The Voice of Providence
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The Voice of Providence:

Mission
The divine call places the Servants of Charity in the heart of the Church, making us share more deeply in her mission in the world and especially in her care for the poor. In the Church, we are witnesses of God’s fatherly love and of the sacred value of each person, even of the least gifted.

In collaboration with the people of goodwill, we endeavor to safeguard the least ones so that we work toward building a better world, open to Christ and His Gospel.
He Dwelt Among Us

A reflection by Fr. Joseph Rinaldo, SdC

The Gospel of St. John begins with a monumental and powerful introduction with a sense of eternity recalling Michelangelo’s Last Judgment and the statue of Moses put together. This introduction used to be read at the end of each Latin Mass.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” (Jn 1, 12). St. Paul adds another stunning dimension, “He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” (Phil. 2, 7).

Jesus, the Word of God, emptied Himself of His will and becomes one of us, the most humble of us.

I have worked with special children and adults all my life. I love them, feed them, play with them, teach them, dress them and change diapers; however for as much as I love them, I do not become like them.

Jesus became one of us so we could get to know him fully and he could save humanity by having been part of it. The secret for a happy and fulfilled life for all Christians is to understand fully how much God loves them personally. Most of the time we are so busy looking for what has nothing to do with everlasting life, that we forget to consider what Christmas really is.

It is the renewal of the greatest act of love on the part of God. Yet the Baby Jesus is also a sign of contradiction. For some He becomes a folklore figure. Some others reject him out rightly. The ones instead who accept him and understand his love will receive the peace of God in this life and the eternal reward in the next life.

This harmless, powerless and small baby changes all of us. His presence cannot be ignored and has the effect of making us decide one way or another. I pray with all the members of the Pious Union of St. Joseph that the Baby Son of the Carpenter becomes for us a powerful message of love from God: Love one another as I have loved you.
Dear Father,

In your prayers please remember my brother who is facing difficulties in his work. Please pray for my mother, who has sacrificed so much and done so much for her two children and for so many others that it would take a book to tell about them all. If anyone ever deserved to be in heaven it has to be her.

We have struggled with troubles for a long time and my mother has faced health problems, the loss of my father, Joseph, and she has taken care of both of her parents in their illnesses. If ever there was a daughter who followed the commandment “honor thy Father and thy Mother” it is my mother. Please pray that my brother and I can give her the life she deserves.

I also pray that we can find a better place to live and not have to move from place to place. Since my father’s passing in 1991 we have had to make difficult choices.

I trust in God to provide, as always, with the kind intercession of his Saints. I know He hears my prayers, for we have come this far. I pray for the guidance of my family in Heaven.

God bless you and your good works.

A New Jersey Man

Dear Jersey Man,

The pilgrims and local community are praying for you and your family in the Shrine of St. Joseph every day and especially on Wednesdays when Fr. Fortunato offers Holy Mass for the intentions of the members of the Pious Union of St. Joseph.

You have a great treasure when you have faith in God, our Father, and the love of a generous-hearted mother. Please give her a big hug for me.

With love,

Sr. Margaret Mary Schissler, DSMP
As we look forward to celebrating the Birth of Our Lord let us try to place ourselves in St. Joseph’s position to experience the joy, love and excitement of welcoming the Baby Jesus. Just as Joseph expected this bundle of joy to enter and change his life we too can look forward to Christ’s rebirth into our lives to make them full again.

Isn’t it true that whenever we turn everything over to the Lord, our hearts, minds and souls become lighter and we begin believing that all things ARE possible with God? May you begin the journey to arrive at this point for Christmas.

As this year comes to a close and we begin another year, each of us needs to reflect on all that occurred in the past year and to begin to pray for the future. We at the Pious Union/Shrine of St. Joseph have many things to be thankful for. First and foremost we thank God for your presence in our lives. Without your continued prayers and support we would definitely be unable to continue the mission so dear to Blessed Guanella and to our Guanellian Family. We ask St. Joseph, who is the guardian and protector of all, to continue to watch over you and your family in the year to come. No matter what your need he is always there ready to comfort and assist you, all you need to do is call upon him.

We, the Guanellian Family, are grateful to God for the gift of leading the Church to recognize the holiness of our Founder, Blessed Fr. Guanella. Sometime in 2011 the Canonization will take place and we will keep you informed as to the progress. Saint Louis Guanella, pray for us.

We wish all of you a very Blessed and Merry Christmas and a Happy and Holy New Year!
Be a Promoter of the Pious Union of St. Joseph

Share this copy of *The Voice of Providence* with your Pastor and let him know that we would be happy to send several copies to him for the parish.

Are there any of your relatives or friends who are interested in joining the Pious Union of St. Joseph? **Print their names clearly below and we will send them an invitation.**

Name

Address

City  State  ZIP

Name

Address

City  State  ZIP

Name

Address

City  State  ZIP

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St. Joseph, Source of Spirituality

By Mario Sgarbossa

One hundred years ago, Father Guanella wrote, “We should publish a bi-monthly newsletter and record in it a few things that are written about St. Joseph.”

The Servants of Charity, his spiritual children, embraced the desire of their Founder to publish a monthly magazine that would be like a hymn singing, among many other publications, the praises of Joseph, the holy Patriarch to whom the Almighty entrusted Jesus and Mary. Father Guanella was a practical man and once said, “It is not enough to hold a theoretical cult to Joseph that leaves our hearts arid like a desert and does not help our will to be effective. What we need is a visible cult that could be seen even by a small, insignificant lit candle in front of his image.”

To the Church, however, a lamp was not enough to properly honor St. Joseph. In 1479, Pope Sixtus IV introduces the feast of St. Joseph to be celebrated on March 19th. Though fifteen centuries passed in the history of the Church with no official celebration of our Patriarch, his name was already glorified by the Fathers of the Church. St. Augustine (354–430) writes, “Joseph is the husband of Mary not because of the union of their bodies but because of the union of their souls.” St. Peter Chrysologus (380–450) emphasizes the role of Joseph within the Holy Family. He mentions the flight to Egypt not as “the result of mere fear. It happened for our liberation. The flight happened not to avoid the death of the Child Jesus, our Redeemer, but to give life to the world.”
Is Jesus the son of the carpenter? Of course He is. Jesus is the Son of the Father who is the true Carpenter of the world.”

St. John Chrysostom (345–407) describes Joseph at the side of Mary when she gives birth to Jesus. He has all the rights to boast of having seen the birth of the Son of God. He follows Mary not only as a husband but also as a servant. And he rejoices to have the opportunity to enter into the service of Jesus, whom all angels serve. St. Ambrose (340–407) speaks of Joseph as the vigilant and chaste guardian of the Virgin Mother that he never profaned because she is the Temple of the Holy Spirit and Mother of the Lord.

St. Hilary of Poitiers (310–367) tells us that being Jesus “the Son of the carpenter” was a scandal for the Jews, but not for Christians. “Jesus was truly the son of the creator of the universe, a carpenter that transforms material things for the benefit of men. Joseph is the carpenter that summarizes in the adopted Son the great work of the Creator”.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1133) said once, “When I do not know how to pray, I turn to St. Joseph.” On the same tune, St. Theresa of Avila (1515–1582) said, “If a person is looking for a teacher helping her learn how to pray, she should go to St. Joseph and she will not be disappointed. To other saints Our Lord gave the power to help people only in particular occasions. Not to our glorious Saint Joseph.
As I have experienced in my own life many times, he gives his help all the time. I do not remember any occasion when he did not grant me what I was asking for.”

Many graces she had to ask for when founding her convents! She dedicated the first one in Avila to St. Joseph. She candidly said, “Theresa without God’s grace is a weak woman, but with God’s grace she is powerful; by God’s grace and a lot of money she is a power.” She knocked at the door of her Patron and the money arrived at the right time. A lot of money? She needed money to open new convents! Even Saints need money to open their foundations and carry out their work of mercy!

See for instance the many Saints of Providence of the 19th–20th centuries: St. Joseph Cottolengo, St. John Bosco, Blessed Luigi Guanella, Mother Seton, Mother Cabrini, Mother Drexel, Bl. Andre Bessette… They were emulating her in expanding the kingdom of charity and mercy into all continents. Father Guanella used to say, “It is God who does everything.” However he added some reassuring advice, “Let us turn to and trust in the glorious St. Joseph. Let us present him all our spiritual and material needs. Let us never doubt, not even for a second, his intercession. He is the great Saint that even Jesus and Mary obeyed.”
Father Guanella and his Cooperators (Part III)

By Fr. Dominic Saginario, SdC

Father Guanella remained with Father Bosco almost four years. He arrived on the evening of January 29, 1875 and left on September 15, 1878. Once his Bishop told him to go back to the Diocese, he obeyed. It was not easy to leave Father Bosco, who had become for him a father, a teacher and an exquisite model of living the Gospel in a changing world. However, fidelity to his Bishop and an interior call to a personal vocation prevailed in his decision to return to his Diocese.

Now the most dramatic, and most productive period of his life began. In the life of the saints, there are always times when they are suffering severe trials and hostility and times of spiritual void, like the temptations Jesus suffered before starting his salvific mission. The experts call this dreadful period of mysterious suffering, “The dark night of the soul.” It is not a surprise that Father Guanella had to undergo the same.
In his case, this period lasted ten years. At the end, when in God’s Providence he had passed the test and achieved the level of a fit instrument of God, molded by the fire of the Spirit, he was allowed to start. He started big and aimed high. To many he appeared a forgotten man on a blind search. God instead had taken his time to shape Father Guanella’s heart into a sensitive, generous and creative heart: a Founder’s heart.

During this painful period, his plans of charity were refined by reflection and prayer. In the desert of his soul, he developed to a high potential the spiritual patrimony accrued while with Father Bosco in Turin.

From the vast array of this treasure, I would like to focus on two aspects concerning the laity. First of all, Father Guanella acquired a deep consciousness of the vital role of the laity in the life of the Church and its activities.

With Father Bosco he had heard, seen and experienced how essential the presence of the laity was in the everyday and long-term mission. Father Bosco was able to expand his activities in such an admirable way because of the closeness between his religious members and the lay cooperators. Father Guanella processed and elaborated this experience and adjusted it to his own style and mission. From the educational field, he moved to the pastoral, social and charitable mission. The relevance of the Christian Laity became, for him, a conviction and basic principle for every activity. Within the years, experience amply confirmed his belief and principle, to the point that he called cofounders, not just his priests and religious brothers, but also the closest and most active lay people who walked along with him in his suffering and trials.

“With Father Bosco, Fr. Guanella heard, seen and experienced how essential the presence of the laity was in the everyday and long-term mission.”
The second aspect concerns the reason that convinced Father Guanella to consider the laity as a vital component of his work. For Father Guanella, one reason was the dignity of the human person, often hidden beyond poverty, suffering, oppression and abuse. Father Guanella loved his poor the way the children are loved in a family. Another reason for his appreciation and appeal toward the laity was their professional expertise. He was well aware that his mission to “evangelize the poor” required a wide variety of intervention. Even the simplest person has needs that go beyond the lack of clothes and food. The Gospel words “Man does not live by bread alone” are valid always and for all. In all his houses and activities, there were a variety of tasks for the education, growth and well being of his friends. Therefore, a large number of lay people were needed to translate his dreams and projects into reality starting from the kitchen, school, church and clinic to playground, music and art programs and more. This will explain why he cherished the many lay people working within and out of his charitable activities.

Obviously, since the beginning, their financial assistance was also an important reason. He prayed and relied on the Providence of God; however, practically he summoned the experience, expertise and wallet of his lay friends. Father Guanella was well aware of the network that beautifully joined all the operators of charity from the Above to the least worker. Therefore, every day a prayer bloomed out of his heart in gratitude to his benefactors. He rarely begged, but with gratitude, he accepted their gifts. Father Guanella, however, was a priest and an evangelizer and his dreams for his poor aimed higher than expected. He did not provide just for their material needs, he gave a higher and

“Therefore, a large number of lay people were needed to translate Fr. Guanella’s dreams and projects into reality…”

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transcendent meaning to their suffering. Through this light of Faith, he appreciated the presence and the intervention of the lay collaborators. The great respect for the laity in his institutions was deeply rooted in their *baptismal identity*. Charity is born primarily in our faith in Jesus. For this reason, Father Guanella felt the communion with those who were closer to him and shared with them the joy of his faith. He wanted them to be holy, beginning with the religious brothers. He had even written, with deep admiration, biographies of many humble lay people of God. He was enchanted by the holiness of so many simple Christians. His dream was to see each one of them in their state of life to live intensely and convincingly their baptismal dignity.

Next year Pope Benedict will officially declare Blessed Louis Guanella “Saint” to the Universal Church. It will be a great opportunity for us to know and love this holy man who, like Jesus, for the love of the poor, has moved Heaven and earth, offering his life to the end.
The Religious Institutes of Fr. Guanella: *Italia*

By Joseph Yekulis

“Bella Italia” means beautiful Italy, and the natural beauty of this country makes it a favorite for Americans traveling to Europe. Its beauty and charm are just two of the many reasons to make it a destination within your life’s journey. It is also important spiritually for every Roman Catholic, as it is the home of our Pope and the most revered Catholic Church in the world; the Vatican Basilica of St. Peter.

Those who are interested in learning more about the Guanellian charism can make a fascinating journey from one end of Italy to the other, as the influence of our future saint, Fr. Louis Guanella can be seen both far and wide. His worldwide ministry of care for persons with Intellectual Developmental Disabilities and the frail elderly began in this country during the 19th Century, and his influence can be seen everywhere. Not willing to confine himself to Northern Italy and the City of Como, Fr. Guanella spread his charism south from Milan, to Perugia, and Rome. A journey to his “houses” becomes a journey through Italy, and demonstrates what a remarkable impact Fr. Guanella made on the people of his time and ours. We begin our journey in the Holy City of Rome, and make our way north to Como.
Visitors to Rome may stay in a hotel owned by the Servants of Charity known as the Bacciarini House for Pilgrims, named for the successor of Fr. Guanella, Bishop Aurelio Bacciarini. The hotel is part of a complex that rests approximately five blocks from the Vatican, and sits on the south end of St. Joseph at Trionfale Church. The International Headquarters of the Pious Union of St. Joseph resides on the north end of the church. Fr. Guanella was good friends with Pope Pius X, and named the church after St. Joseph, as he was the pope’s favorite saint. Pius X joined with Fr. Guanella to build this church, and kept a close eye on its progress from the Vatican. He also provided Fr. Guanella with much of the funding for the church, and Fr. Guanella celebrated the first Mass there on March 19, 1912 during the Feast of St. Joseph. As St. Joseph is the Patron of the Dying and of a Happy Death, Fr. Guanella created the confraternity of prayer known as “The Holy Crusade for the Salvation of the Dying,” now known as the Pious Union of St. Joseph, with the blessing of Pius X.

**General House: World Headquarters – Rome**

The “General House” in south-central Rome is where the leadership of the Servants of Charity maintains their corporate offices; enjoying close proximity to the leadership of the Catholic Church in the Vatican. It is a large enclosed compound with beautiful grounds and built on top of
a hill with a great vista of Rome. It includes large Italian stone pines, shrubs, and flower gardens. The main office is a three story building containing a large conference room for leadership meetings, and the remainder of the complex contains living quarters for visiting priests and seminarians, and a modern chapel for daily prayers and devotions.

**Opera Don Guanella: Rome**

This operation is a true reflection of the Guanellian spirit in caring for persons with developmental disabilities, as more than two hundred men and women are cared for in this facility. The main residential building is three stories high, with two residents occupying each room. When entering the main building, you are struck by the cleanliness of everything around you, and the residents are kept busy with plenty of programs. A beautiful chapel also exists, where a mosaic of Fr. Guanella can be seen floating to heaven with the aid of heavenly angels in the rotunda. During my visit, 75 residents were outside in a park-like setting enjoying a music program in front of a stage where they were singing, dancing, and enjoying the warmth of the sun. A true family atmosphere existed, which is exactly what Fr. Guanella hoped to create in each of his “houses.”

Along with the residential building, there is an administrative building attached to an educational center which doubles as a home for seminarians visiting Rome.

**Opera Don Guanella: Milano**

Fr. Guanella’s “house” in Milano is multifaceted and tackles many social issues. After his first “house” was demolished by the city to make way for a roadway, Fr. Guanella used the money from the city to purchase this large piece of property where construction began on the church in 1920, and was completed in 1928.
The church honors St. Gaetano Cajetan, and a statue of Fr. Guanella and his “good children” can be found at the entrance. Several other buildings were added to the complex over the years. A homeless shelter called “Casa di Gastone” provides transitional housing to people on the street, and the priests actually go out and look for people to help at night. There is also a program there for victims suffering from neglect and abuse, meant to bring families back together again, and the Don Guanella Institute is a school for troubled youth in Milano.

**Sant’Ambrogio ad Nemus: Milano**

The Daughters of St. Mary of Providence are carrying out another of Fr. Guanella’s missions in Milano by caring for 150 frail elderly in their community at “Sant’Ambrogio ad Nemus.” This Fourth Century monastery building in the heart of Milano was once the home of the Monastery of the Order of St. Ambrose. The residents living here are no longer able to care for themselves, and are either brought here by their families or through the auspices of the Italian government. It is a beautiful and historic sanctuary within the city that carries you away to another time and place. The attached basilica is undergoing a total restoration to honor Fr. Guanella, and the original Fourth Century frescos are being uncovered and restored to their original state.

**Next Issue: Como – The Mother House and Casa di Gino**
The Apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe

BY FR. RAUL RODRIGUEZ

The appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe is a historical and transcendental event. It is a historical event because it can be identified as a definite specific incident in history. It is transcendental because of its boundless, mystical and spiritual content. To analyze it implies the need to analyze the period of time in which it happened, as well as the repercussions to the present date.

The name “Guadalupe” has its roots in the Arabic language, but was adapted to Spanish and used frequently in the 15th and 16th century during the Spaniard’s exploration and settlement of the New World. Translated from Arabic, Wad al luben, means “Hidden River.” It is interesting that after Muslims conquered Spain in 711, many proper names acquired the prefix “Gua”, such as Guadalajara, Guadalix, Guadalquivir, etc. Other scholars have suggested other origins and definitions. It has been mentioned that Guadalupe is a hybrid word derived from the Arabic (Wad-al – river) and Latin (lupus – wolf), thus to some Guadalupe translates to “River of Wolves”.

Our Lady of Guadalupe is the patroness or patron saint of Mexico and all Latin America. She appeared on more than one occasion to an Aztec Indian, Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin. He was told by our Lady to tell the first Bishop of Mexico, Juan de Zumárraga, to build a “space” where she
could pour out her love. It is worth stating that when Mother Mary made her invocation to build the shrine that is today the Basilica of Guadalupe, the natives in the New World suffered from exploitation and maltreatment. Sadly, the ecclesiastical authorities at the time declared that the indigenous were “some kind of animal without a soul.”

The bishop Juan de Zumárraga did not believe the message Juan Diego gave him; he asked for some proof from “The Lady from Heaven.” When speaking to Bishop Zumárraga, Juan Diego likely referred to Our Lady with the name Tonantzin. In the Aztec tradition, the goddess named Tonántzin, was considered the mother of all deity. This explains why the bishop did not believe Juan Diego’s message when this was first presented to him. We all know that Mary gave the bishop the evidence he was requesting. Through Juan Diego, she left her own image stamped on the “tilma” (or cape) that Juan Diego wore.

In the quest to see the miracle in the “print” of Our Lady of Guadalupe many experiments and investigations have been performed. The most recent investigations were performed by scientist Jaime Mausan. With the use of powerful microscopes, Dr. Mausan verified great discoveries such as the reflection of images in the eyes of Our Lady of all of the people that were in the room with Juan Diego; and the position of the stars in Mary’s cape that matches the star pattern seen the night of the miracle. The image of Our Lady of Guadalupe has within it so much symbolism that it speaks for itself. It allows us to glimpse at the merging of Christian and indigenous cultures in the era that the miracle took place.
For many years now, the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe has been held in reverence, visited by millions of people annually who ask for her favors. Many more visit to express gratitude for her intercession that made a miracle from God possible. The shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe is the most visited shrine annually in our hemisphere. Our Lady of Guadalupe has been rightly granted the title of Patroness of America.

It has been close to five centuries, and still the event of Guadalupe speaks to us today. It is an invitation to rescue the values of our cultures. The image of our Lady of Guadalupe has many symbols that are unique to the Indians of that site and era, such as the flowers and the medallion around Mary’s neck. These can be seen as a statement of elements that can be rescued and fused from a culture into a Christian tradition. It is possible that in the time of the Spanish conquest religious signs and symbols originating from the native culture were attributed to Satan. This lends itself to the thought that the natives of the site were more like animals, without intellect or soul. Our Lady of Guadalupe returns the lost dignity to those indigenous men and women who were treated as slaves by the conquistadors.

The Church has designated December 12 as a day of solemnity for Mexico and a day of celebration for Latin America. While in Mexico this is not a holiday, it is a day in which La Lupita (as she is named by Mexicans) occupies a very special place. Wherever there is an altar that day, a simple prayer is said with the certainty that it will rise to heaven.
Father Louis Guanella and the India Mission

By Fr. Paul Oggioni, SdC

Wherever political and social events threaten the stability of a people or a nation in the world, the Church is there to intervene. She employs His most faithful children to offer solutions and projects for spiritual and social recovery, capable of producing new methods of cooperation and progress among the people. Today, as always, the Church is present with its message of truth. Christ urges all of us to become the family of God, destined to reach eternal life. For this reason the Church is a missionary, and calls on all believers in Christ to announce the “Good News.”

In 1863, two young theology students, Louis Guanella and Giovanni Battista Scalabrini, requested permission from their Bishop to join the recently formed Foreign Mission Institute. People, priests and seminarians were caught in a wave of enthusiasm for a bold mission of evangelization among the Far East peoples where God and the Christian message were totally unknown. These two young men wanted to become missionaries and reach the State of Andhra Pradesh, in India, where the evangelization had started and many priests were needed.

The Bishop of Como, Giuseppe Marzorati, told these two generous young men that, “Your India is here.” God’s designs are inscrutable at times! Giovanni Battista Scalabrini became the Founder of the Congregation of the Missionaries of St. Charles Borromeo, dedicated to
Soon we will have the joy of honoring Blessed Louis Guanella as a Saint. 150 years have passed since the day the Bishop denied them permission to join the Foreign Missions. The Servants of Charity have joined the Pontifical Institute of Foreign Missions to evangelize Andhra Pradesh in India, and have inherited a beautiful church and a fervent Christian community. It is a very poor community that expects everything from God, who is Providence and love, but it is committed to live and transmit the values of the Gospel.

The Christians of this community still remember with gratitude the first missionaries who brought them the message of the Gospel. They have remained faithful to their message and are committed to changing a society still locked in the caste system where the poor have no voice. They are a community of faith that helps one another and shares what little God gives them. In this way their faith gives them perseverance for good, and gratefulness toward those who help in a time of need.

This Mission, dedicated to the Sacred Heart, follows the Guanellian tradition of serving the poorest. Here the children find a joyous resting place to help them grow, and are involved in the charitable activities of the Parish. The families, collaborating with the Priests, find the human and spiritual support needed to face the cultural and spiritual challenges of their identity as “People of God.”

The poor and rejected find their daily food offered during Mass on Sundays from their brothers and sisters in Christ, just like the early Church in Jerusalem, where the poor helped the poorer, manifesting unity among the children of God.
The Guanellian Missionaries proudly possess two jewels that are jealously protected. The first jewel, next to the Parish church, in the Guanellian tradition, is a house of charity. It is a home for seventy abandoned orphans who live there under the wings of Divine Providence. Here they receive food, clothing, an education and medical care. They have found a family, and can care for the house and themselves. They play and clean, wash their clothes and care for the church. The old help the young. They are full of life and joy with a positive outlook for the future. Most of all, they are happy to live in the house of God, even though many are not Catholic.

The other jewel is a small seminary for over twenty young men who choose to dedicate their lives to God in the service of the poor like Father Guanella. Here they learn that the Guanellian Vocation is a vocation of love, work and prayer. They are the future of the Servants of Charity Congregation in India. The local Church needs the presence of charitable institutions among its people and this is the spiritual testament of Blessed Louis Guanella, “Charity in everything.”

By helping a Missionary, YOU become a Missionary.

For $1.00 a day, you can help feed an orphan or help a seminarian in becoming a priest; and for $0.50 a day you can help a catechist.

Please use the envelope provided with this publication to send your donation to the “Servants of Charity”, and write “India Missions” in the check ledger to designate your contribution for this purpose.
Answering the Call with the Help of Joseph

Sr. Margaret Mary Schissler, DSMP

The longer I live and the more years I add to my life it seems that I view the “details” of my vocation story differently. The call is still the same but the situations leading to and accepting the call, I perceive in a different manner. Let me explain... Now that I have been ministering here at the Pious Union/Shrine of St. Joseph for the past year and have fallen in love with St. Joseph and his mission, I see his role in my calling where I have never given him credit before!

My parents, Margaret and Joseph, were instrumental in providing a comfortable atmosphere where my vocation grew. Mom was always assisting the religious sisters of my elementary school and of my sister’s residential facility, along with reaching out to help others. My dad, in his usual loving way, would always support me in decisions made during my youth but held me accountable for those decisions no matter what the outcome. (A harsh reality for all young people.)

My sister, Mary Agnes, was born normal but developed an ear infection with high fevers in her childhood which cut the oxygen off to the brain which caused brain damage. At age 7 she was enrolled into the residential facility of the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence in Chicago. This is when I believe my religious vocation began to grow; during my first encounter with the sisters, at age one! Wow what a lengthy development of a call.

My brother Joe, is the eldest and only a year older than my sister. Being the eldest he was always held accountable for his “little” sisters when mom and dad weren’t around. Boy, talk about a heavy responsibility; falling in the footsteps of “Joseph” as guardian and care-giver. Now I understand the answer he gave when my parents gave him his duties of taking care of two “sisters” for the day, “Aw come on, do I have to?”
I went through grade school and did things every kid my age did at the time; played school and pretended to have Masses in our living room. Being able to go outside and play in the neighborhood was more important to me than finishing my homework but it did get completed. When it came around to high school I lived my Faith as I had been taught, always to begin our Sunday with Mass followed by “Sunday Breakfast.” And usually at the breakfast table we would bring up something that Father mentioned in his homily. I liked this because I would see what mom, dad and Joe thought about the subject and formed my own opinion.

I look back and see that these little times together helped me in thinking more deeply about my Faith. I would pick up different books of Saints and see how their lives were lived and compare mine at different crossroads. All along, I never really thought of a religious vocation until college. At this time in my life, since I was capable of driving, I would always pick up my sister on the Friday of visiting weekends, from St. Mary’s and would accompany my parents in her return on Sunday. I would visit with the Sisters and ask them questions about their lives and they would very patiently take the time with me. I liked to stop in their chapel and admire the mural in back of the altar with their founder, Blessed Father Guanella, with some Sisters and children by him. I always felt serene and uplifted once I left chapel to face the situations of life again.
In my third year of college I asked one of the sisters, “What do you have to be like to become a sister?” Her response to me, I still remember, was “Just to be who YOU are, God loves you just the way you are and may be calling YOU.” Oh boy, talk about scary feelings. The butterflies were flying in my stomach that day and for many days afterwards. I was leery and most confused about what exactly I should do. So I did what anyone would do ... start talking to my friends. Well, some gave me plenty of reasons why that was a great idea while plenty of others said, “What, are you crazy?”

So I prayed and spent time with Fr. Joseph Auer, one of our parish Priests, and realized that a “Call” may be there. Now I see that God placed two Joseph’s in my growing years to care for and nurture the call from infancy to adulthood. At the time there was a great struggle in following or ignoring the call but if it is meant to be, God will pursue His loved one to be an extension of His love. This is the thought that won me over because I always wanted to portray God’s love to others. After being 33 years with the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence I am grateful to the Holy Family, Blessed Guanella and all the Saints for pursuing me to follow the Call to Religious Life. To this very day I try to be an extension of God’s love to others.

Are you being called?
We have reached the end of Pope John Paul II’s catechesis, through his papal audiences, on the “Theology of the Body.” He reflected about human love in the divine plan and chose to do so by presenting a commentary on Humanae Vitae, the landmark encyclical of Pope Paul VI written in 1968. In fact, he said that his reflections “would remain in some way incomplete if we did not try to see their concrete application (through Humanae Vitae) in the area of conjugal and familial morality.”

To understand this application, the Holy Father has chosen the seminal, and most frequently quoted passage, of Humanae Vitae: “The Church teaches that each and every marriage act must remain through itself open to the transmission of life. That teaching, often set forth by the Magisterium, is founded upon the inseparable connection, willed by God and unable to be broken by man on his own initiative, between the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning” (HV 11–12). For the pope, the openness “to the transmission of life” and the “the inseparable connection...between the two meanings of the conjugal act” affirms what he has called the “language of the body” being reread in the truth. This openness and connection also provides the foundation, for the married couple, for “acting in the truth” and “behaving in conformity with...the moral norm” as stated by the Holy Father.

The pontiff then states that Pope Paul VI “underlines that this norm is part of the “natural law,” that is, that it conforms to reason... (and) also of the moral order revealed by God; also from this point of view it could not be different, but only as it has been handed down by Tradition and the Magisterium and, in our days, by Humanae Vitae... These are all good reasons why every believer, and in particular every theologian, should reread and understand ever more deeply the moral teaching of the encyclical.”
The ideas of the natural law and the “moral order revealed by God” are significant as Pope John Paul II addresses what might be seen as the crux of the moral dilemma for most people—the regulation of birth by natural means or by artificial means such as contraception. The pope quite rightly indicates that the regulation of birth was of pastoral concern to Pope Paul VI and he emphasizes that “pastoral concern means seeking the true good of man, promoting the values impressed by God in the human person... in the certainty that the one and only true good of the human person consists in putting this divine plan into practice.” In short, a married couple can only morally regulate birth through the “natural” method, a method which conforms to both the natural law and the “divine plan” of God, reread in truth through the “language of the body.”

Many understood the teaching of Pope Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae* as one that was primarily a teaching against the use of artificial contraception in the regulation of births within a family. However, this misses the positive teaching that was the fundamental foundation of the encyclical—the inseparable connection in the conjugal act of marriage of the unitive and procreative meanings; the openness in the marriage act to the transmission of life; the building up of married love through upholding the two ends of marriage and the validity and efficacy of the regulation of birth through natural means. Pope John Paul II sees the natural regulation of birth as “responsible fatherhood and motherhood” and sees it in an affirmative and positive light: “Responsible is what we call the fatherhood and motherhood that corresponds to the personal dignity of the spouses as parents, to the truth of their person, and of their conjugal act.” Responsible parenthood is truly fulfilling of the human person and Pope Paul VI, in *Humanae Vitae*, says that “husband and wife fully develop their personalities (while) being enriched with spiritual values” (HV 21).

However, we cannot dismiss the damaging and deleterious effects that the use of “artificial” means of regulating birth, such as
artificial contraception, have on the married persons. By its very definition, contraception means “against conception” or we can say against life. The Holy Father comments on such effects in this part of his catechesis. He says that “artificial means” breaks the constitutive dimension of the person, deprives man of the subjectivity proper to him, and turns him into an object of manipulation.” He further says that the “conjugal act is deprived of its inner truth and ceases to be an act of love... Such a violation of the inner order of conjugal communion, a communion that plunges its roots into the very order of the person, constitutes the essential evil of the contraceptive act.” These words are direct and strong but they reflect, for Pope John Paul II, the truth as read in the “language of the body” and therefore the “theology of body”—the study of God through the human body.

In closing this series of articles on Pope John Paul II’s “theology of the body”, I leave you with the concluding words of his catechesis and his papal audiences. “Still, the most important aspect seems to be the essential aspect that...to face the questions raised by Humanae Vitae above all in theology, to formulate these questions, and to look for an answer to them, one must find that biblical, theological sphere to which we allude when we speak about the “redemption of the body and the Sacramentality of marriage.” It is in this sphere that one finds the answers to the perennial questions of the conscience of men and women and also to the difficult questions of our contemporary world concerning marriage and procreation.”

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