



PROCLAIM

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Rising in Faith

EMBRACING THE RESURRECTION

Answering the Call

Pontifical Society of Saint Peter the Apostle

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Founded in 1889 by Jeanne Bigard and her mother Stephanie in response to a letter from a French Bishop in Japan asking for funds to provide for 50 young men preparing for the priesthood. Ever since its inception the Society supports mission vocations, both priestly and Religious.



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From discernment to commitment

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus,

As the joyous echoes of Easter resound in our hearts and minds, it is fitting to contemplate the profound implications of this sacred season, particularly as it intersects with the calling to priesthood and religious life. In the vibrant context of faith, Easter stands as the pinnacle, radiating hope, renewal, and the promise of eternal life.

Easter, at its core, encapsulates the transformative power of resurrection - a theme that resonates deeply with those discerning vocations to priesthood and religious life. The resurrection of Christ is not merely a historical event; it is a living reality that breathes new life into the very fabric of our existence. It serves as a beacon of light, inviting individuals to consider a life dedicated to the service of God and humanity.

In the midst of the Easter celebration, the call to religious vocations echoes with a renewed vigour. The empty tomb becomes a metaphorical canvas, inviting men and women to consider the emptiness of their own lives, waiting to be filled with purpose, meaning, and divine love. As the lilies bloom and the alleluias resound, so too do the seeds of vocation take root in the fertile soil of receptive hearts.

For those contemplating a life devoted to priesthood, Easter mirrors the journey from the darkness of discernment to the brilliance of commitment. The resurrection story challenges aspiring priests to rise above personal doubts, fears, and uncertainties, just as Christ emerged victorious over death. The path to priesthood is not without its trials, but the promise of resurrection infuses

every step with a profound sense of purpose and divine calling.

Likewise, for those considering religious life, Easter becomes a canvas on which the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience are painted. The risen Christ exemplifies a life of selflessness, sacrifice, and obedience to the will of the Father. Religious vocations are a testament to the belief that in letting go of the worldly, one gains the eternal — an exchange that finds its parallel in the resurrection narrative.

In the pages of the current *Proclaim* magazine, we celebrate the Easter season as a time of reflection, renewal, and rediscovery of the call to vocations. The stories of those who have embraced the priesthood or religious life serve as living testimonies to the transformative power of Easter. Through their journeys, we witness the resurrection of hope, faith, and love - a resurrection that beckons to all, inviting them to consider a life animated by the spirit of Christ.

As we bask in the glow of Easter's triumph, let us encourage and support those discerning vocations to priesthood and religious life. May the seeds of divine calling planted during this sacred season blossom into a garden of selfless service, unwavering faith, and boundless love — a testament to the enduring message of Easter and the profound impact it continues to have on lives devoted to the service of God and humanity.



Fr Dr Ambrose Pitchaimuthu

National Director (PMO-India)

The road to Easter Sunday

By Fr Dr J Anthony

St Athanasius the Great has remarked that through the resurrection of Jesus, death was trodden under feet and the light of his resurrection dispelled the doubts and anxieties of his disciples. He wrote: "If by the sign of the Cross, and by faith in Christ, death is trampled underfoot, it must be evident before the tribunal of truth that it is none other than Christ Himself that has displayed trophies and triumphs over death and made him lose all his



strength. And if, while previously death was strong, and ... terrible, now after the sojourn of the Saviour and the death and Resurrection of His body it is despised, it must be evident that death has been brought to nought and conquered by the very Christ that ascended the Cross. For as, if after night-time the sun rises, and the whole region of earth is illumined by him, it is at any rate not open to doubt that it is the sun who has revealed his light everywhere, that has also driven away the dark and given light to all things; so, now that death has come into contempt, and been trodden under foot, from the time when the Saviour's saving manifestation in the flesh and His death on the Cross took place, it must be quite plain that it is

the very Saviour that also appeared in the body, Who has brought death to nought, and Who displays the signs of victory over him day by day in His own disciples."

If the life of Christ had ended only on the cross, the promises and teachings of Christ would have remained empty words leading to despair of his disciples. After the death of Jesus on the cross, everything was hurried up to avoid any unconventional acts that would impede the celebration

of the paschal feast. Jesus was lowered from the cross and was given a quick burial without many solemnities and formalities of a regular Jewish burial. A huge stone had been rolled to cover his tomb. The disciples were disheartened to see the cruel end of their master. They decamped and quailed from their regular house of stay. The two days (Friday and Saturday) were full of agonies and sorrow. Pontius Pilot would have had a pricking conscience for surrendering an innocent man to the iniquitous group of high priests and the emotional mob of the Passover festival. They had rejoiced for achieving their treacherous plan to end the life of Jesus and his popularity among the Jews and Greeks. They thought that was the end of the story of Jesus, who succumbed to bloody death on the Cross.



Good Friday is the Road to Easter Sunday. There is no Easter Sunday without the Good Friday. Jesus on the cross already breathed his resurrection. It was not a mere last breath of his earthly life. The days after Good Friday, already began to change the melancholy of the disciples. The 'darkness' of their souls began to dissipate through the splendid rays of Easter Sunday.



Empty Tomb

The Empty tomb of Jesus stands out as a testimony of his resurrection. Stones of Sepulcher 'speak' aloud that the Lord is Risen. The empty tomb of Jesus is not empty but full of life, hope and joy. It has emptied all the unfounded allegations of the Sanhedrin and the Pharisees. What is so remarkable about the Empty Tomb of Jesus? In the history of the world, no man's tomb is declared to be empty. Only the tomb of Jesus had been declared empty. It has become a message of hope to his disciples. The resurrection of Jesus has overturned the connotation attached to the tomb of a person. Most of the time, the tomb of our parents, siblings and friends triggers sadness, despair, unhappiness, temporality, and impermanence. The tomb of Jesus conversely generated exuberance, joy, hope, faith in the words of Jesus, permanence of his presence etc. The empty tomb activated enthusiasm in his disciples, and they ran to have a hands-on experience about it. (Jn 20: 2-8). They saw the empty tomb and believed. The first testimony of the risen Christ is the empty tomb. There is an adage which goes like this: Lies cannot travel far because it has short legs. The lies and fabricated stories of the Pharisees about the resurrection of Jesus could not have a lasting impact on the lives of believers and followers of Jesus. They saw the empty tomb and believed that Jesus had risen and truly he was risen. In the pages of the gospels, all those who saw the empty tomb of Jesus (Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of

James, Salome, John and Peter), spoke about it to their brothers and sisters and it has done the rest of the communication about the resurrection of Jesus among the disciples.

Who will roll away the stone?

Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb? (Mk 16: 3) This was the predominant question and discussion of the women on the first day of the week while visiting the tomb of Jesus. Because a great stone was rolled to the door of the tomb (Mt 28: 61) to protect it. The chief priests had placed soldiers to secure and protect it by sealing the stone (Mt 28: 66). The women had no strength to move it and enter the tomb. They had carried the spices to fulfil the rituals of a decent burial according to Jewish customs and traditions. They had the goodwill and desire to honour Jesus' body, anoint it and pay their last respect to him. The stone was rolled away by the angel of God so that they may enter the tomb and witness the resurrection of Jesus and proclaim that he is no longer dead. As Jesus is alive, their hope and joy were resurrected. The darkness of the heart was dispelled as the sun's rays beamed into the tomb. The stone was rolled away not for the exit of Jesus from the tomb rather it was for the women and the disciples to enter into it. The resurrection of Jesus communicates to us that many of our brothers and sisters and those



weak, and marginalized look to someone to assist them in annihilating the injustice structures and roll away the huge/hurdle stone

that hinders rendering justice to them. The inhuman societal taboos and stigmas block their growth and deny them a decent and dignified living. It is a clarion call of the resurrected Jesus to roll away the stone that the 'weaker section of the society', children, women, physically challenged, Dalits, and elders enter into the mainstream of the society where equality, respect, dignity remain pivotal gears of their daily life to move on. They need the assistance of all those of goodwill and those in authority to play their role to roll down the stone of injustice and marginalization. The 'rolling away of the stone' is an act of empowerment and it is the commencement of a new life and new hope and it communicates that evil and injustice do not have the final word. In such an act of 'rolling away the stone', Love and Justice prevail despite being sometimes bleak and unrealistic. Resurrection is the beginning of a new creation. On this day, as the prophet says God makes a new heaven and a new earth. (St Gregory of Nyssa).

Love never ends - Why do you seek the living among the dead?

Life never ends because love never ends. Mary Magdalene and Mary mother of James ran to the tomb out of love for their master and to anoint his body. Their hearts, ears and eyes were always fixed on their Saviour. They loved him and believed in the commencement of the Kingdom of God. Having seen his death on the cross, their calculation on the prospectus future of the Kingdom of God began to deplete. The resurrection of Jesus sent a vibrant message that love does not end and that death on the cross is not the end of his message but a witness to his words and deeds. Death cannot prevail over love. To those who love every bit of life is precious. The resurrected Jesus taught them to see life and the prospective future of the Kingdom of God. The men in dazzling clothes at the tomb of Jesus said to the women, "why do look for the living among the dead?" The life cannot be sought among the dead materials. The women were given clues to search for him among his disciples, on the regular street he treads, the marketplaces he visits, the vineyards he admires, the lake Galilee where he called his disciples, in the land of Gennesaret where he

healed the sick etc. These words of two men caution us not to search for the meaning of our life and existence amidst the inert, momentary pleasures, things that cannot germinate life (Pope Francis, General Audience on 23.04.2014). The resurrected Christ appeared to his disciples in the ordinary life experiences



and expressed his solidarity in their daily toils and anxieties: Dining with the disciples and preparing the fish for their breakfast was a precious moment that he had used to convince his disciples that he had risen (Jn 21: 10-12); The miraculous catch after night-long toil and disappointment (Jn 21: 1-14); Conversing with the disciples treaded with fear of Jews and strengthened them with peace and the spirit of hope and forgiveness (Jn 20 : 19-23); Simple and timely consoling words to Mary Magdalene --- "women why are you weeping?" (Jn 20:15); Accompaniment with the disciples on their walk to Emmaus (Lk 24: 13-35); By the exhibition of his scars and wounds Jesus made it clear to his disciples that the same Christ who was crucified stood before them and the suffering has an end. Let us proclaim through daily acts of our life that the risen lord has victory over despair, death, confusion, fear, doubt and failure. Let the hope of Easter inspire us to find peace, joy and strength.

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Waiting leads to the Lord

Pope Francis' message at the Holy Mass with the members of the institutes of Consecrated Life and the societies of Apostolic Life on Friday, 02 February 2024, at St Peter's Basilica



While the people waited for the Lord's salvation the prophets announced his coming, as the prophet Malachi proclaims, "the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming." (3:1). Simeon and Anna are the image and figure of this longing. Upon seeing the Lord enter his temple, they are enlightened by the Holy Spirit and recognize him as the child whom Mary carries in her arms. They had been waiting for him all their lives: Simeon, "righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him" (Lk 2:25); Anna, who "did not depart from the temple" (Lk 2:37).

It is good for us to look at these two elders who were waiting patiently, vigilant in spirit and persevering in prayer. Their hearts have stayed awake, like an eternal flame. They are advanced in age, but young at heart. They do not let the days wear them down, for their eyes remain fixed on God in expectation (cf. Ps 145:15). Fixed on God in expectation, always in expectation. Along life's journey, they have experienced hardships and disappointments, but they have not given in to defeat: they have not "retired" hope. As they contemplate the child, they recognize that the time has come, the prophecy has been fulfilled, the One they sought and yearned for, the

Messiah of the nations, has arrived. By staying awake in expectation of the Lord, they are able to welcome him in the newness of his coming.

... *waiting for God* is also important for us, for our faith journey. Every day the Lord visits us, speaks to us, reveals himself in unexpected ways and, at the end of life and time, he will come. He himself exhorts us to stay awake, to be vigilant, to persevere in waiting. Indeed, the worst thing that can happen to us is to let "our spirit doze off", to let the heart fall sleep, to anesthetize the soul, to lock hope away in the dark corners of disappointment and resignation.

.....I think of us Christians today: are we still capable of waiting? Are we not at times too caught up in ourselves, in things and in the intense rhythm of daily life to the point of forgetting God who always comes? Are we not too enraptured by our good works, which runs the risk of turning even religious and Christian life into having "many things to do" and neglecting the daily search for the Lord?We must recognize at times that we have lost *the ability to wait*. This is due to several obstacles, of which I would like to highlight two.

The first obstacle that makes us lose the ability to wait is *neglect of the interior life*. This is



what happens when weariness prevails over amazement, when habit takes the place of enthusiasm, when we lose perseverance on the spiritual journey, when negative experiences, conflicts or seemingly delayed fruits turn us into *bitter and embittered people*. It is not good to ruminate on bitterness, because ... bitter and “sour-faced” people are deflating, [they] seem to have vinegar in their hearts. It is necessary then to recover the lost grace: to go back and, through an intense interior life, return to the spirit of joyful humility, of silent gratitude. This is nourished by adoration, by the work of the knees and the heart, by concrete prayer that struggles and intercedes, capable of reawakening a longing for God, that initial love, that amazement of the first day, that taste of waiting.

The second obstacle is *adapting to a worldly lifestyle*, which ends up taking the place of the Gospel. Ours is a world that often runs at great speed, that exalts “everything and now,” that is consumed in activism and seeks to exorcise life's fears and anxieties in the pagan temples of consumerism or in entertainment at all costs. In such a context, where silence is banished and lost, waiting is not easy, for it requires an attitude of healthy passivity, the courage to slow our pace, to not be overwhelmed by activities, to make room within ourselves for God's action. Let us be careful, then, that the spirit of the world does not enter our religious communities, ecclesial life and our individual journey, otherwise we will not bear fruit. The Christian life and apostolic mission need the experience of waiting. Matured in prayer and daily fidelity, waiting frees us from the myth of efficiency, from the obsession with performance and, above all, from the pretense of



pigeonholing God, because he always comes in unpredictable ways, he always comes at times that we do not choose and in ways that we do not expect.

..... Sisters, brothers, let us cultivate in prayer the spirit of waiting for the Lord and learn about the proper “passivity of the Spirit”: thus, we will be able to open ourselves to the newness of God.

Like Simeon, let us also pick up this child, the God of newness and surprises. By welcoming the Lord, the past opens up to the future, the old in us opens up to the new that he awakens. This is not easy, we know this, because, in religious life as in the life of every Christian, it is difficult to go against the “force of the old”. “It is not easy for the old man in us to welcome the child, the new one – to welcome the new one, in our old age to welcome the new one – ... The newness of God presents itself as a child and we, with all our habits, fears, misgivings, envies, – let us think of envies! – worries, come face to face with this child. Will we embrace the child, welcome the child, make room for the child? Will this newness really enter our lives or will we rather try to combine old and new, trying to let ourselves be disturbed as little as possible by the presence of God's newness?” (C.M. MARTINI, *Something So Personal. Meditations on Prayer*, Milan 2009, 32-33).



Brothers and sisters, these questions are for us, for each of us, for our communities and for the Church. Let us be restless, let us be moved by the Spirit, like Simeon and Anna. If, like them, we live in expectation, safeguarding our interior life and in conformity with the Gospel, if, like them, we live in expectation, we will embrace Jesus, who is the light and hope of life. ♦

Urgency of boosting religious vocations in India

By Sr Dr Metti Amirtham, SCC

In contemporary India, consecrated religious life remains profoundly significant despite evolving cultural and religious



landscapes. Those who choose this path are invaluable assets to both India and the broader Church, embodying a deep commitment to Christ and selflessly

dedicating themselves to serving others. Engaged in diverse ministries locally and internationally, they make significant contributions to education, healthcare, evangelisation, and social and pastoral care, enriching countless lives.

Their consecrated lives, modelled after Jesus Christ, stand in stark contrast to prevailing societal trends of consumerism, corruption, and individualism. Embracing lives of poverty, chastity, and obedience, they promote a 'culture of enough,' 'interdependence' and 'respect for humanity and nature.' However, recent statistics reveal a concerning decline in new vocations, prompting urgent discussions on the need to nurture religious vocations across India.

This decline poses significant challenges to the spiritual fabric of Indian society, endangering the essential roles religious institutions play in providing moral guidance, social cohesion, and humanitarian outreach. Without replenishing new vocations, these institutions risk diminishing their impact on society, threatening their long-standing contributions to community welfare and upliftment. Recognising the urgency of this issue, religious congregations and church institutions are to seriously identify the causes and factors leading to dwindling vocations. They need to prioritise efforts to address the decline in vocations while acknowledging the critical importance of

sustaining religious life for the future vitality and resilience of Indian society.

Exploring the decrease

There are several reasons why fewer people are choosing to become religious in India, especially in some parts of India. One big reason is that families are changing. Families are getting smaller, and more women are working outside the home. Because of these changes, families aren't encouraging their children to join religious congregations as much as they used to.

Also, changes in Indian culture are making it harder for people to decide to become religious. Some families worry about discrimination based on their caste if their children join religious congregations. And with TV, internet, and smartphones, religious values are becoming less important to young people. This makes it less appealing for them to choose a religious life.

Another reason is that the religious order itself isn't doing enough to attract young people. Some of the Catholic faithful feel like the priests and nuns are not connecting with young people and are not being God-centred role models. They are too busy with their work, finding very little time to spend with young people and showing them why religious life is meaningful.

Lastly, how religious congregations form new members might also be part of the problem. Some people feel like the training and formation are too strict and do not give candidates a conducive atmosphere to grow as normal human beings, or the formators do not understand the mentality of today's Z generation. Unrealistic expectations and inflexibility from the formators can push candidates away from joining.

It's essential for religious orders to accept new members as they are and help them grow into their roles.

Overall, there are many reasons why fewer people are becoming religious in India. Families,



culture, religious groups, and the training process all play a part. To change this trend, it will take a lot of effort from everyone involved to make religious life more attractive to future generations.

Innovative approaches to vocation facilitation in religious life:

In accordance with the Synodal principles of communion, participation, and mission, it is crucial for priests and religious to reassess their congregation's charism and actively endeavour to exemplify it. They should promote a change in mindset and outlook to cultivate an inclusive and respectful atmosphere for individuals undergoing discernment of a religious calling during their development. Below, we will outline specific measures to enhance the effectiveness of vocation facilitation.

Create holistic vocation promotion plans

Design well-rounded programmes to nurture vocations within religious communities. These programmes should include a range of activities, such as actively reaching out to prospective candidates through personal invitations or targeted events, arranging retreats designed explicitly for discernment, organising motivational and informative sessions to inspire individuals about religious life, and providing personalised mentorship to guide individuals through their discernment process. For instance, establishing a mentorship program where experienced members of the religious community offer one-on-one guidance to those considering a vocation or hosting informational workshops that address common questions and concerns about religious life.

Maximise digital platforms

Make full use of social media and online channels to expand the scope of vocation promotion endeavours. Utilise these platforms to share insights into religious life through engaging content, highlight personal stories of individuals who have pursued vocations, and provide practical resources to aid in the discernment process. For example, creating a series of short videos featuring testimonials from religious and clergy members discussing

their calling, hosting live Q&A sessions on social media platforms with spiritual advisors, and developing an interactive website with articles, videos, and quizzes to help individuals explore their vocational path.

Connect with youth and young adults

Engage proactively with younger generations through specific outreach activities like organising youth retreats, hosting seminars on vocational discernment, and facilitating interactive workshops on spirituality. For instance, establish a regular youth group meeting where participants can openly discuss their spiritual journey and receive guidance from mentors. This approach creates an environment that fosters meaningful connections and encourages the exploration of religious vocations.

Partner with parishes and schools

Collaborate closely with nearby churches and educational establishments to embed vocation promotion within their current activities. Integrate conversations about religious vocations into catechism lessons, youth group meetings, and school gatherings to consistently expose young individuals to the possibilities within religious life. For example, organising joint events with a local parish to host career fairs where representatives from religious orders share insights into their vocations alongside other career paths or inviting religious speakers to address students during school assemblies about their experiences and journeys in religious life.



Provide personalized guidance and support

Offer individualised guidance and support to individuals discerning a religious vocation. Provide opportunities for one-on-one meetings with vocation directors, spiritual direction, and tailored discernment retreats to address the unique needs of each discerning individual. For example, setting up regular check-ins with a spiritual advisor to discuss progress and challenges, arranging retreats focused on

contemplative practices tailored to the preferences of each participant, and providing access to resources such as books or online courses that align with individual interests and questions.

Facilitate vocational awareness initiatives

Plan and execute events to promote awareness of vocations, such as Vocation Sunday gatherings, dedicated Vocation Awareness Weeks, and thematic retreats centred on vocational discernment. These initiatives are crucial in informing and motivating individuals to explore religious life as a meaningful vocation. For instance, hosting a Vocation Sunday event featuring guest speakers sharing personal stories of their calling, organising a week-long series of workshops and discussions during Vocation Awareness Week, or arranging a specialised retreat focused on discerning vocations for young adults interested in religious life.

Foster vocational discernment communities

Create inclusive groups dedicated to vocational discernment within religious communities, parishes, and educational institutions. These communities offer a safe and supportive space for individuals to explore their calling alongside others who share similar aspirations, promoting a sense of camaraderie and mutual encouragement.

For example, forming a weekly discussion group at a parish where individuals can explore questions of vocation and spirituality together, establishing a student-led club at a school focused on discerning life's purpose and calling, or organising retreats specifically for young adults interested in exploring religious vocations, providing opportunities for shared reflection and guidance.

Provide practical support for discernment

Create and disseminate a range of resources to assist individuals in their vocational discernment journey, such as books, articles, videos, and podcasts. These resources should offer practical advice and valuable insights to help individuals navigate the complexities of discernment. For instance,

making a list of good books about finding one's purpose and growing spiritually, recording videos where people talk about how they found their calling, gathering articles about different parts of religious life and finding their purpose, and making podcasts with interviews from experts who know a lot about spirituality and finding their purpose.

Highlight inspirational role models

Share the narratives and journeys of exemplary religious who exemplify the principles and virtues of religious life. These role models offer valuable inspiration and motivation for those considering a vocation, illustrating the joys and fulfilment derived from religious dedication.

For instance, featuring the life story of a compassionate religious sister who has dedicated her life to serving the needy, sharing the experiences of a devoted priest who has positively impacted his community through his ministry, or showcasing the achievements of a spiritual leader who advocates for social justice and equality. These examples can serve as tangible illustrations of the transformative power and fulfilment found in religious service, inspiring others to explore similar paths.

Foster a culture of vocation within religious communities

Build a welcoming environment in religious communities where promoting vocations is seen as important. Encourage everyone to play a part by praying for those discerning vocations, offering mentorship, and showing hospitality to those exploring their calling. This creates a space where people feel supported and empowered to discern and pursue vocations. For instance, organising regular prayer sessions specifically focused on vocations within the community, establishing mentorship programs where experienced members guide those considering vocations, and ensuring newcomers are warmly welcomed and encouraged to explore their potential callings.

By implementing these concrete suggestions, religious institutions can enhance their initiatives to promote vocations and foster a lively and flourishing religious community that will continue to thrive for years to come. ♦

To hear His call to “come and see”

By Fr Dr Merlin Rengith Ambrose

Introduction

We are beginning our holiday. After a hectic schedule of preparation for the exams at school, we are looking forward to our long-awaited and much-deserving holiday. It is during these months, most of the students choose the path for their future. Amidst several vocations in the secular world, God has called us to three forms of special vocations: Priestly and religious life, single blessedness, and married life. It is a month when the representatives of different religious congregations are aggressively campaigning to groups of young people through vocation symposiums, forums and informal meetings. Many of us worry about vocations in the Church. Will we have enough priests? Will there be sisters and brothers and consecrated men and women to serve the Church? Some even call it a crisis.

What is vocation?

What is a vocation? The word vocation comes from the Latin word “vocatio” which is translated into English as a “call” or “summons”. In other words, vocation is a call from God who is the source of every vocation in life.

“Vocation” should not be understood restrictively, as referring simply to those who follow the Lord through a life of special consecration. All of us are called to share in Christ's mission to reunite a fragmented humanity and to reconcile it with God. Each man and woman receives with the gift of life a fundamental calling: each of us is a creature willed and loved by God; each of us has a unique and special place in the mind of God. At every



moment of our lives, we are called to foster this divine spark and thus contribute to the growth of a humanity inspired by

love and mutual acceptance. We are called to be guardians of one another, to strengthen the bonds of harmony and sharing, and to heal the wounds of creation lest its beauty be destroyed.

In a word, we are called to become a single family in the marvellous common home of creation, in the reconciled diversity of its elements. In this



broad sense, not only individuals have a “vocation”, but peoples, communities and groups of various kinds as well. (Message of his Holiness Pope Francis, 2022).

A call within the call

Within this great common vocation, God addresses a particular call to each of us. He touches our lives with his love and directs them to our ultimate goal, to fulfilment that transcends the very threshold of death. That is how God wanted to see our lives and how he sees them still. Michelangelo Buonarroti is said to have maintained that every block of stone contains a statue within it, and it is up to the sculptor to uncover it. If that is true of an artist, how much more is it true of God! In the young woman of Nazareth, he saw the Mother of God. In Simon the fisherman he saw Peter, the rock on which he would build his Church. In the publican Levi he recognized the apostle and evangelist Matthew, and in Saul, a harsh persecutor of Christians, he saw Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles.

That is what happens in every vocation: we are met by the gaze of God, who calls us. Vocation, like holiness, is not an extraordinary experience reserved for a few. Just as there is a “holiness of the saints next door” (Gaudete et Exsultate, nos. 6-9), so too there is a vocation for everyone, for God's gaze and call is directed to every person. According to a proverb from the Far East, “a wise person, looking at the egg can

see an eagle; looking at the seed he glimpses a great tree; looking at the sinner he glimpses a saint". That is how God looks at us: in each of us, he sees a certain potential, at times unbeknownst to ourselves, and throughout our lives he works tirelessly so that we can place this potential at the service of the common good.

Religious or priestly vocation

What is a religious/priestly vocation? This type of vocation can be traced back as early as the New Testament, when Jesus affirmed that there are people who "made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it." (Matthew 19:12) The call to religious/priestly life is always God's initiative, i.e., for the sake of the Kingdom of God. That is why Jesus chose his twelve apostles who were his close collaborators in order to continue his mission of spreading the good news of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 10:1-4/Luke 6:12-16). The initiative always comes from God, hence priestly vocation is a gift from God to the Church and to the world at large.

Christian home – the first seminary

Where does this seed of religious/priestly vocation begin to grow? The first seminary is the Christian home. It is the place where God's presence and love are experienced by the child through the generous self-giving and witnessing of the Christian parents. Let us also remember that priestly vocations spring from the families where married couples belong. The kind of



The Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium no. 11, affirms that the family is a "domestic church"



and in it the parents as the first educators of the faith, through their words and example, should foster religious vocation. In other words, the family as the "seedbed of vocation" is the primary locus where God's call to religious vocation

begins to develop. If vocation is everyone's concern, the family must take the lead. "The Christian family, in fact, is the first community called to announce the Gospel to the human person during growth and to bring him or her, through a progressive education and catechesis, to full human and Christian maturity" (Familiaris Consortio no. 2).

The Vatican through the Dicastery for the Clergy published in 2016 new guidelines for seminary formation under the title: "The Gift of Priestly Vocation" and has a Latin name: "Ratio Fundamental Institutionis Sacerdotalis" (RFIS). In this document, the Dicastery underlines the significance of a solid formation which begins from a community. But what is this community being referred to by the new Ratio? The RFIS no. 149 says: "The vocation usually grows within the context of a community, in which the seminarian has had a significant experience of faith." What is more enlightening and challenging is that this priestly vocation needs nurturance and support from the community where he belongs. The Ratio continues: "Both the family and the parish of origin, or the parish to which he belongs, as well as other ecclesial communities, contribute significantly to sustaining and nourishing the vocation of those called to the priesthood" (RFIS no. 149).

The call tried out in the seminary

However, for the seed of vocation to grow to maturity there is a need for a nurturing community which we call seminary whose primary objective is to form the mind and hearts of young men for them to become priests according to the likeness of Jesus. The seminary is the place of formation that nourishes the seed of vocation through daily prayers especially the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, regular



recourse to the sacrament of reconciliation, and other spiritual activities. The seminarians undergo intellectual training by developing study habit and critical thinking through philosophical studies. They are trained to become men for others by instilling in them the love for service through pastoral and manual work. Thereby seminary is a place wherein seminarians must grow to maturity in making a choice in their life through a discernment process within the whole period of seminary formation. Thus priestly life is also a choice to become Alter Christus (other Christ) or a kind of configuration into the person of Christ.

What is my vocation?

As vocation month is celebrated every May, let us rediscover our vocation in life, as what God wants us to do. In these months of April and May, mostly week-long celebrations are held to promote vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, and consecrated life through prayer and education, and to renew our prayers and support for those considering one of these particular vocations. We must pray and act for vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Everyone's priority must not be material affluence but spiritual growth. Hence, we need more spiritual leaders to inspire and show us the way. Vocation is realized in the history of each person and is the most intense way of living divine love. When I discover God's love for me, I place myself in the school of Jesus, which teaches us to build the Kingdom of God. For this, it is necessary to discern, to be attentive to the signs of the times, and to ask oneself: What is God's call in my history? In what way can I help the world to be better? Where and how do I fulfill myself as a human being, a child of God?

God loves each one of us. It is important to keep in mind that it is God who takes the initiative to call us to this communion with Him. The vocation of the prophet Isaiah, who

recognizes God's call and is aware that God calls him out of love. Like the prophet, we are invited to respond to that same call positively. The discovery of a vocation takes place when I feel loved by God and love my life story. In this way, it is possible to open up a horizon of meaning for the realization of the mission that God entrusts to us. Through baptism, we are introduced into the great family of the Father and we courageously place ourselves on the path of Jesus to face the challenges that life presents us. In this sense, action also means love because a vocation without love is not a vocation.

Conclusion

In a special way, we are asked to support them not only in their material needs but also with our prayers. May the young be daring to respond generously to God's call and not be afraid to seek what is different, because to be religious today is to seek to live the difference in the midst of what society often offers. The process of vocational accompaniment is a time of great self-discovery. It is also a time of discernment in the face of the calls that existence itself makes to us. Allow yourselves to be thrown into the deepest waters. Religious life is a life choice that leads us to consecrate ourselves totally to God, to make of our life, of our history, a giving of love to the Absolute. To spend one's youth and one's life for the Gospel is to make one's life a gift to God and neighbour.



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Towards a fully human communication

Pope Francis' message for World Day of Social Communications 2024

The development of systems of artificial intelligence ... is radically affecting the world of information and communication, and through it, certain foundations of life in society. This leads inevitably to deeper questions about the nature of human beings, our distinctiveness and the future of the species *homo sapiens* in the age of artificial intelligence. How can we remain fully human and guide this cultural transformation to serve a good purpose?



Starting with the heart

Before all else, we need to set aside catastrophic predictions and their numbing effects. A century ago, Romano Guardini reflect[ing] ... on technology and humanity... urged us not to reject “the new” in an attempt to “preserve a beautiful world condemned to disappear”. At the same time, he prophetically warned that “we are constantly in the process of becoming. We must enter into this process, each in his or her own way, with openness but also with sensitivity to everything that is destructive and inhumane therein”.

At this time in history, which risks becoming rich in technology and poor in humanity, our reflections must begin with the human heart. Only by adopting a spiritual way of viewing reality, only by recovering a wisdom of the heart, can we confront and interpret the newness of our time and rediscover the path to a fully human communication. In the Bible, the heart is seen as the place of freedom and decision-making. It symbolizes integrity and unity, but it also engages our emotions, desires, dreams; it is, above all, the inward place of our encounter with God. Wisdom of the heart, then, is the virtue that enables us to integrate the whole and its parts, our decisions and their consequences, our nobility and our vulnerability, our past and our future, our individuality and our membership within a larger community.

This wisdom of the heart lets itself be found by those who seek it and be seen by those who love it; it anticipates those who desire it and it goes in search of those who are worthy of it (cf. *Wis 6:12-16*). It accompanies those willing to take advice (cf. *Prov 13:10*), those

endowed with a docile and listening heart (cf. *1 Kg 3:9*). A gift of the Holy Spirit, it enables us to look at things with God's eyes, to see connections, situations, events and to uncover their real meaning. Without this kind of wisdom, life becomes bland, since it is precisely wisdom – whose Latin root *sapere* is related to the noun *sapor* – that gives “savour” to life.

Opportunity and danger

Such wisdom cannot be sought from machines. Although the term “artificial intelligence” has now supplanted the more correct term, “machine learning”, ... the very use of the word “intelligence” can prove misleading. No doubt, machines possess a limitlessly greater capacity than human beings for storing and correlating data, but human beings alone are capable of making sense of that data. It is not simply a matter of making machines appear more human, but of awakening humanity from the slumber induced by the illusion of omnipotence, based on the belief that we are completely autonomous and self-referential subjects, detached from all social bonds and forgetful of our status as creatures.

Human beings have always realized that they are not self-sufficient and have sought to overcome their vulnerability by employing every means possible. From the earliest prehistoric artifacts, used as extensions of the arms, and then the media, used as an extension of the spoken word, we have now become capable of creating highly sophisticated machines that act as a support for thinking. Each of these instruments, however, can be abused by the primordial temptation to become *like* God



without God (cf. *Gen* 3), that is, to want to grasp by our own effort what should instead be freely

received as a gift from God, to be enjoyed in the company of others.

Depending on the inclination of the heart, everything within our reach becomes either an opportunity or a threat. Our very bodies, created for communication and communion, can become a means of aggression. So too, every technical extension of our humanity can be a means of loving service or of hostile domination.

Artificial intelligence systems can help to overcome ignorance and facilitate the exchange of information between different peoples and generations. For example, they can render accessible and understandable an enormous patrimony of written knowledge from past ages or enable communication between individuals who do not share a common language. Yet, at the same time, they can be a source of “cognitive pollution”, a distortion of reality by partially or completely false narratives, believed and broadcast as if they were true. We need but think of the long-standing problem of disinformation in the form of fake news, which today can employ “deepfakes”, namely the creation and diffusion of images that appear perfectly plausible but false ... or of audio messages that use a person's voice to say things which that person never said. The technology of simulation behind these programmes can be useful in certain specific fields, but it becomes perverse when it distorts our relationship with others and with reality.

Starting with the first wave of artificial intelligence, that of social media, we have experienced its ambivalence: its possibilities but also its risks and associated pathologies. The second level of generative artificial intelligence unquestionably represents a qualitative leap. It is important therefore to understand, appreciate and regulate instruments that, in the wrong hands could lead to disturbing scenarios. Like every other product of human intelligence

and skill, algorithms are not neutral. For this reason, there is a need to act preventively, by proposing models of ethical regulation, to forestall harmful, discriminatory and socially unjust effects of the use of systems of artificial intelligence and to combat their misuse for the purpose of reducing pluralism, polarizing public opinion or creating forms of groupthink.

Growth in humanity

All of us are called to grow together, in humanity and as humanity. We are challenged to make a qualitative leap in order to become a complex, multiethnic, pluralistic, multireligious and multicultural society. We are called to reflect carefully on the theoretical development and the practical use of these new instruments of communication and knowledge. Their great possibilities for good are accompanied by the risk of turning everything into abstract calculations that reduce individuals to data, thinking to a mechanical process, experience to isolated cases, goodness to profit, and, above all, a denial of the uniqueness of each individual and his or her story.

The digital revolution can bring us greater freedom, but not if it imprisons us in models that nowadays are called “echo chambers”. In such cases, rather than increasing a pluralism of information, we risk finding ourselves adrift in a mire of confusion, prey to the interests of the market or of the powers that be. It is unacceptable that the use of artificial intelligence should lead to groupthink, to a gathering of unverified data, to a collective editorial dereliction of duty. The representation of reality in “big data”, however useful for the operation of machines, ultimately entails a substantial loss of the truth of things, hindering interpersonal communication and threatening our very humanity. Information cannot be separated from living relationships.....

Here I think of the reporting of wars and the “parallel war” being waged through campaigns of disinformation. I think too of all those reporters who have been injured or killed in the line of duty in order to enable us to see what they

...Continued on Page 17

Discerning the validity of the sacraments

By Courtney Mares

The Vatican Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF) released a note on Saturday on discerning the validity of the sacraments.

The new document signed by Pope Francis and DDF Prefect Cardinal Victor Fernández is titled “Gestis Verbisque,” or “Deeds and Words.”

Fernández wrote in his introduction to the text that the note on the sacraments was written “to help bishops in their task as promoters and custodians of the liturgical life of the particular Churches entrusted to them.”

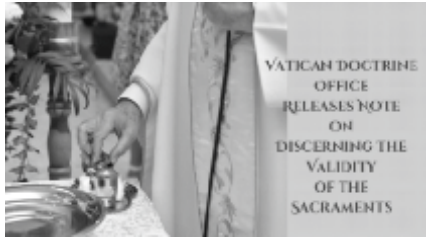
“The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith intends to offer in this note some elements of a doctrinal nature with regard to discernment on the validity of the celebration of the sacraments, paying attention also to some disciplinary and pastoral implications,” he wrote.

The 11-page text published only in Italian on Feb. 3 reiterates that for all sacraments in the Catholic Church, the “observance of both matter and form has always been required for the validity of the celebration.”

“Both matter and form, summarized in the Code of Canon Law, are established in the liturgical books promulgated by the competent authority, which must therefore be faithfully observed, without ‘adding, removing, or changing anything,’” it says.

The document adds that arbitrary changes to either matter or form “jeopardize the effective bestowal of sacramental grace, to the obvious detriment of the faithful” and that the “severity and invalidating force” of such changes “must be ascertained on a case-by-case basis.”

“Gestis Verbisque” frequently refers to the dicastery’s 2020 doctrinal note on the modification of the sacramental formula of baptism, which clarified that the changing the words to the baptismal formula to “we baptize you” invalidated the baptism, requiring anyone



who had been baptized with this formula to be considered as not yet having received the sacrament. Fernández writes that in 2022 cardinals and bishops taking part in the DDF’s January plenary assembly had already

expressed concern about “the multiplication of situations in which they were forced to note the invalidity of the sacraments celebrated.”

Specific examples, listed by the cardinal, include using “I baptize you in the name of the Creator ...” or “In the name of your father and mother ... we baptize you,” instead of the established baptismal formula.

“While in other areas of the Church’s pastoral action there is ample room for creativity, such inventiveness in the context of the celebration of the sacraments turns rather into a ‘manipulative will’ and therefore cannot be invoked,” the cardinal prefect said.

“We ministers are therefore required to have the strength to overcome the temptation to feel like owners of the Church,” Fernández added.

The cardinal later commented that when the priest acts “in persona Christi capitis,” it does not mean that the priest is “the boss” with the ability to exercise arbitrary power, but that Christ alone is “the head of the body, the Church,” citing Colossians 1:18.

“It seems increasingly urgent to mature an art of celebrating that, keeping at a distance as much from rigid rubricism as from unbridled imagination, leads to a discipline to be respected, precisely in order to be authentic disciples,” Fernández said.

Pope Francis approved the text of the DDF note during a private audience with Fernández on Jan. 31 after the note was discussed and



unanimously approved by the cardinals and bishops who attended the dicastery's recent January plenary assembly.

Fernández and Monsignor Armando Matteo, the secretary for the dicastery's doctrinal section, signed the note on Feb. 2, the feast of the Presentation of the Lord.

“Precisely by constituting the Church as his mystical body, Christ makes believers partakers of his own life, uniting them to his

death and resurrection in a real and mysterious way through the sacraments,” the note says.

“Indeed, the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit acts in the faithful through sacramental signs, making them living stones of a spiritual edifice, founded on the cornerstone that is Christ the Lord, and constituting them as a priestly people, partakers of the one priesthood of Christ.”

Source: catholicnewsagency.com 04.02.2024 ♦

Continued from Page 15: Towards a fully human communication

themselves had seen. For only by such direct contact with the suffering of children, women and men, can we come to appreciate the absurdity of wars.

The use of artificial intelligence can make a positive contribution to the communications sector, provided it does not eliminate the role of journalism on the ground but serves to support it. Provided too that it values the professionalism of communication, making every communicator more aware of his or her responsibilities, and enables all people to be, as they should, discerning participants in the work of communication.

Questions for today and for the future

In this regard, a number of questions naturally arise. How do we safeguard professionalism and the dignity of workers in the fields of information and communication, together with that of users throughout the world? How do we ensure the interoperability of platforms? How do we enable businesses that develop digital platforms to accept their responsibilities with regard to content and advertising in the same way as editors of traditional communications media? How do we make more transparent the criteria guiding the operation of algorithms for indexing and de-indexing, and for search engines that are capable of celebrating or cancelling persons and opinions, histories and cultures? How do we guarantee the transparency of information processing? How do we identify the paternity of writings and the traceability of sources

concealed behind the shield of anonymity? How do we make it clear whether an image or video is portraying an event or simulating it? How do we prevent sources from being reduced to one alone, thus fostering a single approach, developed on the basis of an algorithm? How instead do we promote an environment suitable for preserving pluralism and portraying the complexity of reality? How can we make sustainable a technology so powerful, costly and energy-consuming? And how can we make it accessible also to developing countries?

The answers we give to these and other questions will determine if artificial intelligence will end up creating new castes based on access to information and thus giving rise to new forms of exploitation and inequality. Or, if it will lead to greater equality by promoting correct information and a greater awareness of the epochal change that we are experiencing by making it possible to acknowledge the many needs of individuals and of peoples within a well-structured and pluralistic network of information. If, on the one hand, we can glimpse the spectre of a new form of slavery, on the other, we can also envision a means of greater freedom; either the possibility that a select few can condition the thought of others, or that all people can participate in the development of thought.

The answer we give to these questions is not pre-determined; it depends on us. It is up to us to decide whether we will become fodder for algorithms or will nourish our hearts with that freedom without which we cannot grow in wisdom. ♦

SAINT OF THE MONTH - I

St Oscar Arnulfo Romero

1917 - 1980

Feast Day - March 24

The night before he was murdered while celebrating Mass, Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador said on the radio: "I would like to appeal in a special way to the men of the army, and in particular to the troops of the National Guard, the police, and the garrisons. Brothers, you belong to our own people. You kill your own brother peasants; and in the face of an order to kill that is given by a man, the law of God that says 'Do not kill!' should prevail.

"No soldier is obliged to obey an order counter to the law of God. No one has to comply with an immoral law. It is the time now that you recover your conscience and obey its dictates rather than the command of sin. . . . Therefore, in the name of God, and in the name of this long-suffering people, whose laments rise to heaven every day more tumultuous, I beseech you, I beg you, I command you! In the name of God: 'Cease the repression!'"

With these words, while eloquently upholding the gospel, Romero had also effectively signed his own death warrant.

Romero was born on August 15th 1917. Oscar's father wanted him to be a carpenter — a trade for which he demonstrated some talent. Seminary classes in El Salvador preceded his studies at Rome's Gregorian University and his ordination in April 1942. After earning a doctorate in ascetical theology, he returned home and became a parish priest and later rector of an inter-diocesan seminary. He embraced a simple lifestyle; he was a popular preacher who responded with real compassion to the plight of the poor. He gave dedicated

pastoral service to the diocese of San Miguel for 25 years – a greatly-admired workaholic in a cassock!

There followed seven years of pastoral famine in the capital city, San Salvador, as an ecclesiastical bureaucrat. Ordained Auxiliary

Bishop in 1970, he gained a reputation as a stubborn and reactionary prelate. Seemingly unsympathetic to the new social justice thrust of the Latin American Church, he was suspicious of the clergy and the Base Christian Communities of the archdiocese working alongside the exploited rural poor, promoting social organisations and land reform.

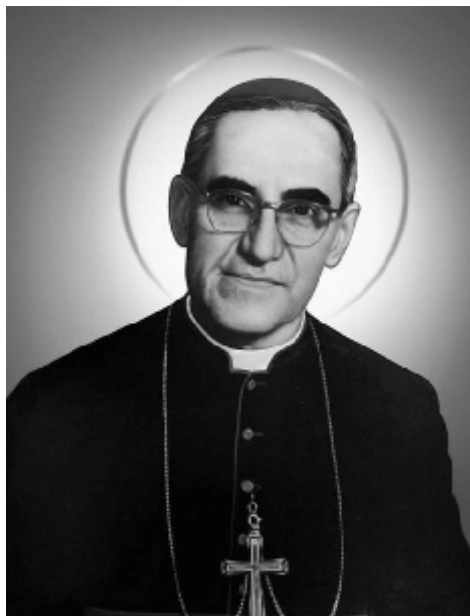
When he was appointed archbishop of San Salvador in 1977, Bishop Romero was considered a very "safe" choice. He had served as auxiliary bishop there for four years before his three years as bishop of Santiago de Maria.

Three weeks after his appointment as archbishop, Romero was shaken by the murder of his good friend Jesuit Father Rutilio Grande, a vigorous defender of the rights of the poor. Five more priests were assassinated in the Archdiocese of San Salvador during Romero's years as its shepherd.

During his three years as archbishop, Romero repeatedly denounced violence and spoke out on behalf of the victims of the civil war. In a time of heavy press censorship, his weekly radio broadcasts were often the only way people could find out the truth about the atrocities that were happening in their country.

...Continued on Page 20

Proclaim. Mar - Apr 2024



SAINT OF THE MONTH - I

St Julie Billiard

1751 - 1816

Feast Day - April 8

In the small village of Cuvilly, north of Paris, France, Marie-Rose Julie Billiard, born on July 12, 1751, was the seventh of nine children of Jean-François Billiard and Marie-Louise Antoinette Debraine. Most of her siblings died in infancy and adolescence. Raised by strong Christian parents, her elder sister Madeleine and younger brother Louis-François married and nurtured good Christian families. Marie-Rose Julie, even as a child, heard a call in the whisperings of God within her, and she shared her beliefs and deep love of God by teaching other children in the village. Although an ordinary child in so many ways, the mark of the cross was a distinctive sign of her inner spiritual greatness. Suffering often accompanied her in the family losses, with the robbery of her father's shop, and her illness brought about by shattered nerves after an attempt on her father's life (1774). Poor medical treatment in 1782 resulted in the paralysis of her legs.

For the next two decades, she continued to teach catechism lessons from her bed, offered spiritual advice, and attracted visitors who had heard of her holiness.

With the French Revolution breaking out in 1789, restrictions became imposed by the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, requiring priests to take an oath to the government, not the Church. Priests refusing to do this were considered non-juring priests and hunted by authorities. The

cure Dangicourt, Julie's parish priest, was one of those priests, sought by revolutionists and protected secretly by Julie. The friends of Julie, who belonged to the nobility, helped these priests and Julie. For about a year, Julie and her niece Félicité stayed in the château of Madame de Pont-l'Abbé in Gournay-sur-Aronde. When revolutionaries surrounded the château, Julie and her niece escaped in a hay cart to Compiègne in 1792 where she suffered even more with the loss of speech. While in Compiègne, Julie experienced more anxiety and fear in this de-christianized city, occupied by many troops, and from the dispelling of her friends, the Carmelites, driven out of their convent. Sixteen of these Sisters would later be guillotined in Paris!

But this period also proved to be a fruitful spiritual time for Julie. It was at this time she had a vision in which she saw Calvary surrounded by women in religious habits and heard a voice saying, "Behold these spiritual daughters whom I give you in an institute marked by the cross."

As time passed and Julie continued her mobile life, she made the acquaintance of an aristocratic woman, Françoise Blin de Bourdon, who shared Julie's interest in teaching the faith. In 1803, the two women began the Institute of Notre Dame, which was dedicated to the education of the poor, young Christian girls, and



the training of catechists.

At Amiens, the two women and a few companions began living a religious life in 1803. In 1804, Julie was miraculously cured of her illness and walked for the first time in twenty-two years. In 1805, Julie and three companions made their profession and took their final vows. She was elected as Mother General of the young Congregation.

Though Julie had always been attentive to the special needs of the poor --- and that always remained her priority --- she also became aware that other classes in society needed Christian instruction. From the founding of the Sisters of Notre Dame until her death, Julie was on the



road, opening a variety of schools in France and Belgium that served the poor and the wealthy, vocational groups, teachers. Ultimately, Julie and Françoise moved the motherhouse to Namur, Belgium.

In 1815, Julie taxed her ever poor health by nursing the wounded and feeding the starving left from the battle of Waterloo. For the last three months of her life, she again suffered much. She died peacefully on April

8, 1816, at 64 years of age. Julie was beatified on May 13, 1906, and was canonized by Pope Paul VI in 1969. Her feast day is April 8th.

Source: www.franciscanmedia.org;
www.sndden.org; www.catholic.org/saints ♦

Continued from Page 18: St Oscar Arnulfo Romero



He defended the right of the poor to demand political change, a stance which made him a troublesome adversary for the country's rulers. When a military junta seized control of the national government in 1979, Archbishop Romero publicly criticized the US government for backing the junta.

Archbishop Romero was shot dead on 24 March 1980, aged 62, while celebrating Mass. In the ensuing decade, some 70,000 Salvadorans were killed in the civil war. Romero's funeral was celebrated in the plaza outside the cathedral and drew an estimated 250,000 mourners.

His tomb in the cathedral crypt soon drew thousands of visitors each year. On February 3, 2015, Pope Francis authorized a decree recognizing Oscar Romero as a martyr for the faith. His beatification took place in San Salvador on May 23, 2015, and he was canonized on October 14, 2018.

Source: www.franciscanmedia.org;
<https://cafod.org.uk>; www.romerotrue.org.uk ♦

The silent influence

Jairus' daughter and the unspoken impact on faith

By Fr Dr Yesu Karunanidhi



The Gospel narratives, rich in their portrayal of Jesus' interactions with diverse characters, often hold hidden gems waiting to be unearthed. One such story is that of Jairus' daughter, a young girl whose silent presence becomes a catalyst for her father's spiritual journey. Though the account is found in all the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), Mark has more details.

The desperate plea

The narrative unfolds (cf. Mark 5:21-43), where Jairus, a synagogue leader, approaches Jesus with desperation etched across his face. His beloved daughter lies gravely ill, and in an act of profound humility, he falls at the feet of Jesus, beseeching Him to come and heal her. Jairus' plea is not just a father's desperate cry for his ailing child but a profound demonstration of faith in the authority and healing power of Jesus.

Divine delay and human haste

As Jesus walks with Jairus towards his home, a great crowd joins him. Mark portrays crowd both as a

hindrance and help. Crowd is a hindrance here because it slows down the pace of Jesus; and it is a help because this will soon become a space for the healing of a woman with haemorrhages (cf. Mk 5:24-34). Later in the gospel, the crowd at Jairus' house again would become a hindrance for Jesus, for it would mock at Jesus when he tells, 'The child is not dead but sleeping' (cf. Mk 5:39), and would be overcome with amazement (cf. cf. Mk 5:42). The crowd and the woman with haemorrhages in fact interrupt Jesus' movement. This interruption makes Jairus anxious, for anytime the news may arrive that his daughter is dead.

Cementing thoughts

Behold, the news arrives from Jairus' home! The messengers or the servants or the relatives, who came from Jairus' house said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher anymore?" The news cements Jairus' faith in Jesus. For, after conveying the message of his daughter's death, they say that Jesus is only a Teacher (not God), and nothing more could be done for the daughter.

From fear to faith



Devastated, Jairus' hope seems shattered. Jesus, overhearing their words, strengthens Jairus and says, "Don't be afraid; only believe" (cf. Mk 5:36). Now Jairus does not remember the words of those who came from his home but recalls the miracle that was worked a few moments ago in front of his own eyes. He regained his faith. Since the daughter is dead, Jairus needs Jesus even more. For he knew in faith that Jesus was the Lord, and he would restore life.

The miraculous encounter

As Jesus arrives at Jairus' home, the mourners mock Him, for they see only death. However, Jesus, undeterred by the earthly reality, takes the girl's hand and commands her to arise: "Little girl, I say to you, arise!" (cf. Mk 5:41). In a moment of divine intervention, the lifeless daughter is restored to life. This miraculous event not only showcases Jesus' authority over life and death but also underscores the profound impact of the daughter's faith on her father. The narrative then shifts its focus to the reactions of those present, highlighting the awe and astonishment of the crowd. However, the girl herself remains remarkably silent.

Lessons for faith formation

Despite her lack of spoken words, the girl's presence plays a crucial role in her father's faith formation. Here's how:

(a) A Spark of Hope: Jairus' initial act of seeking Jesus implies a pre-existing level of faith. However, the news of his daughter's death could have easily extinguished that flame. Instead, Jesus' words rekindle it, urging him to hold onto hope despite the seemingly impossible situation. The girl's subsequent resurrection solidifies this hope, demonstrating the power of Jesus and strengthening Jairus' belief.

(b) Witnessing Divine Power: Even without uttering a word, the girl becomes a living testament to Jesus' power. Her miraculous return from death serves as a tangible expression of God's love and intervention. This first-hand experience undoubtedly deepens Jairus' faith and cements his belief in Jesus' divinity.

(c) A Silent Teacher: The girl's quiet presence throughout the narrative underscores the power of faith that transcends words. It teaches Jairus, and by extension, the reader, that true faith rests not just on pronouncements but on a deep trust and openness to God's works, even in silence.

(d) A Legacy of Faith: While the Gospels don't elaborate on Jairus' life after this event, it's

reasonable to assume that his encounter with Jesus and the miraculous resurrection of his daughter would leave an indelible mark on him and his family. This experience, passed down through generations, could have potentially nurtured a legacy of faith within their lineage.

While the story of Jairus' daughter may seem like a mere footnote in the Gospels, it holds a powerful message about the often overlooked yet profound impact individuals can have on each other's faith journeys. Her silent presence becomes a channel for God's grace, shaping the spiritual landscape of her father and potentially generations to come. It reminds us that faith can be nurtured not just through words but also through witnessing, love, and the quiet confidence that allows miracles to unfold.

Jairus' daughter, an anonymous girl of 12 years old (cf. Mk 5:42), invites us to look at



children, who have the potential to inspire hope, induce faith, and instill love. At Missionary Childhood Association (MCA), one of the four societies of the Pontifical Mission Organizations, we are convinced that children rich in faith and love could play their own part in the Church's mission and even stir adults to the same generous missionary spirit. The children can influence us even with their silence, as did Jairus' daughter.

[Rev. Prof. Dr. Yesu Karunanidhi, a priest of the Archdiocese of Madurai, currently serves as the Executive Secretary to the Commission for Bible, Conference of Catholic Bishops of India. He can be contacted at www.yesukarunanidhi.in/] ♦

The Easter miracle

A true story by Debbie Orrico

Grandma Lily was a very special woman with a fierce streak of independence that showed itself at an early age. When she was just 16 years old, she eloped with a 28 year old man. Although her family placed bets that this union would not last, she proved herself by becoming a loving wife, and a mother to 8 children.



That is, until her world was turned upside down. Grandpa John passed away right before the depression, leaving Grandma Lily alone with 8 young children to raise. It was a tremendous struggle. The family was dirt poor. The children had to sleep 3 to a bed. The good clothes were worn by the first ones up in the morning. The rest had to make do with the patched hand-me-downs that were left behind. Some clothing was even made from flour sacks. During the cold Connecticut winters, none of the children had boots, so if the ground was wet or snow-covered, Grandma Lily would line her children's shoes with newspapers and canvas to keep their feet warm and dry. Meals were meager, with meat served only once or twice a month.

Throughout the years, Grandma Lily longed for Grandpa John, often spending hours at the cemetery, planting flowers at his graveside and remembering their good times together. Some fifty odd years after Grandpa John passed away, as Grandma Lily returned from the cemetery, she noticed that her wedding band was missing. She was frantic! It was the only tangible thing she had left to remember her

husband. It was a symbol of their eternal love. She quickly went back to the cemetery, but the ring was nowhere to be found. Her children also made several of the searches of the area in vain. The ring was gone — vanished into thin air! Grandma Lily was absolutely heartbroken.

The next Mother's Day, her children gifted her with a new wedding band. Although Grandma Lily was touched by the thought that went into the gift, it made her sad to realize her original wedding band was gone forever.

The following Easter, Grandma Lily went to the cemetery accompanied by her daughter Grace. They stood side by side, silently saying their prayers for Grandpa John. They admired the flowers, especially the Easter lilies that were standing tall and proud, sending their fragrance out for all to enjoy. Out of the corner of her eye, Grace noticed a glint of something shiny, and pointed it out to Grandma Lily. Since she was the closest to the plant, Grandma Lily bent over, and examined the leaves of the lily plant. She could not believe her eyes when she saw what it was. There, brilliantly glowing in the sunlight was her original wedding band! The one that she had lost the previous year... the symbol of eternal love... the one that her husband had given her more than fifty years before!



The Easter season is known as a time of miracles, and of resurrection. For Grandma Lily, the miracle was a resurrection...her wedding band, resurrected on a lily plant.

The fact that my Grandma's name was Lily makes this story even more special!

Grandma Lily passed away a few years later. We made sure that we buried her with her original wedding band, and kept her second wedding band as a family keepsake.

Source:

<https://inspire21.com/theeastermiracle/> ♦

Pope open's Vatican's Judicial Year

CnA: Pope Francis presided over the inauguration of the 95th Judicial Year of the Vatican City State on March 02, 2024, morning. However, he delegated the task of reading the speech to an aide due to bronchitis.

“I thank you all. I have prepared a speech, but you can hear I am unable to read it because of bronchitis,” a visibly fatigued and hoarse-sounding Francis said to the Vatican's magistrates gathered in the Hall of Blessings.

The pope's remarks to the Vatican magistrates highlighted the virtue of courage, which he observed was at the very center of justice. He said that when “combined with fortitude, [courage] ensures constancy in the search for good and makes one capable of facing trials.”

Observing that “in well-organized, well-regulated, and institutionally supported societies, it always remains that personal courage is needed to face different situations,” the pope stressed that courage is underscored by a “healthy audacity.” In the absence of this, the pope warned, “we risk giving in to resignation and ending up overlooking many small and large abuses.”

Expanding on this reflection, the Holy Father noted that courage is a core virtue that

allows people to confront difficult inner and external trials. “Courage,” the pope said, “contains a humble strength, which is based on faith and the closeness of God and is expressed in a particular way in the ability to act with patience and perseverance, rejecting the internal and external conditioning that hinders the accomplishment of good. This courage disorientates the corrupt and puts them, so to speak, in a corner, with their hearts closed and hardened.”

The pope also noted that courage is not an isolated virtue but exists in tandem with “prudence and justice,” both of which are underscored by charity. The nexus of these virtues, the pope observed, form the basis for exercising sound judgment.

“The administration of justice,” the pope added, “[is] demonstrated by the serenity of judgment, the independence and impartiality of those who are called upon to judge at the various stages of the process. The best response is industrious silence and serious commitment to work, which allow our courts to administer justice with authority and impartiality, guaranteeing due process, in compliance with the peculiarities of the Vatican system.” ♦

Pope's Prayer Intentions – 2024

March 2024: *For New Martyrs*

Let us pray that those who risk their lives for the Gospel in various parts of the world might imbue the Church with their courage and missionary drive.

April 2024: *For The Role of Women*

Let us pray that the dignity and worth of women be recognized in every culture, and for an end to the discrimination they face in various parts of the world.

Happy Easter



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FOR, IN EVERY EASTER MOMENT,
HOPE IS REBORN

Rev. Dr. Ambrose Pitchaimuthu

National Director

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