

KAIROS

GLOBAL



ALSO ↓

Cleft of the Rock

■ ANIL ISRAEL

ARE FAMILIES PLACES OF JOY?

■ FR SHOJI VECHOORKAROTTU

Ajina
Pray for Us!

VARIOUS AUTHORS



MARY, MY BELOVED MOTHER



I venerate thee with my whole heart, O Most Holy Virgin, above all the Angels and Saints in Heaven, as the beloved Spouse of the Holy Ghost; and I consecrate thee my heart with all its affections, beseeching thee to obtain for me of the Most Sacred Trinity every help for my salvation.

EDITOR'S ROOM



DR. CHACKOCHAN J NJAVALLIL

 @readkairos

AN ENCOUNTER WITH GOD IS ALWAYS VERY PERSONAL AND IT NEEDS A PERSONAL RESPONSE TOO.

IT IS A GIFT – FAITH

Have you ever heard of anyone who attained faith in God through their own efforts? Can somebody give faith in God to someone else? Absolutely not because faith in Jesus is a gift from above. The Church documents are very clear in stating that the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelisation and all conversions are the act of the Holy Spirit.

What then is the role of the parents, relatives, catechists, catechism teachers and the Church in sharing faith? They all can only be facilitators; faith should be received as a gift from above by the individual.

An encounter with God is always very personal and it needs a personal response too. In the Bible and in the history of the Church we come across a large number of people called by God, and their family members follow suit. But there are many situations in which the opposite also is the case. Does it happen due to the unworthiness or unfitness of the call? It may not be appropriate to assume so. The truth is that God's call and touch are very personal and need not necessarily be the same as one's parents or elders.

But, of course, it will always be a painful experience when their children do not follow the path of the Gospel which the parents profess and preach. There will be many to ridicule them for it as well. It surely is a cross to be carried by the parents on their faith journey.

There is no doubt that these parents will ceaselessly pray for their children. The time of waiting for the Lord to intervene in their children's (many of whom would be adults) lives will be excruciating. It is important here for the elders to never fall into the trap of guilt the devil may want to cultivate. Be continuously reminded of the fact that God's ways are always mysterious. St Monica, the mother of St Augustine, had to wait for 18 years for her son to renounce his worldly ways and return.

In the case of salvation of souls, it is the responsibility of the individual and nobody else can be blamed for it.

It is important that we as Christians should extend a helping hand to people who are passing through such difficult stages in their faith journey. We do not know the reality of anybody's life and it is best not to judge.

My job is to inform, not to convince – St Bernadette Soubirous.

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- 33 'What I Love about my Parents'



I have loved you with an everlasting love. Jeremiah 31:3

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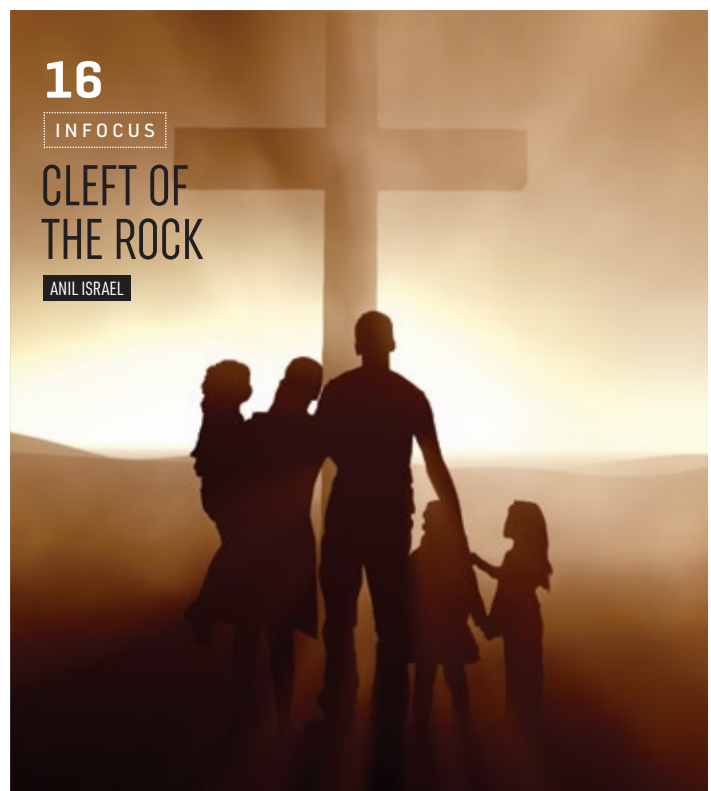
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ASK



FR. BITAJU

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Q. What historical evidence do we have of the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus?

In the last issue, I had focused on the crucifixion of Jesus. In this issue I shall focus on four historical facts proposed by William L. Craig that confirm the resurrection of Jesus.

1. The first fact is that Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea in a tomb. Historians have established this fact on the basis of evidence like: a) Jesus' burial is repeatedly attested in early, independent sources. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John narrate the life of Jesus in their Gospels. The letters of St Paul also account on the death and resurrection of Jesus. Mark's account on the suffering and death of Jesus is a very early source most likely based on eyewitness testimony. Commentator Rudolf Pesch dates this work within seven years of the crucifixion. b) Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus, he couldn't be a Christian invention.

2. The second fact is that a group of women followers of Jesus found the tomb empty. There are two main reasons that led most scholars to such a conclusion: a) multiple attestations of the empty tomb by independent, early sources. Mark, Matthew and John have independent sources about the empty tomb; the sermons in Acts of the Apostles mentions it (2:29; 13:36); Paul accounts it in his first letter to the Corinthians (15:4). b) The tomb was found empty by women. The Jewish patriarchal society did not highly regard the testimony of women. Yet, it is remarkable that it is women who discover Jesus' empty tomb. This indicates that the Gospel writers faithfully recorded what, for them, was an awkward and embarrassing fact.

3. The third fact is that different individuals and groups witnessed Jesus appear

to them alive. Scholars have universally acknowledged this fact for two important reasons: a) Paul's list of eyewitnesses to Jesus guarantees that such appearances occurred. According to Paul, Jesus appeared to Peter, then to all the apostles; then to a group of 500 disciples at once. Finally, Paul says, 'he appeared also to me,' at a time when Paul was still a persecutor of the followers of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:5-8). Considering the early date of Paul's information and his personal acquaintance with the people involved, these appearances can't be dismissed as mere legends. b) The Gospels provide multiple, independent attestation of the appearance narratives. For example, the appearance to Peter is attested by Luke and Paul; the appearance to the disciples is attested by Luke, John and Paul. The appearance narratives span such a breadth of independent sources that it can't be reasonably denied that the earliest disciples did have such experiences.

4. The fourth fact is that the original disciples suddenly and sincerely believed in the resurrection of Jesus despite their having every predisposition to the contrary. Consider the situation of the disciples after the crucifixion of Jesus: a) their leader was dead. And Jewish Messianic expectation was of a triumphant Messiah over Israel's adversaries and not of a criminal who would be executed. b) Jewish beliefs about afterlife excluded anyone rising from the dead to glory and immortality before the general resurrection of the dead at the end of the world. Yet, the original disciples believed so strongly that God had raised Jesus from the dead that they were willing to die for the truth of that belief.

To conclude, there are four facts largely agreed upon by most scholars: Jesus' burial, the discovery of his empty tomb, his post-mortem appearances, and the origin of the disciples' belief in the resurrection.



YOUCAT 103

WAS JESUS REALLY DEAD? MAYBE HE WAS ABLE TO RISE AGAIN BECAUSE HE ONLY APPEARED TO HAVE SUFFERED DEATH.

Jesus really died on the Cross; his body was buried. All the sources testify to this. [627]

In John 19:33, the soldiers even make an explicit determination of death: They open the side of Jesus' dead body with a lance and see blood and water come out. Furthermore, it says that the legs of the men crucified with him were broken—a step that hastened the dying process; this was not required in Jesus' case since his death had already occurred.

DR. KOCHURANI JOSEPH

Prayer Intentions March

A Christian Response to Bioethical Challenges

We pray for Christians facing new bioethical challenges; may they continue to defend the dignity of all human life with prayer and action.



Pope talk



Human life is the most valuable work asset. People are the real wealth: without them, there is no working community, no enterprise, no economy.

During prayer, offer difficulties and sufferings for the unity of Christians.

**God always
forgives: God is
infinitely greater
than our sins.**



The Holy Spirit reforms the Church through the saints.

We must not lose our sense of humour for fulfilling our vocation.

There is an urgent need for 'spiritual fatherhood' today.

Synodality is not a search for 'majority consensus'.

Let's begin again with more humanity looking to Jesus, with hope in our hearts, amid pandemic.

I continue to dream of a completely missionary Church.

Do not hesitate to invoke the Holy Spirit to guide your choices.

Business leaders need to live out the Gospel in the workplace, where the Church needs your witness to carry out your role as leaders according to the heart of God.

JESUS YOUTH



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

Cooking with recipes or without it?



'This is the best time saver. Just select the dish from the list and number of people having it. They will send you all the ingredients exactly as per recipe requirements, as well as cooking instructions. Everything in individual packets – even the salt, meat, curry leaves, etc. Cooking becomes so easy, just follow the instructions and have a great dinner.' This new business of 'prepared meal kits' is gaining popularity in a number of countries. Sophy went on to the advantages of this: no need for shopping, no wastage, expert advice on tasty and healthy food.

Among those listening to Sophy, I noticed that Ann was restless, and she interposed. 'No! I hate this way of cooking! It's like they prescribe everything. There is that great feeling when you cook your own meals. And it's new every time, an old dish can be changed by adding different ingredients. Yes, there is wastage, uncertainty, and tension, but in my kitchen, I want to cook my dinner, instead of being remote-controlled by someone sitting I don't know where.' Wow! That was some outburst!

SPONTANEOUS PRAYER, A REVOLUTION

Charismatic renewal came with a big change. It said, you can be yourself,

God loves you, even pray as you want. The Holy Spirit will guide you and it will be beautiful. Before that, experts told you how and what to pray and everything else about spirituality. With the new spirituality there came in a flood of freedom to walk your path.

In the times of ready-made prayers, you recited them from print, those with approval from authorities. I remember a prayer service we organised, as part of a college students' group. Each of us had to say a prayer. But our animator sister asked us to write it beforehand, so the Father Director could vet the content. The prayer shouldn't have anything against our faith and the father had to verify, we were told.

With this background, I came to the first renewal seminar. We had a model prayer meeting, and all were asked to pray 'as the Spirit guided them'. I was not very comfortable, dreading blunders blurted out. The prayers went in unexpected directions, but into surprisingly 'anointed' moments. It was a 'free for all' but went on so beautifully. Later there was time for sharing 'messages from the Lord'. Most of the participants were college students, yet they started sharing inspiring visions, prophetic words and thoughts. Surprisingly, there was a beautiful pattern in it. For the first time I realised, spontaneity can be so

beautiful and enriching.

The next week we started a weekly prayer meeting. This became another big journey forward in 'spontaneous surprises' of life in the Spirit. The leader would start, and then anyone would suggest songs, everyone was jostling to make prayers in their own ways, some would suggest a new step in the direction, but all these different directions were built into a beautiful whole.

This freedom and confidence to pray and talk as you feel during the meeting was a foundation for much more. Soon someone suggested a music group, a few got together to welcome people, a lively intercession group on Saturdays, outreaches to the poor, and initiatives galore. We were all excited to see this freedom in the Spirit bringing out the best in everyone, building a vibrant and fruitful community. Surely this became one aspect of Jesus Youth for everyone.

A NEED TO GO DEEPER

One day Jerry came to talk about their Monday group. 'We have been meeting regularly, but now most of us yearn for something deeper. We are all working people who have been active in Jesus Youth leadership. But I think we are stuck repeating the same things. Often even in spontaneous prayer, everyone



This eagerness for traditional ways is bringing in greater depth and discipline, forming these young ones into seasoned leaders.

knows what one is about to pray or share in the group. Isn't this when people stop attending? Can we have something deeper, in prayer as well as in Bible study?'

I thought to myself, this is how prayer formats came and formal teaching, what people found spontaneous can also be shallow and boring. Maybe, what we call 'Spirit-led dynamics' has a limit. At some point every group looks for patterns and systems.

So, I saw a new kind of praise and worship, very different from the one in which everyone in the group prayed and felt free to take it where they wanted. So, when I first saw a leader standing up in the group and directing everything, I was at a loss. Later I saw

that another mode was evolving, in which most people readily followed a 'powerful and charismatic' leader and yet entered a deeper relationship with the Lord.

The changes were not merely in the way a prayer group was conducted, but I could see many embracing patterns and ready-made formats in beautiful ways. 'I pray the Liturgy of Hours and the Rosary has become a deeper experience for me.' And what is more? This eagerness for traditional ways is bringing in greater depth and discipline, forming these young ones into seasoned leaders.

SHOULD JY BE SPONTANEOUS OR SYSTEMATIC?

In one memorable review meeting I witnessed a heated debate. Several leaders lamented that the freedom, joy and creativity of the movement was lost, and all became routine; the old vibrancy of life was gone. Many others corrected the former saying the problem was lack of discipline and order, the members not responding to the challenge of walking the difficult path of systematic study and steady growth.

I thought to myself: In the lives of people and groups, there is a honeymoon stage of spontaneous flow and then another phase of dryness requiring deliberate effort. Maybe these stages recur. So, when the group is vibrant and joyful, we need to anticipate the dry phase and prepare for it. But when the boring phase sets in, look for creativity of the Holy Spirit and allow more spontaneity.

And there is more. In every group there are some very creative and beautifully unpredictable persons as well as some hardcore system builders. You can expect good friction between the two types. But when these charisms go hand in hand, you can expect better fruits and miracles.

The big question: recipes or no recipes? I think in the business of working for the Lord's Kingdom, Jesus Youth should use a certain number of recipes, but should also be eager to catch wind of the Spirit and always leave plenty of space for surprises and new sprouts. ■

.....

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

MISSION

TALK

TREESA SHAJI

It was an adventure with my bestie – Jesus Christ, says Treesa Shaji of her one-month mission to Uganda.

isaiah 6:8 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here I am! Send me'. All that I had to do was to say 'Yes' and the rest was taken care of by Him. I was blessed with a month full of joy, love and plenty of new experiences.

Just like in the past two years, this year too, a mission month was observed in the UAE. We got to hear about missions, missionaries and their experiences. As a member of the English youth group, I attended the session by full-time missionary Daimy Francis. His answer to one of the questions left a deep impression on my heart. 'Not everyone will have the desire to go for mission. If you have a desire, a wish in your heart to go for mission, that itself is the indication that God desires it.'

Every year, for the past few years I had been asking my parents but their answer had always been no. So I prayed and told Jesus that if he wished for me to go on mission, he would convince my parents. And when I asked my parents this time if I could go for mission instead of coming home for my vacation, they finally permitted me.

I attended the session by full-time missionary Daimy Francis. His answer to one of the questions left a deep impression on my heart. 'Not everyone will have the desire to go for mission. If you have a desire, a wish in your heart to go for mission, that itself is the indication that God desires it.'

I was allocated Katoosa parish in Uganda as my mission place. And was placed with a beautiful family who welcomed me to their home and their life with abundant love – the home of Ugandan JY seminarian, Brother Robert. To his mother, I was yet another daughter, whom she would scold for eating very little food. As promised, Jesus sent me a friend, Goretti to help me move around, be with me and communicate with others. The local language, Rutooro, was very different and difficult to understand, so Goretti would help as my interpreter.

The village was very beautiful, blessed abundantly by nature and pleasant weather. I wondered if the African authors and artists who wrote our childhood story books were inspired by the beauty of this place.

Fr Venancio, the parish priest, was so kind that he would take me along for his pastoral services. I was surprised to see the enthusiasm and love the people there had for Christ. For them, being able to celebrate Holy Mass in their church was one of the greatest gifts and they would celebrate it with tremendous joy, love, and faith, and with singing and dancing. Each Holy Mass was a celebration for them.

Being a person who loves to travel, meet new people, learn new languages and enjoy new tastes, this whole month was indeed a blessing for me. The new way of greeting, a new culture, lifestyle, and of course, the food – so different yet mouthwatering and healthy, straight from their own farms. That part of Uganda has a culture of addressing each other with a nickname, and as an 'adopted' member of their family, they gave me a nickname too.

Prior to going on this mission, I could never imagine spending an entire day in prayer. But miraculously, Jesus took me through a month of prayer. Normally when I plan my day, it would be imperfect, but here Jesus planned





it and he planned so beautifully that each day had plenty of surprises.

We would go visiting houses and once we visited a family where the mother, though married to a Catholic, was never interested in Catholic prayer. Preaching was not my cup of tea, so I simply told her about my family, friends, Jesus Youth and thus my mission. After listening to me, she began to ask a lot of questions with great interest. When our conversation ended, she requested us to pray for her little son, who was unable to talk and walk normally. Together we prayed for her and her son. As we prepared to leave, I gave her a rosary and scapular. To my surprise, she

asked me to teach her the Rosary right there. It probably was the first time in my life that I prayed the Rosary with such devotion and faith. Within the next 45 minutes, she learnt to pray the Rosary. Just before leaving, I asked what her name was. She said, Monica. And there, God gave me another opportunity to speak of him.

Since the schools were closed, all the kids and youth were at their homes. And we were able to meet more youth, gather them together and pray together.

Yes, when we get close to Jesus, it's obvious that evil will begin playing new tricks. For me, it came in the form of sickness,

fear and uncertainty of the pandemic. Every Wednesday, we had Eucharistic Adoration in the parish for the whole day, and that was what kept me moving forward.

The month-long preparation for the mission with the help of all the preparatory material helped me prepare for different aspects of the mission.

When we usually talk of a solo trip, we have different ideas of how it is always awesome. But for me, it was never a solo trip for I always had my 'bestie' – Jesus Christ on this adventure. And going for adventures with our best friend is the most memorable and precious treasure of our life.

EXPERIENCE

One Condition ... and His Unconditional Love

A promise to be taken to Kanyakumari – this was what he wanted when he agreed to attend a retreat. **Fr Sameer Nagrare** writes about his conversion from a Buddhist to a Catholic.



God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

The above verse refers not to my search for God, but God in his mercy came searching for me. I was a Buddhist. Before encountering God's love in Jesus, my understanding of God and the world was very pessimistic. More than reverence and love, I had a great fear of God. I believed that everything bad that happened in life was a curse or punishment from God. Hence, in order to appease him, I had to pray and offer sacrifices. When I was in class 4, my parents got separated. This incident brought sadness, brokenness and hopelessness to my life. All this affected my studies and my relationship with others. Continuous failure in studies and family problems brought frustration and loneliness.

My life was just passing by without any hope for the future. Everything seemed dark. At this juncture of life,

in the year 2000, Jesus the Light of the world came into my life to remove all the darkness through a life-changing encounter at a retreat. A Brahmin friend, who had a Christian friend, asked me to join them for a retreat. I joined them on the condition that they would take me to Kanyakumari¹.

It was during the retreat at Divine Retreat Centre, Muringoor², that I experienced God's immense love. God was not cruel as I had imagined, but rather full of love and mercy. When they spoke of sin, my misconception that sin only meant killing another person was cleared. I came to know of the Ten Commandments, the Word of God and the Church's teaching on sin in today's context. After becoming aware of my sinfulness, I mentioned my sins to a priest, who, after listening to me, assured me that he would pray for me. After this event, I experienced a lot of peace. On the third day, they spoke about Jesus, his life and teachings. After listening about Jesus I thought if there

is a god he should be like Jesus, for whom nothing is impossible. A man of words and deeds, though all powerful he became humble and suffered for others, and taught a lesson of forgiveness to the world. I was convinced that Jesus is the Unique Saviour of the whole world. The counsellor asked me to continue praying. He told me that God would make his will known to me in his time. I prayed to the Holy Spirit to fill me with his gifts and charisms.

After the retreat, I was in a dilemma about how I was to convey my faith experiences at home and to my friends and relatives. But I felt comforted by the Lord that he would take care of me and give me the right words to speak to my parents and friends. I continued my relationship with Jesus and experienced his love and mercy during personal prayer.

My faith in Jesus gave me enormous strength to undergo the suffering and crushing pain when I lost my mother and two brothers, and also when my elder brother and father were diagnosed with cancer. But Lord Jesus never left me alone, I felt his presence with me all these years. I had a lot of fears in life but Jesus gave me courage to face and overcome all my shortcomings and weaknesses.

After a year or so, I experienced a strong urge to be a priest. I had a conflict within me, as I also wanted to get married. It took me around four years to reach my decision for priesthood. I was baptised on 4th June 2006. The decision to join the seminary was a very difficult one, as I had to face a lot of opposition from my family and friends. In spite of all the difficulties, God carried me in his arms and I finally joined the Archdiocese of Nagpur³. The Archbishop sent me to Mumbai⁴ to pursue my priestly formation.

Thanks be to God! *My soul glorifies the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour!* (Luke 1:46-47) ■

^{1,2} Kanyakumari is a coastal town on the southern tip of India, Muringoor is a place in Kerala.

^{3,4} Nagpur and Mumbai are cities in the central Indian state of Maharashtra.

Fr Sameer Nagrare is a Catholic priest, ordained for the Archdiocese of Nagpur.

ENGAGE



AND TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

The lack of Mass in their native language drove many Pakistanis to attend a Pentecostal church. **Sumol Pious** recollects the beginnings of the Pakistani prayer group in her parish.

Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told Habakkuk 1:5.

God changes our perception once we encounter him and his love. This is a testimony of how he used us to stand together and build a fellowship group for the Pakistanis in our parish in Muscat. Many times I have seen Pakistanis standing before the grotto and praying to Mother Mary. But I had never seen any of them attending Mass at the church. Later I came to know that most of them went to the nearby Pentecostal church.

One of the main reasons was that there was no Mass in Urdu, their native language. Most of them were people who didn't know any other language. And the only option for their spiritual nourishment were the Urdu prayer services in the Pentecostal church. Around that time, we came to make acquaintance with an active youth of Pakistan who was serving the usher's ministry at our church. He was the only strong Pakistani Catholic we had seen in church till then. After a simple chat we invited him lovingly for the preparatory

meeting of a youth retreat by Jesus Youth.

Surprisingly a few hours later, we received a phone call from him assuring us that he would be there for the meeting and asked if he could bring one of his friends with him. When we understood that the Holy Spirit was paving the initial way for an Urdu group, we were filled with joy and awe at his work.

The very next week with seven Pakistanis, God allowed us to start the Urdu group. This group which started in 2012 is the first Jesus Youth Urdu group

Their allowing us to intervene in their social and material difficulties made us see the strong sign and love Christ has given us to love all people beyond borders.

in the Middle East. Later, they were able to have Mass once in a month for their community. They were added as the eighth language group in our church too.

As for their spiritual and sacramental life, God opened the door wide for them through this group. Their weekly gatherings also consisted of Catechism and Bible study lessons. Once a month we used to study household material with them too. Their allowing us to intervene in their social and material difficulties made us see the strong sign and love Christ has given us to love all people beyond borders.

Today the Holy Spirit has inspired us to work with him through the various activities and ministries. He has given us the grace to actively participate in their Mass once a month and we take this as God's Word coming true. The scripture says in Acts 1:8, *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.* We were instruments used to reach out to a new nationality by our loving God. All glory and praise to him.

Most of the people of this group are from Sialkot province in Pakistan. When they go back home for their holidays, they start Jesus Youth groups there in their regions; something that has made us happier than before. Some of them started attending formation courses to deepen their spiritual life. We are ever grateful to God who made this possible through our small and simple efforts. ■■



An active JY in Muscat, Oman **Sumol Pious** works as a higher secondary school teacher.

EVOLUTION

Openness & Transparency @ Work



Alexy Jacob calls everyone to more openness and faithfulness at the workplace.

Ethics in the workplace is a vast topic and I myself am a student in this area, learning and correcting myself. But I can share a few incidents from my life in this area.

I work in the software industry in an MNC. I started my career as a developer and later at one point of time, I became the team lead. In software development we mainly have two teams, namely development team and testing team. Usually, developers are always under pressure to reduce the number of defects in the code. So, both the developers and testers are like 'enemies' – while the developer works on the coding part, this is tested and corrected by the testing team. A developer's quality is measured

by the least number of incidents reported against his code.

Since I am the team lead, I have the back-end access to the code. One day, after I had released my code for testing, I later identified a defect in it. I was sorely tempted to change and correct my code as I had the back-end access. But I quickly realised that it would be unethical on my part and decided not to correct it. I left it for the testers to test and correct it. During one of our casual discussions, the testing team voiced their disappointment that some developers were correcting codes through back-end access, without their knowledge. But the testing team lead added that he was 'pretty sure that Alexy would not do it, even if he gets a chance'. This incident surprised me and their trust was more than motivating.

One of my responsibilities in my current role is to ensure increased revenue and projects to my organisation and so I keep a very good relationship with my customers. In one of my discussions with a customer he asked me if our team could manage 15 more additional websites. This was good news. When I informed my boss and colleagues about this, they were all delighted as it meant more revenue generation from our team.

During our periodical analysis, we identified some websites that were rarely used, some were not being used at all. I had two options – either inform my customer about these findings or continue with their proposal without informing them, thereby taking money for all the barely-used websites. I was in a dilemma

as telling the truth would cut down a huge revenue my company could get. But I prayed and decided to tell the truth to the customer. The customer was surprised to hear this from us and shut down his less-efficient websites. This in turn improved our relationship with that customer. He later began considering us more than before to handle his higher value projects. He even took initiatives at the CEO level to recommend and ensure our company was used for all their future projects. This incident was an eye opener for me. Some lies may give us a short-term benefit, but ultimately it is the truth that triumphs.

Similarly, during the Covid crisis we had to go through multiple lockdowns and it seriously affected our work and delivery of projects. The message every organisation was trying to spread was that project delivery would not be affected in any way. This was actually wrong information as obviously the pandemic was going to delay everything. So I decided to inform my customer regarding the delay that would happen and promised them that we would try our best to deliver on time in future. They appreciated the openness and transparency and we managed the situation in a couple of months' time.

These are some small incidents from my workplace which helped me to be more faithful and transparent. Because 'who is my boss?' is the question I ask myself every time. I believe God is my super boss and I should be very faithful in everything I do. ■

SOME LIES MAY GIVE US A SHORT-TERM BENEFIT, BUT ULTIMATELY IT IS THE TRUTH THAT TRIUMPHS.



Alexy Jacob works as an engagement manager in an IT MNC. He is married to Rosemin they have three children, Ameya, Abel and Abraham. He currently serves as JY Europe coordinator.

IN FOCUS

A large, faint cross is centered in the background against a warm, golden sunset sky. In the foreground, the silhouettes of a family—a man, a woman, and two children—are shown from behind, looking towards the cross. The man is on the left, the woman is in the center, and two children are on the right, holding hands. The overall mood is contemplative and spiritual.

Cleft of the Rock

Together with Scripture, **Anil Israel** explains the duty and responsibility of parents to raise their children in faith and holiness.

We were blessed with the grace to celebrate our first wedding anniversary by participating in a week-long couples' retreat. This was purely divine providence since it set a proper foundation to our family life. 'Holy priests come from holy families' was one golden take-away. We thus became conscious of the reality that the blessed call to holy matrimony is a sacred call to holy family life. I am entrusted with the responsibility to help my spouse become a saint, and my spouse is entrusted with the divine task of helping me become a saint. And together we both share the supreme privilege of helping raise saintly children and thereby be partners in God's incredible divine plan.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church vividly emphasises that parents are the children's primary catechists. *Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children... The home is well suited for education in the virtues... Parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children (CCC 2223). Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child's earliest years... Family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in faith. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God (CCC 2226).* Now this indeed is a serious responsibility for which Catholic couples have already willingly consented before the altar, when asked by the priest: 'Are you prepared to accept children lovingly from God and to bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?'

So how can we respond responsibly to this esteemed mission? In human terms this might appear to be an impossible mission. But the fact remains, that *Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a real blessing (Psalm 127:3).* Since they are a gift from God, this mission is not an earthly mission but a heavenly mission. To make fair progress in this divine mission, we undoubtedly need divine energy – divine support i.e., *grace upon grace (John 1:16). My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).* So let us acknowledge our human frailty and depend on his supernatural strength, which is promised to us through the sacramental grace of holy matrimony.

As a first step, parents ought to believe that they are called to this holy mission, and secondly be willing to accept this divine responsibility. This means they make 'the pursuit of personal holiness' their joint-goal in life. Once they earnestly endeavour to pursue personal sanctification and sincerely propel themselves on the path of righteousness, the way of humility, the street of selflessness then they have accepted the heavenly assignment allocated to them. Children being brilliant imitators, will eventually follow the example set before them.

In the Holy Bible, we see that *the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend (Exodus 33:11).* When Moses requested God: *Please let me see the dazzling light of your presence (Exodus 33:18),* God arranged for him to be sheltered in the *cleft of the rock (Exodus 33:22)* as He passed by. Thus, Moses could

experience the divine presence intimately. Likewise, we too can experience God's presence in our lives. All that is required of us is to allow ourselves to be sheltered in the crevice of the rock. Now *Christ alone is my rock and salvation (Psalm 62:2).* If we build our lives on the solid foundation of Christ, if our lives are deep rooted in his holy living Word, then we are *like the wise man who built his house on the rock (Matthew 7:24).*

What would it mean to me to place myself in the 'cleft of the rock'? Now a cleft might appear to be a non-appealing, unattractive, unpopular and a highly uncomfortable place in the eyes of the world. On the other hand, the *ruler of this world (John 12:31)* seems to be unceasingly attempting to drown us with innumerable suggestions as to how we ought to satiate ourselves in the varied pleasures and glittering comforts of this we-only-live-once earthly living. But it is undeniable that in the face of a storm, even a tiny gap between two rocks is a sure secure place. What might externally appear rugged and unsafe, is potentially a safe refuge for those who are desperately in need of it. Let us try to look at this 'occupancy' in the rock as a place of 'spiritual disposition'. For protection against spiritual warfare, it does make sense to place ourselves on the *palms of His hands (cf. Is. 49:16),* to seek shelter under the mantle of our Spiritual Mother, to secure ourselves behind the *armour of God (Ephesians 6:11).*

So how can we provide a 'spiritual safe space' for ourselves and our loved ones? What all is available at my disposal, that I start building my life on the Rock? First,



we draw our focus to where the *everlasting rock* (Isaiah 26:4) is accessible to us in a tangible way. *The Word became flesh* (John 1:14) is essentially present through the Holy Bible. Jesus, *the bread of life* (John 6:35) is truly in our midst through the Most Blessed Sacrament, for *Emmanuel, God with us* (Matthew 1:23) has promised *I am with you always* (Matthew 28:20). Whenever, we read the Holy Scriptures, or participate in the Eucharistic Celebration or spend moments in Holy Adoration, we make humble attempts to enter the secure confines of the ‘cleft of the rock’.

Here are some things we all can try out. As the Rosary priest, Venerable Father Patrick Peyton widely exclaimed, ‘The family that prays together, stays together! Let us therefore accommodate inexcusable ‘prayer-time’ in the busyness of our modern lives. Family prayer is therefore indispensable. Let this become the *one thing necessary* (Luke 10:42) that our children will learn to continue for life. ‘How beautiful is the family that recites the rosary every evening’ (Pope St John Paul II).

During our family Rosary time, we try to encourage our children to be thankful for something that happened that day. It is pure joy to hear the many things we normally take for granted, are precisely the things we ought to be thankful for each day. Simple things like, ‘Thank you Lord that I could go to kindergarten today’ is a powerful prayer from the heart of a child. There have been days when we have accommodated family Rosary while praying on the move, driving from one place to another. When children are

AS A FIRST STEP, PARENTS OUGHT TO BELIEVE THAT THEY ARE CALLED TO THIS HOLY MISSION, AND SECONDLY BE WILLING TO ACCEPT THIS DIVINE RESPONSIBILITY. THIS MEANS THEY MAKE ‘THE PURSUIT OF PERSONAL HOLINESS’ THEIR JOINT-GOAL IN LIFE. ONCE THEY EARNESTLY ENDEAVOUR TO PURSUE PERSONAL SANCTIFICATION AND SINCERELY PROPEL THEMSELVES ON THE PATH OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, THE WAY OF HUMILITY, THE STREET OF SELFLESSNESS THEN THEY HAVE ACCEPTED THE HEAVENLY ASSIGNMENT ALLOCATED TO THEM.

young, we encourage them to participate in at least one decade of the Rosary.

Encountering Jesus in the Holy Scriptures also needs to become a daily habit. When we read the Holy Bible, God speaks to us. Reading a passage from the New Testament during our family prayer time has helped us be open to God’s voice. It also helps familiarise children with the Word of God. We have been inspired to select a verse or a part of a verse from the Bible and write it on a small piece of paper and keep it displayed at a visible place in the living room till the next family prayer time. We also record it in a family prayer journal. The next day during the family Rosary, we try to rephrase that scripture verse as an invocation to be requested in prayer, at the beginning of every decade. E.g. ‘Lord, give me the grace to trust in you.’

When children see their parents setting priority for family prayer and reading the Bible regularly, they too will be inspired to incorporate these in their life as they grow up. I vividly recall my mother spending time in personal prayer and my father reading the Bible before going to sleep. Likewise, we encourage our children to read the Bible at their pace. It is encouraging to see our elder children have already completed reading the entire Bible while still in their schooling years.

The Old Testament explicitly reminds parents: *you shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise* (Deuteronomy 6:7). We need to therefore equip ourselves with the fundamentals of our faith to be able to transmit faith instructions and Church teachings to our children without error. Family mealtimes are great opportunities for faith discussions for the entire family.

Exposure to Catholic media, books and art also help shape our faith lives. Our bedtime stories also include stories from the lives of saints and stories from the Bible. We always have some Catholic audio running in our car. Watching a Catholic movie is also a good time for the family to bond together.

If children are a blessing to their parents, parents too are a blessing to their children. *You will be a blessing* (Genesis 12:2) reminds us of our duty to place our hands on our children every day and invoke God’s blessing on them to help them *grow in wisdom and stature, in favour with God and man* (Luke 2:52).

God wants us to raise the quality of our family life from natural to supernatural, from earthly to heavenly, from physical to spiritual, from temporal to eternal. *He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it* (1 Thessalonians 5:24). You raise me up to more than I can be. ■



Anil Israel lives in Mannheim, Germany, with his wife Sunitha and their 5 children. He is the current National Formation Co-ordinator for JY Germany.



Are Families Places of Joy?

Families are building blocks of the Catholic Church, writes **Fr Shoji Vechoorkarottu**. And to be happy places, they need to derive grace from the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

‘What do you think is the Catholic Church’s greatest contribution to the world?’ A writer once asked me. My obvious answer was education. But to my surprise, he corrected me saying that it was not education but the institution of family, established by Jesus Christ himself. A man and a woman who join hands to live a lifetime of love, raise children and support each other sets the foundation for an educated, healthy and peaceful society. The social and economic development of places that received the Gospel of Jesus Christ evidently marks the linear relation between graceful Catholic families and social development. Jesus took families seriously and its beauty is reflected in the Catholic Church.

True Catholic families are a gift to this world and an answer to many of its problems. Matthew 19:6 emphasises the beauty of marriage. *Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, therefore they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no one separate.* Here Jesus is being very clear and particular about the importance and relevance of the institution of marriage. It is God himself who comes down during the sacrament of marriage to bind them in love and establish a family to complete his divine mission on earth.

‘The sacrament of matrimony comes about through a promise made by a man and a woman before God and the Church, which is accepted and confirmed by God and consummated by the bodily union of the couple. Because God himself forms the bond of sacramental marriage, it is binding until the death of one of the partners’ (You Cat 261).

Jesus was very clear that families were going to be the building blocks of the Holy Catholic Church, while explaining the mystery legible to all those who received grace.

There is a common misconception that perfectly happy relations between all the members makes the family by default a happy place. But that is not actually true. While it is very beautiful and amazing to have happy families, we cannot generally associate happiness to all families. What then defines families? It’s the

presence of Jesus. When God binds a man and woman together in a lifelong relationship, he blesses them with grace to face everything that comes their way. Blind faith in the one who bound them strengthens the couple to stay together forever. This faith gradually resonates in the lives of their children too.

The witnessing in Christ proclaimed by Catholic families is a unique factor which sets them apart from others. Accepting Jesus Christ as the Lord and Saviour of the family makes it more special.

‘Without relationship a person cannot live. Man’s most important relationship is the one he has with God. This has priority over all human relationships, even family relationships’ (You Cat 374).

We can’t give unless we receive in abundance. We can’t give unless we constantly receive from the pierced heart of Jesus. A family becomes capable of giving when it receives continuously from Jesus. Many times I have seen, in cases of marriages on the verge of divorce, the emergence of new hope, love, and care when either of the partners renew their relationship with Jesus.

Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests (Luke 2:14).

On the one hand, while it reads that peace prevails in all those places glorifying God, we can’t expect those glorifying themselves to be peacemakers.

The Holy Bible begins and ends with the story of marriage and institution of families. In the beginning it introduces a complete Adam and a complete Eve. God himself blesses their marriage and establishes the first family on earth. But in no time conflicts and confusions pop up in this very same family. The Bible never asks us to imitate them but it constantly reminds us to learn from a groom who gave his life for his bride and a bride who adorns herself for her groom – the heavenly groom, Jesus Christ and his bride, the Holy Catholic Church.

God knows that the new blooms of a family should begin from the altar of sacrificial love. We often forget to align ourselves with the sacrifices of our Lord Jesus. A family should derive its strength from the pierced heart of Jesus. Children are a gift from God and parents should constantly align themselves with Christ to raise God’s children in grace.

‘A man and a woman who are married to each other form, together with their children, a family. God wills that the love of the spouses, if possible, should produce children. These children, who are entrusted to the protection and care of their parents, have the same dignity as their parents’ (You Cat 368).

‘A child is a creature and a gift of God, which comes to earth through the love of his parents’ (You Cat 418).

We have to be very conscious about the priorities in families too.

1. Relationship with God

When the father, mother and children in a family

are capable of setting Christ as first priority, they can be identified as a true Catholic family. Each family member may sometimes have to wait for years till everyone comes to a Christ-centred life. The depth of our relationship with Christ will be put to test first, when something goes wrong in the family. We all possess a spiritual battery within us which should be charged from Jesus at least once in 24 hours.

2. Relationship with one’s spouse

Often parents, friends and children assume more importance in life after marriage which in turn affects the marital relationship adversely. Investing in the relationship with your partner is the best thing you can do for your children. Things may not always fall in place, but the depth of your spousal love will sustain you. Even confusions that arise in parenting should be considered as an invitation to grow deeper in your relationship with your partner.

‘What the Church is on a large scale, the family is on a small scale: an image of God’s love in human fellowship. Indeed, every marriage is perfected in openness to others, to the children that God sends, in mutual acceptance, in hospitality and being for others’ (You Cat 271).

3. Relationship with children

The call to procreate and raise children is one of the superior responsibilities given to man on earth. Often we don’t take it seriously. We have to learn and practice daily to become loving, caring parents who understand the importance of freedom too. The basic lessons of parenting should be learned from our Heavenly Father.

God entrusted children to parents so that they might be steady, righteous examples for those children, that they might love and respect them and do everything possible so that their children can develop physically and spiritually (You Cat 372).

4. Relationship with parents

“Son, support the old age of thy father, and grieve him not in his life. When you are in trouble, the Lord will remember your kindness and will help you; your sins will melt away like frost in warm sunshine (Sirach 3: 12, 15). We should keep in mind this promise from our Heavenly Father in the book of Sirach. The example we set before our children is an important lesson in parenting. The willingness to give more than we have received will in turn shower our families with blessings.



Fr Shoji Vechoorkarottu is a Catholic priest of Muvattupuzha diocese and presently serves as parish priest in Trivandrum, India. The Kerala JY chaplain, he is also a professor at St. John’s College Anchal.

NURTURING TALENT

Shoby Varghese writes about her children's passion for music and how as parents she and her husband helped encourage them.

We are a family of five. My husband is Jolly and I am Shoby. Our eldest daughter Joanna is 14 and is in grade 9. Our son is 10 and our youngest daughter, Evangeline is 8. Jolly is a musician. He plays the keyboard and sings too.

When our eldest daughter, Joanna was around 3 or 4, we noticed that she had a strong inclination to music. She was used to us playing songs at home and was around musical instruments like the keyboard at that time. Surprisingly Joanna began to play them even before any formal learning. At 7, she even gave a solo vocal performance for our youngest daughter's first birthday. That was when we realised that she was blessed with the gift of music. From then on we encouraged her to sing devotional songs for baptisms and birthdays of our acquaintances. The appreciation she received after each of these performances boosted her confidence.

Our son and younger daughter too showed musical interests from very young and we decided to invest in improving their musical abilities. We were in no doubt that their talents were the free gift of God and it was our duty as parents to nurture them. The parable of the talents reminds us to do our part in developing the talents we are blessed with.

We decided to give them systematic training for vocals as well as musical instruments. Our eldest is learning piano, our son has taken up drums and the youngest is learning violin. Our investment in musical instruments and recording systems helps them to spread the joy of the gospel to others through music.

They perform covers of popular worship songs and post these on social media, and perform

for Jesus Youth programmes as well. They are always ready to offer their music to all platforms to share the Word of God. The constant encouragement from friends and relatives motivates them to take their music and abilities seriously and improve it day by day.

Knowing that these talents are a gift we also decided to use it to bring the joy and cheer of Christmas to homes isolated due to the pandemic. We felt it was needed, and performed individually for the families in our neighbourhood during the Christmas season as carol singing and public gatherings were impossible due to Covid restrictions. This was a joyful experience for us as well as the families, and we thank God for using us to spread his love.

Another thing we make sure of is to caution our children against the dangers of pride and constantly remind them to stay alert. We emphasise often that whatever talents they have, have come from God and it should go back to God.

Though we now live in a comfortable flat, we have decided to move closer to the church to be regular at Mass. There is no greater way for our children to glorify God through their music than during Holy Mass. We believe that God dwells in their music and we don't want to keep it to ourselves. It is our prayer that others may experience God's love through their music.

It was during this pandemic that Joanna discovered that she had artistic skills too. I was surprised to see her learning basic drawing techniques and calligraphy through online tutorials and she has mastered digital art too. This was a beautiful gift unleashed during the last two years of pandemic and she now prepares frames of Bible verses, which turn out to be beautiful gifts for our friends and relatives on various occasions. By this, she is able to memorise Scripture and the artwork brings beauty and joy to the family it is gifted to. We feel so happy to see her creativity displayed in the living rooms of our friends, and it also taught us the joy of giving. ■



Though we now live in a comfortable flat, we have decided to move closer to the church to be regular at Mass. There is no greater way for our children to glorify God through their music than during Holy Mass. We believe that God dwells in their music and we don't want to keep it to ourselves.

A teacher by profession, **Shoby Varghese** lives in Manama, Bahrain with her husband and their three children.

HOW PARENTS CAN HELP TALENT BLOSSOM

Geetha Jose shares wisdom on how parents can encourage and develop skills in their children.

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10.)

As parents, we are often confused about identifying the hidden talents of our children and nurturing it at the right time. As God has a wonderful plan for each one of us, our responsibility is to recognise their skills and talents and help them grow for the greater glory of the creator.

Let us go through few points to see whether we are on the right track:

- Make sure that your children are provided with a range of opportunities by introducing different games, books and activities.

- Encourage your child to discover her talents and never put too much pressure on her to study. Take note of the activities she chooses as these will help us to identify her tastes and interests.
- You will always be a role model and living example for your child. So never give up your desire to study and experiment with new areas of interests. It will really help your child to emerge with her own new ideas.
- It is okay to make mistakes. By accepting her mistakes you are allowing her to take risks in order to succeed in her life.
- Find time to play with your children, crack silly and funny jokes which will encourage their creativity.

- Take your child to a library and encourage her to choose books of her own interest, it will help you to identify her interests and passion.
- Have craft materials or things that will kindle the senses like clay, paint, building blocks, 3D puzzles, etc.
- Encourage your child to speak about her dreams and expectations. Sometimes you might not find it realistic. In such cases ask her how she plans to pursue the dream. It will also help her to develop critical thinking. Teach your youngster to believe in herself and to follow her instincts.
- Ask exciting questions which will help your child look at the world with curiosity and awe. Help her find answers to her queries by exploring together.
- Allow them to narrate made up stories. From my personal experience I have seen young writers develop at home when I tried to listen patiently to the little ones' imaginations.
- Permit your child to participate in activities that she enjoys at school.
- Share stories about those who have achieved success in life. Try to help them understand that success is not judged according to worldly standards but by God's.
- Consider your home as a learning environment. Cooking in the kitchen is a terrific way to learn many things in life. Never forget to affirm them when they finish doing their household chores or responsibilities.
- Have regular family time for playing, eating dinner, watching shows, talking etc.
- Never compare your child, accept her as she is. Try to focus her attention towards the highest goal, HEAVEN which will help her to give glory to the Lord in all her success and failures. ■



Geetha Jose lives in Abu Dhabi, UAE with her husband and four children. She is currently part of the JY Formation Base team and also supports the JY Teens team.

SEEDS OF FAITH

Mary Dilgush tells parents how to sow seeds of faith in their children.



God has called us to live holy lives (1 Thessalonians 4:7) and so through the sacrament of marriage when husband and wife live up to this call, they can give birth and raise holy kids. Every child is created in the image and likeness of God and when the Lord sends children as a gift, he has an expectation. It is important to give faith to our children from a very young age. Parenthood begins from the time of conception, i.e., when every father and mother accepts their child in the womb.

I was blessed to know the importance of praying while the child is in the womb. During my pregnancy I was keen to take part in Holy Mass regularly, read the Bible often and do my daily personal prayer. I was also introduced to the Angels' Army WhatsApp prayer group for pregnant mothers and children. All these helped me when the time came to teach my child about faith because the foundation was already laid when my baby was in the womb, Jesus was already a familiar person to her.

As long as the kids are young, we know that their entire world will revolve around parents, and so whatever we tell them, they will believe. Hence this is the best time to teach them faith. Parents can do it easily without any difficulty.

Nowadays kids are mostly indoors and stuck to screens. We parents need to keep a watch on the content played. I used to play JY action songs, saint stories on YouTube. My daughter enjoys singing and dancing to JY songs. Children are very curious at this age and so if we can show them images of saints, holy family, etc., they will keep asking and we can teach

them. There are also Bible verses that kids learn easily. I make my daughter pray in her own simple words.

Every day when she wakes up, I make her say 'Good Morning' to Jesus first and 'Thank You' for that day. This makes her understand, it is Jesus who is taking care of her the whole day and all her needs can be told to him. Also, before going to bed, I trace the Cross on her forehead three times and pray the Malayalam prayer (Yu Ra Na Ee). This is also a powerful prayer seeking God's protection in our sleep. This has become a routine and not a single day do we go to bed without praying; even if we forget she reminds us. We can pray to the Lord to make our children a blessing. My husband and I place our palms on our daughter's head and pray the Aaronic Blessing (Numbers 6:24-26), every day.

We all are totally incomplete without God. Many times, we fail if we try to do and plan things ourselves. Pope Francis has said that there are no perfect people, therefore no perfect couples and naturally no perfect families. Hence perfect parenting is not possible, the only way out is to look up to heaven and keep asking God.

So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives growth (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). ■

As long as the kids are young, we know that their entire world will revolve around parents, and so whatever we tell them, they will believe. Hence this is the best time to teach them faith.

Mary Dilgush is a homemaker living in Bangalore, India with her husband and four-year-old daughter.

'LET THE LITTLE CHILDREN COME TO ME'

Parents of four young kids, **Soni Thomas & Janet K Maliakal** speak of the importance of attending Holy Mass together as family.



Parents with infants or toddlers always face one big dilemma, especially on Sundays. Should we go for Holy Mass? If yes, what if our child goes wild and how do we keep the child calm and occupied during Mass.

Most dread even trying while some parents try for a while and then drop going to church altogether. There are parents who leave their kid/s with babysitters or take turns to attend Mass. Some persistent parents keep striving to attend Mass with their kids even though they spend most of the time looking after the kid/s instead of focusing on the liturgy; they also invite judgmental looks from others, who consider families with young kids a nuisance. In each case an integral part of celebrating the Holy Eucharist as a family goes missing, despite the Church encouraging families to bring young children to mass. As Pope Francis says, *Never silence a crying baby in Church. Never, because it is the voice that attracts God's tenderness.*

We are a young family with 4 kids (1 month, 2, 4 & 6 year-old) and we believe that having small kids should not be a hindrance but a blessing to attend Mass with. After each Mass we find a special

joy of togetherness as a family. We attend every Mass just like any regular attendee by sitting in the midst of the congregation. Our eldest son Michael holds his Sunday Youth Missal and recites the common prayer responses aloud, the younger one Samuel watches on curiously, Rachel sits or stands calm and sometimes helps us in getting song books, no crying or running around the pew throughout the Mass.

So how do we achieve going to regular Mass with our young kids? Initially with our first kid we too faced the struggle of keeping him quiet, but ever since he was baptised at 2 months, we made it a point to attend every Mass with him. When kids understand that going for Mass is a regular family activity, they tend to be more cooperative. With every subsequent child, the younger child observes the elder and follows suit. So, if the elder ones are calm, so will the younger ones be.

We also follow few simple steps to prepare each child before going to mass:

Satisfy their physical needs: Make sure they are not hungry or sleepy when they come for Mass. These are two situations where children can't be reasoned with.

Avoid distractions: Avoid getting toys or books to keep children occupied. They need to know that they are also active participants and not mere tag-alongs.

Feed their reasoning: We need to understand that our kids rely a lot on logic and reasoning. We as parents are bound to explain the importance of Mass and its different aspects patiently and in a respectful way, without waving them off as too young to understand. Michael started asking questions from age 3, 'Why do we go to Mass every Sunday?' and our answer would be very simple yet logical: 'Every good thing around us, including this family, house, toys, food is a gift from God and in Mass we go to meet Jesus and say Thanks'.

Remove the insecurity: For a child, change leads to insecurity; a new atmosphere, people, sounds and even smells can make the child tense. As parents we need to make them feel secure and safe. For this we need to prepare them in advance; give them details of what, when and how. In the case of Sunday Mass, we tell our kids a day prior, sometimes we need to explain to them how to behave in church and how to respond when the priest gives them blessings, etc. Also, add it to your routine by bringing consistency of going to Mass at same time, same church, sitting at the usual aisle; this helps in making children comfortable.

Walk the Talk: Kids follow what parents do. Especially during Mass, if we are distracted and not attentive, kids will follow the same.

We believe that every child, infant or grown has the same soul which longs to unite with God during the Holy Eucharist. Even though we think that the younger ones are feeble and naive, they have a fully active soul which wants to unite and rejoice at the celebration of the Holy Eucharist and we as parents have the spiritual responsibility to facilitate this in our child's spiritual growth from their earliest age. ■

Soni & Janet are married for 8 years, have 4 kids and live in Halifax, Canada. They are a young family who strive to live a life according to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

CHOSEN TO AFFIRM OUR CHILDREN

Jilu Chengat writes that we as parents can learn tender affirmation and mercifully just discipline from God the Father.

These days it is commonplace to hear about speaking affirmations to grow in confidence and self-esteem. Affirmations are known as statements of truth spoken as a reminder to orient a person. As Christian parents, affirmations can be powerful tools to form our children in their identity and self-worth, especially when we look to God and his Word for guidance.

On the wall in my daughter's room was written this verse from Jeremiah 1:5, *Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born, I set you apart.* Every morning while getting her ready, I would proclaim the verse and say, 'Magdalena Rose, you are special!' As she grew more independent, I found myself doing this less and less. In fact, as she grew older, rather than verses of blessing or affirmations, I often found myself speaking critical and harsh words when she didn't meet my expectations.

Frustrated with myself, I turned to prayer and began to realise that this gap in my parenting came from my own wounds and childhood. Over time, I identified and received healing and deliverance from wounds of inadequacy, unrealistic expectations, and critical words. I began to see and love the humanity of my parents and in turn my own humanity and limitations. Most importantly, I received through these healings, an invitation from the Lord to remain a child, his beloved

daughter. He reminded me of how much he loved me for who I was. His words of affirmation, through Scripture and prayer, strengthened my resolve to love my children more tenderly, even when I had no idea how to do so! As God the Father loved me, I received deeply from his tender affirmation and mercifully just discipline and began to learn from his beautiful model of parenting.

This model of parenting is clearly visible in the interaction between God and his Son during the Baptism of Jesus. The heavens opened up and God proclaimed these words over his son, *This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased.* (Matthew 3:17) In this simple but profound exchange between the Father and the Son, God expresses his delight in his son and affirms his being. It is important to note here that his delight and affirmation is not expressed for what his son has done, but for who he is. The baptism of Jesus occurs at the beginning of Jesus's public ministry. Until that point, he had not done any public miracles or made himself known to the world, yet, in the eyes of his Father he was pleasing!

This may be the most difficult idea for us to actualise in our own life and in the affirmations we speak. How many times do we praise our children for who they are versus what they do? An awareness of this is very enlightening, as most of us will realise that our affirmations and praise center around the actions of our child. While it is not wrong to praise their good behavior or actions, it is clear by looking at God the Father, that we are called to affirm their goodness and being. Opportunities lay aplenty as we seek moments when our child is being loving, caring, wise, prudent, and the like. Even when we would like to praise the good work of our child, we can look deeper to acknowledge their perseverance or generosity and virtue in completing the action. Moments of discipline and correction can also provide opportunities for affirmation as we bless their desire for humility or reconciliation. In these ways, our children grow in confidence that whether they have done the right thing or not, they are still a beloved child.

Of course, as with many things in Christian life, this is much easier said than done. When we have not grown up in a culture of affirmation and blessing, we may recognise that more than just learning the right words to speak over our children, we need to allow God's affirmation to heal us. If that sounds like you, God has an affirmation for you. He says, 'You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.' God has chosen you! Through your own healing and by your words of truth you can build strong foundations for the holiness of your children as you bless them, affirm them, and bear them to be fruit that lasts in this world! ■

Jilu Chengat lives in Massachusetts, USA where she lives out her missionary call as a wife and mother to three children. She enjoys writing and accompanying young people as they discern the voice of God in their lives.



HOW HOMESCHOOLING BENEFITS US

Mother of nine, **Dr Annilyn Sebastian** writes how homeschooling has been a blessing to their family.



Even though we initially started off homeschooling with a mission to impart faith and morality in our kids, we have seen lots and lots of added benefits! I am extremely grateful that God has called me to homeschool my children, even if that meant putting aside my profession as a medical doctor!

Just wanted to share some of the benefits we have seen with homeschooling:

(1) Joy Homeschooling has given me the joy that I wouldn't have been able to experience, had I sent my kids to school and went to work. The joy of being able to be present with family is something I am truly grateful for. Homeschooling offers me the opportunity to be present with all my 9 kids, without wondering whether they are being bullied, or under

peer pressure to live up to the standards of the culture that is sadly deteriorating. It gives me peace of mind to know that the children are under our guidance and trying to live the standards we set, and not what the community sets.

(2) Academics On an academic level, the one-on-one attention as well as ability to move on at your own pace is something that homeschooling is certainly noteworthy for. As a homeschool teacher, I get to choose my kids' curriculum and tailor it according to their needs as well as passion, instead of going with a 'one size fits all' style of most traditional schools. I get to decide what books they read, and what things they are exposed to, to a certain degree. They are trained to be independent learners, and this has greatly helped them

to teach themselves and move on, also bringing along self-motivation, diligence, perseverance and critical thinking.

Homeschooling definitely has an academic advantage over other forms of education, but homeschooling is not just about academics. It's the whole 'package deal' that makes homeschooling beautiful. It is actually a lifestyle combining real life with academics.

(3) Faith, morality and character

Homeschooling gives me an opportunity to instill faith. With homeschooling and being available for the children, I have the opportunity to discipline the kids in God's path. On a spiritual level, it has not only helped the kids but my own spiritual life, to be more dependent on the Lord for being able to 'do it all'. As a mom who homeschools, I wear several hats – including (and not limited to) wife, mom, daughter, teacher, cook, chauffeur, homemaker, just to mention a few at the tip of the iceberg. It also provides an opportunity to promote good virtues, and emphasise on building character. I am available to deal with character issues right then and there. I have the flexibility to put away a day or two of academics and focus on the real thing that needs to be focused on – character.

(4) Life skills We have kids involved in daily routine household chores as well as taking care of siblings, and this exposes them to life skills that are highly necessary and equip them to be prepared for independent life after school. This work ethic is probably something we would not have been able to provide had we sent them to school.

Kids are also with each other throughout the day, which promotes sibling bonding and ability to help each other where needed.

With homeschooling, it is not possible to segregate real life from school. Life happens when it happens and the kids become part of real life rather than an artificial life created within the walls of a classroom.

(5) Socialisation One question most people have about homeschooling is about socialisation. In reality, most homeschooled kids are exposed to a wide variety of age ranges on a day-to-day

basis, as opposed to kids of only their same age in a traditional school setting. The exposure to more age ranges develop in them the ability to cope in different circumstances. We also take advantage of the fellowship that our beautiful JY community offers, as well as socialising within local homeschool groups and our parish.

(6) Nurturing passions Another real benefit we have noticed with homeschooling is the being able to

nurture the passions of the kids in a positive environment; passions that we would have probably overlooked, or wouldn't have had an opportunity to pursue, had we sent them to school.

There are many who understand the positive impacts of homeschooling, but are afraid to take the plunge. One might think we need a lot of patience, or that we need an academic degree to homeschool. But those are not true. The only real qualification needed to homeschool is

that you love your kids, that you know basic reading/writing/ math, and that you are ready to accept the grace that God offers! **IK**

Dr. Annilyn Sebastian, an MD Pathologist by profession, and wife of Dr. Anup Skaria, is currently a stay-at-home homeschooling mother of their nine children. They reside in Houston, USA.

CREATING HAPPY MEMORIES

Turning special moments into beautiful memories is a parental privilege, says **Dr Remya Joby**.

They may not remember what you did or what you said, but they will remember how you made them feel.' This is a quote I often reminisce about when it comes to parenting.

Creating happy memories with our children is one of the most beautiful parenting privileges.

The memories that we create do not have to be about expensive vacations or big surprises, but sharing joy with them throughout with little gestures, to let them know how much they mean to us; and that each child is special and loved immensely.

As a family we have been blessed to have gone on several vacations, but the one that lingers in all our memories is the trip we enjoyed together as a family to North India on a cold January, where

we also had our first experience of snowfall. The beauty of this vacation was that it was not a trip that was planned beforehand but a decision made after sometime in prayer, together as a family and a message from the Bible that urged us to do it NOW.

Once the decision was made we were amazed at how God arranged a beautiful and memorable trip. Although it seemed like a bad decision to many, to travel with kids to North India at a time when a cold wave was forecasted, we just held on to the affirmation we had received from the Word of God and moved on. Today we know why God gave us such a message. It was after that year that the long Covid-19 years began.

The Lord plays a part in every desire of ours turned into silent prayers. He enables the right people and situations when we surrender our every desire – even creating those loving moments and memories with our children.

One thing our children talk about when they remember that trip is how the Lord fulfils our desires, how he leads when we sit in prayer with him and how the Lord loves each of us.

Talking about our beautiful memories is a joy and this also refreshes the beauty of those moments.

We have a weekly movie night with a movie that we all agree upon (that's the toughest part) but it's not so much about the movie we enjoy, but the ambience we create with homemade popcorn, nachos and other accompaniments and



all of us plonk in our TV area. None of us remember much about the movie later on but we all cherish the feeling of being together and the planning and the snack preparations and the joy of all of us huddling together.

Every family will have different ways to cherish special moments. Go ahead and make memories when you can because our children may forget what we told them and did for them but will definitely remember how we made them feel **LOVED!** **IK**

Married to Adv. KR Joby, **Dr Remya Joby** is a dentist by profession and is a mother of three from Bangalore, India.

MANAGING TIME THE BEST WAY

Homeschooling mother of five, **Alphy Thevalakara** shares how they best manage time.

As a mother of five children and also a homeschooling family, we have to organise time in a very orderly manner to be able to not just have basic needs met but also to school each of our children at home.

As a family focused on our Catholic faith and values, I want to share how we incorporate spiritual practices into our day-to-day schedule. It was always very important for us to go to daily Mass. I grew up going to daily Mass from my middle-school years. It became part of my life and was where I came into a deeper relationship with Jesus. My husband and I believe that it is through Holy Mass, which is the source and summit of our

faith, that we can meet Jesus in a very personal way. After we got married, we tried our best to go to Mass as often as we could, whether that be when pregnant, in freezing cold, or with a newborn. Even though our day is hectic with just taking care of children, especially the little ones, we have prioritised our time in such a way that Holy Mass comes as a very important part of the day.

Another spiritual activity which we include into our day is Morning Prayer. This time consists of singing simple songs to Jesus, a few simple prayers of thanksgiving by each of my children, and praying for any intentions in their own simple and sweet words. It's amazing how much children can pray from such a young age and how seriously they take it, especially when they are little. Sometimes I also read aloud a few Bible stories. If there is a feast day of a saint we celebrate that day, we take time to share the story of that saint and have a small discussion. In the middle of all this there are small fights and loud noises by the babies and toddlers which eventually becomes part of the prayer and everyone gets used to it. Regardless of all commotion, the children learn to talk to God and experience how to pray from such a young age. This helps them in building a relationship with Jesus that hopefully is the beginning of a prayer life.

Around 3pm we also try to take a

break from our schooling and recite the Divine Mercy Chaplet. This only takes five minutes and it is a good time in the middle of the day to remind ourselves of God's mercy while also a chance to pray for others. Sometimes I include tea-time with some simple snacks along with the Mercy Chaplet.

Rosary is another powerful weapon we use in the evening during our family prayer. We make it a point to say the full Rosary together as a family every day. At times it gets hard as the little ones can get tired and noisy during the family prayer which can cause a distraction for the older siblings. We try to keep reminding them how we need to stay focused while also accommodating the restlessness of the younger ones. Sometimes we sit together, sing songs and chit-chat as a family which the kids love. Rosary can become tiring for especially the younger ones and that is why we have tried to include some songs, stories and family time along with family prayer. We try to engage the children by letting them lead the Rosary and also use Rosary books which have pictures and explanations of each mystery.

Keeping Jesus the center of our day-to-day activities brings such peace and joy into our daily life. Even in times of suffering it is this continuous connection with God that gets us through the day. When time is a gift from God, we must give the most of our time to him. Though we wake up at a certain time, have our meals at the appropriate times, and take care of our other responsibilities and activities such as schooling, babies and toddlers, ministry work that we are involved in outside our home, we always try hard to keep our schedule focused on Jesus.

Ultimately it is our choice to manage time in such a way that we give value to God more than anything else. When putting God at the center of your lives, everything else falls into place. There is no better time management than that.

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides Mathew 6:33. ■



Alphy Thevalakara lives with her husband Sony and their five children in Chicago.

LITTLE HANDS DO HOUSEHOLD CHORES

Aneesh K Thomas and Tintu Aneesh write about how they get their children interested and involved in the chores at home.



I am Aneesh and my wife is Tintu. We live with our parents. Our family is blessed with four kids with a two year age gap (the eldest is 8 years-old and the youngest, 1 year-old). We thank God for choosing us to raise his children and we pray he blesses our humble efforts and be parents according to his will. As responsible Catholic parents we are very concerned about inculcating an interest towards work and duties in our children and we constantly try and figure out new ways to include them in the household chores.

The Bible reminds us in Luke 2:52: *And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men.* We tell our children how Jesus as a boy would have accompanied Joseph with carpentry and helped Mary with her chores.

Children observe keenly

We have observed that the basic interest to try something new and take up responsibilities comes through observation and adaptation in children. This is a big realisation and the need to set good examples for them at home begins here. Our attitude towards various domestic chores and circumstances are keenly observed by children and it influences their attitude towards work too. Many times, we have noticed that

children have a natural inclination to things we consider easy and are reluctant to take up chores which are tiring for us. We have noticed that our children are more active and creative when they are also taken along while doing daily household activities instead of telling them that they can't do it. Also, it is our concern that children should have a positive approach to all chores.

Smart apprentices

Most of the time we cannot entrust children completely with a responsibility but we can ensure their participation in the most interesting part of the work. When we do something at home, we ask our children to be smart apprentices so that we can ensure their participation as well as their safety. We still remember how our children enjoyed helping with moving furniture at home, preparing ground for the new fish pond, cheering us every time with *elaiyyas* (cheers in Malayalam, usually to lighten strenuous work), and bringing us water and snacks. It was really surprising and enjoyable to know that even though they were below 7 years, they took responsibility to take care of the kitchen, prepared cool drinks and snacks and served with great enthusiasm. This gave them the feeling that they too

were a part of a productive activity at home and improved their confidence. With these little experiences they have of working together, we are sure they will be capable of doing smaller chores independently and may seek our help too, if needed.

Supporting their interests

We have understood that children respond more when we give them tasks they are interested in. We should be able to figure out what type of activity our children like and engage them accordingly. Whether it be organising toys, decorating the prayer room with flowers in the evening or arranging the table for dinner or folding dried clothes, each duty can be assigned to children considering their age and taste. Acknowledging their work every time is also very important.

Earlier, the kids used to complain often that it was very boring at home and nothing else but screens were their last resolve. But since we began to support their small experiments and outdoor activities, we have noticed that most of their YouTube searches are related to seeking new ways to make their outdoor activities more alive and interesting. As a result, they are capable of washing

the car, slicing vegetables, kneading dough, etc. They research recipes of their favourite dishes and try to prepare it themselves. Every time we too accompany them without interfering in their choices. We often make sure that we don't impose our interests and tastes on children but instead appreciate and support their choices.

Ownership

Another interesting way to involve children in household activities is by teaching them to enjoy the fruits of their efforts. Whether it be planting something new or learning a new DIY technique from YouTube, you can constantly follow up their progress and creations. We often ask our children whether their plants have bloomed or tomatoes have grown big and this gives them a feeling that they too are involved in something important at home. We also try to inculcate in them gratitude towards our animals and plants for providing us with milk, egg, fruits, etc. Andrea, our daughter takes this duty quite literally by verbally thanking our pets, livestock and plants and also enquiring about their wellness. It's a reviving experience for us parents too to watch our children enjoying the fruits of their efforts.

Sportsmen and referees

Chores from washing clothes to cleaning the house can be done with sportsman spirit if we parents have the patience to be good referees. We have seen our children thoroughly enjoying the scoreboard system and treasure hunts we do to get them involved in household activities. We even can utilise their screen time to explore various techniques to simplify their daily household activities. The small, daily activities at our home like adding sugar to tea, and holding the strainer while pouring tea, etc. belong to each child, though these activities could very well be done without their help too. Be it fish farming, feeding goats or cleaning the backyard, the children are given small daily responsibilities; this gives them the sense that their contributions have been vital for the survival of these livestock.



We have observed that the basic interest to try something new and take up responsibilities comes through observation and adaptation in children. This is a big realisation and the need to set good examples for them at home begins here.

Encouraging small experiments

We also encourage our kids in easy cooking experiments like making a bullseye or instant noodles, letting them be the chief cook while we join them as apprentices to ensure their safety. While shopping or at restaurants or petrol pumps, we allow them the opportunity to place orders and make payments. Activities like these at home and outside have helped our children escape the spoon-feed culture.

Element of surprise

Another important thing we noticed which really works for children is adding a surprise element to anything new we introduce to them. Our children are pretty sure that the grocery bag we bring home daily contains some small gifts for them. All are curious to transport the groceries

from the car to the kitchen to grab their tiny gifts. Along with our patience and time these small encouragements help the children keep alive their interest in doing chores.

Upgrading

We also ensure that the elder ones upgrade their skills and entrust them with bigger responsibilities to remind them of their capacities. Entrusting them with chores like separating organic and non-organic waste at home, preparing a weekly menu for the kitchen, etc. will make them grow as responsible individuals and gradually they will learn the importance of abiding by rules while living in a society.

What we have noticed in such activities is that they become aware of the people around them. When they perform their assigned duties, they also try to help younger ones perfect it. By doing so, each child understands the other's strengths and weaknesses and learns how to be concerned for others. In our experience it helps develop their character as well as understand and respect the feelings of others. ■■

Aneesh and his wife Tintu live in Idukki, India with his parents and four children. Aneesh works as an administrative staff at Pavanatma College, Murikkassery while Tintu is a homemaker.

NAVIGATING THE TURBULENT YEARS

Biju Joseph shares from experience wisdom in parenting teenagers.



We are blessed with three children. The elder one is 24 years-old now. We were very particular about the faith formation of our children from their initial years. Hence we ensured their participation in the daily prayers at home, daily Holy Mass, and sent them for retreats too as often as possible. We have the habit of praying together before going to school and both of us parents bless them after prayers and pray for each one of them specially too. It's a happy thing to share that they stick on to this prayer routine even after entering university.

We thank God for helping us handle their teenage years smoothly and we feel so proud about it. One thing we ensured was the presence of at least one parent when the kids were home. We were convinced that it was during their teenage years that they would need more attention and the company of their

parents, though they appeared resilient or rebellious on the outside. Children badly need a shoulder to lean on and it's the best when it is their parents' shoulders. My wife decided to remain a homemaker to make herself more available to the children. So, as soon as school was over, the children were happy to run home and share all that had happened in school with their mother. She waited for them with their favourite snacks every evening and it was more than enough for our children to run home at the earliest rather than roam around elsewhere.

They always had the freedom to make fun of or even fight with us and hence all their frustrations and confusions of the age ended with us. That's one important thing we can provide our children – a shoulder to lean on, a friend to fight with, a confidant to share secrets with and a pillar to hold on to.

Another daily habit which helped us a lot

They always had the freedom to make fun of or even fight with us and hence all their frustrations and confusions of the age ended with us. That's one important thing we can provide our children – a shoulder to lean on, a friend to fight with, a confidant to share secrets with and a pillar to hold on to.

was our casual chit-chat time before daily prayer. Everything that happened in a day was shared by all of us. It also gave us parents a chance to remind them constantly that whatever we are and all that we have are only because of pure grace. This time was also utilised to give them our suggestions and tiny corrections. No grudge or tension was carried over to the next day once shared in the family.

Teenagers are on their journey to independence and they highly appreciate recognition. We have to consider them as mature individuals. Whenever we make decisions at home, we ask the opinions of our children too. Everything new at home is always done considering their interests and opinions.

Teenage years are so fragile and ought to be handled with care. It's quite natural for them to be rebellious or indifferent towards their parents. One thing we have to keep in mind is that we always have to stay close and with them, no matter how far they try to go away. It is the time for us to kneel down before our Lord too. The prayer of parents is what holds them together. Children would also appreciate having prayerful parents. The belief that parents are praying for them will give them more confidence to face life courageously.

Things don't always fall in place and go according to our wishes. Once when our elder son was studying in the tenth standard, he became extremely upset on realising that his answer to an essay question had gone wrong in the board exam. It didn't bother us much but he was disappointed. He was afraid that we would blame him for being careless, but instead we kept calm and consoled him saying those were small things in life and that nothing happens without the knowledge of our God. It was an incident for us to help him understand that God is good all the time, not just in our achievements but in our small failures too. It's our duty to not burden them with over expectations and pressure during their teenage years specially.

One thing we strictly hold are faith practises and we have observed that once they are regular with it everything else falls in place. We make sure that all of us go for the sacrament of confession at least once in two weeks and we never compromise on our daily prayers or daily Mass. This I can say has laid the foundation for our kids.

Our trust helps them a lot to stay truthful and faithful. Our openness and trust will



It was an incident for us to help him understand that God is good all the time, not just in our achievements but in our small failures too.

challenge them to remain open to us too. Our children have never nagged us asking for phones or any such gadgets for personal use during their teenage years. Our passwords are common at home. This creates an air of togetherness and trust automatically. Our availability is the second thing which counts in parenting teenagers. They need us always. And the feeling that we are there for them all the time strengthens the bonding and love. But it's important to ensure that our availability doesn't over burden them or end up in over pampering. Over parenting is also a dangerous threat which spoils our children. Every interaction should be done considering their personal spaces too.

Trusting in the Lord, praying hard and loving unconditionally we become parents according to his will and wish.

Let's not waste a second, but enjoy our precious time with God's children. ■■

'WHAT I LOVE ABOUT MY PARENTS'

Children (and some young adults) share what they like most about their parents.



I am proud of my parents because they care for me and help me when I am in need. They make me happy and do so much for me. I am proud to be the son of my parents and nothing can change that.

Ashish Siju, 14 yrs, Singapore



My parents are the best because they are always loving and caring. They always support me in everything I do. They are always near whenever I need help and correct me when I go wrong. And their spiritual guidance helps me to grow up as a better person.

Grace Maria Mathew, 13 yrs, Dublin, Ireland



I am grateful for my parents because they showed me how faith can be lived out in our most ordinary lives. They gave me Jesus, which is the best gift I could ever receive.

Anjali Sebastian, 22 yrs, Ernakulam



My parents are the best because they spend time with me as much as they can. They sometimes scold me but they still love me. They hug me and take good care of me. They are the best because they teach me what I understand.

Theresa Thomas, 8 yrs, Dallas, USA,



I am proud of my parents because they cultivated in me a habit of saying two magical words, 'Thank you' and 'Sorry'; to give everything first to Jesus and pray on both big and small things of life. Importantly, they were very open to allow me the freedom to make my own decision at times.

Mariya Varghese, 26 yrs, Toronto, Canada



I am grateful for my parents because they said YES to the Lord to have me, they have sacrificed their whole life for me, loved the messy me and believed in me when no one else dared to. I know that I always flood their thoughts and prayers.

Anne Mary Nova, 24 yrs, UK



I am grateful to my parents because they love me so much. I am really proud of them because in all my struggles, they help me.

Edria Maria Shimy, 12 yrs, Pala, Kottayam



I am proud of my parents because they do everything they can to make my brother's and my dreams come true.

Toby Dinoop, 15 yrs, Melbourne, Australia



I am proud of the fact that they work really hard for us. They knew that I'm not that perfect but they love me for what I am.

Tom Sunny, 16 yrs, Kanjirapally, India



I love my parents because they love me unconditionally and they give me everything I need. They help me be the best version of myself and I owe all my successes to their love and support.

Jiya Rose Jamu, 14 yrs, Port Macquarie, Australia



I am grateful to my parents because just like my Heavenly Father, they never give up on me.

Ann Maria Jose, 25 yrs, Kottayam



I love my parents because God chose them especially for me. I couldn't ask for better parents. They love me and I love them. Our love for each other will never stop flowing.

Deldiona Maria Prejomy, 15 yrs, Abu Dhabi, UAE



My parents are the best because God has chosen them for me. God always gives us the best because he is our loving Father. They teach me the Word of God and how we should have faith in God throughout our life. They guide me through the right path whenever I commit any mistakes. They don't give me everything that I ask but they give me everything I need. When I love and respect them, I love and honour God who has sent them for me.

Neha Ann Manoj, 17 yrs, Ruwi, Muscat



I love my parents because they are capable of differentiating between good and bad and how to deal with both.

Ann Mary EJ, 17 yrs, Thrissur, Kerala



I love my parents because they have sacrificed so much for my siblings and myself, making sure all our needs were met. I also thank my parents for helping me have a good relationship with God. I will always be very thankful to them for supporting me in my weaknesses and loving me unconditionally.

Ann Maria Thomas, 18 yrs, Kottayam, India

IN MEMORIAM

Sister of the Blessed Carlo Acutis

Ajna George (27), who went to her eternal rest had been fighting cancer for the last 5 years. A very active Jesus Youth, she was the former JY coordinator at SH College, Thevara, part of the Ernakulam Teens' Team and the All-Kerala Music Central Team. This beautiful reflection was written by her parish priest Rev Fr Jean Felix Kattassery, Vicar of St Patrick's Church, Vyttila, Archdiocese of Verapoly, Kerala.

A life lived with utmost devotion to the Holy Eucharist from a very early age, of forbearance, surrender to and offering of the excruciating pains of cancer for the glory of God, embracing the Eucharistic Lord with a smile even as death drew close...

This is not a reference to Carlo Acutis whom the Church recently declared Blessed. This is about one whose life closely resembled Carlo's holy life; about Ajna George, a 27-year-old Jesus Youth, who left for her heavenly abode on 21 January 2022.

Striving to love Jesus. Smiling even when the cancer cells claimed her eyes, ears, liver, mouth, and jawbone. Adamant in her desire to walk to church for Mass every day even when her body wracked with pain. Stubbornly demanding to receive the Eucharist even during the lockdown. Asking Jesus for greater suffering even as everyone prayed for her release from a world of pain. There could be no more fitting appellation for Ajna, who amazed everyone around her, than that of 'Sister of Blessed Carlo Acutis'.

I have read about saints who prayed for suffering and have also heard about saints who dedicated their lives to Jesus in the Eucharist. However, my eyes fill with tears as I ponder on God's will, which granted me the opportunity to witness



a holy life at such close quarters and allowed me to provide for her spiritual needs – O God, you are so great! The Church elevates a person to sainthood only after long years of intensive study and scrutiny. But as someone who has known Ajna personally for around 17 years, I can testify that her life resembled that of a saint!

Ajna must have been around 10 years-old when she was introduced to me as the sister of my classmate, Ajma. As she grew older, her love for Jesus grew. She often spoke of the spiritual nourishment she received from being active in Jesus Youth as a student in college. Having completed her undergraduate and postgraduate studies with excellent grades, she was appointed as Assistant Professor in the Department of Commerce at Sacred Heart College, Thevara. It was at this juncture, around four-and-a-half years ago that cancer cells were first detected in her jawbone.

Following treatment including emergency surgery, she resumed normal life, but those days of good health were short-lived. Even when the cancer began to affect her eyes, ears, liver, jawbone and lips, the smile on her face never faded, and the praise of God was ever present upon her lips. During this time, cancer did not only rob her of her vision in one eye and hearing in an ear, but also the beauty of her face. Two months back, she lost most of her ability to speak.

I deem it God's will that as she entered the last phase of her suffering, two-and-a-half years ago, I was appointed vicar of her parish. Those days gave me an insight into her deep devotion for the Holy Eucharist. It often seemed to me that she was striving to love Jesus even more than Jesus loved her. She never stopped attending daily Mass, something she had been accustomed to since childhood,



AJNA GEORGE
1994 - 2022

even on days when she was in great pain. She came to church for Holy Mass holding her mother's hand, like a toddler learning to walk. How can I ever forget the words with which she stopped me from arranging transportation for her to come to the Church, 'You're tempting me to evade suffering, aren't you?'

Her persistence was astounding as she stubbornly insisted on receiving Holy Communion even when churches were closed to the public during lockdown. Many were the times I was subjected to questioning by the police during my journeys to her home with Holy Communion! The very last week of her stay in the hospital, at the height of her illness will forever be the most memorable days of my pastoral life, days when her hospital room was converted into a chapel of Eucharistic adoration. Only after offering an hour of silent worship and adoration of the Blessed

Host that I brought her would she receive Jesus on her tongue. And it was thus, having received the Eucharistic Lord that she went to her eternal rest. (It is to be noted that since she could not open her mouth, she used to receive the Eucharist dissolved in water, through a gastrostomy feeding tube. This had been her mode of receiving communion over the last seven months). That holy death will never fade from my mind. Having received the anointing of the sick and the Holy Eucharist, she held my hand and recited the ejaculatory prayer 'Jesus, Mary, Joseph...' for almost half-an-hour, her voice slowly fading till finally her life breath, her offering to God, ceased. It was on a Friday, at exactly 3 o'clock in the afternoon, the very time Jesus gave up his breath! O God, were you making me witness a saint's entry into heaven? I wonder.

But of one thing, I'm certain – her sole desire was to share Jesus in the Eucharist with everyone she met. While on her sickbed, like St Therese of the Child Jesus and St Alphonsa, she offered all the suffering she endured for this very intention. Perhaps that is why her very death became a proclamation of the Holy Eucharist. How many are the glowing tributes to her love for the Eucharist posted on social media.

Despite the pain of losing a loved one, her parents Muttungal George and Achamma, a couple who gave birth to a saint, and their family can rejoice, and all those who knew her can take pride, knowing that from her place near Jesus who loved her and whom she loved even more, she will continue to help us in our prayers to grow in devotion to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. Our greatest blessing is that we lived at the same time that she did. Ajna, do remember us when you are in Paradise.

Ajna, Pray for Us

Ajna George had been participating in the Emmaus course (Jesus Youth's Bible study formation course). Even when cancer claimed her mouth, right eye and ear, she attended sessions online and tried her best to complete the assignments with the help of others. A few days before her death, she shared with her spiritual director her sadness at not being able to attend the sessions any more.

Following is the eulogy delivered at the funeral service at Ajna's home by Rev Fr Sabu Thomas, Asst Prof SH College, Thevara, Kerala, her spiritual father for the last five years.

Dear priests, parents of Ajna, other family members, friends, Jesus Youth family members and neighbours.

A little while back when praying the Office of the Dead, I was struck by the following verse, 'Lord you are always good!' Immediately after I sang these lines, I felt an uncomfortable thought pass through me like lightning. I felt disturbed and looked around to see how others were feeling about this Psalm.

For, in the situation we are in now, it may not be easy for our feeble minds to proclaim, 'Lord you are always good!' Our intellects may question why God had allowed this if he is so good in the first place. The minute Ajna's medical report came out, everyone I came across had only one thing to ask. Why did this happen to a child who has been living for God? A child who did so much for her community and society. Without a doubt, I can say that there has been no other student in SH college who witnessed Jesus Christ like Ajna did.

Ajna was a person who passed her NET exam (qualifies a person for Assistant Professorship) while still a student, and got qualified to teach in the same college. A child with a lot of potential, dreams and ambitions. As she lies lifeless before us, how are we to understand when the Psalms proclaim, 'Lord you are always good.'

But one thing is certain that though the whole world may have asked why God did this to her, the only person who never questioned till her last breath was our Ajna herself.

I still remember the day when I

came here with Jith. It was a strange coincidence that the two news reached her the same day – the diagnosis of her cancer and her appointment as a professor in SH College. While driving here, I mentally prepared myself. I didn't know what to say to console her, and she probably would ask me why this was happening to her. I noted a few Bible verses to say to her. But when we met her, she welcomed us both without any remorse. Her parents, on seeing us, began to sob but Ajna held them close and consoled them. She asked her mother to stop crying and bring us tea. We spent

almost two hours with the family, talking together, praying together and reciting a Rosary together.

While we were leaving, surprise and curiosity got the better of me. I asked Ajna how she could accept this predicament with such ease. Her response, I have since quoted in many homilies, retreats, church feasts and I will still continue to quote them. Because those words have really inspired me. 'In the midst of this suffering and pain, as I am preparing for my operation, I don't have any complaints. If I come back to life cured, I'll thank Jesus and continue being a witness for his kingdom. And if this brings my life to a close, then also I'll thank him and be happy with him. I understand this is a part of the plan that my Jesus has for me.'

I know that these are not just mere words.

I have been here several times and last Sunday, together with Fr Prashanth,



I came here and spent an hour with Ajna and her family. She looked very pale and tired. I am pretty sure that if any of us were in her place, we would have felt awkward presenting ourselves before others. But even that morning, she went to church holding her mother's hands, participated in Mass and received Holy Communion. Ajna poses a big challenge before us, a big challenge. All of us, even in our small sufferings, lose heart and become shattered. For some young people, something as small as a pimple appearing makes them so upset. And we read in the news about suicides over trivial problems of life. Against this backdrop, we should be proud of this child who has been living pain for four years, uniting it with His Cross, endured the suffering, went for daily Mass and received Holy Communion, even on the day of her death, saying, 'Jesus, I give my soul into your hands'. If this child is not a saint, I don't know who else is.



While Jesus was at prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, on seeing the hill of Calvary, his heart trembled foreseeing the pain he would have to bear. He asked his Father if it were possible to take the cup away. Going through these words we may ask ourselves why Jesus, being the Son of God, prayed so. Reading this, do we at some point expect God the Father to intervene and free him from the Cross? However, in the next verse we read that an angel came from heaven to strengthen him. For sure, a similar angel descended from heaven to strengthen Ajna and to be with her till the last moment. It is not when God obliterates suffering from us that we call him good. When we go through difficult times and accept it willingly as God's plan, he will send angels to console and strengthen us and to be his witnesses in that suffering. It is such a God whom we ought to call good.

Wisdom 4:10 says *Having won God's favour, he has been loved and, as he was living among sinners, has been taken away.* We can say the same of Ajna. Ajna pleased God. She was called early from this world of sinners.

We often use the example of the gardener who takes the most beautiful flower from his garden for his house or church. When God looked among us, he found a very beautiful flower and took her away before the world could taint her soul. This is a challenge and a wakeup call to everyone to look into our own lives.

I was Ajna's spiritual father for the past 5 years at Sacred Heart College, Thevara. I have seen her spiritual life closer than anyone else. I still see the memory of her hurrying to the college chapel to say her personal prayer, as I would return to the monastery every day for lunch. Never have I seen in this college another student with such zeal and love for Jesus. She actively led all the activities of the Jesus Youth on campus. She was there in the forefront to take the destitute for a ride on the metro train, to take them to LuLu Mall, to visit their

homes, to visit orphanages and hospitals, to collect clothes and so much more! For every outreach programme, she was there at its lead. It was during her time as coordinator that Jesus Youth flourished in Sacred Heart College. There has never been – before her or after her time – programmes such as these accomplished. These activities were intended to help students understand and share in the sufferings of others and provide the vision for future outreaches of the college. Standing here with us are many friends of Ajna who were there with her and who can testify this.

Dear parish priest and parents of Ajna,

You can be proud today that we have an intercessor in heaven to pray for us. There are times when we priests say the clichéd phrase, 'not just pray for the deceased, we should pray to them'. Today however, it is with a heart full of conviction that we can say, 'Ajna, pray for us to Jesus'.

To all of you attending this funeral today and those participating online, you are all blessed. Were it not for the Covid restrictions, many more people would have showed up today. For those who were unable to attend, they will regret the opportunity they missed to witness the funeral service of a saint.

Like the candle that's lit near Ajna's body, the warmth and brightness it emits while lit is something no one can ignore or deny, even if it is blown off. The glow that it gave will still be felt. Similarly the incense that is burned, its fragrance will still remain in the air. Just the same, even after burying Ajna, the twenty-seven years that she lived, a pure and saintly life, being a role model to her peers, the values that she upheld, the sacrifice that she lived, similar to that of St Alphonsa. That radiance will last forever in this parish, in this family, in the society and in our hearts forever.

Dear parents, let's say goodbye to her with a happy heart because she has secured a place in heaven.





What She Left Unsaid

(An excerpt from a touching remembrance written by Jith George, a close friend of Ajna.)

My eyes brim with tears as the memories of you keep coming to me, Ajna. Why do my ears still ring with the familiar sound of you calling out, 'Jithe'? Indeed, those calls were so filled with love! When like a songbird you flew into our midst, did you ever know that people would welcome into their hearts all that you sang and spoke, dear friend?

My friendship with Ajna goes back a long way, I've known her well for many years. We studied together at Sacred Heart College, Thevara, and we were both part of Jesus Youth Kerala Music Ministry. When I heard that she'd been diagnosed with cancer, I rushed to her home along with our beloved Fr Sabu Thomas. The scene that unfolded before us there was more heroic than the most heroic movies. Cancer had arrived, like Goliath, to trample down her dreams and her faith; but she stood, like David, with the smooth stones of spirituality and fortitude that she'd perfected over the years! What I later saw was my dear friend preparing to move into the heart of the battle, armed with a smile.

Her long slew of operations started with replacing her jawbone with a piece of bone from her thigh. This bone was replaced several times by other bones when the onslaught of cancer got worse. When it got down to the last viable bone she said, 'Hey, I've got just one precious bone left to be used on my face. The doctor said that if this doesn't work then nothing else can be done'. With slight unease she continued, 'Can you pray that I am able to receive Jesus every day? That's all I need. I would not be able to go to church if I start chemotherapy'. That day I realised how much she loved Jesus even in the midst of so much pain. She loved Jesus more than her life. Perhaps that was why I never wasted any opportunity I got to spend time with her and visited often. Each of those days I spent at her home were truly holy days. Holy moments spent with a living saint!

I went to see her after that operation as well. Her hair had all fallen and the procedure had disfigured her face. Ajna had been a really good singer, but the operation had taken away half of her lips. How would she teach with half her lips gone? How would she sing? She would never be able to sing again. Would she be able to bear this? These thoughts ran through my mind in a frenzy as I thought of how much she loved singing and teaching. As I stood before her with these distressing thoughts, she said to me, 'Hey, this gloomy look does not suit you. Be happy'. That was when I realised that she was truly the best singer! Instead of the lamentations of pain, what remained of her lips sang psalms of joy. Never before, or even after, have I seen a singer who so courageously lived the praises she sang

to God. How happy she used to be when I visited her at home! She would eagerly get me to have the savouries her mother prepared. Never once did we see the sadness of a person unable to have had food through her mouth for months, or one who had possibly forgotten all sense of taste. That day we laughed a lot. Yes, it's true, all Everests of sadness melted away when talking to her! When even the simplest things of life exasperate me, I visit Ajna and I start looking at life from a different perspective. She couldn't tolerate anyone being sad around her. That was why even during the most intense pain she would remain silent, not even letting her mother know how much she was suffering. Not once would she talk about the excruciating pain, rather preferring to eagerly ask about the lives and activities of her visitors!

Ajna's name was perfect for her. The word 'Ajna' means inner eye. With this 'inner eye' she would see and notice what was left unobserved by others. Read minds. I am reminded of an incident which occurred on 31 October 2020. The JY Teens Ministry was organising a massive online gathering, 'TMG FINALE', and had asked Kerala Music Ministry to arrange the music for it. There was to be a grand performance by the band, 'band show' as we called it. And so, several of our bandmates had already gone shopping for new clothes the previous day. Even though I too would have liked to get a pair of new clothes, I decided against it as I didn't have enough money. The next morning Ajna called me, 'Jith, where are you? Can you come to Kacheripady, Ernakulam right now? It's a bit urgent'. Borrowing Fr Sabu's bike from the college, I rushed there. Ajna was waiting with her mother in front of Seematti (a clothing store, famous in Kerala). I couldn't figure out what was going on. Gesturing me to discipline a disobedient mask that had slipped off my face, she said that she wanted to buy someone clothes, and wanted my help. She led me into the shop, towards the men's section. 'Why are we here?' I asked, 'Aren't we getting clothes for you?' Pretending not to hear, Ajna started looking through clothes with her mother, and asked me which ones I liked. Like an expectant mother buying clothes the first time for her unborn child, she excitedly kept looking. I was dumbfounded. 'We're here to buy clothes for you,' she then said. Don't tell anyone, but Jesus asked me to; it's not me, it is Jesus giving this to you.' Instantly I felt the flood of God's love wash over me! God's love flowed down my face in twin streams. The next day, dressed in those new clothes, when we sang praises to God, I thanked Him for Ajna: the gift of a friend and truly, a soul sister.

Heroic faith of a life heroically devoted to Jesus



Bedwin Titus K, Ajna's friend and fellow member of the JY Kochi Central Prayer Group core team remembers her.

I've known Ajna for the past 10 years. I first met her during a prayer group meeting at Sacred Heart College, Thevara. I had gone there to conduct the praise and worship for their prayer group. From the very beginning itself, I found Ajna to be a very humble, innocent, and shy person. But she had a strong desire to bring her friends and college mates closer to Jesus. Talking to her I could feel her love for Jesus, but she always used to say that she was unworthy of his love. Jesus was someone very personal to Ajna. It made her sad when people drifted away from God or when their interest in attending the college prayer group waned. But she would strongly pray for them knowing that God had a plan. If someone said something bad about Jesus or the Church or Jesus Youth, she would become really sad. She used to bounce back after recharging herself with simple conversations with Jesus. We would confidently say, 'If Ajna is sad, you can find her in a chapel'.

She had this beautiful way of emptying herself and letting Jesus take complete control of the things she did. I have

witnessed numerous times her graceful handling of many things that were new to her. From difficult situations to big programmes, she beautifully handled them all.

It's not like Ajna didn't get worried/tense, I remember how she used to really worry on the day before a programme where she was the coordinator or when things didn't go as planned. The more worried she would get, the more she would pray, and the more she would talk with Jesus. I remember how happy she would become when the programmes concluded successfully or when a problem got resolved; she would be filled with praise, making sure to share with everyone that it was Jesus who did it.

She had a strong conviction that Jesus would make everything for good and that he was there with her, loving and caring for her. She also had a strong desire to share that love she experienced. There was always a loving grace in her conversations that was hard to miss. Ajna was instrumental in bringing a lot of youth close to Jesus. Her testimony on her love for the Holy Mass has transformed many young people.

After a few years of limited contact with Ajna, it was with happiness that I learnt of her posting as assistant

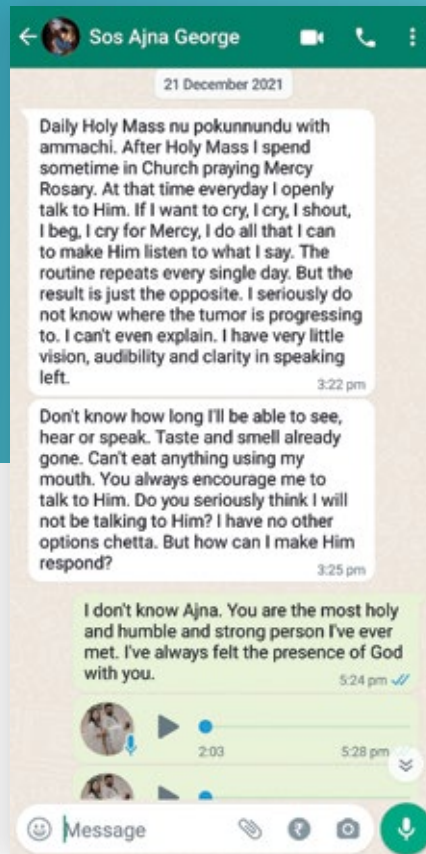
professor in her own alma mater. But later, when I came to know that on that same day she received news of her cancer diagnosis, I was shocked. My initial thought was how could something like this happen to her? How could such suffering come to so innocent and humble a person who was in love with Jesus?

One afternoon, 6-7 months back, I called to ask her if she was interested in attending the Central Prayer Group at Kochi. She had mentioned that she had stopped attending online meetings due to her condition, since her face was disfigured, she was hesitant to come on video. But she said that she would try to attend and even asked if it was ok that she turned off the video during the meeting. Unaware of her situation at that time, I casually asked if she had had lunch, that's when she explained that it had been some time since she consumed solid food. Her food intake was now through a tube to her stomach.

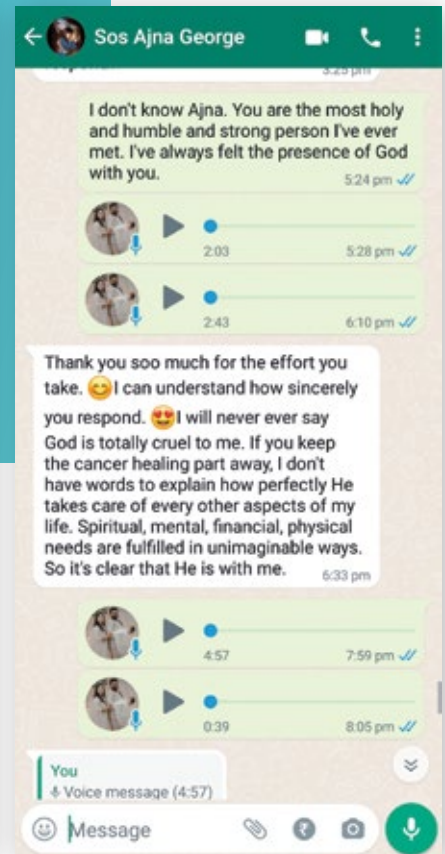
From the next week itself, she began to attend the prayer meeting and never missed a single session. The only prayer meeting she missed was the week when she was admitted for the last time, she was heavily sedated.



Message 1



Message 2



Message 3

Messages from Ajna

The following screenshots are a few conversations I had with Ajna during the past few months. When you put these messages in context with the pain she suffered, only a saint would be able to think like this. Each word typed by Ajna was laborious and strenuous for her amidst the severe headaches.

In December 2021, she had shared the following message briefing her situation (Message 1).

After reading the message I was deeply saddened. A particular thought gnawing at me, 'What if she loses eyesight, hearing, and her ability to talk? Wouldn't it be a complete silence? How would she hold up in that void? The only person to whom she

could talk to was Jesus'. I panicked and was worried. In my desperation, I wanted to make sure that she was still on talking terms with Jesus. But I really struggled to frame the words. So I put in a voice message asking whether she is able to have conversations with Jesus these days (Message 2).

The above reply was a bit too much for me to take in. I had absolutely no idea what to answer back. I ended up restating, 'Even if you reach a point where you cannot hear, speak, see, Jesus is there with you whom you can talk to' (Message 3).

From her reply I was sure that she had a very strong holy bond with Jesus. Only a saintly person could praise God and acknowledge his presence while going

through so much pain.

Even though I knew that her face was disfigured, it was when I saw the body that I could really understand the extent of her suffering. All the above conversations and sharing she did during the prayer groups were hours and hours of painful sacrifice and she did it with no complaints. She never gave up.

Even though all who know her are deeply saddened by her death, we are also happy that she is now able to be with the love of her life. I thank Jesus for letting me know her.

As we have begun to say, 'Ajna, pray for us'.

Chandeliers

☀ Soul Chat with St Francis of Assisi

By Jisha John

Jisha John has a conversation with St Francis of Assisi, through which we learn more about the saint.

Jisha: Dear Francis! My favourite saint! And beloved of Jesus!

Francis: Hello my dear, Jesus loves you abundantly too!

Jisha: I'm so excited to meet you. It has been my life-long wish.

Francis: Yes, I know. I too am delighted to be here with my sibling in Christ.

Jisha: Great! Thanking Jesus for this wonderful meeting.

Francis: Thank you Jesus!

Jisha: Francis, everyone knows your life story. But it would be a different experience if you narrate it. Everything from Pietro Bernardone's son to Father God's son.

Francis: Well, I certainly can speak about it. We should never miss an opportunity to proclaim God's love.

Jisha: Superb! I'm all ears.

Francis: I was born to a wealthy family in Assisi, Italy. Pietro Bernardone and Pica de Bourlemont were my parents. It was a life of happiness and I always tried to please my body. But over the course of time, I realised that something important was lacking in my life. God brought me closer to him and I prayed to learn his will.

Jisha: Was it a tough time, the process of discernment?

Francis: Yes, It was. Praise to God! He maintained my soul in him and strengthened me to sail through it. I heard Jesus telling me to repair his house which was falling into ruins. I thought he was talking about San Damiano church where I was praying then. Meanwhile, my life had changed upside down. I felt a thirst to follow Christ. My father on earth couldn't accept it. He dragged me home and locked me inside and my mother would bring me food in his absence. Later, I was summoned before the Bishop of Assisi. There I renounced my worldly life and my family ties to become the son of the



Heavenly Father. It's just his grace that strengthened me to peel off my garments and return them to my father. Though I was naked before the world, the warmth of God's love protected me.

Jisha: From there, your life was really different from the one you had. Did you ever feel the desire to go back?

Francis: No, never. The Holy Spirit led me ahead. Mamma Mary was praying for me. I pondered about God's will for me. I heard him speaking through the holy Gospel of St Matthew. He made poverty my lady so that I no longer would be a slave of the flesh. He clasped me with his arms. He hugged and kissed me every moment. He strengthened me to reach the heavens.

Jisha: Wow! Lord, clasp me too with your mighty arms. I long for your hugs and kisses. I wish to cling on to you. Give me your warmth.

Francis: May God be praised for this episode of love.

Jisha: Francis, tell me more... How to learn God's will. How to overcome the struggles that come on the way. How to say no to the flesh...

Francis: My dear, pray more and more. Sit with Jesus and ask him. When I had trouble learning his will, I sat before

him. I opened the Scripture to hear him speak to me. I asked my siblings in Christ to pray for me. It is a journey together with Jesus and struggles help to sanctify yourself. It takes away everything worldly and leaves the soul unblemished. Struggles, pain sickness and even death are our brothers and sisters. They shape us. They give us a bath. They are the tickets to take us to our heavenly abode.

Jisha: Amazing! See, Birds are flocking in... There are so many of them.

Francis: Our siblings are here to listen to us sharing God's love.

Jisha: How lovely it is! Francis, I have read about the wolf who obeyed you, fishes, birds and other animals who listened to your teaching.

Francis: When people are reluctant to receive the Gospel, God is capable of having his creation enjoy the feast. Even wild animals would obey you, if you ask them in the name of the Lord.

Jisha: What about the mystical incident in your life? You had many of such episodes and even the stigma of the crucified Lord in your human body. I was very moved when I read it in books.

Francis: Mystical events are just a glimpse of heavenly joy and reunion. When you experience them, you forget everything around you and be with the Lord. May God alone be praised!

Jisha: Our Lord is an awesome God, isn't he?

Francis: Yeah, He is awesome. He is our father. We won't be parched or hungry once we meet him.

Jisha: Thank you dear Jesus for sending dear Francis for this chat. We are blessed! Francis, convey my regards to all there.

Francis: Sure, they would love it. The heavens are with you. And don't worry that I am leaving now. We can always talk in the Spirit.

Jisha: Thank you. You read my heart. Let's talk more and more.

Francis: Yes, we shall. Bye for now. Jesus loves you my dear.

Jisha: Bye Francis! Thank you!

Coming Soon in their Name Slip Avatars!

(Hint: All eyes on Kairos Buds April issue #16!)



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Hug of Heaven

Anil Israel reflects upon the deepest desire of every person – to be loved.


Babies born pre-maturely need intensive care in neonatal centres. Differently abled people too demand exclusive attention and special support. Those who retire and are lonely also crave a dose of companionship in the twilight of their lives. In fact, everyone who is added to the earth's population, comes with an in-born desire to be at the receiving end of love. 'Forget-me-not' echoes the unheard cry of the abandoned lot. The greatest need in the world is presumably the need to be valued – to be wanted – to be accepted – to be loved. St Mother Teresa of Calcutta said it more succinctly, 'The greatest disease in the West today is not TB or leprosy; it is being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for. We can cure physical diseases with medicine, but the only cure for loneliness, despair, and hopelessness is love'.

I recall, once in a sermon, a priest mentioning that we are all beggars of love. In some way, we too might identify ourselves, pleading out to others with our empty vessels: 'Give me love, give me love'. Every thirsting soul silently seems to be longing for more love. Now,

we ourselves are a masterpiece of love, created in the image and likeness of the Divine Creator, who is none other than pure Love, for the scriptures affirm: *God is Love* (1 John 4:8). Besides, we are created for love – to put love into action, as the Holy Bible resounds almost a dozen times: *love one another* (John 13:34). However, until we are reunited with Divine Love, our hearts unceasingly crave to be continuously filled with this essence of life – love – deprived of which life does not seem to make any sense.

God's love for fallen human nature is exhibited incessantly in the Divine Word – his love letter to aching mankind. God shows his *loving kindness* (Psalm 63:3) in saving his children from their enemies and delivering them from their troubles. He *made the sea dry land* (Exodus 14:21) to deliver his chosen people from the *house of bondage* (Exodus 20:2) and lead them to *a land flowing with milk and honey* (Exodus 3:8). In his eternal plan of salvation, *he gave his only begotten son* (John 3:16) and continues to shower his unfathomable mercy to repentant souls, who place their trust in him.

God gifts special grace to parents to love their children 'come what may', irrespective of the child's response to their parents' love. God created parents to reflect the face of the heavenly Father – to radiate the sparkle of unfading love. *You are precious to me, you are honoured* (Isaiah 43:4), *I have engraved you on the palms of my hands* (Isaiah 49:16), *I have loved you with an everlasting love* (Jeremiah 31:3). Such is God's unconditional love for reckless mankind. Such is the unchanging love that helps shape mischievous children to adorable saints. 'Not with blows, but with gentleness and kindness you shall win them over', was the heavenly advice, St Don Bosco – the friend of the youth, received in a dream at age nine, to guide him in his future mission to help ruffian street-boys (akin to wolves) turn to gentle human beings (akin to lambs). *Conquer evil with good* (Romans 12:21) seems to



Such is God's unconditional love for reckless mankind. Such is the unchanging love that helps shape mischievous children to adorable saints.

be the only way to go, to bring about a healing touch to wounded humanity.

Sharing his reflection on the life of St Joseph, in *Patris Corde* (With a Father's Heart), Pope Francis beautifully outlines the heart of the heavenly Father, as a beloved father, a tender loving father, an obedient father, an accepting father, a creatively courageous father, a working father and a father in the shadows. This urges all earthly parents to raise themselves to this epitome of love. St Paul's advice is equally applicable to all parental figures, *do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged* (Colossians 3:21). All those in influencing positions, all educational formators and caregivers, being guardians of the souls entrusted to them, shoulder an

I HAVE LOVED YOU WITH AN EVERLASTING LOVE › JEREMIAH 31:3



enormous responsibility to nurture with tender loving care. This is possible only in cooperation with supernatural grace from above – with the assistance of the Divine Helper – with the *power from on high* (Luke 24:49). People are fragile, handle with prayer.

The sun gives warmth, the moon and the stars give light. Trees give shade, flowers give fragrance, vegetables and fruits give food for nourishment. Everything in nature that gives something to humanity, highlights the signature of the creator engraved in it. Every pretty butterfly, every captivating smile, tells the fascinating news to those who dare to hope; that the message is God is passionately busy loving you and me. Everything in creation vibrantly proclaims

God's eternal message of love. Every heart shaped leaf is a constant reminder that created in the divine image of love, our lives too, ought to radiate immeasurable love.

Even though we might consider ourselves as unworthy and undeserving sinners, God cannot help but emanate love, for God's divine nature is love. If God unceasingly loves us, aren't we too supposed to reciprocate in like manner? Are our thoughts shaped with love? Are our actions flavoured with love? Do our words carry the fragrance of love? Do our lives emit the colours of love? When people look at us, do they see shades of love in us? May we consciously strive to be a person *after God's own heart* (1Samuel 13:14) so that our lives too may

lovingly reflect *the face of God* (Genesis 33:10).

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another (John 13:35). By our love they will know we are Christians – by our love. All that matters in the end will be, the love in you and the love in me. It's all that matters. Where we do not find love, we must put it there. I must be the missing piece of love I wish to see in the world. May we be the 'hug of heaven' we are all called to be. Nothing else matters, only love counts. ■



Anil Israel lives in Mannheim, Germany, with his wife Sunitha and their 5 children. He is the current National Formation Coordinator of JY Germany.

time out



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

PART A

Can you guess the names of these Bible characters, who are not that famous?

1 A mighty Syrian commander who was afflicted by leprosy (2 Kings: 5).

2 He was a priest of Midian and related to Moses (Exodus 18).

3 The great-grandson of Levi who revolted against Moses (Numbers 16).

4 God sent him as Israel's deliverer against the evil Eglon, king of Moab (Judges 3).

5 Of the tribe of Benjamin, he was the only relative of the Jewish queen of a Persian king (No clues).

6 The runaway slave for whom Paul pleads (Philemon).



"Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty'"
John 6:35

PART B

Unscramble

The letters from each of the above six boxes forms the name of a character, one of the greatest kings to rule Israel. Can you unscramble and find out who?

ANSWERS TO QUIZTIME ISSUE 47

Part A


Donkey, Foxes, Raven, Lion, Turtledoves or pigeons, Dog, Fish

Part B

Saul, David, Solomon; Bartimaeus; Reuben; Rebekah and Sarah; Zipporah; Bethel; Ur



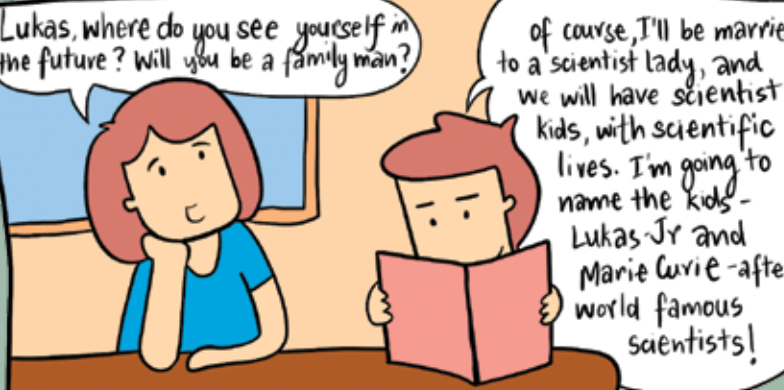
LUKAS and RAY



By Steffi Anhalt Faria
IG @sunflowerpictures_steffi

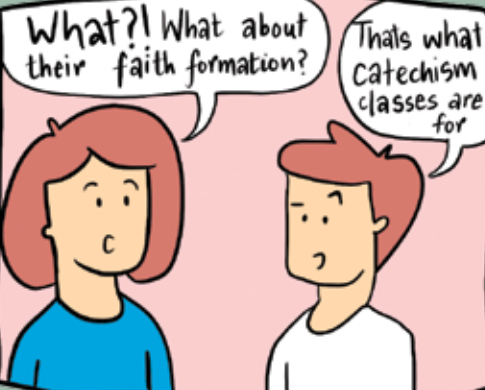
Lukas, where do you see yourself in the future? Will you be a family man?

Of course, I'll be married to a scientist lady, and we will have scientist kids, with scientific lives. I'm going to name the kids - Lukas Jr and Marie Curie - after world famous scientists!



What?! What about their faith formation?

That's what Catechism classes are for



They'll probably be too busy saving the world!

But aren't you as a parent supposed to lead them to the REAL saviour of the world?



Don't be so busy helping them achieve their worldly goals, even more important is their relation with Jesus!



WHEN WILL YOU GROW UP!



Lukas is looking at a book on the table.

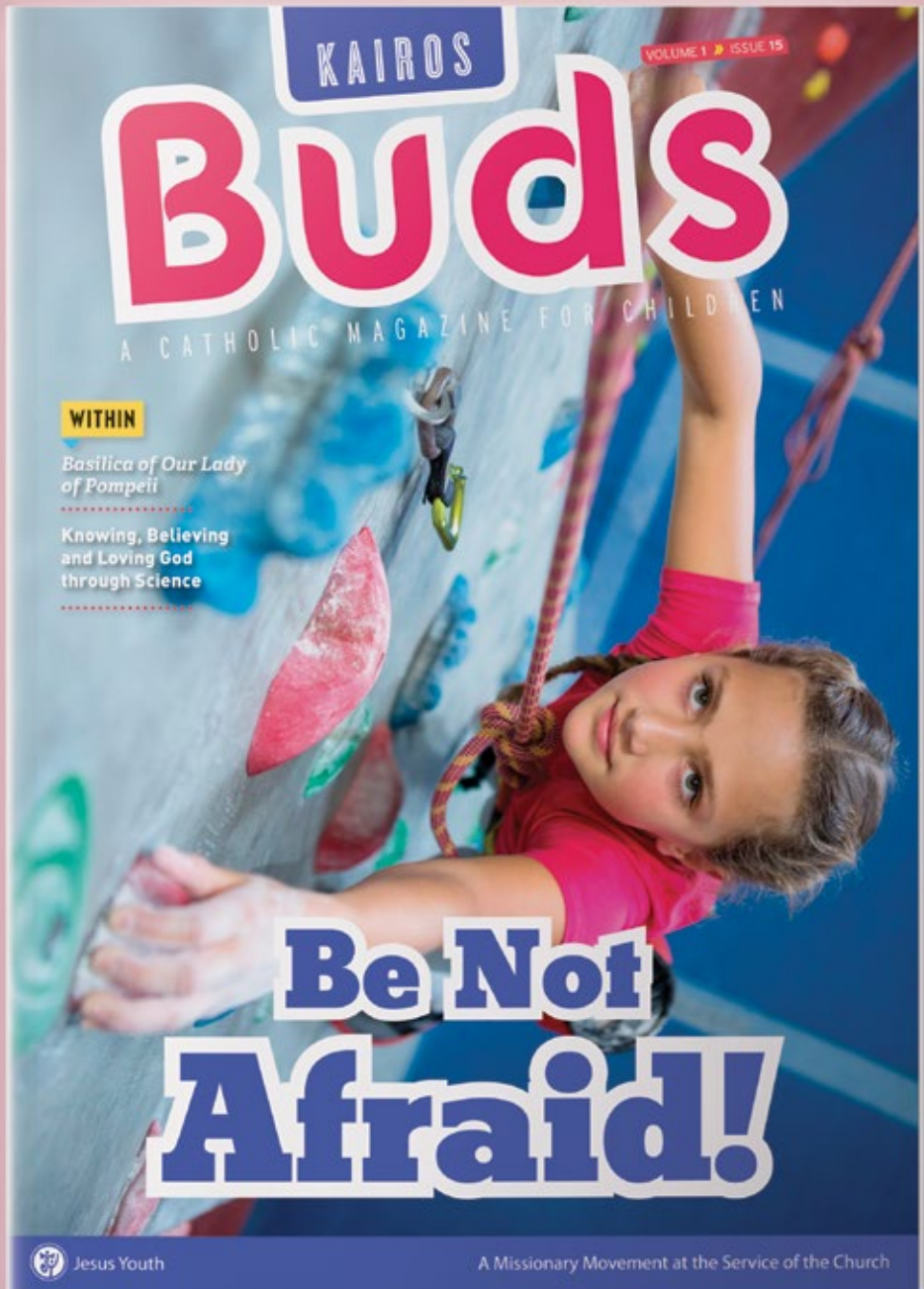


Lukas is reading a book while Ray looks on.

Well, I guess she's never baby sitting Lukas-Jr.

Don't let the distractions of this world...





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