

## **My friend Don Giacomo**

*“During the ceremony of confirmations in Saint Laurence Outside the Walls we prayed for his health... and he expressed his gratitude with a gesture that was of hope of healing and, at the same time, of trust”. Cardinal Bergoglio remembers Giacomo Tantardini, priest*  
**by Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio**

“Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you; Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (*Heb 13, 7*). Thus, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews exhorts us to bear in mind those who announced the Gospel to us and who have already departed. He asks us to remember them, but not in that formal and, at times pitiable way, that leads us to say “how good he was!”, a phrase often heard in the courtyard of cemeteries. That type of memory is a simple reminder of social formalities. This asks us, rather, to remember them beginning from the fruitfulness of their sowing in our midst. It asks us to remember them with the memory of the heart, that Deuteronomic memory that builds on rock, that moulds lives and marks hearts. Yes, our heart is built on the memory of those men and women who have brought us closer to sources of life and hope that can also be drawn upon by those who follow us. It is the memory of the inheritance we have received and that we must, in turn, transmit to our children.

So, it is with this memory that we remember Don Giacomo, and we ask ourselves: what did he leave us? What signs of him do we find on the journey of our life? I dare simply say that he left the impression of a man-child who never finished being surprised. Don Giacomo, the man of wonder; the man who let himself be surprised by God and was able to open up the path so that this wonder be born in others.

Don Giacomo, a man surprised that, as he watched the Lord who called him, always wondered within himself, was hardly able to believe it, as Caravaggio’s Matthew: I, Lord? A man overwhelmed with wonder before this indescribable “superabundance” of grace that wins over the mean abundance of sin, that sin that diminishes us, always; a man amazed that he felt himself sought, wanted and loved by God long before he himself had sought him, wanted him and loved him; a man in wonderment who, like those of Lake Tiberias, did not dare ask Him who He was because he knew He was the Lord.

And this man in wonder, allowed himself, more than once, to be queried: “Do you love me?”, to reply with the ardent simplicity of love: “Lord, you know that I love you”. And it was so because this man-child nurtured his love with the simple but wise readiness of the contemplation of all that Grace that surpassed him.

Don Giacomo was so. He had not lost the ability to be surprised; he reflected beginning with the wonder that he received and nourished in prayer. Sometimes, he gave the impression that this sensibility stressed him, made him tired or restless, and this is not unusual in a man with a strong human temperament, on which Grace did not cease to work in his conversion to meekness.

The last image I have of him moves me: during the ceremony of confirmations in Saint Laurence Outside the Walls, with hands clasped, his eyes open and in wonder, smiling and serious at the same time. There, we prayed for his health... and he expressed his gratitude with a gesture that was of hope of healing and, at the same time, of trust. Thus, by grace, one can persevere on the path until the end: the man-child abandons himself to the arms of Jesus while he asks that this chalice may pass, and is picked up and carried in the arms, his hands clasped and eyes open. Allowing himself to be surprised once again, for the greatest gift.

I thank God our Lord for having known him. That “consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” of the Epistle to the Hebrews is also directed to me.

*Buenos Aires, 6 May 2012*

# **“Jesus will give us strength. Not you, but Him in you”**

*Homily by His Eminence Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, Archbishop of Buenos Aires, during the Holy Mass in which he administered the Sacrament of Confirmation — Rome, 18 February 2012, Basilica of St Lawrence Outside the Walls*

**by Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio**

**First Reading (Is 43, 18-19. 21-22.24b-25)**

**From the book of the prophet Isaiah**

Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? In the desert I make a way, in the wasteland, rivers. The people whom I formed for myself, that they might announce my praise. Yet you did not call upon me, O Jacob, for you grew weary of me, O Israel. Instead, you burdened me with your sins, and wearied me with your crimes. It is I, I, who wipe out, for my own sake, your offenses; your sins I remember no more.

**Second Reading (2 Corinthians 1, 18-22)**

**From the Second Epistle of the apostle St Paul to the Corinthians**

As God is faithful, our word to you is not “yes” and “no”. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was proclaimed to you by us, Silvanus and Timothy and me, was not “yes” and “no,” but “yes” has been in him. For however many are the promises of God, their Yes is in him; therefore, the Amen from us also goes through him to God for glory. But the one who gives us security with you in Christ and who anointed us is God; he has also put his seal upon us and given the Spirit in our hearts as a first installment.

**From the Gospel according to Mark (Mk 2, 1-12)**

When Jesus returned to Capernaum after some days, it became known that he was at home. Many gathered together so that there was no longer room for them, not even around the door, and he preached the word to them. They came bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. Unable to get near Jesus because of the crowd, they opened up the roof above him. After they had broken through, they let down the mat on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Child, your sins are forgiven.” Now some of the scribes were sitting there asking themselves, “Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming. Who but God alone can forgive sins?” Jesus immediately knew in his mind what they were thinking to themselves, so he said, “Why are you thinking such things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, pick up your mat and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth” - he said to the paralytic, “I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home.” He rose, picked up his mat at once, and went away in the sight of everyone. They were all astounded and glorified God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this”.

In the prayer at the beginning of Mass we made an appeal to God the Father: “May your help, merciful Father, make us ever attentive to the voice of the Spirit”. We need the help of God to understand the voice of the Spirit, the newness of the Spirit. The Spirit is always new, always comes to renew. That’s what we heard in the first Reading, the prophecy: “I am doing something new”. So does God, so does the Spirit. So we ask God’s help to be attentive to the voice of the Spirit, to the new things.

Making everything new. The Gospel tells the story of the paralytic who was renewed by the power of the Spirit and of Jesus. The Spirit was in Jesus. Jesus is the one who sends the Spirit to renew everything. Jesus is the only one capable of starting everything anew, of beginning life again. Let us think about the life of this paralytic, the physical life, and also the inner life – because the Lord heals the soul first: “Your sins are forgiven”. Jesus has the power, with the strength of His Spirit, to renew the heart. We must have confidence in this. If we do not have confidence in the power of Jesus Christ as the only salvation, the only one who can make all things new, we are fake Christians. We are not true Christians.

Jesus does not force you to be a Christian. But if you say you are a Christian you must believe that Jesus has all the strength – the only one who has the strength – to renew the world, to renew your life, to renew your family, to renew the community, to renew everybody. This is the message that today we must take with us when asking the Father to make us attentive to the voice of the Spirit that does this work: the Spirit of Jesus

Today, following the invitation of my friend Don Giacomo, whom I treasure so much, and we all must pray for him, because he’s somewhat ill... Shall we all pray for him? Yes or no? I can’t hear anything ... If the prayer is like that, we’re done for... Shall we will pray for him? Yes!

The call for today is to perform these confirmations on you who come to receive the strength of the Spirit of God: believe in the power of the Spirit! It is the Spirit of Jesus. Believe in Jesus who sends you this Spirit – to you and all of us: He sends the Spirit to renew everything. You are not fake Christians, Christians only in name. You are Christians with your words, with your hearts, with your hands. Feel like Christians, talk like Christians and do the work of Christians. But you alone could not do it. It is Jesus who will give you this Spirit, will give you the strength to renew everything: not you, but Him in you.

And with this thought of Jesus who is the only salvation, the only one who brings us grace, who gives us peace, brotherhood, who gives us salvation, let us continue the celebration of this Mass with the recitation of the *Creed*, the profession of our faith.

## **Closeness and compassion**

*The bishops participating in the latest Assembly of the Latin American Bishops' Council speak of the 'continental mission' of their Churches. Not projects of cultural hegemony, but a 'pastoral conversion' to help people's faith. And to reach out to everyone. Amidst the processes of secularization and temptations of neoclericalism*

**by Gianni Valente**

On Saturday morning at Constitución station, located in what is by no means a 'good' neighborhood in Buenos Aires, everything is moving, as always: buses, taxis, travelers going in and out of the terminal, women with shopping, police, street vendors with their carts. The youths of the parish of Santa Elisa and those of the Virgen de Caacupé have set up their yellow tent on the edge of that perpetual whirl of human motion, alongside the monument to the inspirer of the Argentine Constitution, the Mason Juan Bautista Alberdi. They call it the *Carpa misionera*, the missionary tent of the Catholic Church. They have also brought a statue of the Virgen de Lujan, the Madonna venerated in the national shrine. Around it they have set a few tables with statuettes of the Child Jesus and Saint Expedito, the saint of urgent cases. And then some of them begin quartering the whole station precinct, handing out to people waiting and passing by a holy picture of Jesus with a prayer. Many people approach to ask for a blessing, leaving in the boxes on the tables little notes asking for health and work for themselves and others, prayers and masses for their dead loved ones, happiness and rest from toil. A queue wanting confession has formed in front of Father Flavio. *'Bautismos aquí, baptisms here'*, says a banner hanging from a tree. And underneath it stands a table where two youths write down requests for baptisms. Even of those who wander up out of simple, instinctive curiosity. Since yesterday evening, since the start of the mission, the baptisms of thirteen children and adults has taken place in front of the 'carpa católica', people already prepared by lay catechists, with whom post-baptismal catechesis continues. At one point, unexpectedly and without warning, Father Bergoglio also arrives. The Archbishop of the city greets the young men and women one by one, and hugs Don Facundo, who immediately thunders into the megaphone: *"Adelante, come over to the Carpa misionera, we'll be celebrating Mass in a few minutes"*. A street drinker also stops. At eleven in the morning he's already a bit tipsy. He closes in on Bergoglio,

looks at him in puzzlement: “I’ve seen you somewhere...”, he mutters. And adds: “Are you Catholic? Then you say Mass!” Don Facundo, while taking out vestments for the service, also asks him to say mass. Then, in front of the small group of kids, old men, mothers with children and chance passers-by the Jesuit Cardinal speaks a few words. “Let’s call on Jesus for all we need. Let’s ask the Father in His name, let’s ask Him to ask the Father. Like the poor who asked everything of Him when He went through the streets and they thronged around Him. Jesus is very keen to be with the rest of us, with all the rest of us, with all those passing by. It’s something that interests Him first of all. If there had been only one man or one woman in the whole world, He would have offered His life just the same, for that one man or one woman”.

For that reason Bergoglio – and Facundo, Don Flavio and all the priests of Buenos Aires who sometimes go to baptize and confess in the stations, squares and even under the obelisk in Plaza de la República, along the immense Avenida 9 de Julio – believes it is most important to make things easy, not to be selective, not to put obstacles in the way of this desire for Jesus. Embracing any hint of expectation that might spring from the fleeting and fortuitous situation that the present moment offers. Acting as the Apostle Philip did with the eunuch to whom he proclaimed the good news as they went along. “Look, here is water: what prevents me from being baptized?” the eunuch asked as they passed near a stream. “So Philip baptized him. When they were out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord spirited Philip away and the eunuch saw him no more and went on his way rejoicing” (*Acts 8, 36-39*).

### **The feeling of insecurity grows, but also the chances for encounter**

“In the Gospel”, Cardinal Aloísio Lorscheider used to say, “the most beautiful encounters of God with mankind take place on the road. Centuries in the history of lived Christianity tell us no different”.

At this moment, the whole of Latin America seems like a huge train station in which everything is on the move, nothing is standing still. Where potent economic and socio-cultural processes are changing and sometimes distorting the experience of individuals and multitudes. While the Mass and the baptisms administered at the Constitución station are one concrete image – out of the many possible – of the Continental Mission that the Latin American Churches took on as their task, in these rapidly changing

circumstances, in 2007 at Aparecida, at the last General Assembly of the Latin American episcopate.

Four years later, the bishops and others summoned to the 33rd Assembly of the Latin American Bishop's Council, held in Montevideo May 15/20 last, checked on progress. They once again asked themselves questions and scrutinized the insights and the overview of the Continent set out at the Aparecida conference.

In the words and views of some of the representatives of the episcopate at that meeting, as put together by *30Days*, the shared judgment is that of an unfinished and ongoing project. Where – as always happens – insights full of evangelical hope burgeon and blossom in the daily work of the pastors most involved in the lived experience of God's people.

An initial datum helps set aside misunderstandings often fueled by clerical and anticlerical propaganda: the more pastorally aware bishops are increasingly sure that the continental mission is not a strategy or program. Nor an appeal to new militancy aimed at regaining lost positions. "The continental mission outlined at Aparecida", **Ricardo Ezzati Andreollo**, Archbishop of Santiago in Chile, explains in firm and straightforward terms, "is not and cannot be understood as a scheme to recapture some of the sociological power that the Church has been losing in Latin America". Not least because, as pointed out by **Rubén Salazar Gómez**, Archbishop of Bogota, "the Church as such is of no interest, it doesn't matter. It's just a tool. The Second Vatican Council reiterates that the Church is a sacrament and a sacrament in itself is meaningless except as a sign and instrument. This is the Church. It exists only to serve men by showing them the face of Christ". So the arguments of the 'eighties and 'nineties which staked everything on an almost magical 'evangelization of culture', to be contracted out to elites militating to re-establish a culturally influential presence in the public arena for the Church, seem to have had their day in Latin America also.

The continental mission, repeats Brazilian **Geraldo Lyrio Rocha**, Archbishop of Mariana, "is not a mobilization, or a list of new things to do and events to organize, but a spirit that should set its mark on every expression and detail of the life of the Church. In times of transition and great change such as we are living through, concern and a feeling of insecurity grow, but also the possibilities of encounter. For example with the eighty percent of Brazilian Catholics who in Catholic Brazil live their lives removed from the ordinary practices of the Church".

The Aparecida declaration took account of the fact that processes of secularization in Latin America are ongoing and the faith that has animated the Church and the life of the continent for five centuries is not being transmitted from generation to generation with the ease of the past. The document called on the Latin American Churches to get rid of all the “transient structures that no longer encourage the transmission of the faith” (no. 365), not to wallow in rhetorical complacency about the ‘continent of hope’ and ‘not to take anything for granted and settled’ (no. 549). The same document also did away with the pretexts of professional complainers and recriminators, expressing the hope – with a quotation from Pope Paul VI’s *Evangelii nuntiandi* – that “the world of our time ‘may receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient and anxious, but from ministers who have primarily received the joy of Christ in themselves’ (no. 552). Despite the amount of reflections, points and suggestions made, the continental mission was not configured as the goal of the effort of pastoral workers, the outcome of those who presume to build the Church by their exertions, maybe even from scratch. Because ‘the action of the Lord always remains the most important thing in the Church’ (Introduction, no. 5). And every new step ‘can only come about if we positively make the most of what the Spirit has sown’ (no. 262). Starting out from the faith that despite all omissions, frailty and possible waste, continues to manifest itself in the simple devotion of the people, with the helplessness of a child rescued from the waves. The gratuitous and surprising sign of the love for Jesus and His Mother still alive in the hearts of most Latin Americans.

### **From the notion of the Church as *regulator* of faith to a Church as *facilitator* of faith**

In article 264, the same document describes popular piety as a great and enduring ‘confession of the living God who acts in history’. A matter of fact before which the ecclesial body has the minimal mandate not to complicate what is simple. **Eduardo Horacio García**, Auxiliary Bishop of Buenos Aires and in charge of the pastoral work of the archdiocese compresses in a neat but effective phrase: “It’s a matter of passing from the notion of the Church as *regulator* of faith to a Church as *facilitator* of faith”.

In this may lie the whole of the *pastoral conversion* that the Aparecida document set out as the fruit of gratitude and the task proper to the

Churches in Latin America at the present time. In the discourse of many bishops the word most frequently used, and not at random, is *cercanía*, closeness. The characteristic feature of a Church that offers itself to all like ‘a mother who comes forward to greet, a welcoming home’ (no. 370). Thus the bishops in this present moment of the Church pick up the threads of continuity with the generations of their predecessors. In particular, the generation of pastors who after Vatican Council II forged the CELAM into an effective tool for witnessing to the daily sharing by local Churches in the destinies and real lives of the peoples of the continent. “Above everything else”, notes Venezuelan **Baltazar Enrique Porras Cardozo**, Archbishop of Mérida, “even in this time of great changes, closeness to the desires and sufferings of people remains a hallmark of the Latin American Churches, and people acknowledge this. Even in the face of the growth of violence and social degradation, always at the expense of the weakest, everyone knows they can find in the Church a reality in tune with their real desires for peace, a quiet life, security, and a concrete help in difficulties and sufferings”. He is echoed by the Capuchin friar **Andrés Stanovnik**, Archbishop of Corrientes: “In general, leaving aside individual cases, if there is a human reality that keeps its footing in our countries in the middle of daily life, that reality is the Church. Our Churches are not made up only of the meetings of bishops, like that of Aparecida. Those same bishops every day walk alongside their people. The priests do not live secluded in their parishes. They are with the people all day, in the streets, in soup kitchens, in country schools, in all the endless social and charitable works where they truly come across people’s struggle to continue. Only within the concrete circumstances of daily life can one share in the faith and joy for the living presence of Christ. Otherwise, any community project in the long run closes down the prospect and turns into segregation with religious pretexts”.

### **A certain harking-back to clericalism: the old figure of the ‘Prince’ priest**

According to some bishops, the most insidious enemy of “closeness” as suggested by the Aparecida Conference is not relativism or secularism, or the prejudices of groups hostile to the Church. “The greatest resistance”, notes the Peruvian Franciscan **Héctor Miguel Cabrejos Vidarte**, Archbishop of Trujillo, “coincides with a certain harking-back to clericalism. Not least for that reason the pastoral conversion outlined at Aparecida primarily concerns

priests and bishops. But even some organized groups and movements, which sometimes behave like cliques in search of prestige and power in the Church”. The old figure of the ‘prince’ priest seems to resurface. In some situations, the representative of a privileged caste, official of a religious power, which treats even the sacraments as its own so as to assert its supremacy over the laity. Maybe throwing the weakness and hurts of people in their face, stultifying the willingness and expectations of those not in good standing with doctrinal ‘requirements’ and moral conditions imposed by a growing return to clerical strictness. One of those styles and structures that the Aparecida document defines as ‘perishable’, and that does not encourage but hinders the transmission of the faith. “It’s inevitable”, notes Archbishop Stanovnik, “that when one plans to build, to ‘make’ the Church as one’s own project and achievement, one ends up in self-celebration”. Archbishop Porras adds: “Similar presumptions have marked the history of Catholicism in Latin America from the beginning. It’s enough to read the documents published by the Vatican on the occasion of the fifth centenary of the discovery of America. Then there were people who out of disciplinary strictness required that priests or religious be born in wedlock, reared up in respectable families, able to bestow a dowry. And already then, between the 16th and 18th centuries, hundreds and hundreds of dispensations came from Rome to get around those rigorist pretensions”.

### **A Church against the powers that be?**

Since the days when it was led and inspired by such free spirits as Chilean bishop Manuel Larraín and Dom Hélder Câmara the CELAM has always reflected the prevailing feeling of the Latin American bishops towards the changing social and political geography of the area. That interweave of peoples and nations that Dom Hélder himself called ‘the Christian continent of the Third World’ when calling on his brethren to fight the poverty ‘that destroys the image of God in every man’.

At present the ranks of variously assorted left-wing governments in these countries are consolidating over time and growing with new additions, with leaders of diverse backing and orientation – former guerrillas, former soldiers, national-populists, pragmatic reformers – all called on to handle a booming economic situation, real processes of political integration, growing imbalances and compensatory social programs that have impact on the lives of millions of people. A continental effervescence in which the media

portrayal of churchmen is routinely to dismiss them as frowning censors. Emissaries of a corporation in everlasting struggle with political leaders and governments, and stuck fast to an agenda of ethically sensitive issues: defense of life, of the family, of freedom of education.

The fact is that among the bishops who came together in Montevideo for the recent CELAM assembly, no one seemed ready to back or even expand the media cliché of the Church as a ‘belligerent’ bloc alternative to the powers that be. For all of them the characteristics cognate to ecclesial action are those of apostolic zeal and meekness. “The image of a Church as an antagonistic force”, says Venezuelan Archbishop Porras, “is convenient for governments and populist regimes that often fall into the deification of their own power. Then the Church, precisely because of its immanence in the people and the way in which it assesses social problems without messianism, is presented as a corporation in search of privileges”. According to Chilean Archbishop Ricardo Ezzati, “in political language there are those who want at times to pass off the idea that the Church structure is a factor in backwardness that reins in society and individual conscience, and who denounce its alleged attempt to reclaim a lost social and cultural monopoly. In my opinion, no confirmation should be given to the stereotype. And it should be made clear that the Church seeks no power, no hegemony. It just wants to make known to our people a message of liberation that is good for all”. Cardinal **Julio Terrazas Sandoval**, Archbishop of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, described the reduction of the Church to a countervailing force as a convenient caricature: “In Bolivia, in recent years, the Church waited in silence for the changes so much desired by the people. We started talking only when we heard speeches calling for the eliminating of the ‘Christian God’ and claiming there was a division between two Churches, that of the rich and that of the poor”. Colombian Rubén Salazar Gómez concludes: “Emphasizing only the intervention of the clergy on matters of sexual morality is a distortion of the media. And the Church must do everything possible to avoid the mechanism of those who paint it as an antagonistic political corporation. Showing everybody, with humility, that it seeks nothing for itself.”.

## THE TIME OF THE CHURCH ACCORDING TO AUGUSTINE

### “Grant what You command”

*The beautiful prayer of St Augustine, recently revived also by Benedict XVI, can also summarize this book: “Grant what You command, and command what You will”. So writes Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, Archbishop of Buenos Aires, in the preface of the book *Il tempo della Chiesa secondo Agostino* (The Time of the Church according to Augustine)*

**by Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio**

Giacomo Tantardini, *Il tempo della Chiesa secondo Agostino. Seguire e rimanere in attesa. La felicità in speranza*, Città Nuova, Rome 2009, 388 pp., 22 euros

In the pages of this book run the impassioned lectures on the relevance of Saint Augustine given by Don Giacomo Tantardini at the University of Padua, over the course of the three academic years from 2005 to 2008.

It can be said in so many ways that the holy Bishop of Hippo is relevant. One can venture reviews of his theology, rediscover the modernity of his gaze at the motions of the human spirit, bring out the brilliance of his judgments on the historical vicissitudes of his time, in some ways so similar to those of the present day.

In his lectures on Augustine, with the texts read and commented on directly, Don Giacomo has picked and followed another pattern. If Augustine is relevant, if he is our contemporary – as this book documents – he is so especially because he describes just how to become and remain Christian in the time of the Church. That time which is His, as it is ours. “That short time – Augustine repeats several times commenting on the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John (*John* 16, 16-20) – which goes from the Lord’s ascension into heaven in His true body to His glorious return” (p. 123).

The most striking image for me of how one becomes a Christian, as it emerges in this book, is the way in which Augustine recounts and comments on Jesus’ encounter with Zacchaeus (pp. 279-281). Zacchaeus is small, and wants to see the Lord pass, and so he climbs a sycamore. Augustine says: “*Et vidit Dominus ipsum Zacchaeum. Visus est, et vidit / And the Lord looked at Zacchaeus himself. Zacchaeus was seen, and therefore saw*”. What strikes one are those three seeings: that of Zacchaeus, that of Jesus and then that of

Zacchaeus again, after being seen by the Lord. “He would have seen Him pass even if Jesus had not raised his eyes”, comments Don Giacomo, “but it would not have been a meeting. He would perhaps have satisfied that minimum of good curiosity out of which he had climbed the tree, but it would not have been a meeting” (p. 281).

There is the point: some believe that faith and salvation come with our effort to look for, to seek the Lord. Whereas it’s the opposite: you are saved when the Lord looks for you, when He looks at you and you let yourself be looked at and sought for. The Lord will look for you first. And when you find Him, you understand that He was waiting there looking at you, He was expecting you from beforehand.

That is salvation: He loves you *beforehand*. And you let yourself be loved. Salvation is precisely this meeting where He works first. If this meeting does not take place, we are not saved. We can talk about salvation. Invent reassuring theological systems that turn God into a notary and His gratuitous love into a due deed to which He is supposed to be forced by His nature. But we never enter into the People of God. Whereas, when you look at the Lord and you realize with gratitude that you are looking at Him because He is looking at you, all intellectual prejudices go away, that elitism of the spirit that is characteristic of intellectuals without talent and is ethicism without goodness.

If the beginning of faith is the work of the Lord, Saint Augustine also describes how you remain in this beginning. Here the keywords are those contained in the subtitle: *following and awaiting*. And the figure that represents them is John, the beloved disciple. John represents those awaiting to be loved, and remains by grace and not effort in this expectation. In him it is obvious that “if one is not loved first (cf. 1 Jn 4, 19) one can neither love nor follow” (p. 171). The awaiting of the acts of the Lord is renewed in him in every instant, the expectation of those new beginnings in which freedom adheres to grace “through the pleasure by which it is drawn” (p. 372).

According to Augustine, there are distinctive features – Don Giacomo points out – indications of when one is seen and embraced by the Lord.

The first sign is gratitude, the spontaneous motion of the heart that gives thanks. Augustine shows that even the clear understanding of what it takes to obtain salvation can become a source of pride, of the sort that he registered among the Platonic philosophers of his time, who “have seen where one must reach to be happy, but decided to attribute to themselves

what they saw, and become proud, have lost what they saw” (p. 27). One can arrive at discovering that only in God is there happiness, but this knowledge does not by itself move the heart. The heart remains sad and full of itself. It does not dissolve in tears of gratitude (pp. 19-25). Instead, when one is picked up in His arms by the Lord and “humbly embraces my humble God Jesus” (p. 40), without even thinking about it, he becomes full of gratitude and gives thanks. And in this gratitude also becomes good. Don Giacomo writes that “one is good not because one knows what goodness is, one is glad not because one knows what happiness is. One is good and is happy because one is embraced by goodness and by happiness” (p. 330).

The other distinguishing feature is precisely the surfacing in the heart of that happiness *in hope* that the subtitle of the book also mentions. For Augustine, the joy promised by the Lord to his followers is given and lives *in spe*, in hope. What does that mean? The expression *in spe* in the writings of Augustine indicates that this happiness is always a grace. In our earthly condition, this is immediately obvious to everybody: happiness on earth, promised as pledge of heavenly happiness, does not come from us, we cannot build it nor maintain and master it. It is not in our hands, and hence is precarious, according to the schemes of those who believe they can build their life as their own project. It is the happiness of the poor, who enjoy it as a gratuitous gift. The happiness of those who live forever suspended in the hope of the Lord, and for that very reason are untroubled. Because it is a beautiful thing to live confident that the Lord loves us beforehand, seeks us beforehand. The Lord of patience that comes to us hoping that we, like Zacchaeus, climb the tree of *humilitas*. Saint Augustine addressed to Him the beautiful prayer also recently revived by Pope Benedict XVI, which can also summarize this book: “Grant what You command, and command what You will”. Grant us the gift of becoming as children, and then ask to be as children, to enter the kingdom of heaven.

These are some of the many tones and ideas in this book that can be an invaluable comfort to many, well beyond the circle of experts and scholars.

For this I wish it luck, while all the friends of Augustine are preparing to remember that 1600 years have passed since the holy Bishop of Hippo, faced with the sack of Rome, was inspired to write the *City of God*.

# **We are not owners of the gifts of the Lord**

**Interview with Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio**

**by Gianni Valente**

If the priests of Buenos Aires aim to make “every effort” to help their fellow citizens approach the first sacrament, they can rest assured that they have the archbishop by their side. For Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio the important things are these.

**Some priests In Buenos Aires are taking steps to facilitate the celebration of new baptisms and encourage them in every way. What is driving them?**

JORGE MARIO BERGOGLIO: The Conference of Latin American Bishops held in Aparecida reminded us to proclaim the Gospel by going out to find people, not sitting in the Curia or the presbytery waiting for people to come to us. In the third to last paragraph, the Aparecida document casts back thirty years and returns to the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* of Paul VI, which described “apostolic zeal” as “the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing”, of “proclaiming with joy a Good News that has been learned through the mercy of the Lord”. But this is expressed not so much by planning initiatives or exceptional events. The *Evangelii nuntiandi* itself repeated that “if the Son came, it was precisely to reveal, by His words and His life, the ordinary paths of salvation”. It’s the ordinary that one can achieve in missionary fashion. And baptism is paradigmatic in that. I think the parish priests of Buenos Aires are acting in that spirit.

**Do you think that concern to facilitate baptism is tied to specific and local situations, or is a criterion that can be recommended for everyone?**

BERGOGLIO: The concern to encourage in every way the administration of baptism and the other sacraments involves the whole Church. If the Church follows its Lord, it comes out of itself, with courage and compassion: it doesn’t remain locked in its own self. The Lord works a change in those who are faithful to Him, makes them look up away from themselves. That is the mission, that is witness.

**In the handbook on baptism prepared and distributed by the diocese of Buenos Aires answer is given to possible criticism from those who say that the sacraments should not be “a bargain offer” and that the requirements of preparation and readiness should be held to. Is the criticism valid?**

BERGOGLIO: There is no sellout, no exchange. The parish priests are observing the directions given by the bishops of the pastoral region of Buenos Aires, which meet all the conditions required by the Code of Canon Law, according to the basic criterion expressed in the last canon: the supreme law is the salvation of souls.

**In your opinion, are the cases where baptism is denied to children because the parents are not in a canonically regular marital situation justified in some way?**

BERGOGLIO: To us here that would be like closing the doors of the Church. The child has no responsibility for the marital state of its parents. And then, the baptism of children often becomes a new beginning for parents. Usually there is a little catechesis before baptism, about an hour, then a mystagogic catechesis during liturgy. Then, the priests and laity go to visit these families to continue with their post-baptismal pastoral. And it often happens that parents, who were not married in church, maybe ask to come before the altar to celebrate the sacrament of marriage.

**It sometimes happens that ministers and pastoral workers assume almost a proprietorial attitude as if the decision to grant the sacraments or not were in their hands.**

BERGOGLIO: The sacraments are signs of the Lord. They are not performances or the conquests of priests or bishops. In our vast country there are many small towns or villages that are difficult to reach, where the priest arrives once or twice a year. But popular piety feels that children should be baptized as soon as possible, and so in those places there is always a layman or woman known by everyone as *bautizadores* who baptize the children when they are born, awaiting the arrival of the priest. When the priest comes, they bring him the children so he can anoint them with holy oil, completing the ceremony. When I think of it, I'm always surprised by that story of those Christian communities in Japan that were left without a priest for more than two hundred years. When the missionaries returned

they found them all baptized, all married validly for the Church and all their dead had been buried in Christian fashion. Those laymen had received only baptism, and by virtue of their baptism they had also lived their apostolic mission.

**According to some people unless there is adequate understanding and preparation the sacramental rite is in danger of becoming something “magical” or mechanical. What do you think?**

BERGOGLIO: Nobody thinks that we don't need catechesis, preparing children for confirmation and communion. But we must always look at our people as they are, and see what is needed most. The sacraments are for the life of men and women as they are. Who maybe don't talk all that much, but their *sensus fidei* captures the reality of the sacraments with more clarity than that of many specialists.

**Can you give us some incident in your pastoral experience that highlights this *sensus fidei*?**

BERGOGLIO: Just a few days ago I baptized seven children of a woman on her own, a poor widow, who works as a maid and she had had them from two different men. I met her last year at the Feast of San Cayetano. She'd said: Father, I'm in mortal sin, I have seven children and I've never had them baptized. It had happened because she had no money to bring the godparents from a distance, or to pay for the party, because she always had to work ... I suggested we meet, to talk about it. We spoke on the phone, she came to see me, told me that she could never find all the godparents and get them together ... In the end I said: let's do everything with only two godparents, representing the others. They all came here and after a little catechesis I baptized them in the chapel of the archbishopric. After the ceremony we had a little refreshment. A coca cola and sandwiches. She told me: Father, I can't believe it, you make me feel important... I replied, but lady, where do I come in, it's Jesus who makes you important.

## **BUENOS AIRES. The priests, the narcos, the threats** **“They are priests who pray and work”**

*The drug traffickers threatened the parish priest of a villa miseria, stirring a wave of popular sympathy. An interview with Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio*  
**Interview with Cardinal Jorge Maria Bergoglio by Gianni Valente**

Sometimes he also encounters them, the poor slaves of *paco*, maybe on Sunday when he arrives on foot in the maze of some *villa miseria*, to say Mass, baptize and confirm, to celebrate the patron saint. They see the white collar in the distance, realize that it's a priest, and then the calls go up: “Hola padre, tienes un peso para la coca?”. For Jorge Mario Bergoglio, a Jesuit, cardinal and archbishop of Buenos Aires since 1998, it is the confirmation that in those parts “they tell the truth”. Also when they want to leave the dark background of their disastrous lives. So everything is fine, but let no one try to touch his priest friends of Baires. Those who speak to him informally of the miracles that the Lord performs down their way. It was him, Father Bergoglio, who made public the death threats brought to the priests from those whom he calls “los mercaderes de las tinieblas”, the merchants of darkness.

**Why did you decide to let everyone know that a priest had been threatened by the drug traffickers?**

JORGE MARIO BERGOGLIO: The decision was taken in prayer. I felt that this was a problem of the whole local Church. And all the faithful should know. I mentioned it in a sermon during the Mass said for workers in schools and educational activities, in which I also spoke of the dangers for the young people of today, such as drugs. At the end, I just added that a priest had been threatened, without even speaking his name.

**Those who have had the luck to meet Father Pepe and the priests who work with him know that they are also prudent and realistic. They're not hamming the part of “frontier priests”, or “anti-drug professionals”. What has changed? Why were they threatened?**

BERGOGLIO: They work. They're not attacking anyone. The one who said that drugs are a danger, not just in the *favelas*, but throughout the city, was myself at that Mass. I told parents to watch what their children do, to take care of them, because drugs reach everywhere, come to the school gate.

They, the priests of the *villas*, are also working in preventing drug addiction and the social rehabilitation of young drug addicts. A month ago they drafted a constructive proposal on the startling growth of drug trafficking. The people of Villa 21 have recently opened three shelters for young addicts. It must be that the traffickers don't like that. Someone must have got annoyed.

**It's well known that you are attached to the priests who work in the *villas miserias* and poor neighborhoods.**

BERGOGLIO: They work and pray. There are priests who pray. And they do catechesis, social work... That's what I like. This priest who was threatened, they say, and it is true, has a special devotion for Don Bosco. It is precisely the style of Don Bosco that inspires him.

**How has the rest of the diocese reacted? Jealousies?**

BERGOGLIO: Not at all. More than four hundred priests in Buenos Aires signed a declaration in favor of their brothers, and presented it at a press conference in the bishop's residence. An initiative that they took themselves, not something inspired by the bishops. They saw the matter as an example of apostolic work.

**Your concern for pastoral work in the poor districts and the *villas* has become a reference point for the whole diocese.**

BERGOGLIO: Yes, and they are happy about it. The company and the government have responded well in backing Pepe.

**Maybe there are people who would have preferred these problems to be hidden since there's also the question of the connivance and inaction of politicians.**

BERGOGLIO: Greater responsiveness to this problem emerged in the Church some time ago. Last year the bishops' conference made a statement. Another came from the Social Pastoral Commission. Then Bishop Jorge Casaretto, a member of the Comisión Nacional de Justicia y paz, conducted an enquiry and has spoken several times on the subject. Finally came this document from the priests of the *villas*, with the resultant threat, which caught everybody's attention. All this to make clear that the document was

not an isolated statement, but is in line with the course taken by the whole Church in Argentina, to say to everybody: watch out, this is a danger.

**But does the Church have the fight against drugs as its main task?**

BERGOGLIO: Not at all. It's a pastoral thing. Pastoral work. To ask for the conversion of all. Even traffickers.

**Father Pepe has many friends**

The nasty event occurred in the evening, at the end of April. Father Pepe was coming back home on his bicycle. The one with the *Huracán* stickers, the team that always gets through by the skin of its teeth, and indeed the other priests of Nuestra Señora de Caacupé make fun of him (they follow *River* or *Boca Juniors*, good goers). At a certain moment, a man beckoned him to stop. "Are you Father Pepe?", he asked. He had never seen him. He spoke with a *porteño* accent, was dressed well. He was not a *cabeçita negra* from Villa 21. He said few words to him. That if he didn't stop, if they continued to talk about those things on television, "tu vas a ser boleta. Te la tienen jurada": you'll be taken out, we've sworn it.

Father José María "Pepe" Di Paola immediately understood what the trouble was. Before Easter, he and other priests who work in the *villas miserias* – the favelas of Argentina, half way between shanty towns and working-class neighborhoods, packed with immigrants from Bolivia, Paraguay and the poor provinces to the north of the country – had written and distributed a document telling everyone that in their neighborhoods drug trafficking was "de facto decriminalized", that the narcos were transforming those slums full of poor and helpless people into helpless, off-limits areas, no man's land where to peddle their surplus production of cocaine. A "Brazilian" crime wave, which is seeing the number of dead and wounded growing from month to month, daily felonies and cruelty.

It wasn't that Pepe and his friends had got a sudden urge to turn into heroes. The fact was that they happened to be priests there, in the *villas*, among the misshapen and afflicted lives of those alleys, in the midst of those fragile and wounded people who have so often seen hope blossom, like a flower on the edge of the pit. They had seen how the Lord did great things among the multitude of their powerless and destitute friends, He, who always prefers the humble to the arrogant. Thus, every attempt to try to

protect those poor beloved of the Lord always comes like a conditioned reflex, like an instinctive move. From generation to generation.

In the 'sixties and 'seventies, the first priests who opened chapels and parishes in the *villas* not least in support of the *villeros*' fight for justice and to show them how to work for social improvement, found fresh commitment in the encounter with the simple faith and devotion of those whom they had generously gone to educate and help. They – Rodolfo Ricciardelli, Carlos Mugica, Jorge Vernazza and all the other “pioneers” close to the movement of the *sacerdotes para el tercer mundo*– had had to hold their helpless arms wide to block the bulldozers sent several times by the military regimes to flatten the shacks of the *villeros*.

Now what was making their days tormented were no longer the *topadoras* sent by the military to *limpiar la ciudad*, to rid Buenos Aires of those who, according to them “did not deserve” to live there. For several years now the monster has been viler and more devastating. It burns out brains, dims eyes, cankers the hearts of young people, teenagers, children. They call it *el paco*, or *pasta base de cocaina* (PBC). It's made with the chemical residue of the processing of the white powder. The quality stuff is sent to Europe and the US. The “normal” stuff is for the good neighborhoods of Buenos Aires. In 2001, the year of the economic collapse in Argentina, they discovered that the waste product could make money as mass commodity in the *villas*. One dose costs less than a dollar and a half, indeed they give away the first ones. It turns people on more than marijuana, but the effect is very short-lived and people want it again immediately. Just one day is enough to become *adicto*. The state of anxiety that follows every smoke is unbearable, abstinence is a nightmare of paranoia and hallucination. The need to find money to buy another dose makes people crazy. In just a few days normal children and adolescents become zombies voracious for a dose, to the point of killing those they come across for a few *peso* without even realizing it. They call them the *muertos vivos*, the living dead. They forget to eat. They spend entire weeks without sleep. They wander aimlessly, with dead eyes, or slump on sidewalks, lips burned by the homemade tin pipes they use to smoke.

Pepe also came across them in the more secluded corners of the *villa*. Some of those in his barrio had known them since they were little kids. Maybe they would greet him, ask for a rosary and a bit of money. And Pepe would reply that he didn't have anything at that moment, but if they'd come

by the church, he could do something. He had too many things to do already. Since he'd arrived in Caacupé twelve years ago, with the help of the Virgin and the saints – St Expedito, St Pantaleo, St Cayetano and all the others – a surprisingly exuberant Christian life had grown around the network of chapels of the parish: Masses of healing and popular canteens, rosaries and professional schools, pilgrimages and sewing classes, camping in Bariloche and spiritual retreats for couples, doctors' surgeries and nights to prepare the fire for the *asado*. There are those who would have paused to gaze in self-content on these small and large victories in the marginal intricacy of the *villa*, shaking their heads at the fate of *drogacitos*. Accepting it as if it were just part of the evil of the times. But Pepe and his friends could not. Unable not to bet that the contagion of that improved life they saw spreading in the *villa* would reach even them, the most damned. Nor could they keep their mouths closed about the abyss in which so many were getting lost.

In 2008, seeing that the kids almost always failed in their attempts at detoxifying in the city help centers, they tried to set up an ad hoc rescue project, structured in three stages, all of them woven into the network of social relations of the *villa*. Father Charly and *misionero* Gustavo handled it, with the help of the whole community. The men of the parish offered dozens of weekends of *trabajo solidario* to build up the farm on the road to Luján, where the second stage on the path of recovery takes place: a few months of retreat, with paced rhythms of work and rest, away from the city. But the path starts at the *Hogar de Cristo*, the day center opened on the outskirts of Villa 21: a few rooms, the kitchen, the soccer field. The street children, whom they called the *niños de Belén*, the children of Bethlehem, also go there to eat, to wash and to see movies with pretty good heroes. It is there that some of the *paco* addicts begins to look in to see whether there is anyone who could rid them of the darkness in their lives. The symbol of the Hogar is a cross planted so as to break a chain. A bit naive, but it meant that nobody can save themselves alone, without the help of Jesus. One can't do without it, it's necessary as the bread baked at the school for cooks in Pepirí street that then goes to the *comedores* to feed the children of the *villa*. One person well aware of it is Miriam, the beautiful girl who two years earlier was sleeping tossed like a rag between the waste containers, whose two children had been taken away from her and who spent her days and nights getting money for *paco* in any way she could. "I didn't think there was any rescue for me. But I was always bumping into the curate in the *calle* and he'd say: *Dios te ama*".

Now she's also a catechism teacher, she wants to become a therapist for the drug addicts who want to come off, and she wants to see her girls again, "but not yet, only when I'm stronger". Also well aware of it is Raúl, who once managed to stop, but then lapsed ("I felt *una mierda*. A year of effort, and within a few hours everything collapsed again") and who for some months now has been attending the Hogar, taking the course in electrics and carpentry at the Pepirí school, and who realizes in some confused way that something is changing. Charly and Gustavo know many stories like this. Failures and re-starts. Outsets derailed and rebegun. Lives saved hand over hand. The *muertos vivos* returning to life. What miracle is there greater than this? It leaves hope open even to those who sell drugs, and would seem unredeemable. The smalltime drug dealers of the *villa*, maybe believing they're just doing a job like any other, just to find the *gana* for their family, and not even aware of the evil they do, greet Charly or Pepe when they pass along the street.

The Church, Bergoglio always says, is not a place just for good people. The cardinal of Buenos Aires reiterated in his sermon on the feast day of San Cayetano: "Are people driven out of here because they are bad? No, on the contrary, they are welcomed with more affection. That is what Jesus has taught us". When the cardinal wants to be heartened he often goes to hear about the victories of Jesus to be seen in the *villas*. On Maundy Thursday in 2008, at the mass of *in Coena Domini*, he went to wash the feet of twelve boys who attend the *Hogar de Cristo*. That day they were the apostles. Initially the only money for the

## Reportage. Priests and poor in Buenos Aires

### The friends of Father Bergoglio

In the sixties some priests went to live among the immigrants in the shanty towns of the Argentine capital to help them in their political and social struggles. And were changed by the simple devotion of those they aimed to educate. The story of a Christian adventure that continues. With the help of the Virgin Mary and the saints  
by Gianni Valente

The appointment is for Sunday at noon in front of Nuestra Señora di Caacupé. “Procession and mass *de sanación y liberación*” promised the flyer delivered even to the most dilapidated hovels in Villa 21. Initially there were more than two hundred, but many more joined in as the small procession headed by Bishop Oscar threaded the network of muddy alleys packed with crossed water pipes, threads of drooping electric wires, the burnt out carcasses of cars. On the feast of St. Pantaleon, a doctor and martyr, which falls in the middle of Argentina’s winter one needs to protect oneself from the *gripe*, the flu virus, from pneumonia and other seasonal illnesses. But not only that. “Let each of us look into our hearts and see what is going on”, is the invitation that Father Pepe makes during the Mass, in the square crammed beyond belief. “Let us all acknowledge that we are sinners, and that we need the Lord to heal us. For those who are sick in body and soul, for those who are worried and going through a serious problem ... We ask our mother, the Virgen de Caacupé, to help us to have the health we need in our *barrio*”. At the end of the Mass, the most elderly get in line to receive the anointing of the sick. So that “the Holy Spirit of forgiveness may heal us and rid us of all illness ... As St. James says, the prayer made in faith will save the sick”.

The poet Charles Péguy, thinking perhaps of the parable of the Pharisee and Publican, writes that when the rich man prays he *talks*, the poor man *asks* for things that are needed in life: peace in the family and in the world, the healing of a loved one, the health of soul and body. In the *villas miserias* – the favelas of Argentina, midway between slum neighborhoods and working-class neighborhoods – it is not difficult to fall ill. In Villa 21, then there is also the Riachuelo, “the filthy river, the most polluted in the world” – they say – that runs alongside, infesting the air with its miasma. Part of the Villa has arisen on the mountains of garbage of the

illegal landfills, God only knows what's under there. When every day, several times a day, freight trains cut the tangle of earth roads without seeking permission, the walls of huts tremble like cardboard and occasionally someone – mostly children caught in their street games – loses their legs. And then there are the other diseases, the ones that beset marginal agglomerations in many urban suburbs in the southern hemisphere: the *chicos* devastated by *paco*, the drug for the poor made with the residue of cocaine manufacture, the *niños de la calle*, the drunks who beat their wives, the thousand destinies derailed, broken families, the bankrupt lives of so many who have given up. Including those whom the economic crisis of 2001 tossed out into the street when the banks and their interest rates stole their homes.

There are a lot of people who need healing. But with all this, there is also a current of good life, a line of healing that is growing over time, in the tired and tangled days of the *villeros*.

“It was Father Pepe”, they all say. They say for example that since he's been in Caacupé, Father José “Pepe” di Paola, with his friends – Father Facundo, Don Charly, the deacon Juan and all the others – people no longer kill in the streets. The Paraguayans no longer have knife fights with the Bolivians. But if you mention it to him, he will immediately dodge with his loud and contagious laugh: “We haven't invented anything,” he says, “we've just taken position behind the Guaraní who today live in the Villa and the saints they brought from their villages when they arrived here in town”. From them, too, Pepe has learned that one doesn't get much done, if you're not in sympathy with the Virgin and the saints. And before him, Father Daniel had also learned it.

### **Friends in Paradise**

The *barrio* songs tell of “el angel de la bicicleta”, the one on which he died in the early 'nineties run over by a bus. Whereas the naïf murals around the Villa portray him with arms out wide, blocking the way of the bulldozers that were razing the *villeros*' homes. It was 1978, and the regime had decided to clean up the city before the World Cup. They called it the *plan de erradicación*. Daniel de la Sierra, the Claretian priest who built the church of Nuestra Señora de Caacupé in Villa 21, put his vulnerable body in the way as passive resistance to the violence of the *topadoras*. And other priests of the *equipo de los curas de la villa* did the same. The ones who already during the

Council had chosen to settle in the Buenos Aires shantytowns that were swelling with emigrants mainly from Paraguay, Bolivia and the poor northern provinces of Argentina (Tucumán, Santiago del Estero, Jujuy, Salta, Misiones, Corrientes) to proclaim the love of Christ among *los cabecitas negras*, sharing in the lives of those that the rest of the city considered *gente mala*, dangerous vagrants, half scoundrels to stay away from.

The *curas villeros* were third-worldist priests, no getting away from it. They went to the Villa to testify that Christ was with the poor. They wanted to get involved with a generous stance in the low-class struggles of those years. But when they arrived, and people noticed they were priests, the requests began, “Olà Father, I have two chicos to baptize”, “when does Catechism start?”. “Is there mass next Sunday?”. “The, surprise”, wrote Jorge Vernazza, one of the pioneers, who died in 1997, in the book telling their story, “was comparable only to our ignorance about the real feeling of those people... Sometimes we would talk among ourselves of seeking an ‘authentic faith’, but we expected more from ‘evangelical think tanks’ than from traditional methods of spreading the faith... the situation of the people of the *villas* in which we generously and without prejudice involved ourselves, ended up opening our eyes to the richness of the devotion of the people”. So the *curas villeros* began building chapels with unequivocal names (Santa Maria Madre del Pueblo in Bajo Flores, Christ Obrero in Villa de Retiro, Christ Libertador in Villa 30), to minister baptisms, weddings and funerals, recite rosaries, organize processions, at the same time as working every day to support the material and socio-political demands of the *villeros*: commissions for water, sewers and electricity, to get a minimum of health care for the *villas*, organized resistance to the plans for demolition regularly set up by the various military regimes, building cooperatives, canteens. Some of them did not hide their explicit political siding with the Peronist left. In 1972, on the plane that brought Peron back to Argentina for his last fleeting return to power, there was also Father Vernazza along with Carlos Mugica, the priest martyr of Villa de Retiro, killed by paramilitary gunfire on 11 May 1974, while returning home after celebrating Mass (see box). But their immanence in the real life of the *villas* exposed them to misunderstandings of an opposing sort. There were those who considered them subversives in cassocks, priests contaminated by Marxist propaganda. On the other hand, even the intellectuals of the left who looked abroad for inspiration, including those of ecclesial mould, did not spare their enlightened contempt of the

*villeros* so busy dealing with primary needs as to have no time for insurgency, and of their priests still lingering with Madonnas and rosaries, masses and confessions. “They think they’ll effect a revolution with pilgrimages to Our Lady of Luján”, some wisecracked, when in the late ’seventies the *curas villeros* – on the suggestion of a mother in the congregation of Bajo Flores – organized the first annual pilgrimage of the *villas* to the national Marian shrine, fifty kilometers from the capital. Pepe says: “In those years that was the point of greatest misunderstanding between the *curas* of Buenos Aires and the misunderstood progressivism of some ecclesiastics who maybe came from Europe with a certain mentality *ilustrada*, enlightened. On the one hand there were those who had seen and followed the faith of the people, their way of living it and expressing it. On the other was the pride of those who came from outside to give lessons”.

### **New friends**

From the mid-’eighties the slogan whereby one gets ahead in an ecclesiastical career changed in Latin America also. Those who argued against the theology of liberation became appreciated. In the analysis of the new ecclesial conference-paper-givers, including those who were flirting with the growing trend towards the free-market, the *curas villeros* were seen as a local reflection of the Catholic third-worldism that was on the way out.

But the *villas*, in Buenos Aires and in all the cities of Argentina, continues to exist. When the period of ferocious dictatorship ended they began swelling again, also with masses of new poor, including those produced in those recent years by the late twentieth century free-market mirage. The *curas villeros* continue to share the daily lives and concerns of the people they have chosen to follow. In their off-limits neighborhoods, where taxi drivers do not enter and even the police do not venture, they remain faithful to the simplest gestures of faith of their people, they continue to recite rosaries, build chapels, celebrate all the feasts of the Virgin. Almost without wanting to, they are safeguarding treasures of devotion that others seem to have lost, through a program of consciousness raising and a strategy of cultural hegemony.

“An icon in every home, a shrine at every crossroads”. Such was the idea of Rodolfo Ricciardelli for his Villa, one of the founders of the movement of Priests for the Third World, who was also one of the first members of the *equipo de los curas villeros*, who died last 14 July after two

years of illness. We were reminded of such by Cardinal Bergoglio, celebrating his funeral in the church of Bajo Flores before the people of the *barrio* – children, old people, workers, old companions and the new ones also, the squad of young priests, between thirty and forty, who currently work in the *villas*. Those who continue to walk on the path marked out by Mugica, Vernazza, Ricciardelli, Father Daniel de la Sierra. And none are epigones nostalgic for a past ecclesial period. “Passing time makes things clearer”, says Guglielmo, parish priest at Villa Retiro, in the church of Christ Obrero where Mugica is now buried. “We can see better that even for the first ones the only criterion was the Gospel. Loving the poor living in their midst, as Jesus did. For some of them in that difficult time, that meant also becoming involved in the political struggles. But that had to do with the circumstances at the time”. Now, with the residues of ideology drained away, misunderstandings and misconceptions about the work of the *curas villeros* have disappeared. And providential proximities flourish. “We work in the same spirit as those who preceded us”, says Father Gustavo, parish priest at Villa Fatima: “the situations and problems are different, but what unites us with them is the most important thing: admiration and care for the faith of people and for their devotions”. After so many even ecclesial misunderstandings the bishop is with them. “Father Bergoglio”, says Gustavo, “shows in his style the preferential option for the poor. He has established many new parishes in the working-class neighborhoods. It was he who suggested to me being the priest in a *villa*, and he also asked other priests just out of the seminary”. Three years ago the priests of the *equipo* of the *villas miserias* were less than ten, now there are a score, almost all young. Occasionally, the archbishop leaves the curia of Plaza de Mayo and takes the metro, then jumps on some bus, and pops up in one or another of the *villas* to bless new canteens, celebrate christenings and confirmations, inaugurate new chapels, celebrate the feast of the saint or the Virgin to whom the parish is dedicated. Maybe he happens to stop and eat *el locro* with them, the soup of meat and corn they cook outdoors in large cauldrons. Meanwhile he gains fresh heart, like a father watching his children play, because “it does good to the soul to see what the Lord can do among his beloved children”.

### **Ask Saint Cayetano**

At the last feast of Saint Cayetano, during the sermon, Father Bergoglio told all those who were there in front of him: some of the hundreds of

thousands of Argentines who as every year packed the outlying neighborhood where the shrine stands to ask favors from the saint of bread and work or thank him for those received. “Let me ask you a question: is the Church a place open only for the good?”; and all in chorus: “Nooo!”. The cardinal, in reply: “Is there room for the bad guys, too?”. And the others, still all together, “Yeeees!!!”. “Do people get thrown out because they’re bad? No, on the contrary, they’re welcomed with more affection. And who taught us that? Jesus taught us. Imagine, then, how patient the heart of God is with all of us”.

In Father Pepe’s parish they see it the same way. The one thing you need to do is keep the doors open, make things easier. “Here everyone knows that one can come to the parish throughout the year and go to communion or confirmation after some catechism lessons. For baptisms, you just have to turn up a quarter of an hour before the mass”. The last time, on the feast of St John the Baptist, the adults who got themselves confirmed were more than a hundred and fifty. “The people work, *desde lunes hasta sábado*. You have to keep it in mind: you mustn’t impose any burden on people. We believe in the work of grace, rather than the stratagem of lengthening the preparation courses”.

It must be through the trust in grace, and the continuous “complicity” of the Virgin and the Saints, that a network of astonishing life, a sparkling whirl of facts, events, things to do, has taken root and is growing around the work of Pepe and the other young *curas villeros*. In Villa 21 alone, catechism for a thousand children and adolescents involved in the “movimiento Exploradores” (a kind of homemade Salesian scout group), eight *comedores*, the canteens where eight hundred people eat everyday, daily school help for six hundred and fifty *chicos*, football schools, music and sewing, homes for the recovery of drug addicts and *niños* who live in the street, and then, “for the most rebellious *chicos*, those who do not go to catechism, there is the *Murga*, “band” of dancers and drummers (“but we always start with an *Ave Maria*, and the uniform is blue and white, because those are the colors of the Virgin’s cloak”), and even spiritual retreats for groups of men and women, for families ... A network of charity overflowing and carefree, where there is always time to try something, and there is always something to be tried, to help somebody not get lost, to ask that hope be rekindled in those who seem already lost. Letting themselves be guided by what happens.

In 2001, for example, when the Argentine economy collapsed, the effects on the people of the *villa* were devastating. And even when things started to go better, nobody could find work anymore, not even a *changa* in the homes of the rich, “because no one takes those of the *villas*”. Pepe and his friends realized that they had to do something. So, even asking the diocese of Como for help, the school of Avenida Pepiri was set up, where five hundred kids from the *villa* are learning to become electricians, stone workers, mechanics, blacksmiths. And bakers, who all week prepare the bread for the *comedores*. Now, energies are focused on the recovery of *drogacitos*. At weekends, the group of men from the parish goes out of town to cheer up, between a mass and an *asado*, the farm where the young drug addicts who want to detox go. “It’s on the way to Luján, near the shrine,” Pepe winks, “so the Virgin also lends a hand...”.

The circuit of good life that runs through the *Villa* is all woven around the eight chapels with colorful murals and the dozens of wayside shrines that Pepe and his friends have scattered in the alleys and courtyards: a network of dozens of places to pray, say mass, recite rosaries. And where every opportunity is good to dedicate someone – children, men, women, old people – to the Paraguayan Virgin of Caacupé, or the Bolivian one of Copacabana, or the Argentine one of Luján, or to St. Cayetano, to St. Blaise, to St. John, or St. Pantaleon. The last time it happened was to thirty *villeros* couples whom Pepe had invited to a two-day retreat in the Holy House on Avenida Independencia. “There was Bishop Oscar also. We prayed, celebrated mass, spoke of sufferings and joys, and then all the couples dedicated themselves to the Virgen de Luján. Some people were moved. In the end, some couples came to ask me to celebrate their marriage in church”. Because “there are many in the *Villa*, couples living together for years, and bringing up their children without being married...”.

### **For a calm and quiet life**

“Gracias, san Expedito, por tu milagros”, is written on a banner at the entrance of the *Villa* in the *barrio* of Zavaleta. The Roman soldier, the saint of urgent causes, the one to whom all run when time has become short and the tunnel seems a dead end, always finds new friends in the *villas* and throughout Buenos Aires. The miracle they ask is not the revolution, a perfect world, but a quiet life, health of soul and body, that there be work to do so as to get up in the morning, and that the kids don’t lose themselves in

the black maze of drugs, where everything becomes dark. That is why, as the slogan of the parish says, “Caacupé calla, reza y trabaja por su *barrio*”, Caacupé keeps silence, prays and works for its district. *Ora et labora*. As happened more than three hundred years ago in the *reducciones* of Guaraní, here, too, what colors the days is not the mirage of a dream to be achieved, but the drops of daily charity that water the routine of ordinary acts and moments. The kind that silently and boundlessly without even realizing it Chula, the mother of five children, spreads around her each day as in her home, transformed into a chapel, she prepares lunches and dinner for forty children from the *Villa*, “because I’d promised it to San Cayetano, if my husband found work”. Or that of Pablo Ramos arrived here from Paraguay after escaping torture by the military (“but they were mixed up, we were from the Franciscan Youth, we didn’t harm anyone”), who would have liked to study architecture, but has no regrets, and gives thanks to God because in the *Villa* they gave him a chance to build the chapel of San Blas, and for his two *chicos flamantes*, his two wonderful children “who when I look at them so, give me strength and life *también*”.

Meanwhile, the male and female missionaries of the parish are distributing a new statuette to the huts in the *barrio*. They call it “el Cristo de la villa”. The young stone workers and carvers of the *barrio* Pepiri school made it, “after the sectarians of the *Iglesia universal*,” says Pepe, “had gone around slandering us, saying that we preach a dead Christ”. The image is also reproduced in the mural of the church. Jesus smiling victorious and reassuring, while crushing the head of a snake beneath his feet. His blessing hand is lifted skyward, with the arm straight, as *goleadores* do in the stadium when they score. “If he plays for us”, Pepe says laughing, “we’ll win the championship this year as well”.

## What I would have said at the Consistory

An interview with Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, Archbishop of Buenos Aires

by Sefania Falasca

“I must return”, he repeats. Not that he doesn’t like the atmosphere of Rome. But he misses that of Buenos Aires. His diocese. He calls it “*Esposa*”. Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, Archbishop of Buenos Aires, always makes lightning visits to Rome. But this time an attack of sciatica has forced him to prolong his stay in the Eternal City for some days of rest. And what is more, by an irony of circumstances, he had to miss the occasion for which he crossed the ocean, the meeting with the Pope and all the cardinals gathered in Consistory.

His company is never far away. He tells us how the Aparecida Conference went, where he chaired the editorial committee for the concluding document. He confides that his speech at the Consistory would have been on that. And this is what he had to say about it in that light, but acute and incisive, way of talking that throws one off track and takes one by surprise.

**Your Eminence, you would have spoken about Aparecida at the Consistory. What for you characterized the fifth General Conference of the Latin American bishops?**

JORGE MARIO BERGOGLIO: The Aparecida Conference was a moment of grace for the Latin American Church.

**Yet there was no lack of argument about the closing document...**

BERGOGLIO: The concluding document, that was an act of the Magisterium of the Latin American Church, underwent no manipulation. Neither from us nor from the Holy See. There were some small re-touchings of style, of form, and some things that were removed on the one hand were put back in on the other. The substance, therefore, remained identical, it was absolutely not changed. The reason for that is because the atmosphere leading up to the editing of the document was an atmosphere of genuine and brotherly collaboration, of mutual respect, that characterized the work, work that moved from below upwards, not vice versa. To understand the

atmosphere one has to look at what for me were the three key points, the three “pillars” of Aparecida. The first of which was precisely that: from below upwards. It’s perhaps the first time that one of our General Conferences didn’t start out from a pre-prepared basic text but from open dialogue, that had already begun earlier between the CELAM and the Episcopal Conferences, and that has since continued.

**But wasn’t the orientation of the Conference already set out by the opening speech by Benedict XVI?**

BERGOGLIO: The Pope gave general indications on the problems of Latin America, and then left it open: up to you, up to you! That was very grand on the Pope’s part. The Conference began with statements from the twenty-three presidents of the various Episcopal Conferences and from that discussion opened on the topics in the different groups. The editing phases of the document were also open to the contributions of all. At the moment of gathering the “modes”, for the second and third editing, 2,240 arrived! Our stance was that of receiving everything that came from below, from the People of God, and to make not so much a synthesis, as a harmony.

**An arduous task...**

BERGOGLIO: “Harmony”, I said, that’s the right word. In the Church harmony is the work of the Holy Spirit. One of the early Fathers of the Church wrote that the Holy Spirit “ipse harmonia est”, He Himself is harmony. He alone is author at the same time of plurality and of unity. Only the Spirit can stir diversity, plurality, multiplicity and at the same time make unity. Because when it’s us who decide to create diversity we create schisms and when it’s us who decide to create unity we create uniformity, leveling. At Aparecida we collaborated in this work of the Holy Spirit. And the document, if one reads it well, one sees that it has circular, harmonic thinking. The harmony is perceived not as passive, but creative, that urges creativity because it is of the Spirit.

**And what is the second key point?**

BERGOGLIO: It’s the first time that a Conference of Latin American bishops has gathered in a Marian shrine. And the place in itself already speaks all the meaning. Every morning we recited lauds, we celebrated mass together with the pilgrims, the believers. On Saturday or Sunday there were

two thousand, five thousand. Celebrating the Eucharist together with the people is different from celebrating it amongst us bishops separately. That gave us a live sense of belonging to our people, of the Church that goes forward as People of God, of us bishops as its servants. The work of the Conference then went on in a hall below the sanctuary. And from there one continued to hear the prayers, the hymns of the faithful... In the final document there is a point that concerns popular piety. They are very fine pages. And I believe, indeed I am sure, that they were inspired precisely by that. After those contained in the *Evangelii nuntiandi*, they are the finest pages written on popular piety in a document of the Church. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that the Aparecida document is the *Evangelii nuntiandi* of Latin America, it is like the *Evangelii nuntiandi*.

**The *Evangelii nuntiandi* is an apostolic exhortation about the missionary spirit.**

BERGOGLIO: Exactly. There's a close similarity also in that. And here I come to the third point. The Aparecida document isn't sufficient to itself, it doesn't close, it is not the last step, because the final opening is to the mission. The announcing and the testimony of the disciples. To remain faithful we need to go outside. Remaining faithful one goes out. That is what Aparecida says at bottom. That it is the heart of the mission.

**Can you explain the image further?**

BERGOGLIO: Staying, remaining faithful implies an outgoing. Precisely if one remains in the Lord one goes out of oneself. Paradoxically precisely because one remains, precisely if one is faithful one changes. One does not remain faithful, like the traditionalists or the fundamentalists, to the letter. Fidelity is always a change, a blossoming, a growth. The Lord brings about a change in those who are faithful to Him. That is Catholic doctrine. Saint Vincent of Lerins makes the comparison between the biologic development of the person, between the person who grows, and the Tradition which, in handing on the *depositum fidei* from one age to another, grows and consolidates with the passage of time: "Ut annis scilicet consolidetur, dilatetur tempore, sublimetur aetate".

**Is this what you would have said at the Consistory?**

BERGOGLIO: Yes. I would have spoken about these three key points.

### **Nothing else?**

BERGOGLIO: Nothing else... No, perhaps I would have mentioned two things of which there is need in this moment, there is more need: mercy, mercy and apostolic courage.

### **What do they mean to you?**

BERGOGLIO: To me apostolic courage is disseminating. Disseminating the Word. Giving it to that man and to that woman for whom it was bestowed. Giving them the beauty of the Gospel, the amazement of the encounter with Jesus... and leaving it to the Holy Spirit to do the rest. It is the Lord, says the Gospel, who makes the seed spring and bear fruit.

### **In short, it is the Holy Spirit who performs the mission.**

BERGOGLIO: The early theologians said: the soul is a kind of sailing boat, the Holy Spirit is the wind that blows in the sail, to send it on its way, the impulses and the force of the wind are the gifts of the Spirit. Without His drive, without His grace, we don't go ahead. The Holy Spirit lets us enter the mystery of God and saves us from the danger of a gnostic Church and from the danger of a self-referential Church, leading us to the mission.

### **That means also overthrowing all your functionalist solutions, your consolidated plans and pastoral systems ...**

BERGOGLIO: I didn't say that pastoral systems are useless. On the contrary. In itself everything that leads by the paths of God is good. I have told my priests: "Do everything you should, you know your duties as ministers, take your responsibilities and then leave the door open". Our sociologists of religion tell us that the influence of a parish has a radius of six hundred meters. In Buenos Aires there are about two thousand meters between one parish and the next. So I then told the priests: "If you can, rent a garage and, if you find some willing layman, let him go there! Let him be with those people a bit, do a little catechesis and even give communion if they ask him". A parish priest said to me: "But Father, if we do this the people then won't come to church". "But why?" I asked him: "Do they come to mass now?" "No", he answered. And so! Coming out of oneself is also coming out from the fenced garden of one's own convictions, considered

irremovable, if they risk becoming an obstacle, if they close the horizon that is also of God.

**This is valid also for lay people...**

BERGOGLIO: Their clericalization is a problem. The priests clericalize the laity and the laity beg us to be clericalized... It really is sinful abetment. And to think that baptism alone could suffice. I'm thinking of those Christian communities in Japan that remained without priests for more than two hundred years. When the missionaries returned they found them all baptized, all validly married for the Church and all their dead had had a Catholic funeral. The faith had remained intact through the gifts of grace that had gladdened the life of a laity who had received only baptism and had also lived their apostolic mission in virtue of baptism alone. One must not be afraid of depending only on His tenderness... Do you know the biblical episode of the prophet Jonah?

**I don't remember it. Tell us.**

BERGOGLIO: Jonah had everything clear. He had clear ideas about God, very clear ideas about good and evil. On what God does and on what He wants, on who was faithful to the Covenant and who instead was outside the Covenant. He had the recipe for being a good prophet. God broke into his life like a torrent. He sent him to Nineveh. Nineveh was the symbol of all the separated, the lost, of all the peripheries of humanity. Of all those who are outside, forlorn. Jonah saw that the task set on him was only to tell all those people that the arms of God were still open, that the patience of God was there and waiting, to heal them with His forgiveness and nourish them with His tenderness. Only for that had God sent him. He sent him to Nineveh, but he instead ran off in the opposite direction, toward Tarsis.

**Running away from a difficult mission...**

BERGOGLIO: No. What he was fleeing was not so much Nineveh as the boundless love of God for those people. It was that that didn't come into his plans. God had come once... "and I'll see to the rest": that's what Jonah told himself. He wanted to do things his way, he wanted to steer it all. His stubbornness shut him in his own structures of evaluation, in his pre-ordained methods, in his righteous opinions. He had fenced his soul off with the barbed wire of those certainties that instead of giving freedom with God

and opening horizons of greater service to others had finished by deafening his heart. How the isolated conscience hardens the heart! Jonah no longer knew that God leads His people with the heart of a Father.

**A great many of us can identify with Jonah.**

BERGOGLIO: Our certainties can become a wall, a jail that imprisons the Holy Spirit. Those who isolate their conscience from the path of the people of God don't know the joy of the Holy Spirit that sustains hope. That is the risk run by the isolated conscience. Of those who from the closed world of their Tarsis complain about everything or, feeling their identity threatened, launch themselves into battles only in the end to be still more self-concerned and self-referential.

**What should one do?**

BERGOGLIO: Look at our people not for what it should be but for what it is and see what is necessary. Without preconceptions and recipes but with generous openness. For the wounds and the frailty God spoke. Allowing the Lord to speak... In a world that we can't manage to interest with the words we say, only His presence that loves us, saves us, can be of interest. The apostolic fervor renews itself in order to testify to Him who has loved us from the beginning.

**For you, then, what is the worst thing that can happen in the Church?**

BERGOGLIO: It is what De Lubac calls "spiritual worldliness". It is the greatest danger for the Church, for us, who are in the Church. "It is worse", says De Lubac, "more disastrous than the infamous leprosy that disfigured the dearly beloved Bride at the time of the libertine popes". Spiritual worldliness is putting oneself at the center. It is what Jesus saw going on among the Pharisees: "... You who glorify yourselves. Who give glory to yourselves, the ones to the others".

## **The Holy Spirit defender and consoler**

*Translation of the homily of Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio in the Basilica of Saint Laurence Outside the Walls during the mass with the conferring of the Sacrament of Confirmation during the solemnity of Pentecost Rome 4 June 2006*

Now you will have the Holy Spirit. Jesus teaches us that the Holy Spirit is a gift that He sends us from Heaven. It is indeed important to have the Holy Spirit over us. What will the Holy Spirit do? We have heard: “The Holy Spirit, whom Jesus will give you, will lead you to complete truth”. What does this mean? That the Holy Spirit combats evils.

The Holy Spirit comes over us and in us. He guides us. He reminds us of everything that Jesus has taught us. He guides us straight along the path, in situations that perhaps now we can't imagine. He guides us. The Holy Spirit guides us and insures that we have two very important attitudes. If we all have these two important attitudes in life, that are two virtues, we will have the full happiness of the Holy Spirit, the consolation of the Holy Spirit. The first is the meekness that says: “Don't quarrel, brothers, you are my sons, good, beloved”. The Lord has told us the Spirit teaches us to be as brothers among ourselves, therefore to love each other, to be united. The second virtue seems contrary but is not contrary: it is strength. Strength is the witness of Jesus Christ. Strength gives witness to Jesus: of not being afraid to be Christian. This the Holy Spirit will give us.

The Gospel calls Him the interior consoler, because he gives us consolation. He gives you peace. The Gospel also calls him the defender, the advocate. It is understood that the accuser is the devil. The devil accuses us. He accuses us because he wants us to be sad, he wants us with a bitter heart, sad. The Holy Spirit gives a heart sweet with meekness and a heart strong with strength, according to the teachings of Jesus full of joy.

You candidates for confirmation, who will now receive the Holy Spirit, pray for this small community of yourselves, who today, as the first apostles, is formed in this church. Remember that the consolation of the Holy Spirit makes us as children. We must remain as children, because the Lord wants us to be children and our mother is the Madonna, and now I invite you, candidates for Confirmation, to pray to the Madonna. Stand up, Confirmation candidates, along with me, and with me, you are ready for the Holy Spirit and pray with me.

Let us say:

Come, Holy Spirit, through Mary.

Come, Holy Spirit, through Mary.

Come, Holy Spirit, through Mary.

Remember to hold the hand of the Madonna because if you have the Holy Spirit and hold your hand in the Madonna's hand you will be happy.

All the articles above were extracted from 30 Days magazine: [http://www.30giorni.it/index\\_l3.htm](http://www.30giorni.it/index_l3.htm)