauro Mantovani, SDB, was recently appointed Prefect of the Vatican Apostolic Library.

The Salesian priest, a native of Moncalieri, Italy, holds a doctorate in Philosophy and Literature from the Pontifical University of Salamanca in Spain and in Theology from the *Angelicum* in Rome. He is a member of the Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas and of the Scientific Committee of the Holy See's Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties. Since 2007 he has been a full professor at the Salesian Pontifical University in Rome, where he has also held the posts of rector, vice-rector and dean of the Faculties of Philosophy and of Social Communication Sciences.

Disciplinary rules applauded by parents and students

Olga Narváez, principal of the Misael Pastrana Borrero School in the city of Rivera, Colombia, has strictly forbidden the use of mobile phones in the classroom, as well as amorous relationships between students during school hours.

In her speech laying out the rules governing the institution, Olga reminded parents, teachers and students that the behaviour manual includes these disciplinary rules and others along the same lines regarding the use of ball caps, piercing and the like, asserting that students enrolled in the school must obey the laws that govern it, or choose another educational institute in line with their personal preferences. The measures were welcomed with applause by the audience.

Thousands join Rosary procession in the streets of Madrid

Defying the secularism and incredulity of the modern world, over 3,000 people participated in the Rosary for the Youth of Spain, held in the city of Madrid on February 11. The multitude of devotees passed through several streets of the capital's downtown area toward Plaza de España, reciting the Rosary interspersed with religious hymns, while priests heard Confessions and blessed the passers-by who came to them.

The initiative, which has brought together religious and lay people for the third consecutive year, was attended by the Archbishop of Madrid, Cardinal Carlos Osoro Sierra, who encouraged the young people to "give public witness of our Faith."

Emilio Esteban-Hanza, one of the organizers of the event, stressed the importance of the presence of religious symbols in an increasingly secularized society, so that "they may remind everyone of the transcendent meaning of our lives, and that we are in this world with the goal of gaining Heaven."

US airport has new chapel

The Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, located in the American city of Atlanta and considered one of the busiest in the world, now has sacramental services and a chapel housing the Blessed Sacrament. The blessing of the site was performed by Metropolitan Archbishop Gregory John Hartmayer, OFM Conv, on February 13.

The chapel will remain open at all times, benefiting the more than three hundred thousand travellers and sixty-four thousand employees who pass through it daily.

Sacrilegious theft of consecrated Hosts in Italy

On January 27, a criminal forced open the door of the tabernacle and stole a silver ciborium containing more than fifty consecrated Hosts in the Basilica of St. Vincent and St. Catherine of Ricci, in the city of Prato, Italy. The Dominican nuns who care for the sanctuary noticed the damage on the door of the tabernacle and checked the footage from security cameras.

Despite the efforts of the carabinieri and the religious, the Hosts were not found. The Bishop of Prato, Most Rev. Giovanni Nerbini, expressed profound sadness for the sacrilegious act and the desire to promote an Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and a Mass in reparation for this latest desecration, which offends the Catholic Faith and the Real Presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

Young Christian woman attacked with acid in Pakistan

Sunita Masih, a nineteen-year-old woman from Pakistan, was brutally attacked with acid by her Muslim neighbour, Kamran Allah Bux, after she refused to accept his proposal of marriage and conversion to Islam. The young woman suffered burns to approximately 20 per cent of her body, which will leave her scarred for life.

Despite the efforts of numerous religious organizations and activists for the safety of Pakistani women belonging to religious minorities, between 2007 and 2022 more than one thousand five hundred similar assaults have been recorded.

facebook.com/ilgits/?fref=nf

Amid tragedy, a sign of hope

The catastrophic earthquake of magnitude 7.8 on the Richter scale that struck Turkey on February 6 left tens of thousands dead and missing, and immersed the country in a desolate panorama. However, one sign of hope stood tall amid the general devastation: in the city of Alexandretta, a statue of the Virgin Mary remained unscathed among the ruins of the Cathedral of the Annunciation, the main church of the Apostolic Vicariate of Anatolia.

"Now the living stones that need attention are here, and with God's help we can rebuild everything," Fr. Antuan Ilgit, SJ, declared as he shared photos of the surprising fact on social media.

Study published on the persecution of Christians in China

A report published on February 14 by the American organization China Aid, reveals discouraging data about the situation of Christians in China. The 63-page document assesses information gathered throughout the year of 2022 outlining the pressure exerted by the Chinese Communist Party. According to the study, the country's top officials have increasingly forced believers to submit to the government's political ideology, using means such as the systematic demolition of churches, penalizing worship gatherings with exorbitant fines, denying fundamental rights to Christian citizens, and arresting religious leaders who resist.

Especially alarming is the number of missing clerics – including bishops – and lay people. Many Catholics have been arbitrarily arrested throughout the country, receiving disproportionate sentences, with no right to defence, no medical care and are not permitted to contact their families.

Illustrations: Giuliana D'Amaro

A Good Piece of Advice!

The aircraft was being fuelled, and the final checks and adjustments had been made. But was everything really ready for take-off?

Maria Clara Custódio

"First Lieutenant Louis Laforge, your obedience, competence and good performance in training and combat has earned you a promotion. It is my honour to nominate you Captain Louis Laforge of the French Air Force!"

It is 1944, at the height of World War II. The news of such a promotion was a great honour in the thick of the battle. Since joining the army, Louis wanted nothing other than to give his best in the service of his homeland, cradle of heroic kings and examples of faith, such as St. Louis IX, and of valiant peasants who, with their eyes set on the triumph of the Catholic Faith, had willingly shed their blood in the Wars of the Vendée.

Captain Laforge had plenty of experience, having served in the Air Force for two decades. By now, starting the engine, adjusting the gun sights, checking the altitude and fuel reserve for the trip, and inspecting the operation of the aircraft were routine tasks that he performed with his eyes closed.

On April 30, the new captain was summoned to the major's office. As he went, his mind was filled with thoughts such as: "What campaign will he send me on? Being a shrewd military man, he must have chosen me for an airstrike on the enemy headquarters, or else a secret base, or even…" At each step a different possibility occurred to him.

He entered the room, saluted and remained at attention until the superior officer bid him be at ease.

"Out of consideration for your noble services to our division, I am going to grant you a privilege. Tomorrow a second lieutenant will arrive; his name is Bernard-Jean, and he has been assigned as your assistant. While he is under you orders, you must gradually instruct him in the art of war, so that he will become a good aviator, for he will be part of our team."

"But, Major, I have served in the Air Force for two decades and have never needed an assistant. I really don't feel that I need one now…"

"Captain Laforge, as we rise through the senior officer ranks, all of us, regardless of our years of service and our level of competence, need an assistant to take over some of our routine tasks so that we can devote ourselves to more important and specialized responsibilities. Everyone benefits from this. As much as your assistant may yet lack experience, I am sure that you, as well, will gain from his collaboration and learn valuable principles in command."

Not daring to raise any further objections, Louis saluted and responded to the instruction given:

"Yes sir!"

"You may withdraw."

The next morning, the new captain walked down to the front gate of the air base to meet his assistant. The young lieutenant was already waiting, his eyes scanning his surroundings, trying to spot his immediate superior. Louis approached and said:

"Are you Second Lieutenant Bernard-Jean?"

"Yes sir! At your orders! I am here for whatever may need to be done."

"Very good. We shall start in an hour."

The young man left, quickly got ready, and returned eagerly for duty. With each passing day, he learned everything that was passed on to him, and did his utmost to be an excellent assistant.

Three weeks later, the major gathered the officers and announced the upcoming engagement:

"Yesterday we received orders to attack an important enemy target. Thirty fighter planes will be deployed, and another transport plane will be used to take ammunition, supplies and equipment to the air base that will serve as our attack platform. And now for the assignment of commanders: Colonel Romuald will control one unit, First Lieutenant Laurent will coordinate…"

And the whole list was read. Lastly, the major designated:

"Captain Louis Laforge will be in charge of ammunition and supplies; Second Lieutenant Bernard-Jean will be at Laforge's service in whatever he needs. All those selected for commander roles should now meet with me separately for a detailed explanation of the plan."

"Well, look at that!" thought the captain to himself, "This ignorant underling is interfering with my opportunities. Just because I have to constantly supervise him, I end up being chosen for a second-rate mission! I could have been at the spearhead of the campaign, but instead I am slated as quartermaster… That is not what I was trained for!" Such were the bitter complaints that filled the captain's mind, but he maintained the outward demeanour of a perfect officer.

The next day, at dawn, everyone got into their respective aircraft. Laforge's plane was still being fuelled as the pilot adjusted the seat and made other necessary checks.

"Did you ask the mechanics to do a vital systems check?" asked his assistant.

"There is no need. I looked over everything myself before boarding, and made a few adjustments. From my years of experience, I can guarantee that we are ready to fly safely."

"Captain, you taught me that before any aeronautical operation, a technician should inspect the aircraft to ensure that everything is in shape for the mission. If there is a problem, it won't just affect us, but the whole campaign, which depends on the material we are carrying."

Louis, unwilling to admit that he had failed to observe proper procedure, replied impatiently:

"Lieutenant, if the mechanic's inspection would make you feel better, then call him! But be quick about it, because it is time for take-off."

Bernard set off at a run to fetch the specialist, and within five minutes they were both checking every part of the plane. In the meantime, Laforge muttered to himself: "Hmm… And what if they really do find a problem? What a terrible disgrace that would be!" But his self-love soon came to his defence: "No! I have enough experience to know that everything is fine! This boy is not going to prove me wrong. He is the one learning from me, not I from him!"

After inspecting Captain Laforge's plane, the mechanic discovered that there was, in fact, a problem with the aircraft

Louis answered the suggestion of his young assistant impatiently, annoyed at being questioned

"Captain, sir!" shouted the mechanic.

"What is it?"

"You will need to delay your departure. I found a propeller with a defective fitting. Now that is dangerous! It could come loose mid-flight and that would have very serious consequences…"

Trying to regain his wounded dignity, Laforge agreed.

With the repair completed, Louis and Bernard-Jean got into the into the cockpit to get ready for departure. This was the moment that called for a supreme act of courage from the captain – not to take flight and go into combat, but to overcome his own arrogance and practice an act of humility:

"Lieutenant Bernad-Jean," he whispered.

"At your orders, sir!"

"I need to thank you for your help. Today I learned a lesson that had escaped me in these two decades of service: we should never try to take everything on our own shoulders, passing over the help of those under our command. Juniors are also capable of teaching veterans, as long as they act out of loyal dedication to their ideal. Congratulations for the way you did your duty in a difficult situation, my friend! I appreciate the good advice!" ✧

The Saints of Each Day

1. Blessed Charles of Austria, king (†1922). Having suffered with Catholic heroism the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after the First World War, he died in exile on the island of Madeira, Portugal.

2. Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord.

St. Francis of Paola, hermit (†1507 Chateau de Plessis-les-Tours - France).

St. Theodora, virgin and martyr (†307). An eighteen-year-old girl arrested, tortured and thrown into the sea for her support and veneration of the Christians brought before the tribunal in Caesarea in Palestine.

3. St. Nicetas, abbot (†824). Hegumen of the Monastery of Medikion, in present-day Turkey, he suffered persecution for courageously defending the cult of sacred images.

4. St. Isidore of Seville, bishop and Doctor of the Church (†636 Seville - Spain).

St. Peter of Poitiers, bishop (†1115). Zealous for integrity and justice, he denounced and excommunicated King Philip I for irregularly contracting a second marriage.

5. St. Vincent Ferrer, priest (†1419 Vannes - France).

St. Irene, virgin and martyr (†304). Born in Thessalonica, she converted to Christianity along with her sisters Agape and Chionia, and She was burned alive during the persecution of Diocletian.

6. Holy Thursday. Institution of the Holy Eucharist.

Blessed Notkar the Stammerer, monk (†912). He spent almost all his life in the Abbey of St. Gall in what is now Switzerland, where he composed numerous liturgical poems. He was feeble of body but not of soul, impeded in speech but not of mind; assiduous in prayer, reading and meditation.

7. Good Friday.

St. John Baptist de La Salle, priest (†1719 Rouen - France).

St. Herman Joseph, priest (†1241/1252). Religious of the Premonstratensian monastery of Steinfeld, Germany, where he shone for his love of the Virgin Mary and devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

8. Holy Saturday.

Blessed Julian of St. Augustine, religious (†1606). Member of the Order of the Discalced Friars Minor, misunderstood for the way he practised austere penance.

9. Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord.

St. Casilda, virgin (†1075). Born a Mohammedan, she compassionately helped imprisoned Christians and then embraced the Christian life in hermitic solitude near Briviesca, Spain.

Reproduction

St. Marie de l'Incarnation Guyart - Fine Arts Museum, Quebec

10. Sts. Terence and companions, martyrs (†c. 250). During the persecution by Emperor Decius, they suffered cruel torments and were beheaded for practising the Christian Faith.

11. St. Stanislaus of Krakow, bishop and martyr (†1079 Krakow - Poland).

St. Gemma Galgani, virgin (†1905). A mystic ardently devoted to the Cross of Christ, she had the privilege of receiving the stigmata of the Passion.

12. St. Joseph Moscati, layman (†1927). A prestigious physician, he treated poor patients free of charge, and while providing medical assistance to bodies, he tried to strengthen souls. He died at the age of forty-seven in Naples, Italy.

13. St. Martin I, Pope and martyr (†656 Chersonesus - Ukraine).

Blessed Ida, widow (†1113). Mother of Godfrey of Bouillon. After the death of her husband, Eustace II, Count of Boulogne, France, she devoted herself entirely to works of piety and charity.

14. St. Bernard of Tiron, abbot (†1117). Superior of the abbey of Tiron, near Chartres, France, he instructed and guided his numerous disciples towards evangelical perfection.

15. St. Abundius, layman (†circa 564). He faithfully and humbly carried out the office of sacristan of St. Peter's Church, according to the testimony of Pope St. Gregory.

16. 2nd Sunday of Easter. Divine Mercy Sunday.

St. Benedict Joseph Labre, pilgrim (†1783). Having resolved to lead a life of penance, he undertook exhausting pilgrimages to famous shrines, poorly clothed and living on alms. He died in Rome at the age of 35.

17. St. Kateri Tekakwitha, virgin (†1680). A North American native Indian, she suffered ill-treatment and threats after being Baptized and offering her virginity to God. She died in a Christian community in Quebec.

18. Blessed Marie of the Incarnation Avrillot, religious (†1618). An exemplary mother, she embraced religious life after her husband's death and introduced the Carmelite reform in France, founding five monasteries.

19. St. Leo IX, Pope (†1054). As Bishop of Toul, France, he vigorously defended the rights of the Church. Elected Pope, he called several synods to reform the clergy and eradicate simony.

20. St. Anastasius of Antioch, bishop and martyr (†609). Patriarch of Antioch (present-day Turkey), cruelly murdered by hired assassins in the time of Byzantine Emperor Phocas.

21. St. Anselm, bishop and Doctor of the Church (†1109 Canterbury - United Kingdom).

St. Conrad of Parzham, religious (†1891). A young man from a prosperous family in Bavaria, Germany, he became a Capuchin and worked humbly for more than forty years as doorkeeper of the friary.

22. St. Senorina, abbess (†c. 980). A descendant of a noble family of Braga, Portugal, she took the habit in the Benedictine abbey of St. John of Vieira do Minho, of which she became superior.

St. Vincent Ferrer - National Art Museum, Catalonia (Spain)

23. 3rd Sunday of Easter.

St. George, martyr (†4th-century Palestine).

St. Adalbert, bishop and martyr (†997 Tenkitten - Russia).

Blessed Giles of Assisi, religious (†1262). Encouraged by the example of some friends, he became a disciple of St. Francis and accompanied him in his preaching.

24. St. Fidelis of Sigmaringen, priest and martyr (†1622 Seewis - Switzerland).

St. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier, virgin (†1868). To mercifully welcome women abandoning a life of public sin, called "Magdalenes", she founded the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Angers, France.

25. St. Mark, Evangelist.

St. John Piamarta, priest (†1913). He founded the Workman's Institute and the Congregation of the Holy Family of Nazareth in Brescia, Italy.

26. Our Lady of Good Counsel.

St. Cletus (†88). Second successor of St. Peter to preside over the Roman Church.

27. Blessed Catherine of Montenegro, virgin (†1565). Baptized as a girl in the Orthodox Church, she became a Dominican tertiary and lived for fifty-one years in a tiny cell next to the Church of St. Paul in Kotor, Montenegro.

28. St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort, priest (†1716 Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre - France).

St. Peter Chanel, priest and martyr (†1841 Futuna - Oceania).

Sts. Paul Pham Khac Khoan, John Baptist Dinh Van Thanh and Peter Nguyen Van Hieu, martyrs (†1840). Priest and catechists in Vietnam who were tortured and beheaded after being imprisoned for three years.

29. St. Catherine of Siena, virgin and Doctor of the Church (†1380 Rome).

St. Tychicus. Disciple of the Apostle St. Paul, who deserved to be called "beloved brother and faithful minister" (Eph 6:21).

30. 4th Sunday of Easter.

St. Pius V, Pope (†1572 Rome).

St. Marie de l'Incarnation Guyart, religious (†1672). As a young widow, she made her religious profession at the Ursuline convent in Tours, France, and later founded a house of her Order in Canada dedicated to the education of girls.

Like Grains of Sand?

There are beautiful aspects of sand that merit attention. However, one particular detail of its constitution can be a starting point to reflect on certain attitudes we adopt.

Sr. Paula Defanti, EP

Exposed to the scorching heat of the sun, which blazes at its maximum intensity, these almost insignificant granules of infertile earth make up the deserts and beaches spread over the face of the earth. Incapable even of retaining the high temperature that it receives for hours, sand is scattered in abundance throughout the continents, at the mercy of the winds, which can carry it far away from its original location.

Between one grain and another there is no connection, no brotherhood or bond, not the least mutual relationship. Each seems unaware of the extensive society of which it is part. Under the effect of water they come together, it is true, but they do not form a unity. They easily separate from each other, so as to remain *chacun dans sa chacunière*.[1]

There are beautiful aspects of sand that we could highlight, but let take this detail of its constitution as a starting point to reflect on certain attitudes we may have, and to ask ourselves whether they are good or bad, morally speaking.

As inanimate beings, these little grains are not aware of their "individualism", because it is a characteristic of the nature with which God created them. The same, however, does not apply to us when, in our social relationships, we live selfishly like grains of sand… Are we free from the evils that such behaviour implies?

All of us, without exception, have been inserted into a society: in a family, in our faith, at school, at work, in our circle of friendships, in a religious vocation… However, although we are in close proximity to others and may even perform some task or mission together with them, we can fall into the tendency to be concerned solely with our own interests, without establishing a true spiritual bond with others.

And this deplorable habit will not fail to have consequences… The first of them is the risk of never developing our personality. After all, we only reach our own fullness in contact with others, never alone.

Moreover, the selfish are prone to being carried along by any wind, to the detriment of their earthly and eternal life! Indeed, who among us would be able to overcome the sufferings of our present existence and reach Heaven relying only on our own strength? Ecclesiastes left us the following teaching: "For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up" (4:10).

If, on the contrary, we know how to lean on our neighbour in a relationship based on love of God, we will be unvanquished by adversity. Supporting one another and assuming as our own the other's weakness or joy, we will not be shaken by interior or exterior disasters but, united with our brothers and sisters in the Faith, we will stand fast, like a cliff that faces hurricanes and stormy seas unscathed. Let us examine the rock and we will see: it is firm because it is one solid piece; when it crumbles it becomes sand which is swept aimlessly wherever the wind carries it.

Let us make a resolution in this brief meditation: no egoism! Let us give ourselves to others, take an interest in them, and reinforce ties of true charity with our neighbour. Let us turn our gaze away from ourselves and towards those whom we can help. This decision will draw down graces for our sanctification and that of others, and will contribute to the fulfilment of God's plans in history. ✧

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[1] French expression that can be used to refer to selfish dispositions, in the sense of "each in his own little world."

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At top, Ahaggar Cultural Park (Algeria); beneath, different examples of grains of sand in the Museum of Wiesbaden (Germany). In background, sand from Morouzos beach, Ortigueira (Spain)

Contents

St. Gemma Galgani, photographed at age twenty-one

Reproduction

The physiognomy of St. Gemma Galgani expresses something other-worldly.

She is a physical, corporeal representation of the valiant woman of the Gospel: a rare pearl, of incomparable price, worth going to the ends of the universe to find.

Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira