

KAIROS

GLOBAL

ALSO ↓

The Greatest Romance

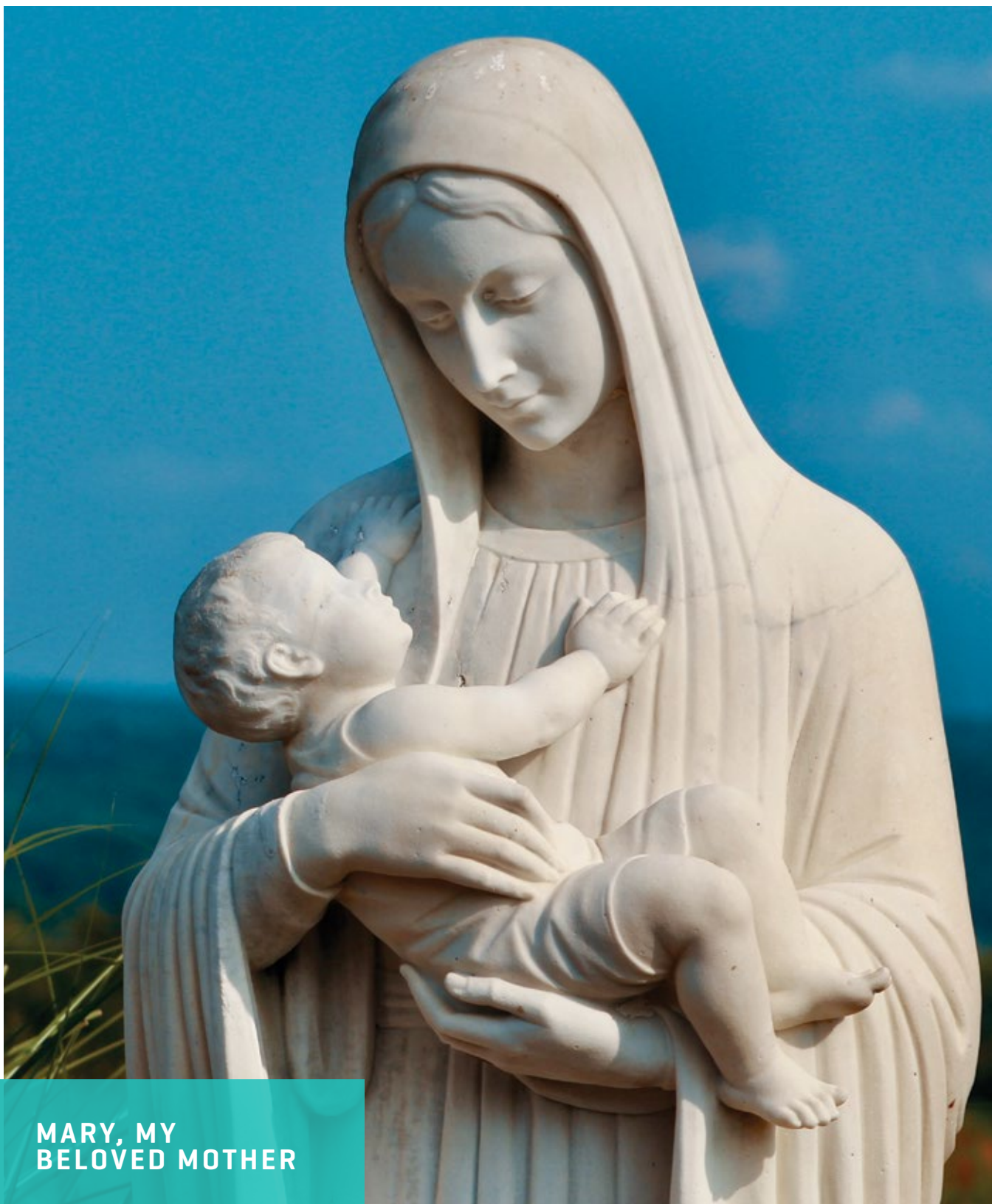
■ FR SIJO POULOSE OFM CAP

ROUTE CORRECTIONS IN LIFE

■ LIVIN VARGHESE

SAFEGUARDING PRICELESS

PROF GEORGE VM



MARY, MY BELOVED MOTHER



We believe that in the glory where thou reigns, clothed in the sun and crowned with the stars, thou art, after Jesus, the joy and happiness of all the angels and saints; and we on this earth, who pass as pilgrims comforted by faith in future resurrection, look to thee, our life, our sweetness and our hope. Draw us with the sweetness of thy voice and show unto us, one day, after this our exile, the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

EDITOR'S ROOM



DR. CHACKOCHAN J NJAVALLIL



WHEN THERE IS NO UNDERSTANDING, THE CLOSEST PEOPLE BECOME STRANGERS AND EVEN GREAT ENEMIES!

MAKE YOUR HOMES HAPPY PLACES

T What do you think about keeping everyday accounts of the family expenses? Do you think it a good habit? What if the woman of the house does not care for it and ridicules the man doing it?

How would you feel if in trying to identify ways to control the family expenses, you are called a 'miser'?

When one of the parents tries to persuade the children to go for morning Mass but the other parent communicates both directly and indirectly that it is unnecessary, what does one do?!

What if you are convinced that resources like water, electricity, etc. should be used without waste but the spouse does not agree?

How about you are an environmentally conscious person and you avoid using plastic but each time your spouse returns from shopping, it is with numerous plastic bags!

What if the wife is progressing fast in her career and earns more than her husband, resulting in envy and frustration in the family?

Who is sacrificing more, who is working more, who is always losing, who started the argument... The reasons behind arguments and heated exchanges are simple things like these...

What do you think about the above situations? Aren't they so trivial? Of course, while each situation in itself is trivial, many such trivial experiences take away love and warmth from family relationships.

When there is no understanding, the closest people become strangers and even great enemies!

Families and especially young families are facing serious challenges today. The 'happily ever after' narrative is true often in stories only!

Young families of today need support and help. They need people and organisations who can help them with compassion and without judging. They need people to help them not only with great ideas and advice but also with tangible support.

It definitely is the responsibility of the Church and more so with youth organisations to devise suitable and appropriate mechanisms to support young families today. There needs to be some way to have appropriate, down-to-earth approaches

It is high time that we make our homes happy places to hang around.



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Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.
James 4:8

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EXPERIENCE

THE GREATEST ROMANCE

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ASK



FR. BITAJU

Fr. Bitaju Mathew, O.S.S.T. belongs to the Order of the Most Holy Trinity and of the Captives (Trinitarians). He serves as the Secretary Vice Provincial of the Order in India and is currently the Chaplain of the Jesus Youth International Formation Team.

➔ **Q. As Christians, is it necessary to bring other people to God or can we be a good Christian by just being good?**

Your question seeks what is necessary to be a Christian: a witnessing of Christian life or an explicit sharing of the Good News. It is remarkable to note that Jesus, before ascending into heaven, gave a mandate to the apostles: *Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature* (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19). From the day of Pentecost, the apostles did just that and the work of evangelisation continues to this day. Pope Paul VI, in his apostolic exhortation 'Evangelization in the Modern World' (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*), declared that 'the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church ... Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize' (EN 14). Consequently, it is very clear that evangelisation (sharing of the Good News) is not an optional add-on, but it is at the heart of what it means to be a Catholic follower of Christ.

Yet, often Catholics are tempted to respond to this call to evangelisation by stating that 'Catholics evangelise by the way we live and not by our words.' This does not mean that we can choose between proclaiming and living the gospel. Pope Paul VI delineated the important interplay between word and witness thus: 'The Good News proclaimed by the witness of life sooner

or later has to be proclaimed by the word of life. There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed' (EN 22). The Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks of a disciple in the following manner: 'The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it, and spread it' (CCC 1816). In his encyclical 'The Mission of the Redeemer' (*Redemptoris Missio*), St John Paul II highlighted the permanent validity of the mission mandate. He stated that 'No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples' (RM 3). Further, Pope Francis, in his apostolic exhortation 'The Joy of the Gospel' (*Evangelii Gaudium*), affirms that the mandate of Jesus to 'go forth' has to come from the joy of the Gospel: 'In our day Jesus' command to "go and make disciples" echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church's mission of evangelization, and all of us are called to take part in this missionary "going forth"' (EG 20).

I hope it is obvious from the exhortations above that both living a witnessing life and sharing (proclaiming) the Good News are necessary in fulfilling the mission mandate of Christ in order to be a true missionary disciple of Jesus Christ.



YOUCAT 354

CAN PEOPLE BE FORCED TO BELIEVE IN GOD?

No. No one may force others to believe, not even one's own children, just as no one may be forced to be an unbeliever. A person can make the decision to believe only in complete freedom. Christians, however, are called to help other people, by word and example, to find the way to faith. [2104-2109, 2137]

Pope John Paul II said, 'Proclaiming Christ and bearing witness to him, when done in a way that respects consciences, does not violate freedom. Faith demands a free adherence on the part of man, but at the same time faith must also be offered to him' [Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, 1990, no. 8].

DR. KOCHURANI JOSEPH

Prayer Intentions August

Small Businesses

We pray for small and medium-sized businesses; in the midst of economic and social crisis, may they find ways to continue operating, and serving their communities.



Pope talk



Evangelisation is not personal activism but a witness of love.

Lord calls all Christians to be ambassadors of peace and peace begins with us.

Faith is never a walk in the park, but is instead demanding, sometimes arduous.

Resisting anger takes tremendous interior strength and so ask God for help.



Youth must use well and responsibly the time that is available: it is in this way that one grows and prepares oneself to take on more demanding tasks.

Society would become cold and unbearable without welcoming families and generous families give warmth to society.

Do not sugarcoat your witness of the Gospel, but let the truth be made manifest even through your weakness.

Let Jesus Christ feed the hungers of your life.

Follow St Paul's wisdom when using technology to spread the Gospel. From St Paul, we learn anew passion for the Gospel and missionary spirit, from a pastoral heart, pushed to make himself everything to everyone.

JESUS YOUTH



Dr Edward Edezhath, one of the pioneers of Jesus Youth, gives us a glimpse of the growth of the movement.

Focus on forming faith habits



A message at a recent prayer meeting was this: 'I am forming some habits in you and moulding your character. Walk in my path and I will prepare you little by little for heavenly joy.' This was followed by reflections shared on Galatians 3:27 – you who were 'baptised into Christ have put on Christ'. Sangeetha's reflection connected to dressing up for some marriage party. 'Looking into the mirror, I would say, I look so beautiful.' Putting on Christ is like that; we get a new and beautiful image. Others spoke up about their transformations making a gradual difference in their lives.

THROUGH HABITS TO A LIFESTYLE

Listening to this, I reflected on the importance of habit formation in the Jesus Youth movement. In our journey of forming a vision for the movement we have learned many lessons. For a person to grow in Christ a retreat or a set of classes alone are not enough. Most people soon 'fall away'. Today's youth face numerous 'push and pull' in their complex daily life. 'We need regular follow-up and an effective support system to build them in a Christian lifestyle.'

Think of it, each of us is a bundle of habits, some helpful and acceptable, others not. An active Christian life is

all about 'conscious living with Christ' or becoming aware of ourselves and taking conscious efforts to grow into the image of the Lord. In this context it is good to recall Mahatma Gandhi's oft repeated quote, 'Your beliefs become your thoughts, your thoughts become your words, your words become your actions, your actions become your habits, your habits become your values, your values become your destiny.' There is need for us, personally and in our communities, to work 'little by little', leading towards a new lifestyle.

REACHING THE FLOW STATE

What habits are we talking about? There are personal habits and lifestyles in families and communities. We often acknowledge our sins 'in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and what I have failed to do.' So, there is need for us to cultivate good attitudes, emotional responses, patterns of conversations and other communications, and ways of doing things or refraining from certain actions. There are patterns of eating, drinking, breathing, praying, reading, talking and much more that we have to attend to.

'Everywhere I am super-decent, but when I talk at home, my wrong side comes out,' one spoke up in the group. 'If I begin my day with 30 minutes of

prayer time, the day goes quite well,' said another. 'Just giving a warm smile to anyone is something I try to do. And if possible, I start a casual conversation,' a young mother spoke up. 'I know the Lord wants me to be faithful in the little things of life. But my problem is I quickly judge people and mostly think in a negative way.' Being regular and punctual for the prayer meeting was the habit that another wanted to cultivate. The list could go on endlessly.

And how do we go about it? Any skill requires continuous practise. Playing a musical instrument, sports, dancing or cooking, is initially quite complex and difficult, but later reaches a stage of gracefulness. The Hungarian American psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls this the 'Flow State', in which you do a complex activity with great ease, enjoyment, and complete absorption. But to make an important activity in our life into a regular habit reaching the joyful flow state we need much 'inner push' or what he calls 'intrinsic motivation'. St Paul challenges us to this journey, *Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect* (Romans 12:2).

Any skill requires continuous practise. Playing a musical instrument, sports, dancing or cooking, is initially quite complex and difficult, but later reaches a stage of gracefulness.



HABITS WITH A VIEW TO FORM A JOYFUL NATURE

But isn't there a danger of people being blindly carried away by the example of successful heroes, ambitiously trying to cultivate habits not meant for them. Absolutely true! As a thinker rightly said, 'Imitation is suicide.' My old parish priest used to chase away women remaining in the church after the Mass, praying for a long time, 'Go home and look after your family, that's what God wants from you!'

A proper self-awareness of my unique nature and mission in life is a very important starting point for the grooming of right habits. One challenge many young people face is the fascination for glamorous and successful people. This could be faraway saints or next-door leaders. Discovering, accepting myself, building up the little things that the Lord

has given to me in my life (Matthew 25:21) and learning to practise what is beautiful and joyful to me, are simple ways in which I find out my own path of cultivating faith habits.

INTERIORITY - CONNECTEDNESS - FRUITFULNESS

'No person is an island.' A helpful community and its cultural setting is the best bet for helping a person to develop good lifestyle. Jesus Youth with its motto of 'Towards a life in its fullness' provides such a supportive ambience. The six pillars of the movement are indications of its emphasis on the cultivation as well as balancing of essential habits of interiority, community life and missionary effectiveness.

'Jesus Youth has a very powerful trade secret,' I heard a remark. She went on mentioning the fascinating

way JY gathers youth and how they challenge them in the context of joyful communities. Its wondrous result is that these youth welcome the Lord into their lives and start walking in the Lord in an enjoyable manner. Best habits are caught and not taught, and that happens most effectively in a lively community. Perhaps, more than powerful teachings or irritating scolding, the need of the hour is opportunities to sit and chat in a small group about our daily struggles to grow into the image of Jesus.

I began with the prophecy in our group and the discussion that followed. Later someone summed it up, 'The Lord invites us to a walk towards fullness, leading us to an everlasting life of joy. We need to respond by examining how we are building up suitable personal habits, resulting in a rich Christian life.'

This path is well expressed in that old song, 'Little by little every day . . . Jesus is changing me.' Maybe this was inspired by the famous saying in the Old Testament. *For your immortal spirit is in all things. Therefore, you correct little by little those who trespass . . . that they may be freed from wickedness and put their trust in you, O Lord.* (Wisdom 12:1,2) Let us cooperate with the Lord's plan of shaping each of us into the image of Jesus attending to the cultivation of beautiful and helpful habits. ■■

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Dr. Edward Edezhath, is a retired professor from St. Albert's College, Ernakulam. He lives with his wife Audrey in Kochi, India.

MISSION

TALK

MISSION: BIHAR

MMJ [Mission Month Journey] Finale, an initiative of Jesus Youth Central India, and was held in October 2021 through six states of central India.

MMJ Finale was one of the greatest mission journeys in the history of Catholic Church in India as well as in Jesus Youth movement in terms of number of missionaries involved in this journey. In mid-March 2022 Jesus Youth Kerala got a call to be a part of this great mission outreach in Patna, Bihar. And God assigned us a task to find and send missionaries for his duty.

From the moment the Kerala Mission Team and I said yes to this great call to send 100 missionaries to Bihar, we started experiencing great providence in our every initiative.

The Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel' (Acts 9:15)

Like Ananias, we went throughout the zones of Kerala in search of missionaries. Instead of 100, the Lord brought us 200+ mission spirits from different zones, ministries and streams of JY Kerala. So, for me the taste and experience of this mission started earlier than others when I began to witness how beautifully God arranged things for us. If I begin to count the blessings, it will start

from seeing the huge number of registrations, the grace of Jericho prayer, arranging long leaves from office, confirmed seats in trains, execution of God's plans with his chosen people and finally, knowing how each and every person I met during this time became a part of this mission.

The preparations for this mission, outreach to parishes and experiencing the lives of people in Patna diocese motivated me to be an instrument of God to proclaim his good news.

Jomin James, General Coordinator, JY Kerala Mission Team

My Jesus Youth journey began in college. Later, I had to relocate for work and the continual switching between online and offline work made me more of a workaholic. As days passed, I realised I was slowly drifting away from the Lord.



It was at that time I came to know about MMJ and decided to go for a mission to Bihar. By nature, I am a methodical person but on the first day of the mission itself, I realised that God already had a plan for my mission and I just had to abide by his plan. The entire mission was a beautiful journey with God, meeting his beloved people from different walks of life. God helped me revisit the various areas of my life and brought me the self-realisation of who I was and who I can be; and I got the answer to my big question, 'What next?'

This mission journey was a close and intimate journey with the Lord and has helped me become a renewed person with a clearer perception of his will in my life.

Olivia Kuriakose, Koothatukulam

Omy Jesus, will you call me for a mission? This was an intention I wrote on a sticky note along with many other intentions. Even now, when I think about it, I don't know the inspiration or the reason behind this particular intention.

When I came to know about the MMJ Finale 2022, as usual, I thought, 'Wow... How blessed are those who are called for this mission! Let them be on fire and spread the fire in Bihar.' I couldn't imagine that I could go for the same. But the soul's thirst to respond to the call increased rapidly. Permission from family was the first task to complete. With a lot of prayer, especially the intercession of Ajna Chechi (Ajna George, who passed away in January 2022 after a faith-filled, valiant battle with cancer), my family gave me their permission.

And we started to prayerfully prepare for the journey. Even then, I didn't know what I would do in Bihar. During the train journey to Bihar, while doing my personal prayer, the Holy Spirit spoke 'You won't go anywhere, you'll be in intercession.' As I always do, I began to question the Holy Spirit's inspiration



By the grace of God, this mission journey helped me understand the power of intercession. Even if we are weak and broken, even if we don't know how to speak in tongues, Jesus Christ only needs our five loaves and two fish. He is the one who multiplies it.

with my logical reasoning.

On the day when my group was supposed to go to the mission place, I fell sick and was asked to remain back in the centre, even though I felt I would be alright for the mission. But during the sacrament of confession, Jesus spoke, 'You are supposed to be here. Be here.' And thus connecting the dots, I realised that this was my mission, to intercede, to raise my hands and soul for those who are in mission places and those who are going to receive them.

By the grace of God, this mission journey helped me understand the power of intercession. Even if we are weak and broken, even if we don't know how to speak in tongues, Jesus Christ only needs our five loaves and two fish. He is the one who multiplies it. Our duty is to hand over our insecurities and vulnerabilities with one prayer, 'O my Jesus, use me as your instrument.'

Theja Theres Tomy, Ernakulam

If not now, then when?' Is there any apt time for evangelisation? I don't think so. As we are called Christians, we are the offspring of an overwhelming love that enables us to do great things at any time.

Before every venture the human mind gets confused and I was not an exception. In the midst of last semester exams and submissions, it was not easy to look forward to the mission. But it was easy for me as Jesus called me by name. The phase of decision making was not easy until I offered it in Holy Mass. By the grace of God, my exams and project work got completed on time.

The Bihar mission was a story of a great Father who led his children in the midst of all the hardships. I would say, we can give the love of Jesus even through the charm of your face and a smile. Sometimes, telling people pages and pages of Bible verses may not work but you can be Christ to them through the way you listen to them.

A train full of missionaries was an amazing experience. This train transformed into an altar every morning with Holy Mass for the missionaries – while crowds of people passed by silently; people who had never heard of Jesus passed amidst the Holy Mass and left hearing the name, Jesus.

It was not easy to face the summer. The



unusual climate made some of us weak but we were not ready to stop. The prayers we prayed together blissfully fulfilled every moment.

We prayed for a small rain to get relief from the scorching sun. A few hours later we got a message from missionaries, 'It's raining here.' That hour was full of grace.

The one thing that I have to say is Jesus loves you and me very much. Surrender yourself before him. Be conscious about the call of Jesus. He said on the cross, 'I thirst.' His thirst was for souls. And he taught me to thirst for souls by saying, 'O Lord give me one more soul to share with you.'

Jinu John, Kothamangalam

Praise the Lord
We, my wife, son, daughter, and I went on a mission to Bihar together. Even though there were a lot of worries and confusions, we were quite eager to experience the mission. Everything, the children's examinations, their schools, and my job had been expertly planned by the Lord because we said YES to the mission. We first participated in an orientation session, which was a lovely experience. As a result, the Lord eventually included us in the MMJ Finale Journey. We now count this as a blessing for our family. Experience is considerably more significant for youngsters in today's society than any verbal instructions. Our children witnessed many things in the village of Bard in Bihar, where they learned

But during the sacrament of confession, Jesus spoke, 'You are supposed to be here. Be here.' And thus connecting the dots, I realised that this was my mission, to intercede, to raise my hands and soul for those who are in mission places and those who are going to receive them.



that food, possessions, and education are lovely gifts from God.

We want everyone to go for a mission. Villages welcomed us warmly despite their extreme poverty. They did everything they could to make sure that we had the best food and accommodation. We finally assimilated with the locals when we prayed together, studied the Bible, and preached the Gospel to them. In the midst of them, we were able to constantly sense God's love. We came to understand that we could not begin the

mission unless we took off our fake masks and be as Jesus was. When we gave up all our earthly pursuits and began to rely solely on Jesus, we merged with them in their community.

Together with the Jesus Youth movement, we would like to thank God for this beautiful honour. We ask God to help us all spread the good news of Jesus to those who don't know him.

Prince TP, Litha Prince, Asin Prince, Ashish Prince, Thrissur



EXPERIENCE

THE GREATEST ROMANCE

It was a desire that kept getting stronger each day, says Fr Sijo Poulose Chakkalakkal OFM Cap on his road to the priesthood.

To fall in love with God is the greatest of all romances, To seek God the greatest of all adventures, And to find God, the greatest human achievement. – St Augustine

We are all called to give ourselves to God, whether we admit it or not. We all do this in a way that is unique to us.

For some it is through giving ourselves to another in marriage. For others it is through living a single life that frees us up to work on ourselves and our personal relationship with God.

For still others, it is through a priestly or religious life where we share ourselves with all of God's children and guide them into relationship with him through our words and actions.

As a child, during our every evening prayer, my mother used to pray, 'May the guardian angels protect my children the way Raphael guarded Tobias.' God answered this by blessing me with the Jesus Youth fellowship.

It was in Hyderabad while working as a nurse in Yasodha hospital that I first started considering the possibility of life as a Franciscan priest. My involvement with Jesus Youth in Hyderabad, and my friendship with Antony led me to Francis and my priestly call. While reading a book on St Francis of Assisi, I suddenly started to get these 'strange thoughts'. It felt as though God wanted something different for me than I had planned, which was moving abroad to make some money, settle family debts and live happily ever after. I still remember the severe financial crisis my family was going through at that time. But day by day my desire grew big and I spent more time in prayer in order to understand this new experience. Along with it, the sacramental life of Jesus Youth fellows like Besto encouraged me to love Jesus dearly and to aspire for priesthood.

My life took another unexpected turn when I decided to serve as a volunteer at the Premagiri Retreat Centre at Karnool run by the Vincentian fathers. I stayed there for a year as situations at home and in my personal life were unfavourable for priesthood at that time.

In between, I fasted for 40 days, three times to discern my vocation. Fr Jose Kannambilly VC who was a Jesus Youth

You never know what will happen when you try to follow the Lord or when he catches up to fall in step with you; but it's inevitably surprising.

before joining the priesthood and the Assistant Director of the retreat centre at that time helped me with it.

Sr Smitha Mathew CMC, who was also my spiritual counsellor did not initially support my vocation to priesthood. A decisive moment in my call happened while praying together with her one day after my third fasting when Matthew 28:18 *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age* came as a confirmation message to us repeatedly. I believed in his Word. She too got totally convinced that I was chosen to be a priest.

In 2011, I finally resigned from my job and joined the priesthood.

I chose the Franciscan order because of my childhood love for St Antony and inspired by St Francis of Assisi. I joined the Capuchin Order of North Indian province where my younger brother was already a seminarian.

The roots of my vocation can be traced back to the priests at my parish growing up for whom I had great admiration and respect, my parents and family, the

religious who taught me in school, and the retreat centre at Potta.

You never know what will happen when you try to follow the Lord or when he catches up to fall in step with you; but it's inevitably surprising.

I witnessed a series of miracles in my family from paying off all the debts, the professional excellence of my sister and the well-being of my family, far better than I had initially planned. But along with my call, what I count as the greatest miracle I ever witnessed was the call of my father back to faith and spirituality. The unexpected helping hands at unforeseen times, the remarkable success of our new business, etc. added to my conviction that the Lord who called me is faithful and he has tremendous riches available for those who will take the time to open the door, even a little.

I was surprised more to see his keen efforts to teach me the lessons of life. Being a tonsillitis patient, I was once struck hard during my novitiate. This got me seriously worried as being a late vocation, more than 15 days of leave would end in my restarting the novitiate all over again. Doctors suggested surgery and I was utterly disappointed. That's when one of my fellow seminarians reminded me of the best medicine in this whole universe, our precious Holy Eucharist. He asked me to confess sincerely and receive Holy Communion the next day with faith. I followed his instruction and an unbelievable miracle happened. I was completely cured of my illness and tonsillitis has not struck me once even after that. All this added to my faith.

On 13 June 2022, I got ordained as a priest.

After what seemed like a dream come true, I began to realise that our relationship with God is the only thing that matters, that I held on to God because I loved him. It was only when I lost everything, when I emptied my heart, that I realised this. He called me from a void and now I am all his. ■■

Wishes for Fr Sijo

I have known Fr Sijo from his initial days in JY Hyderabad. He lived in a JY home with other JYs and was so taken up by their simplicity, prayer life and love for the poor. He was quiet, yet one of the most simple and humble persons among us. After reading a book on St Francis of Assisi, he was not just inspired but also began to use just two pairs of clothes. Being a nurse, he got actively involved with the Nurse's Ministry and with the retreats conducted in the region; he was always ready to help whenever possible. He slowly started playing the keyboard and singing which was Spirit-filled and graceful and yet when one would compliment him, his humility found it difficult for him to accept it. Recently when he came home to invite us for his ordination, I was so happy to see a new Sijo, who spoke with a lot with passion and love for Christ. I was touched to see that his simplicity and humility had only increased. He spent just a couple of hours at my home; my mom was so taken up by his sharing and his zeal, and was happy to get another JY son who would soon be a priest. When he came on 3rd July 2022 to celebrate his Thanksgiving Mass here in Hyderabad, we were all filled with immense joy and pride.

Vandana Maria Paul

The hand that nursed the sick is anointed to celebrate Holy Mass every day. I count it as a blessing to be associated with Fr Sijo right from the time he was a member of the Jesus Youth family in Hyderabad. He was actively involved with the Nurses Ministry in Hyderabad. God lifted him from healing ministry to ministerial priesthood. What I admire in him is his virtue of simplicity and piety. His great love for God is seen in his singing, music and all that he does. May he continue to spread the fragrance of Christ's love through his priestly ministry. And may the powerful intercession of our Blessed Mother and his patron saint, St Antony, accompany him all through his life journey.

Sr Mary P. T. SAP

I met Sijo in 2008, while we were coming back from CPG. Later during a night vigil, we met and the Lord brought us together at Emmaus Hyderabad. This was the time we got so close – going together for daily Mass, prayer meetings, evening dinner and discussions and visiting FBA [Friends and Birds of the Air], etc. During those days we got to read Nikos Kazantzakis' *St Francis*, which greatly influenced our lives – and even the vocation of Fr Sijo. And finally we have Fr Sijo giving glory to the Kingdom of God. Thank God!

Antony Kannamadathil George

During the Thanksgiving Mass, JY Priest Rev. Fr Sijo celebrated in Hyderabad last week after his ordination, my mind raced back to the memories I treasure with Fr Sijo. From the first time I met him in Emmaus [JY House in Hyderabad] I knew ours would be a lifetime spiritual friendship. We both travelled together for many JY events like prayer groups, retreats and different programmes in the region. Throughout these journeys, I witnessed his deep love for people, being simple and fully compassionate, more meaningful, because he was a professional nurse. My friend received the vocational call through Jesus Youth and with the Holy Spirit's discernment, decided to join priesthood. I visited him in Premagiri Retreat Centre, where he was preparing prayerfully to join priesthood. It was during the spiritual sharing that the Lord showed us that he would become a priest. Many of us had tears of joy during the Thanksgiving Mass as we saw him offering bread and wine and lifting Jesus in his anointed hands in worship. The message he shared during the Mass was heart-touching.

Prashant Kumar Amarlapudi



A SCEPTIC ENCOUNTERS

What began with honest questions ended in a certainty to defend. **Aby Jacob** tells his story.

JESUS CHRIST

I was raised very well in a Christian family in Kerala, India. Since childhood, I have practised the Christian faith along with my family. In 2009, after higher secondary education in India, my family sent me overseas to the UK for higher studies at the age of 19.

In my early 20s, I began to think critically about my life, God, and the world, and I realised that I truly didn't know what I believed about God. I became secretly sceptical about my Christian faith with some honest questions in mind. I remember pondering these at different times – 'I

don't know God truly', 'I don't know how to talk about God', 'I would love to know him.' I gradually started to backslide from practising faith as I didn't find any interest in God. I reached a point when I fully stopped attending church on Sundays. Instead, I entirely focused on fulfilling my dreams.

I worked hard and always maintained a good work ethic. My life was going pretty well, filled with material things of my passion during that time. Nevertheless, I have always loved truth and honesty in every area of my life. To me truth has always been more valuable than anything else.

Even though I was always chasing my dreams, my quest for the truth about God, life, and the cosmos remained secretly active within me. But I wasn't actively trying to find it. I didn't know where to search for it. At that time, I had no clue that God had already listened to the questions in my heart and was going to reveal the truth to me through a series of events.

In 2014, I had an unexpected reason to travel back to India abruptly. My plan was to return to the UK soon. However, after I arrived in India, I had a series of Christian spiritual experiences while staying with my family. So, one day

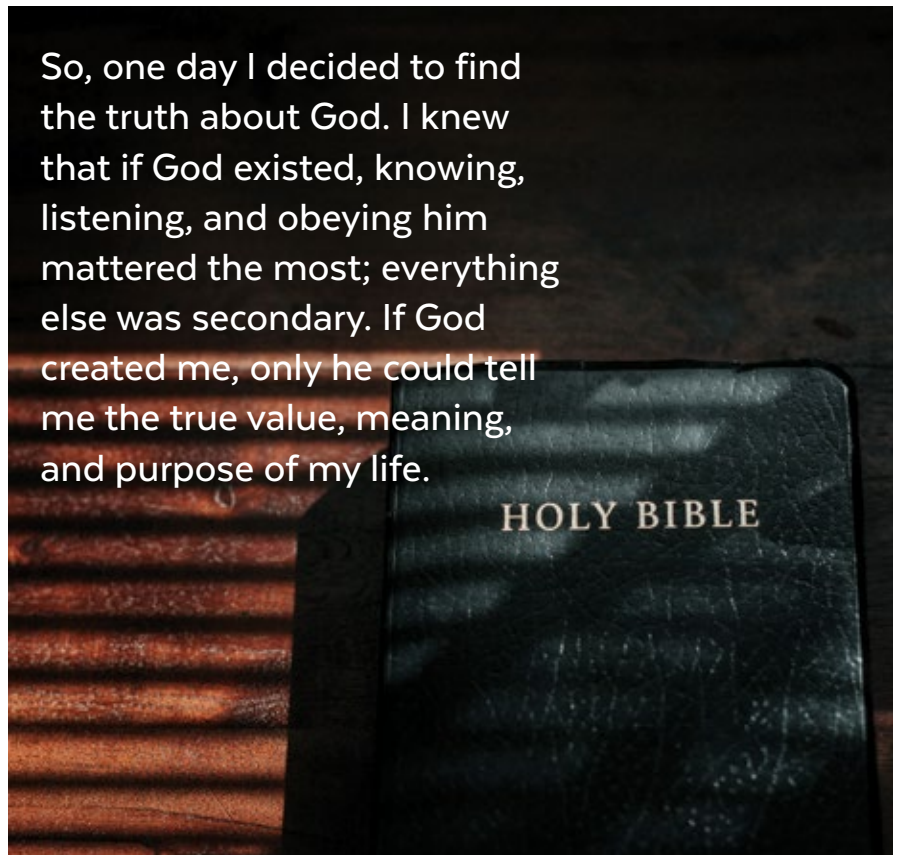
I decided to find the truth about God. I knew that if God existed, knowing, listening, and obeying him mattered the most; everything else was secondary. If God created me, only he could tell me the true value, meaning, and purpose of my life. I did not want the answer to be probably true, nor did I want some delusion. I wanted to know the absolute truth so that I could follow and defend it without fear and shame. Since the question was about God, I decided to ask him directly.

I presupposed that if God exists, he must be all-knowing. Therefore, he would be able to listen to my voice. And if God is all-loving, he would also respond to the honest question from the bottom of my heart. So I went into my room, knelt, and said a prayer, 'God, if you are true, please reveal the truth to me.' My prayer was sincere; it did not come out of a rebellious heart but from a humble heart. Indeed, God heard my voice. The Holy Spirit led me to read the Bible. And what happened after was something I never expected. I encountered Jesus Christ. It was a mysterious event, an exercise of raw divine power. I had entered into the joy of God when I received love, grace, forgiveness, and eternal life through Christ. It was the most significant turning point in my life, at the age of 24. Words cannot express the immense joy, light, and wonder I have been experiencing since I began a relationship with the Triune God.

It was also the starting point of my intellectual journey to gain more knowledge and wisdom about God. I did not go back to the UK, but God redirected my path to the US in 2015. It was only then I realised that my sudden journey to India was divinely scheduled to bring me to the perfect arena where God could reveal the truth and redirect my path. I have gone through tremendous transformation after I met Christ. Then a more powerful spiritual explosion occurred within me at the age of 27 (in 2017). After a few months, I felt a higher calling from the Lord. God led me to leave my job in the US and directed me to study and investigate the rational side of the Christian faith.

I studied the major world religions,

So, one day I decided to find the truth about God. I knew that if God existed, knowing, listening, and obeying him mattered the most; everything else was secondary. If God created me, only he could tell me the true value, meaning, and purpose of my life.



philosophy, theology, science, apologetics, etc. and tried to understand every major worldview, including atheism and nihilism. I have looked into the reasons and evidence for the existence of God and found overwhelmingly convincing, undeniable philosophical and scientific reasons. I have investigated the truth claims of the Judeo-Christian worldview and discovered an abundance of evidence for the Biblical truth claims, including the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I compared the Judeo-Christian worldview with all other major worldviews and reached the conclusion that only the Judeo-Christian worldview sufficiently and satisfactorily answers the big questions about life and the world. In every possible way, I tested to see if I could find any reason to doubt the Christian faith, but I didn't find one. So, there was no way I could run away from it for intellectual reasons.

On the cross of Calvary, God's perfect justice and perfect love were displayed in perfect unity. Knowing that truth and accepting God's grace offered through Christ brought me into an eternal

relationship with the Triune God. He gave me the greatest freedom from the bondage of sin and freedom from an eternal separation from God. Now my life is thrilling, and filled with tears of joy.

After all my studies and investigations, I dedicated my life to giving reasons to believe in Christianity and answering people's honest questions about God, life and the world. If Christianity were not true, I certainly would not have decided to spend the rest of my life defending it. I can assure all truth-seekers that there are sufficient reasons to put all their trust in the God of the Bible. The Judeo-Christian worldview is true, rational, and pertinent to whole life. The truth is so beautiful and extremely valuable. ■

Aby Jacob was born and raised in Kerala, India. He is currently pursuing an MA in Philosophy and a Certificate in Scientific Apologetics at Southern Evangelical Seminary (USA). He dedicates his life to defending the Christian faith and answering people's honest questions about God, life, and the world.

FAMILIA

Angel of God

Dr Sharmila Benny shares the extraordinary story of her daughter, Angel, whose love for Jesus and joy in death brought the family back to the Catholic faith.



The death of a child shatters our sense of the natural order of things. It tests and sometimes breaks our faith in a loving God. It is capable of throwing the parents and surviving siblings into grief more intense and more lasting than most can even imagine. To lose a child is literally to lose part of oneself.

While no words or gestures will ever be enough to comfort the pain experienced by those who have lost a child, Pope Francis said that God's response to our tears is the offer of hope – hope in the promise of eternal life.

Reflecting on the Old Testament figure of Rachel, who in the book of Jeremiah weeps 'for her children—they are no more,' the Pope focused his January 4, 2022, general audience on God's response to her mourning. 'God, with his gentleness and his love, responds to the cry of Rachel with real words' through the Prophet Jeremiah, the Pope said. *Cease your cries of weeping, hold back your tears! There is compensation for your labour. They shall return from the enemy's land. There is hope for your future ... your children shall return to their own land* (Jeremiah 31:16, 17).

Nine years ago when I lost my daughter, I took these words of Jeremiah to heart. Now, as I tell the story of a child who desired to meet Jesus in heaven and who embraced death with utmost happiness, I feel the heavens come down...

'Amma, I hear bells ringing, I see white flowers around,' she told me on the hospital bed. I still believe that it was angels she saw, who came to carry her to heaven. I don't grieve over the death of my child, instead I count it as the biggest blessing for our family. Her death is a gift, not just for us but to all who come to know about her.

My faith story begins in my family, where I was raised in the Catholic faith. We were twelve children at home. After completing my studies, a good marriage proposal came from another Christian

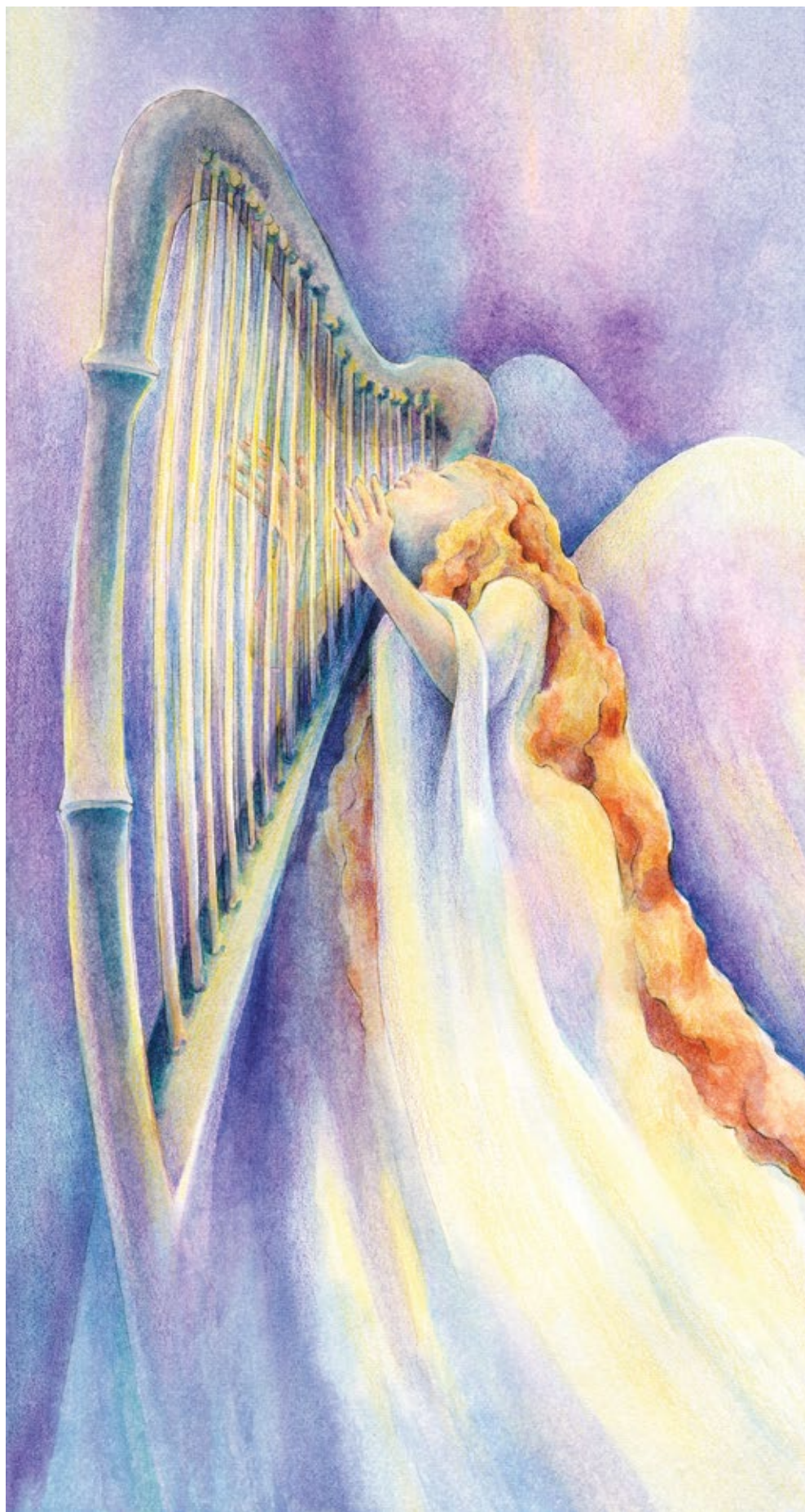
denomination. Though I didn't want to go away from my Catholic faith, I had no other option at the time. I couldn't imagine missing my daily Holy Mass and Rosary, but there was no other choice but to obey my parents and go ahead.

From the very first day of my marriage, I wanted to return to my Catholic faith. Things remained the same till our second daughter, Angel came. She used to watch *Shalom Television* with me and was very fond of the saints and religious practises. She showed an unusual acquaintance and familiarity to the Catholic faith, prayers and practises. My husband and family didn't approve of us attending Catholic prayers or Holy Mass, so we had to secretly recite our prayers in our room and got to attend Holy Mass only when we went to my parents' place. Many times, Angel surprised me with saints' stories – this she was neither taught nor told about. Slowly I began to realise that she was gifted with heavenly wisdom.

Day by day, I was humbled through tough experiences and challenges in life. Though initially I was disappointed in my husband and his faith, gradually I came to the realisation that he was the perfect partner for me. When I accepted this fact and loved him, changes automatically began to happen; he even agreed to attend a retreat which led him to the Catholic faith. He became a strong believer in Mother Mary and started joining our secret Rosaries.

Angel was in a way instrumental in many changes within our family. One day I came to know that she longed to receive Holy Communion and was refused it when she attended a Holy Mass in St Antony's Shrine near her school. I took her to my parents' Catholic parish and enrolled her for catechism classes to prepare her for Holy Communion. All this had to be kept a secret from my family, as they wouldn't have approved us following the Catholic faith. My daughter was also deeply worried about this.

However, God's plans were entirely different. My daughter was taken to her heavenly abode within six months of this incident, before her desire to receive Holy Communion could be fulfilled. Everything started taking a U-turn after her death. We were pulled back as a family to the Catholic faith through various



I could feel a question from inside asking me, *Do you love me?* Something similar to what our father Abraham faced. I understand the depth of this question very clearly now. I prayed for the strength to say 'Yes, Lord' then and ever since.



incidents and circumstances which I recollect as miracles arranged by my saintly daughter who loved Jesus and his Church more than anything. *If God is for us, who can be against us* (Romans 8:31). We began to attend daily Holy Mass at a nearby Catholic shrine and gradually the resentment of my in-laws disappeared. My husband grew in faith and joined me in regular prayers.

Angel embraced death wholeheartedly, with the intense desire to be with Jesus in heaven. She had once asked me where Jesus lived. In heaven, I said. Her immediate question was, 'How do we get to heaven?' Without any second thoughts, I explained that we get to heaven only after death. But her reply jolted me. She said that she wanted to die soon to meet Jesus in person and be with him forever. Though initially I took it as a joke, she kept speaking about this wish that it began to disturb me. Whenever she fell ill, she was happy to be able to join St Alphonsa in her mystical joy in suffering. She didn't like us having pictures of the suffering Jesus or Rosa Mystica, as this pained her to watch them bleed. She used to write short prayers for all her friends and dear ones in her Missal, which I had bought for her to attend Holy Mass in the shrine near her school.

Her doll's name was Germaine Cousin, a saint I came to know from her. She was very fond of priests too. She used

to tell me that she often saw Jesus in the place of priests. She was not fond of songs other than devotional ones and many a time I have experienced a breeze coming in whenever she sang, along with a fragrance.

When Angel passed away, we were able to get over it with grace. An unusual courage swept all of us. I could feel a question from inside asking me, *Do you love me?* Something similar to what our father Abraham faced. I understand the depth of this question very clearly now. I prayed for the strength to say 'Yes, Lord' then and ever since.

Our life has been filled with grace since then. *I will go before you and will level the mountains; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who summons you by name* (Isaiah 45:2-3). We began to see this verse take shape in our lives. We became strong in faith and faith practices and haven't missed our daily Holy Mass since – not even during Covid lockdown.

Though Angel was cremated in my husband's church as per their traditions, six years later, God arranged for us to move her mortal remains to the nearby Catholic church, which was her favourite place.

Another interesting blessing which our daughter coordinated from heaven is the daily family prayer at 8.30 pm, where all my siblings along with their families come together online from different parts of the world. This indeed is the foundation of all our daily activities. I often seek the intercession of my daughter when 'hopeless' patients come to me and I have witnessed miraculous healings on many occasions.

God has a reason for allowing things to happen. We may never understand his wisdom, we simply have to trust his will.

Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will act (Psalm 37:5). ■■

EVOLUTION

ROUTE CORRECTIONS IN LIFE

Livin Varghese thinks back upon the various instances and events through which God was leading him to his destined path.

Let me start with my story. This was back in 2003, I was writing my final board exams and was just recovering from the setback of failing eleven subjects during the preparatory exams, in which I scored just an average of 27%. The task at hand was a very simple pass for all the eleven subjects, to get the minimum 40% marks to attend university or repeat a year. My parents, being religious, made all possible offerings to Jesus and Mary to make me pass (sort of like a bribe) because they knew I could not crack this exam and that only God could save me. Fast-forward to today and I am head of HR of an SMB IT service company based out of the US and India. Am I setting the world on fire? Probably not yet, there is a long way to go! But how did I even reach here in the first place?

When I was studying the Word of God, the verse from Isaiah

43:4 (*Because you are precious in my eyes and honoured, and I love you, I give people in return for you and nations in exchange for your life*) made me wonder how God could do 'anything for me' when I was struggling to find my purpose. This made me believe that there was something in me, and in each one of us that makes God give anything in exchange to win us back. But the problem was me – I thought I wasn't good enough. Where did that feeling come from? Since childhood, I was compared to everyone around me, I felt I would never rise up to meet my parents' expectations and would never reach anywhere close to what they wanted me to achieve.

Being in a pit of rejection and not accepted for who I was led me to low levels of self-confidence. But God still kept reminding me how precious I was... Somehow I could never bring myself to feel that until God brought me through an experience. During one of my 'personal time with God,' he asked me, 'Livin, why is gold so precious? Because it is rare. Why is diamond costlier than gold? Because it is more rare than gold. So if a stone or metal is worth so much because it is rare, how much more worth are you, my child, who is the most unique being in the whole world. No one who existed before, or will ever be is like you. You are more valuable to me than anything else in the world.'

This simple realisation brought me



back on track but I kept asking God about the years I lost, where my efforts went lacking because of the belief that I was not good enough. Then the Lord spoke to me again through a Jesus Youth retreat I attended back in my campus days, through the words 'We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose' (Romans 8:28). When I asked God for an example to understand how things could be reversed, he showed me a Google map and said, 'If you know your destination then even if you take a wrong route, the map will redirect you to the destination with an alternative route but you must be clear of your destination.' This simple yet powerful example brought a breakthrough in my life and influenced the kind of courses I took in university, and the career I am in right now. Yes, my destination is to be with my Father in heaven, everything else in this world is simply meant to achieve this.

But where do I start now? Matthew 25:14–30 talks about the parable of the talents, something I probably must have heard a thousand times. Yet, it never dawned on me that I needed to go back to my maker who gave me my talents. My mind had been clouded by what the world was drumming into me – that to be successful, I had to be famous. So, to get attention, I ended up doing a lot of crazy things, influenced by popular culture. I

Being in a pit of rejection and not accepted for who I was led me to low levels of self-confidence. But God still kept reminding me how precious I was...

thought I was actually using my talent to build my career and life instead all that I was doing was living someone else's dream.

It was at this time that, persuaded by many Jesus Youth elders, I decided to have eldering in my life. Till that time, I was not ready to be open about my life to anyone as I had projected a good image outside and never thought of showing the side I struggled with. But the day I submitted to an elder, the Lord started to work in my life and began to show me areas I had not explored before. He brought a beautiful cell group into my life, where the members knew what my true abilities were. Even then, I was not really able to live the way God wanted me to because I was struggling with a particular sin that was holding me back, the guilt of which was killing me. But when a senior in college challenged me to go for regular Mass, it eventually helped me overcome this sin too.

Later in my corporate life, I was selected by my company and sent to the Gallup institute for leadership training. There I realised that I was not working on my strengths, was struggling at my work and not happy in what I was doing. I opened up about this situation to my wife and this area where I struggled. I had been working in an operations role in the organisation but my strength was in human relations and networking. But I was not ready to make the shift as it was a completely new domain and felt I would lose many years in doing something I was not sure would bring success. But with the help of a priest who was guiding my wife and I, and after a lot of prayer, I decided to resign my job and start something on my own. That was when Covid hit and all plans came to a standstill.

I began to question myself if I had made the right decision. And also filled my time with a lot of odd things to survive; in the process one day, I made a call to a known person in the industry for business advice. He immediately asked me to join him full-time to lead human relations because he knew I was in the Jesus Youth movement and liked the way we go about building and treating each other (by the way he is not a Christian). We knew this was God's providence.

As I end this article, I am reminded about a quote from St. Catherine of Siena. 'If you are what you should be, you will set the whole world on fire!' ■

IN FOCUS



Young Catholic families from around the world have a heart-to-heart talk with Jesus Youth elder, Prof George VM on the various challenges young families face today.

SAFEGUARDING PRICELESS

The 2018 Disney movie, *Incredibles 2* opens with the Incredibles working together to defeat the Underminer. While the villain did cause a great deal of havoc in the city, he wasn't able to undermine the strength of the family's teamwork. They drew together and fought as a team, putting each other's strengths to good use.

Beyond the superhero punches, *Incredibles* was truly incredible in how it portrayed the beauty of the family's oneness.

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labour: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

'Sacred Scripture begins with the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God and concludes with a vision of "the wedding-feast of the Lamb"' (CCC 1602).

Adam calls the woman Eve – mother of life, thoughtfully covering up her agony of losing Eden and upholding her dignity in the midst of all her follies.

Sarah was more careful by calling her husband, Lord, thereby changing his status before generations.

Moving ahead, we see profound versions of love when it comes to Joseph, where he covered Mary in ways beyond explanation and hence, we have Christmas.

The sacrament of marriage is supposed to be the most beautiful institution that helps a couple become their best selves – people God created them to be – and help each other get to heaven.

As Catholics, we place a high priority on staying together in love. But what happens when things take a turn for the worse? What happens when, instead of being a source of blessing, the marriage becomes miserable where two people can't be in the same room without things turning ugly?

Every marriage hits its rough spots. Pope Francis noted in his apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* that 'the life of every family is marked by all kinds of crises.' He goes on to say, 'Couples should be helped to realise that surmounting a crisis need not weaken their relationship... Each crisis becomes an apprenticeship in growing closer together or learning a little more about what it

means to be married. There is no need for couples to resign themselves to an inevitable downward spiral or a tolerable mediocrity' (232).

UNCERTAINTIES

Anoop Simon: I got married to Shilpa a year ago and we moved to Abu Dhabi. We wished to establish a Catholic family and enthusiastically stepped into the initial days of marriage. But we immediately had to deal with quite a lot of uncertainties in career, place of stay, migration plans, etc. And when our first child was conceived within two months, our uncertainties seemed intense. Though both of us were convinced about our decisions, criticism from family and friends made it tough for us; often our decisions and blind faith left us confused. It disturbed our relationship too and I wished those days were more peaceful and stress-free.

Aasha Mathew: I too had a very similar situation. When I got pregnant two months into our marriage, I came to realise that people, including my family in Mumbai and friends, weren't pleased. They had expected me to find a job as soon as possible, to be proficient in the native language and culture, to get to know my spouse well, and take at least a year for ourselves before we thought of starting a family. This pulled me down.

George VM: A child is God's plan while career, yours. I admit that a career and higher prospects are essential for a sound family but nothing can be more precious than receiving a child into the family. A child indeed is heaven's affirmation of the sacrament you received and they bring sufficient grace to the family.

In John 21:6, *Jesus called out, 'Haven't you caught anything, friends?' And when they answered, 'No,' he said, 'Throw the net out to starboard and you'll find something.' So they threw the net out and could not haul it in because of the quantity of fish.*

How can anyone with logic think that there would be more fish to the right side of an approx. 15 ft. wide boat, than left? But they believed in his word and witnessed miracles. It's just a matter of believing in his word and peace will follow.

Ann: The idea is convincing and makes sense. But answering the concerns

of our loved ones while fighting the emotional and physical struggles of pregnancy was tougher than expected for me. I too entered family life in a similar situation and had to face severe criticisms from around for being foolish. The culture and customs demand too much of a newlywed daughter-in-law, and meeting all those expectations while enduring pregnancy's symptoms was really tough.

George VM: One of my close friends who is also a Catholic preacher and counsellor received their first child without any hands or legs. In spite of their strong religious convictions and beliefs, they were still baffled initially but gradually accepted it as part of God's plan. But when I look at them now, I see proud parents of a miracle child who, with prosthetic hands, is a prodigy with western musical instruments and aces studies too.

When God decides to give us a child, we have no other option but to receive with gratitude, unless we are too stubborn with selfishness. And the relationship between the partners deepens more beautifully in the presence of a child.

Here we should remember what Pope Francis reminds us through his exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*: 'Each crisis becomes an apprenticeship in growing closer together or learning a little more about what it means to be married.' (232)

Dominic: I actually have a flip side to what both of you are talking about. We are in our third year of marriage and expecting our first child now. Remaining childless for two-and-half years, amidst the societal 'concerns' seems like a nightmare to us now. I still am clueless about why we should be answerable to 'society'? These are private matters and the nagging we faced was a challenge. When we are practising Catholics sticking to NFP, living a righteous life, these prejudiced concerns from around are more than disturbing. I can't imagine the pain my sister would have gone through – she received her first child after five years of marriage.

George VM: We can't avoid this as long as we are social beings. Answering gracefully rather than getting disturbed is an art to be practised and a gift of the Holy Spirit. I agree that these questions will disturb our calm. The bonding

between partners is also very relevant here. Defending becomes easier, when you are a team.

DISAGREEMENTS

Noel: Bonding sounds beautiful but not as easy as it sounds. I am in my first year of marriage and it's not easy to be in the same box with two strong personalities. Disagreements arise on anything and everything on a daily basis. Living biblically seems almost impossible in such situations. I have my 'right' which stands perpendicular to my partner's 'right'. The question of which right is RIGHT is confusing.

George VM: Marriage is a 1+1=1 theory. Scripture says, *So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate* (Mathew 19:6).

This lifelong union has now been given an additional dignity by being elevated by Christ to the status of sacrament, which is symbolic of the union between Christ and his Church, which is why St Ambrose declared that marriage was 'sanctified by Christ'.

It takes time to balance this understanding without compromising on our personality and individuality. When both partners try to enter through a door, the two of them cannot pass through together, either of them will have to step back to make the entry easy and possible. Understanding is about knowing the strengths of each other and it works when we start appreciating the goodness inside the partner. Time will give you more important things to focus on in life.

Fulton J Sheen has explained this beautifully in his book *Three to get Married*:

As life goes on, they become not two compatible beings who have learned to live together through self-suppression and patience, but one new and richer being, fused in the fires of God's love and tempered of the best of both. One by one, the veils of life's mysteries have been lifted. The flesh, they found, was too precocious to reveal its own mystery; then came the mystery of the other's inner life, disclosed in the raising of young minds and hearts in the ways of God.

Ann: I am in my fifth year of marriage and I can relate to this. I too had this confusion of clash of personalities

initially and had ample fights over it. But gradually as years passed, I see and admire many of the things I disagreed with my partner initially and have even started practising things, learning from him. I observe the same in the case of my husband too. He admires many traits of mine now and has even absorbed some of them organically which he initially disagreed with.

George VM: I completed 38 years of marriage this year, and all these years we disagreed on our personalities and it's still the same. But the intensity with which we disagreed has come down and it no longer affects us. But there is another

side to it. We have to understand and identify our partner as an individual, and beyond criticism we have to accept their personalities as unique.

Anoop: There is another beautiful way of doing it. We can sometimes change our styles a bit to please our partner too. It's harmless and will boost our bonding. These could be read simply as gestures of love rather than giving up. It's not a formal alliance, rather a gift and intimate

'As life goes on, they become not two compatible beings who have learned to live together through self-suppression and patience, but one new and richer being, fused in the fires of God's love and tempered of the best of both. One by one, the veils of life's mysteries have been lifted. The flesh, they found, was too precocious to reveal its own mystery; then came the mystery of the other's inner life, disclosed in the raising of young minds and hearts in the ways of God.'



relationship based on love.

George VM: Marriage is about knowing each other and growing in love day by day. It definitely takes time to understand the inner dimensions of your partner. The husband and wife come from two entirely different families, based on two different cultures under the special care of two sets of entirely different parents. When they join to make a family, it's totally impractical to expect them to fit in a frame. But as days go by, they interact, they understand, they love and they come to a oneness polished through experience.

Do not confuse this with the age-old concept of wives being completely obedient to husbands. No sound comes

out of such homes nor any conflicts, but this came from the unethical surrendering of wives to their husbands beyond question. This is not fair.

We read in the book of Tobit, how Tobias began his married life. We see how beautifully they give space to each other. Tobias and Sarah's whirlwind romance came at a time unbeknownst to both of them. When they were dealing with their own burdens, oblivious to the truth that their identities intertwined one another. A divine orchestration, mystical in proportion.

It could happen to us, too! If we are ready to open our hearts and offer ourselves in love.

Theresa: I entered marriage with so many questions in my mind. I had no idea about how to identify my real partner from the proposals that came. Finally, I placed a condition before God that if I liked the proposal, I would take as a sign if the prospective groom came to see me wearing the same colour as I did. It sounded ridiculous to my parents and siblings but it gave me some sort of relief. I liked Naveen when he came to my house to see me. and surprisingly, he was wearing exactly the same colour as I. We are now in the fifth year of our marriage living happily with our two kids. I can

relate to almost all the issues discussed so far during the initial years of my marriage. There were personality clashes, misunderstandings and conflicts. But when I look back, one thing that helped us most was that I did not let any of these go out of my family. We discussed everything together and sorted it out and gradually understanding took place.

FORGIVENESS

Anoop: Though we say understanding comes gradually, many times we fail to forgive and forget. It keeps recurring during every conflict. I often pray inside and surrender such situations along with my partner into God's hand.

Ann: To be frank, neither do I get the composure to pray nor forgive in such situations.

Noel: Also we read in Matthew 18:21, 22: *Then Peter came up and said to him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.'* This biblical style of forgiving seems totally impossible.

George VM: To forgive instantly and forget soon may not be always possible, but one thing we can do – confess at the earliest. No conflict should go beyond a confession. Disagreements and quarrels are an inevitable part of my life too. But both my wife Lucy and I make sure that none of our conflicts go beyond a confession.

Often, we can't naturally forgive our partners and in-laws as we consider it our 'rights' and are in a mood to fight for it. I don't think family life is possible without any of these problems.

When Joseph heard of Mary's pregnancy, he responded like any other man. But apart from that, he left a space for God to intervene and sort things out. Often this is what we forget. We rely on our merits and fail. But when we let God, there is a big difference.

Once while sharing with my pastor, he told me that inability to forgive is unwillingness to love as love is unconditional. You can't go ahead in love an inch unless you forgive.

Theresa: Love helps the best in forgiving. I have noticed that we need not worry much about forgiving as it naturally



happens over time, when we grow day by day in love. Definitely I take time to heal myself and wounds healed by time with love often never recurs.

George VM: Though priests bless the couples during marriage – that now you are no longer two but one, it doesn't actually happen on that very day. The process of becoming one just begins with the sacrament of marriage. As long as the couple remains as two different entities, all that they come across will become hurts and wounds.

Marriage gradually evolves as a loving relationship as we move from falling in love in the early stage of marriage with its virtually inevitable conflicts and finally into a long-term stage of enduring love when we use each conflict as an opportunity to build a stronger and more loving relationship.

Dominic: When we begin a new family, we wish to build it based on our convictions and policies. Unnecessary celebrations and customs often annoy me and I fail to convince my family in such situations. My sister consoles me saying

that it's all a part of humbling ourselves.

Anoop: My wife was recently sent home for delivery. I actually didn't approve of it personally, but I could relate to the sentiments of my in-laws to take care of their only daughter during her first delivery; I gave into their sentiments despite what I felt. Sometimes this is also needed when we interact with family members.

George VM: You can stick on to your convictions when your intention is pure, but I would appreciate what Anoop did as it's an extra mile in love taught by Jesus Christ. We could be lenient to the customs and interests of our family members unless it leads to a sin. For e.g., when serving liquor in family functions is a custom, you can strongly disagree and be stern with your stand as its outcome is sin.

PARENTING

Deepu: As young parents another major challenge before us is Catholic parenting. We definitely wish to raise our kids in faith and righteousness. But concerns

whether we are enough to give them the best arise when we enter parenthood.

George VM: Parenting is important. We are gifted with God's children and it's our responsibility to provide them the best within our limits. Children respond to examples better. We should constantly reform ourselves to be good examples before them. But this is not easy for normal human beings like us along with our day to day struggles. That's where we receive help, as Catholics, through the Word of God, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the good counsel of others, and Church teaching (CCC 1785).

Mass is also an immersive opportunity for our reformation. The Penitential Rite helps us examine our conscience as we acknowledge our failures. The Liturgy of the Word helps form our conscience as we listen to Scripture. And throughout the Mass, we receive a concrete example of how to live in good conscience as we contemplate Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Ann: I have noticed that though we give our children the best, they receive it and respond to it according to their personalities. I find it interesting to see my two kids evolving as two totally different entities though we gave them the same resources and background.

George VM: Catholics are challenged to ask, 'Of all the different ways I can raise my kids and organise my family life, what choices enable me to do the best job I can of bearing witness to the embodied self-giving and call to intimacy that rests at the heart of the Catholic vision of love?' ■■

Newly married? Keep this in mind!

Thank God always for putting them in your life.

Listen to the other until you understand the other side.

Do not compare your partner to others.

Keep your secrets to yourselves.

Attempt only to solve one thing at a time.

Do not bring up issues from the past.

Be as specific as possible in what you mean and want.

Be the first to say sorry.

Pray together daily at a fixed time.

Eat, sleep, and take care of yourself and those in your care.

Saint Teresa of Calcutta said that if we wish to change the world, we have to go home and love our family.



Even though there was a blizzard raging outside, I made it the half-mile to the bakery, where I asked the owner for six jam rolls.

'Your wife must like rolls,' he said.

'How do you know these are for my wife?' I asked.

'Because your mother wouldn't send you out in weather like this.'

George VM lives in Kodungallur, India and is a professor at MES Asambi College there.

Marriage counsellor,
Sr Sherin CSN
 elaborates about
 a case of family
 discord and how
 healing came to be.

YOU RAISE ME UP

ISAIAH 40:31



The LORD directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble, they will never fall, for the LORD holds them by the hand (Psalm 37:23-24).

Those who are convinced that God will guide them will continue to move forward no matter the failures and setbacks in life. It is through a higher perspective (Holy Spirit) that the mind gains strength and energy to move forward without jumping to the verdict that everything was a failure. We experience the presence of God as we move forward completely relying on him, regardless of the suffering. It has been my experience over twenty-two years of marital counseling that God, who



takes care of everything, comes to care for and help us in many different ways.

Let me illustrate with an example where I experienced God guiding a couple through marital counselling. Biju and Siji [names changed] were working as nurses, having completed their BSc Nursing. Four years had passed since they filed for divorce. Attempts at reconciliation by family and friends failed miserably. So bad were things that Biju, who became involved with another lady, was planning to marry her after the divorce. But his dreams came crashing down when his girlfriend parted ways and married someone else. This left him shattered and he tried to take his life twice, but failed.

Around that time, he attended a retreat and was directed to counselling. Reluctantly he participated in the first counselling session with many justifications. Then he began to cooperate in the subsequent sessions. Slowly, with grace, he was able to understand himself and Siji as well. He was filled with great regret and repentance. God prepared him to receive his wife and her family with love and care. Gradually he began to realise his own flaws and shortcomings and that of his parents.

Then God said: "It is not good that the man should be

alone; I will make him a helper as his partner" (Genesis 2:18).

For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no man separate (Matthew 19:5-6).

The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace (Romans 8:6).

The backstory to the couple's problems began with Biju's mother. His happiness was to be in the shadow of his mother. And after his marriage too, the mother insisted that the relationship remain the same. It was her inordinate attachment, stubbornness and interference that ruptured the foundation of her son's family life. Sadly the young couple didn't recognise that reality. The son lacked the knowledge or mental maturity to set boundaries and so fell prey to his mother's mental games. He had been working in a hospital far away from home, believing the myths about Siji and his father to be true. Although he had brought his wife to his ancestral home on the advice of neighbours and relatives, it became a tortuous and bitter experience.

Siji was unable to understand her husband's

behaviour. They never had the opportunity for open communication. Biju's mother's influence had affected his mind so much that disgust, hatred and animosity kept building up in his mind, and was always reflected in word and deed. The two began to torture each other physically and mentally. The mother was constantly pointing out to her son that there was an unhealthy relationship between her husband and daughter-in-law. His mother's every conversation was filled with Siji's faults and shortcomings. Biju was unable to communicate openly with his wife or submit to God's will to have proper discernment of spirits to what the mother said. Instead, he reacted by believing his mother, who unfortunately made a lot of things up because of her strained marital relationship with her husband. On the other hand, there was a mature relationship between daughter-in-law and father-in-law.

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (Colossians 3:12-14).

When Biju filed for divorce after taking Siji to her own home, it came as a huge shock to Siji and her family. Yet their response was very dignified, opting not to go for any objection or re-trial. They surrendered everything to God and prayed that God's will would be done. She presented everything when the case was called but God did not give him a chance to reach out.

Later, three false cases were filed against her by Biju's lawyer. It left her weary, filled her with anger and resentment. She found a job and began to support herself and the baby. The next four years went by with the divorce case and all hope for a reunion seemed lost.

It was at that time that God brought a despairing Biju, who had lost all his dreams, to Nazareth Family Retreat Centre, Ernakulam. His understanding of marriage, the husband-wife relationship, and the relationship between parents and children underwent a dramatic change. He also realised the need to cultivate differentiation of self - distinguishing between thoughts and feelings in an emotional relationship system like family. He became aware about the things that needed to change after marriage (thoughts) at the same time respecting and loving parents in attitude, word and deed (feeling). God gave him the grace to go to Siji's home and apologise to her.

Once the decision was made, God's intervention could be seen in many forms to help Biju. His father and grandfather came to his support, they arranged for a flat and necessary amenities so that the couple could stay together. Siji too was advised to go for counselling.

No matter how hard we work and resolve to achieve

our goals in life, things do not always work out in our favour. There can be sorrowful moments in life when it seems as though God has forsaken us. Such adverse moments can at first cause frustration, sadness and estrangement, but any separation must not be allowed to prolong. We may fail, we may fall down, but the real failure is when we do not get up. When we look at failure and suffering through the eyes of Jesus and offer them to him completely, it becomes redemptive and hopeful.

Although Siji was reluctant to reconcile with Biju, God gave her the grace and strength to accept and embrace things, and gradually her wounds began to heal. Though she put forward certain terms for their reconciliation, she came to realise the genuineness in Biju, who repented for the years of cruelty he had put her through. Siji decided against the terms she had initially laid out. This became a huge positive factor in their marriage. God gave them a new heart, mind and spirit to forget all the problems between them. Today, they live happily and peacefully.

May this success story be an inspiration to today's young couples and their parents. *They that hope in the LORD will renew their strength, they will soar on eagles' wings; they will run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint (Isaiah 40:31).*

Sr Sherin CSN currently serves as Director of Nazareth Family Retreat Centre. She actively integrates psychology with the Catholic faith to provide faith-based psychological services. She believes marriage is a covenant of persons in love. And love can be deepened and poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, which has been given us.



CULTURE OF LIFE



PROJECT LILY

Jacob Jose writes about Soul Chat, a YouTube series by Project Lily, the Jesus Youth chastity initiative. The series offers friendly conversations around human sexuality.

Nowadays, under the guise of freedom and advancement, the very ideal of leading a chaste life is mocked and ridiculed. Individual interests are exalted and physical pleasure is given priority. Degradation of the human individual is the sad consequence. People who have limitless worth and dignity are reduced to objects of use, merely a means to an end. Hook-ups, casual relationships, one-night encounters, pornography, and other forms of sexual perversion have all become widespread. In the end, people struggle with poor self-esteem and worth. They are plagued by guilt and shame day after day.

Yet as Christians we know that true freedom is not absence of rules and boundaries. Rather, they are

vital to man's true joy and freedom. God created man and woman, our sexual differences, mutual attraction and love. He instituted marriage, procreation and family. Man finds true joy and freedom only in living according to divine plan. God has a perfect plan for humanity and for our sexuality in particular.

How will the youngsters of today come to terms with these hard-hitting realities? Who will usher them to the truth? Who is to tell them their true worth and significance despite the mess in and around them? Who will take the good news of authentic, life-giving love that will free them from the slavery of lies and deception?

Project Lily is a Jesus Youth initiative to promote, teach, and

help young people grow in the virtue of chastity. The ministry is largely online. Project Lily actively engages teenagers and young people across social media platforms, spreading the truth about human sexuality and authentic human love.

As part of their mission, Project Lily launched a YouTube channel that offers a series of friendly conversations around sexuality, attraction, relationships, and marriage. Its conversational style is proving to be effective in communicating hard truths in a way that everyone can relate to. The people involved in these conversations are interestingly both young and old, who have had their own challenges, yet poised to overcome every hurdle with humility, trusting God's mercy and grace, and disciplining themselves from inordinate attachments and corruptions of the flesh. **IK**

A designer, **Jacob Jose** is elder to Project Lily, a chastity initiative. He runs catholic.cafe, a website answering questions on faith and morals. He also blogs at myarticulateheart.com.



CHECK OUT
PROJECT
LILY ON
YOUTUBE



Plunging into the Unknown

Taken from Jacob Jose's blog,
www.myarticulateheart.com

What if the Aston Martin Vantage GT12 is convinced that it is just a pull cart and lives like one, oblivious of its power or potential? As a larva that does not know the fascinating butterfly it will soon become, man also does not know his own greatness or what he is destined to become. He lives in ignorance of what he is actually capable of. All that he is able to envision with his so-called advanced intellect is so meagre. It seldom measures up to the reality of who he really is or what he is capable of.

Man can only find himself fully in God – his creator.

Man does not become great by addition but by subtraction. Man tries to become great by accruing degrees, possession, wealth, health, superficial beauty, name, fame, etc. He thinks he is the sum total of the value of all that he possesses. Truth is, he becomes great only by letting go...

His greatness lies within himself. Being not humble enough to look up to God, he fails to look into himself to find treasure. The godless man is driven by inordinate passions and desires rather than the light and wisdom of God. The greatest of his ambitions thus is still earth-bound and tiny.

Who is a godless man? You might think I'm referring to some self-professed atheists and God haters. Error! I'm referring to all those who have not plunged into the unknown leaving their lives totally into the hands of God. Those who are 'in control' of their own lives are like the Aston Martin pull cart. Let me repeat: Man cannot reach his fullest potential except in God – his creator.

Salvation as you might think is not merely a saving act but a discovery of self. It is discovering who I actually am. It is discovering my real greatness. It is about sharing God's own life, it is partaking in God's divine nature.

Growing into true greatness means unlearning worldly knowledge and relearning everything in the light of the divine. Jesus said, *I am the way and the truth and the life* (John 14:6). He also said, *I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life* (John 8:12). Jesus is the revelation of the Father in whom we have our fullness. It is the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit that animates the life of God that God has given to us, to animate our lives. True greatness is ascending to the realm of the creator, gliding on the supernatural grace he supplies. God wants us to ascend to his own glory. He loves us so much that he wants to share everything with us.

If we choose to surrender and handover the reins of our lives to God and throw ourselves into his hands, trusting him without a trace of doubt, reordering our lives according to his commandments, we will be set free to soar heights and traverse depths unknown. This unknown is God. But he won't be unknown for long. Knowing God just as he knows us is Heaven. Heaven awaits us.

True greatness lies in abandoning oneself into the merciful, all powerful, protecting, caring, empowering, fatherly, yet mighty hands of God.

Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise (Luke 23:43).

TEEN TALK



THE BARE MINIMUM

Shane Mascarenhas takes us to a conversation a group of friends have as they chill out at a café.

Kevin, Sarah and Joshua have been friends for a long time. They'd gone to school together, studied together, grew up together, and basically been an integral part of each other's lives so far. So it's no surprise that they have a strong bond between themselves. There's a truckload of trust that they share with each other as well.

They love sitting and chilling at cafés, by the way ... affordable ones ... because they're in college ... and that's just how they vibe

So, wanna eavesdrop on one of their café conversations?

Sarah: Why's it always THIS cafeteria? They haven't changed the menu since the first year.

Joshua: It's nice here. Sarah, the three of us made it past our first sem. exams here. It means more to us than the menu.

Kevin: Sarah, when you're finally an architect, we'll dine at the cafeteria, no,



the RESTAURANT that you design, sounds good?

Sarah: Lol sure! So Kev, how's Reshma doing?

Joshua: Yea, yea we need to know, Kev. You tell us WAAAAAAY TOO LITTLE!

Kevin: There really isn't much to say that you guys don't already know. You're as close to anyone I have in my life. Sometimes I feel you guys are closer to me than Resh is. I don't know how to explain it... sometimes, with her it feels ... distant. And there's nothing more to tell you. I feel like I come to you guys to catch some air. It feels nice to be with you guys.

Sarah: That's sweet, dude, but 'distant' doesn't sound right to me. Hmm ... Josh does that sound ... off to you?

Joshua: Kay, look, all I wanted to know was which base you guys are currently at but now we're having this #deep talk.

Sarah: JOSH, come ON DUDE! Is this ALL THAT YOU GUYS ARE CONCERNED

ABOUT! Geez! JOSH! Kev's basically grown up with you, and the first thing you wanna find out is which BASE he's hit?

Kevin (gestures to Josh): We'll talk about it later.

An annoyed Sarah makes to leave.

Kevin: Sarah, Sarah, I'm kidding ha ha! Don't leave, I'm just messing around. This is why I love you guys, 'cause I feel I have the freedom to say anything without being judged, yet being morally corrected ... It's great that we're able to talk about these things. I honestly have NO IDEA what I'd do without you guys. You ground me.

Joshua: Sarah was never going to leave, she loves the attention she gets from us ha ha!

Sarah sticks her tongue out.

Joshua: Although, I see your point, Sarah. Kev's been talking about us and to us perhaps in the way he should be talking about Resh, yea?

Sarah: You mean he's spending her time with us?

Joshua: Yea yea, maybe, you could say so... Tell us, Kev?

Kevin: It's actually smart you picked up on that, Josh, seeing how Sarah's the smartest of us.

Joshua feels super proud of himself. It's not common for him to be called smart...not in his classes at least!

Kevin: Resh has been spending a lot of time at campus gatherings lately. I'd been to one myself, but great as it was, I didn't see the point of it beyond the first few gatherings... I don't get how she's so drawn to it. Not that I have a problem with THAT, but, I'd have loved to spend at least some of her 'gatherings' time with her...

Sarah: Hmm...pretty strange how it seems like these gatherings are becoming the focus of the issue concerning her... Jesus Youth stuff right?

Kevin: Yep, JY.

Sarah: Yea yea, heard of them ... good things, mostly... I've honestly been thinking of dropping by, checking what all the hype is about... though I've been saying this for three years now lol!

Kevin: I actually wouldn't be surprised if Resh is the one to get you to those gatherings. She's been asking me for a while, but ... I don't know ... I feel it takes away from my time with her. And I

haven't been too nice with her about it...

Joshua: NICE with her?

Kevin: I mean I kinda throw a fit, smirk, or do something really childish leading to us not talking for a bit after that.

Sarah: And then?

Kevin: And then? Then I come to you losers ... to share this *kheema paratha*.

Joshua and Sarah laugh aloud.

Kevin: Well, at least I can make you two laugh.

Joshua: Hey, we love you dude. Sarah does too, she doesn't even need to say it.

Sarah: Okay, look Kev, you really need to progress from where you currently stand with Resh ... looks like a stale place to be if you're not being nice, doesn't it? What do you think you could do?

Kevin shrugs his shoulders.

Joshua: Be nice?

Kevin: What?

Joshua: I mean you said you weren't being nice, yea? So just be nice? Maybe that'd change something? You could maybe ask her about it before you smirk away something that interests Reshma. Nicely.

Sarah: Hmm good call, Josh. Yea, be nice. It's something that Resh is interested in. She's a great gal. She'd love your support, Kev. She'd love for you to be even slightly interested in it. So, yea, maybe just be nice.

Joshua: Yea be nice.

Sarah: I think it's the bare minimum, isn't it?

Kevin: Sounds ... fair. Sounds like a plan. That was a helpful conversation. Come to think of it, I haven't been doing the least I could do.

Sarah: Right ... I have to head to class. Meet you guys at 2:30? Table Tennis, PLEASE! Kev you HAVE to teach me the spin serve!

Kevin: Yep! Promise I'll teach you.

Joshua: Fun. I'll come stand beside the table and watch ... and fall asleep.

Kevin: Thanks you guys, I'll go see Resh for a bit ... nicely. ■■

Shane is just one of those ordinary Goan musician dudes . He's lived in Sharjah, UAE for practically his whole life. Buy him an avocado shake (without sugar) to get to know him.

SPECIAL

Walking with the Vicariate

With contributions from Biju PC, Synodal Coordinator of JY UAE, Noel Benno writes about the Synodal Process at AVOSA and the JY contribution in it.



In preparation for the Synod 2021-2023, Pope Francis has asked that every diocese undertake its own Synodal Phase of local consultations: through prayerful listening and discernment rooted in the Holy Spirit, the entire People of God is called to contribute to an undertaking by which the Church deepens in understanding of her mission and looks toward the future.

It has been a great privilege for the Jesus Youth movement to be a part of the synodal consultation by the Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Arabia (AVOSA) in the past couple of months. Since the Synod 2021-2023 is intended as a synodal process *'to provide an opportunity for the entire People of God to discern together how to move forward on the path towards being a more synodal Church in the long-term,'* it was indeed a great opportunity to put to use our unique charisms and collate and share insights, hopes and dreams from communities far and wide in the vicariate. We were specifically requested to share two reports, one from within the movement on our thoughts on the path forward, and another on the migrant population in labour camps, quarries, fisher folk communities, professional workers, supermarket sales staff, and so on. Reaching out to the migrant population is of great significance since AVOSA is by very nature a migrant Church. In the words of Bishop Paul Hinder, we are *'a Church composed of members coming from all parts of the world and living amid an Islamic society'* (Pastoral Letter 2007).

Along with supporting parishes across the vicariate to provide inputs for the consultation, we then set off to see and listen to the Church on the outskirts – labour camps, quarries and places we'd categorise as margins of society. In this way, JY was able to go into the depths of the real meaning of Synodality as seen in the logo of the Synod – kids, teens, youth, families and the clergy journeying together. We also reached out to include those who are no longer active in the faith, that we may understand what distances them from the Church and how we might accompany them. Moreover, this was a holistic process of meeting people in focus groups initiated by a small prayer, reflection with Word of God, and later explaining the synod and listening to them. Despite the restrictions caused by the pandemic, at the end of the process we could reach 1,630 people in the entire vicariate, through 109 consultation meet-ups. The real beauty was to see ourselves reaching out to places no other movement was able to.

'I'm 47 years old and this is the first time someone representing the Church has reached out to me to listen to my thoughts,' said one of the participants. 1,630 might be a very small number compared to 1.3 billion Catholics across the world, but it is immensely beautiful to be part of a mission of the Pope and the Church to reach out to each and every Catholic in the world.

Throughout the process there have been numerous instances and encounters with people from many walks of life. This is particularly interesting when we walk into labour camps where people are constantly on the move. We spent time with individuals who did not have the best of relationships with the Church due to past events, and once we made significant progress into these conversations, initiations of healing could be seen in these stressed relationships. We were even able to connect some of these individuals to the local parish so that they could take their healing process further ahead and experience faith in its fullness.

We as a movement were able to reach out to the fringes and listen to people who had been away from the Church by distance, by faith, by heart and often by their minds for years if not decades. It is often eye-opening for such individuals, that the Church has now come looking for them where

WHAT IS THE SYNOD?

The Synod on Synodality is a two-year process of listening and dialogue beginning with a solemn opening in Rome on October 9 and 10, 2021 with each individual diocese and church celebrating the following week on October 17. The synodal process will conclude in 2023.

Pope Francis invites the entire Church to reflect on a theme that is decisive for its life and mission: *'It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.'*

www.usccb.org

they are. The healing process is one of the most beautiful aspects of the whole journey towards Synodality. The goal was not just to conduct a synodal consultation but to go in search of souls who are away from and bring them back into the loving folds of the Catholic Church.

We had a long term vision in mind when starting off this process. Some of the quarries we went to were in the hills, far away from the mainland. There have been many instances where people in labour camps were happily surprised by our enthusiasm and the hardship we underwent to reach out to them in the middle of a pandemic. These visits and the dialogue were a huge deal for them, living in an isolated camp away from their homes and families.

In a fisher folk colony in Ras Al Khaimah (one of the seven emirates), the people showed no interest in the request for a synodal meeting. They had been staying away from all Church activities due to an incident that happened on Christmas day, two years back. The Church had arranged transportation for Christmas Holy Mass for a few of them only. That incident hurt them. Jesus Youth visited them as part of the synodal consultation which made them happy and

JY was able to go into the depths of the real meaning of Synodality which is seen in the logo of the Synod – kids, teens, youth, families and the clergy journeying together. We also reached out to include those who are no longer active in the faith so that we may understand what distances them from the Church and how we might accompany them.



the visit concluded with a dinner prepared by the fishermen. This synodal consultation process became a healing process for them. This incident was particularly mentioned in the vicariate report to the Vatican as well.

One of the major hurdles we faced during some of these conversations was the doubt among the faithful whether the Church was truly listening to what they had to say. 'Is the Pope really going to listen to our thoughts?' This was the first response from many of the young adults. Approaching this from the perspective that they had things to share with us made it easy for us to open ourselves to some of these difficult conversations. It was such a wonderful experience to be listening to their issues, ideas and even hopes and dreams about the Church. We were also reasonably successful in convincing the participants of their significance, and that every voice was being heard.

Role of Jesus Youth in the Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Arabia

The JY movement had its beginnings in Dubai in 1994; in 2019 we celebrated the Jubilee year. Growth was through outreach, which involved travel to the various emirates and continuous follow ups. In a matter of 3-4 years, we had presence in all emirates and are now the largest JY network after JY India.

We are all happy about the fact that Jesus Youth has played a very significant role in the growth of the vicariate in terms of bringing more people closer to the Church and Christ. It is often said that it is Jesus Youth that takes the Church to people who are outside the walls of the church. This has been one of our biggest missions as a missionary movement which came to fruition with the Synodal consultations. A large number of these people who came closer to the Church and enriched their sacramental life and fellowship experience as a result of such initiatives are now active members of the Church. Sometimes it'd take years, but we continue with our mission to follow up. JY has also had very significant roles to play in vicariate level youth conferences such as the ACYC. Such events and gatherings have had a tremendous impact in bringing youth and teenagers closer to the Church.

This year we are also focusing on reaching out to the multicultural Catholic population that reaches the UAE and we already have attendees from multiple nationalities in our gatherings. In terms of reaching out to other parts of the world, our mission area has always been Uganda and now the UAE Mission Team is supporting mission in Lebanon as well. Looking forward, some of the focus areas for JY UAE is 1) bringing back the vibrancy of JY in a post-pandemic world 2) multicultural outreaches 3) increase the significance in the vicariate. In addition to this, we hope to grow the campus ministry further and maybe even organise a campus meet.

We hope and pray that the Holy Spirit guides the movement as he has always done in the past. ■■

Biju PC resides in Fujeirah, UAE with his wife and their three children. His is also the animator of JY UAE National Council.
Noel Benno is a technology strategy consultant by profession and lives in Thrissur, India with his wife Minu Santhosh.

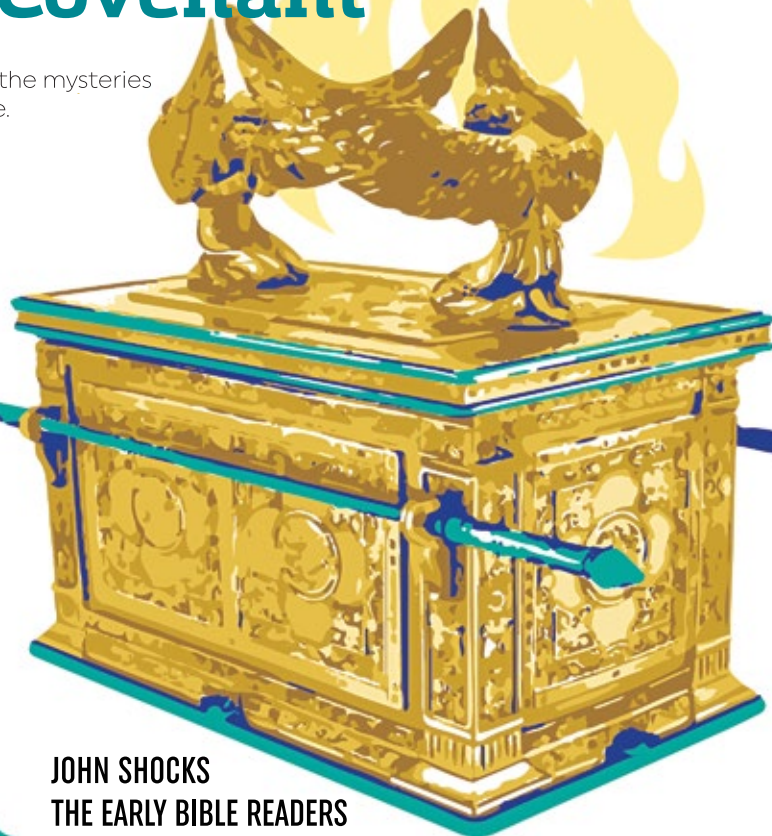
Discovering Mary in Scripture – Ark of the New Covenant



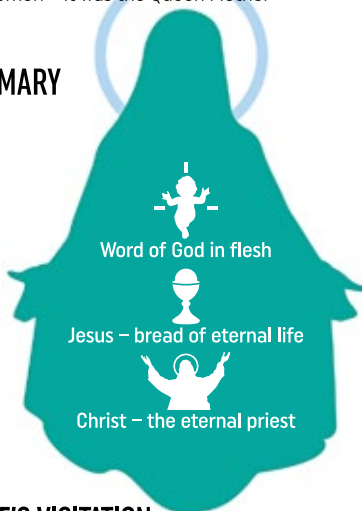
A monthly infographic by **Tena Conil**, illuminating the mysteries of our Catholic faith and values, one pixel at a time.

NEW TESTAMENT COMPLETES THE OLD

When interpreting the Scripture, the Catholic Church always reads verses in its context. 'The Old Testament is the new concealed, but the New Testament is the old revealed' (St Augustine). One such principle is 'typology' (a 'type' is a person, thing, or event in the Old Testament that foreshadows or symbolises something in the New Testament). For example, we see how in the Gospel, Jesus is presented as a new Adam connecting back to Genesis, as a new Moses connecting back to the Exodus, bringing about a new Passover, and a new Solomon, going back to Kings, as the son of David bringing about a new Jerusalem. On closer study, we also begin to discover paired typology. In creation for instance, it wasn't just Adam – there was also Eve by his side and at the time of the Exodus, it wasn't just Moses – there was the Ark of the Covenant as the sign of God's presence. Likewise, at the time of David's Kingdom it wasn't just Solomon – it was the Queen Mother enthroned at the King's right hand.



INSIDE THE ARK – INSIDE MARY



JOHN SHOCKS THE EARLY BIBLE READERS

While exiled on the island of Patmos, the apostle John recorded the divine revelations he received (the Book of Revelation). In chapter 11:19, he makes a dramatic assertion: *God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple.* This would have shocked any first-century Jew, since the (Old Testament's) Ark of the Covenant had been lost for centuries – no one had seen it for about 600 years! At this verse, rather abruptly, chapter 11 ends and chapter 12 begins. But remember, chapter divisions were only added to the Bible in the 12th century. So the very next verse John wrote was: *And a great sign appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; she was with child* (Revelation 12:1-2). Early Christians understood that he's describing Mary revealed as the Ark of the New Covenant – the Queen Mother in the heavenly Jerusalem, who brings forth a *male child, one who is to rule all the nations* (Revelation 12:5).

ARK-MARY TYPOLOGY IN LUKE'S VISITATION

The cloud covered [overshadowed] the tent... and the glory of God filled the tabernacle [Ark of the Covenant]. (Exodus 40:34)

How can the ark of the Lord ever come to me? (2 Samuel 6:9)

As the ark of the Lord was entering the city of David... Michal... saw King David leaping and dancing. (2 Samuel 6:16)

The ark of the Lord remained in the house of Obed-Edom... for three months. (2 Samuel 6:11)

The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. (Luke 1:35)

Why am I so favoured that the mother of my Lord should come to me? (Luke 1:43)

As soon as the sound of your [Mary's] greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. (Luke 1:44)

Mary remained with her [Elizabeth] for about three months. (Luke 1:56)



REVERENCING THE ARK IS GIVING GOD WORSHIP

The Ark of the Old Covenant was made of the purest gold for God's Word (Exodus 25:11-21). Mary – the Ark of the New Covenant is the Immaculate vessel for the Word of God made flesh. Reverencing the old ark did not subtract from the worship of God, but irreverence to it was considered an offense to God. 'Mary, in whom the Lord himself has just made his dwelling, is the daughter of Zion in person, the Ark of the Covenant, the place where the glory of the Lord dwells. She is "the dwelling of God... with men"' (CCC 2676). In venerating Mary as the Ark of the New Covenant who has been taken up into the heavenly Jerusalem (Assumption), we remember our own eternal destiny of a beatific life with God and entrust it into the hands of our Queen Mother (1 Kings 2:17-19).



Blessed and broken

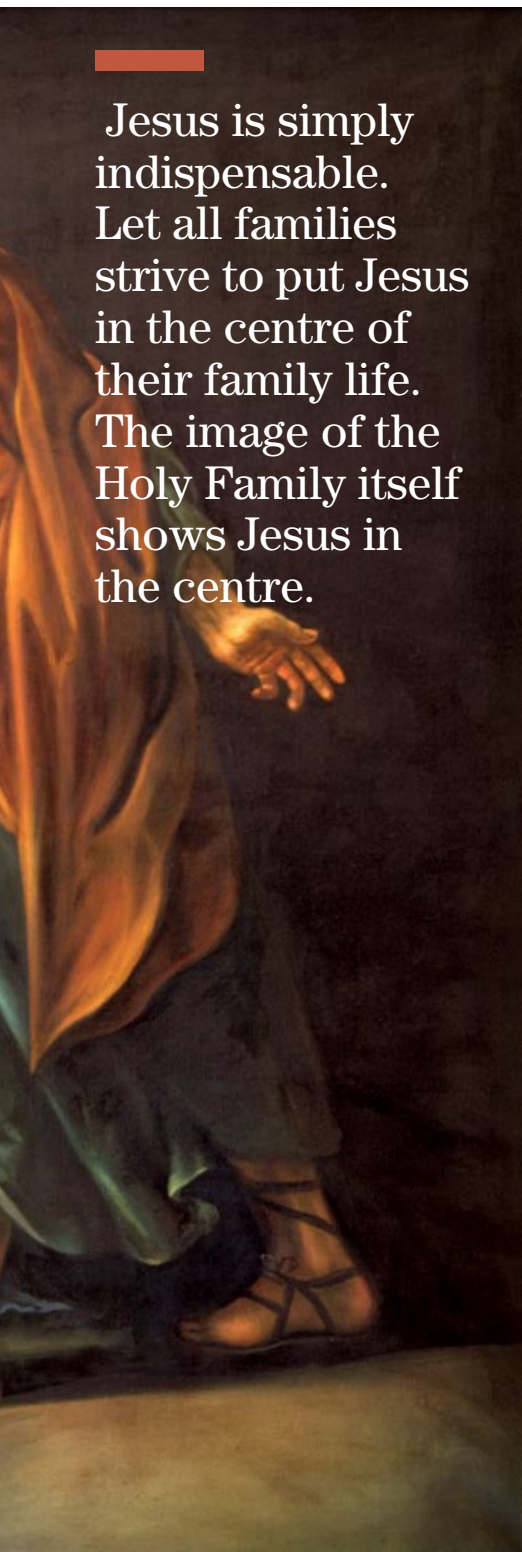
I must be the change I wish to see in my family life, says **Anil Israel**.

We are all on a journey – a lifelong journey of perfection. For scripture itself exhorts: *You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect* (Matthew 5:48). Though perfection may appear as an unattained goal in life, the lifelong pursuit of perfection is what matters. Participation is mandatory. Perseverance is essential. Am I willing to keep on keeping on? God looks at the intention in our hearts with which we do all that we do. Success eventually is not viewed in terms of results and achievements, but in terms of faithfulness. The extent to which I have been willing to be faithful to His call, to His plans, is what counts.

When the sailing is smooth, there is nothing to fear. Where there is no adventure, there is also no fun. When there are no mistakes, there are also no lessons learnt. We must be thankful therefore, that the path to progress is



MUST BE PERFECT, AS YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS PERFECT › MATTHEW 5:48



Jesus is simply indispensable. Let all families strive to put Jesus in the centre of their family life. The image of the Holy Family itself shows Jesus in the centre.

uneven and bumpy like a roller-coaster ride – sometimes up – sometimes down.

When the disciples were in a boat and their boat was caught up in the midst of a storm, they were left with no option but to turn to Jesus who *was asleep* (Matthew 8:24) in the boat. Likewise, when things don't seem to progress as per our human-logical-intellectual plans, when we too seem to have reached a dead-end with no way-forward in sight, then we too turn out with our cry for help, to Him who *rebuked the winds* (Matthew 8:26) and calmed the sea. It is only when we hit rock-bottom that we remember to include Jesus in the team.

This is a very important lesson for all of us, especially married couples. *A threefold cord is not quickly broken* (Ecclesiastes 4:12). A cord of three strands is made up of three persons – the husband, the wife and not-to-forget most significantly God Himself. For if God is not part of all our planning and decision making, then mistakenly (albeit unintentionally) we have unknowingly allowed Jesus to remain asleep in the boat of our lives.

In the wedding at Cana, when the wine ran out, we see a wine-out situation (problem-in), and shortly thereafter Jesus-in (problem-out). In the life of every family, Jesus is simply indispensable. Let all families strive to put Jesus in the centre of their family life. The image of the Holy Family itself shows Jesus in the centre.

It's well said that God helps those who help themselves. So, we need to always do our best and then leave the rest to God. Life is a blend of human-divine partnership. What we ought to do, we must, we ought not to leave it to God. What is beyond our human capacity, where we acknowledge our human limitations-frailty-weakness, there His grace takes over. *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you* (James 4:8).

What else can I do to overcome times of crisis? Let us first acknowledge that in a family, husband and wife are not meant

to compete one another but complement one another. Each one should learn to appreciate the unique strengths of the other person. Of course, we all have our own unique weaknesses too. The earlier we learn to accept the shortcomings of the other person, the better.

In the early years of family life, one invariably thinks in terms of changing the other person to one's own way of thinking, doing, liking. But we forget the truth that we are not change-agents. That is the role of the Holy Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit can convince someone to change. We can pray to the Spirit to bring about a change in the other person, if it is in God's will and give the time needed for that change to come about (which could even be a lifetime). At the same time, truly and very importantly, change is inevitable, but let me be open to the idea that, what if it is God's will that the change should occur in me instead of my partner? Let me be open to change.

We are meant to *be a blessing* (Genesis 12:2) to one another. To make one another and not break one another. I must encourage and help my partner to bloom and grow. I must recognise the temperamental differences and accept them without any attempt to change them. Temperaments are basic raw material which make up a person, and simply cannot be changed. I must therefore learn to let go. I must allow myself to be '*blessed and broken*' (cf. Matthew 26:26). Whenever I am willing to be broken, I allow myself to be a blessing. I must be the change I wish to see in my family life.

Lord help me to remember that nothing is going to happen to me today that you and I together cannot handle. Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know it's me. ■■

Anil Israel lives in Mannheim, Germany, with his wife Sunita and their 5 children.

Chandeliers

✦ Conversations with St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross



St Teresa of Avila



St John of the Cross

Girl: O Lord! It's so miserable to be all alone. I wish to have a soulmate, to be chummed up with someone. I'm desolate...

Teresa: Don't worry dear! We are here with you.

Girl: Oh! Teresa of Jesus. How did you come here now?

Teresa: We are sent by our beloved Jesus. Here's John too, John of the Cross.

Girl: Heavens! It's like my prayer has been instantly answered. This is incredible!

Teresa: Our Lord is faithful. He cares for you.

Girl: Dear Jesus! I asked you for a friend and you sent me two! And dear Teresa, I know you both are great friends too.

John: Yeah, we are. It's wonderful to have friends. Their company will ease our burdens and colour our days.

Teresa: As the scripture says, whose soul is in accord with your soul, and who will sorrow with you if you fail.

Girl: This is nice. You even complement each other when you speak. How did you become friends?

Teresa: It's a long story.

Girl: My pleasure! I'm ready to spend the whole day or more if you would stay. Every second with you is precious.

John: Oh dear! We too love to stay with you.

We both were born in Spain. Teresa was born in 1515 AD and I came in 1542. Both of us grew up in different kinds of families and circumstances.

Teresa: Yes, I was very fond of the saints and their lives during my childhood. I even ran away from home at the age of seven with my brother Rodego to become martyrs for Christ but we were brought back home by our uncle. I lost my mother when I was eleven. That put me in utter despair and sorrow. I turned to the Holy Mother for solace and she became my spiritual mother.

John: I too lost my father when I was just three-years-old. My childhood was poverty-stricken. I entered the Carmelite order and was ordained in 1567 as a priest.

Teresa: My story is different. I initially didn't like the idea of becoming a religious sister as I was more attracted to worldly things. But once I happened to read the letters of St. Jerome, which changed my perspectives inside-out. It made a huge impact on me and my preferences. My entry into the

By Jisha John

Carmelite Convent of the Incarnation was in 1535.

Girl: Aww..! That was God's doing.

Teresa: Yeah, indeed.

Girl: How did both meet to become friends?

John: I met her shortly after my ordination. It was when Teresa was reforming the Carmelite order guided by the Holy Spirit. We met at Medina, where she was working on the foundations of the second reformed Carmelite order.

Teresa: Yes. John told me that he wished to become a Carthusian monk.

John: I wanted a place of silent prayer and contemplation. I shared it with her. I was looking for someone who would understand the meaning of my choice and I could confide in. I found the right person in Teresa. She persuaded me to remain and join her in reforming the Carmelite order. I felt privileged to join this godly mission and we began the journey together.

Teresa: It is wonderful for two souls to understand each other and become true friends, that they will always have a listener and a confidant without prejudice.

Girl: Very true. Thomas Aquinas once said that there's nothing more prized on this earth than true friendship.

Teresa: Thomas is right.

John: God doesn't want us to be alone except when he speaks to us and trains us in solitude.

Teresa: God too enjoys friendship. He created man to share his love with. He also likes to see us love each other. We see evidently in the Gospel that Jesus too enjoyed the company of friends and apostles.

But there's a time of Gethsemane and Calvary too, where we are alone with God. It takes us closer to God and purifies us.

Girl: Yeah! Sometimes it's good to be with the Beloved in solitude. Let me ask you something now. How do you read each other in friendship?

John: Teresa was very witty and talkative, definitely a people's person.

Teresa: John was a kind fellow. He was very gentle and reserved too. But he possessed exceptionally good leadership skills.

John: You know something, she used to call me 'Half-a-Friar'.

Teresa: Oh no! I was just kidding.

Girl: It's interesting to watch your rapport and the way you share friendship.

John: Though she cracks such jokes, she's always loving. She even gifted me a habit once, which was hand sewn by herself.

Teresa: Yeah. Our friendship is precious. More than that, I would say, he gradually became the father of my soul and my confessor. He also greatly helped with the formation of the sisters and the reformation of the Carmelite male community.

Girl: I have heard that the reformation was an arduous task and you were even imprisoned and secluded for it.

Teresa: It was our Gethsemane dear.

John: We had to face severe injustice, misunderstanding, and persecution. But it had a beautiful purpose to serve. It gave us ample time for retrospection and brought us so close to God and sanctified our souls.

Teresa: John had to undergo rigorous imprisonment for nine months. And that's how he became 'John of the Cross'.

John: And when I came out, it was Teresa's nuns who nursed me. I am always thankful to their selfless service.

Girl: The story of 'the order of the Discalced Carmelites' is the story of your fellowship too I guess. It's one of the greatest collaborations in human history like that of St Francis and St Clare, St Brigit and St Patrick, etc...

Teresa: Two are better than one for they have a better reward for their toil.

John: For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow.

Girl: Let us be together in the Spirit. I feel like I'm on cloud nine. I had a great time with you. Your books too are truly inspiring. I feel so proud to have met two Doctors of the Church. Thank you, Lord!

Teresa: Thanks to God. Before we go we would like to affirm you that you aren't alone. We assure you of our company and always remember that we are siblings in Christ. So we always have each other.

John: See you dear. God bless you.

SOUNDREPLY



MOVIE

THE WAY BACK (2020)

presently lives an isolated life, emotionally distant from even his sister, Beth, and his mom, with alcohol his only companion day and night.

Unexpectedly, Jack receives a call from Fr Devine, his old pastor at school, asking him to become the coach of his alma mater, Bishop Hayes. After much protestation and deliberation, Jack takes up the job, to coach a group of average-skilled players, whose lack of discipline and enthusiasm towards the game is matched by Jack's own attitude towards life. Yet little by little, with much effort, dedication and hard work, Jack moulds this group into a competitive team, in the meantime, painfully trying to turn the corner with his alcoholism.

Yes, it is a sports drama; but no, *The Way Back* is not a simplistic feel-good sports drama – if only de-addiction and dealing with life's past and present demons and wounds were as simple as winning a basketball game and making it to the playoffs – mighty hard accomplishments in themselves. As the movie progresses, we get to know snippets from Jack's past life, windows giving us insight into why Jack probably is the way he is – his alcoholism, broken marriage, and the many scars he carries from childhood. Yet there are no simple solutions for any of those, nor for his own bad decisions stemming from those baggage and wounds.

That it doesn't try to associate success on the field with success off it, is one of the many good things about the movie. Ben Affleck gives a stellar performance as Jack, as does Al

With life, as Randy Pausch says in his last lecture, none of us can change the cards we are dealt with; and for many of us reeling under the relentless blows of what some people call 'fate', sometimes just not quitting the game is work enough!

Madrigal as his assistant coach. Directed by Gavin O'Connor and written by Brad Ingelsby, *The Way Back* is studded with Catholic imagery and symbolism, and the story is ultimately about redemption – though not of the feel good, rosy version; but the hard fought, blood, sweat and tears version, where each step forward sometimes is accompanied by many steps back, over and over again.

The Hound of Heaven, though, never leaves any of His children alone – and in that is humanity's only hope!

NB: Viewer discretion is recommended as language is R-rated

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, exhorts St Paul in his letter to the Philippians – and all of us from the greatest to the least, rich and poor, in ways that we know best are trying to do just that – working out the meaning of this great riddle called life. With life, as Randy Pausch says in his last lecture, none of us can change the cards we are dealt with; and for many of us reeling under the relentless blows of what some people call 'fate', sometimes just not quitting the game is work enough!

The Way Back portrays one such story – of Jack Cunningham (Ben Affleck), an alcoholic construction worker, who was once an iconic basketball player in high school, at Bishop Hayes Catholic School. Now separated from his wife Angela, he

REVIEW BY
Joseph Anthraper

Joseph lives in Southampton, UK with Mahima, his wife and their 4 kids.





‘Announce with joy the beauty of being family!’ - WMOF 2022

An excerpt from the final message by Pope Francis, at the World Meeting of Families recently held at Rome goes like this: ‘Announce with joy the beauty of being family! Announce to children and young people the grace of Christian marriage. Give hope to those who have none ... Be the seed of a more fraternal world! Be families with big hearts! Be the welcoming face of the Church! And please pray, always pray!’ The theme of the 10th WMOF was ‘Family Love: a Vocation and a Path to Holiness.’ The Pope exhorted that marriage and family life are paths to holiness, but families can always start with tiny little steps from wherever they are. The Pontiff encouraged to live this love in a way that is ‘always open, extroverted, capable of “touching” the weakest and most wounded

that one encounters along the way: fragile in body and fragile in soul. Love, in fact, even family love, is purified and strengthened when it is give.’

The 10th World Meeting of Families which concludes the *Amoris laetitia* - Year of the Family took place in Rome from June 22-26. The gathering was physically attended by around 2,000 families from around the world. But it was attended by tens of thousands of families around the world, thanks to the live streaming and television broadcasts.

Before the concluding Mass, Cardinal Farrell announced that a ‘Jubilee of Families’ will be celebrated in Rome during the Holy Year 2025. The cardinal said the next World Meeting of Families will take place in 2028.

WHAT DOES THE OVERTURN OF ROE V. WADE MEAN FOR THE REST OF THE WORLD?

The US Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* – a case that legalised abortion nationwide in 1973 – in a decision on 24 June 2022.

A statement from the Pontifical Academy for Life, established by St John Paul II in 1994 reads, ‘It’s a time for healing wounds and repairing social divisions.... The court’s opinion shows how the issue of abortion continues to arouse heated debate. The fact that a large country with a long democratic tradition has changed its position on this issue also challenges the whole world. The protection and defense of human life is not an issue that can remain confined to the exercise of individual rights, but instead is a matter of broader social significance.’

Let’s pray that this inspires and opens the eyes of the rest of the world too. At the same time let us also remember to encourage others and offer our support to families and women in difficult situations who are struggling to make a decision, with compassion and kindness the Lord equips us with.

SYNOD ON SYNODALITY – WHERE ARE WE?

According to the preparatory handbook the Synod ‘is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make people’s hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts, and restore strength to our hands for our common mission.’

The Synod has 4 phases – the diocesan phase, the episcopal conference, the continental phase and the universal phase. It started in 2021 and will end with the world Synod of Bishops in October 2023. This Synod is intended as a **Synodal Process**. The aim of this synodal process is not to provide a temporary or one-time experience of synodality, but rather to provide an opportunity for the entire people of God to discern together how to move forward on the path towards being a more synodal Church in the long-term.

This is an invitation for each one of us to take part and play an active part in shaping the Body of Christ – the Church – in modern days.

A gentle call to action: By convoking this Synod, Pope Francis has invited all the baptised to participate in this Synodal Process that begins at the diocesan level. You can also visit synod.va for updates and more information.

time out



Mail your answers to quiztime@jykairosmedia.org before 25th August 2022.
The winner will be rewarded with 1 year subscription of Kairos Global



Spot the difference

Find 8 differences in these two images.

A



B

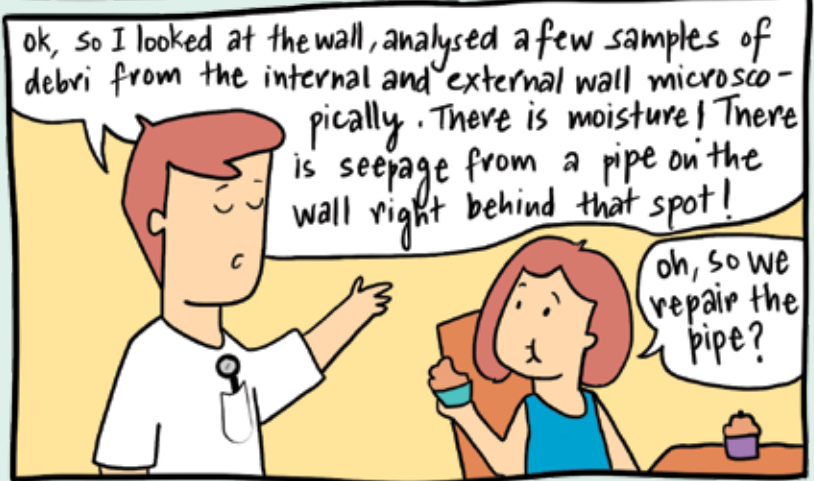
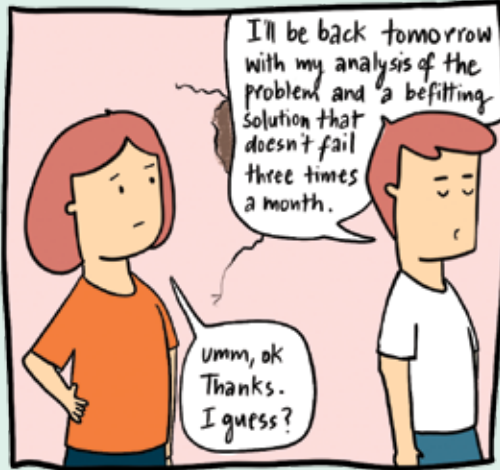
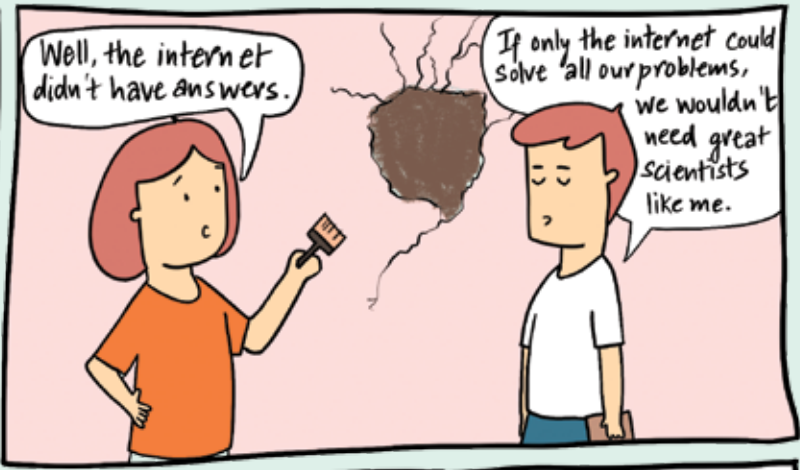


ANSWERS TO TIMEOUT 52

Mother, Gethsemane, Present, Myles Connolly, Eric Liddell, Abraham Lincoln, France, GK Chesterton, Story of a Soul, St Josemaria Escriva, Caryll Houselander, Maximilian Kolbe

LUKAS and RAY

By Steffi Anshul Faria
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