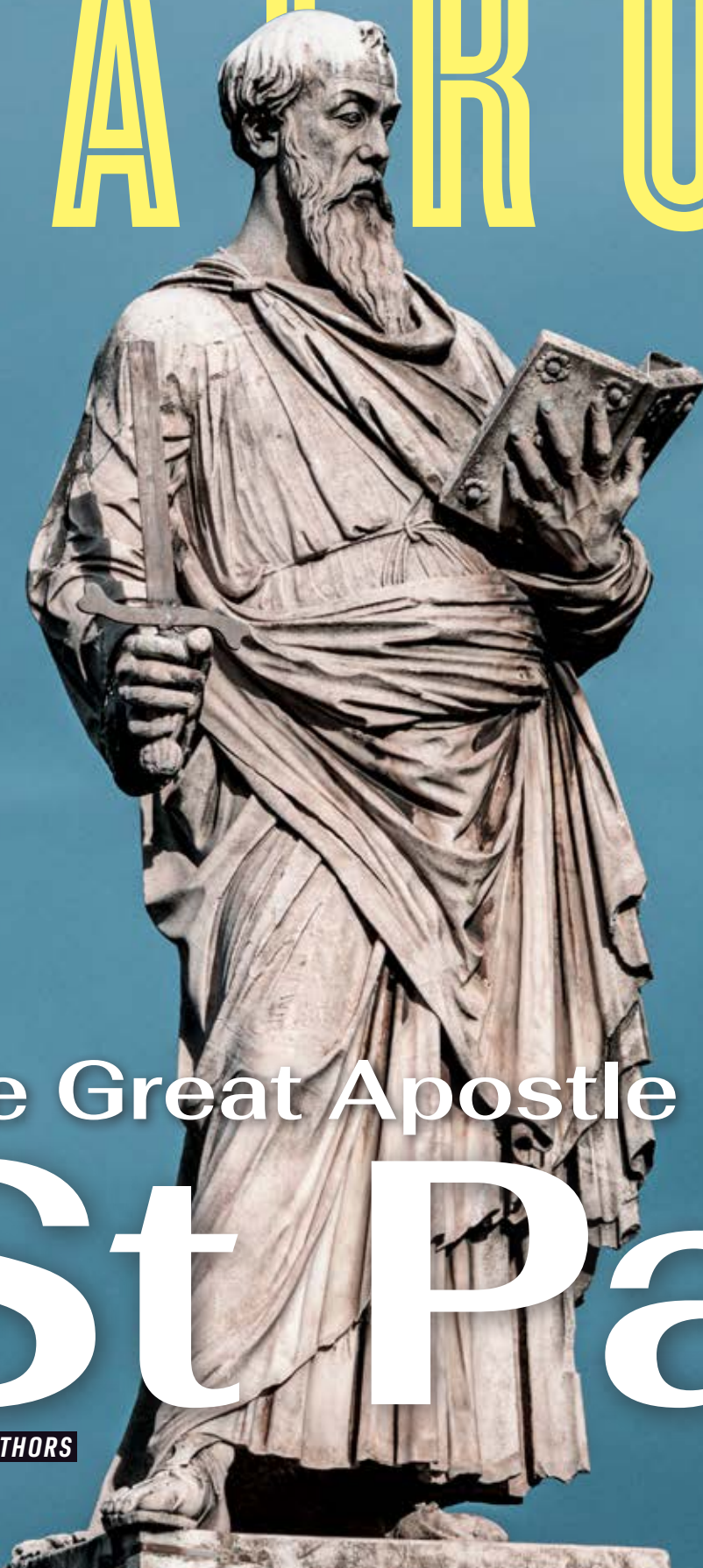


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Speranza

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The Great Apostle St Paul

VARIOUS AUTHORS



Jesus Youth

A Missionary Movement At The Service Of The Church



PRAY FOR US



Glorious Saint Paul, most zealous apostle, martyr for the love of Christ, give us a deep faith, a steadfast hope, a burning love for our Lord. Help us to become apostles, serving the Church with a pure heart, witnesses to her truth and beauty amidst the darkness of our days. With you we praise God our Father: 'To him be the glory, in the Church and in Christ, now and forever.' Amen.

EDITOR'S ROOM

DR CHACKOCHAN J NJAVALLIL

X @readkairos



PAUL WAS KEENLY AWARE OF THE CULTURAL AND SOCIAL REALITIES OF THE PLACES HE VISITED. HE USED THIS AWARENESS TO SHAPE HIS MESSAGE IN WAYS THAT RESONATED WITH DIFFERENT AUDIENCES, WHETHER JEWS OR GENTILES.

St Paul – Unparalleled Missionary

St Paul stands as a deeply fascinating and inspiring figure in the Bible, especially for those aspiring a missionary life. We first encounter him as Saul, overseeing the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. This event marks the beginning of his determined campaign to eradicate the followers of Christ. Armed with letters of authority, Saul travelled to far-flung places, bent on persecuting Christians.

Then came the dramatic turning point – his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus. Blinded by the encounter, he became physically and spiritually transformed. Saul the persecutor became Paul the Apostle, a tireless missionary who would spend the rest of his life spreading the message of Christ to the world. Indeed, much of the New Testament, aside from the Gospels, is attributed to his writings and letters, reflecting the profound impact he had on early Christianity.

St Paul serves as a powerful model. His journey offers many important lessons for us today:

Commitment to the cause until the end

Despite facing intense opposition, including beatings, imprisonment, and even the threat of death, he remained steadfast in his purpose. Paul's life teaches us the importance of staying committed to our cause, even when the road becomes difficult.

Awareness of surroundings and realities

Paul was keenly aware of the cultural and social realities of the places he visited. He used this awareness to shape his message in ways that resonated with different audiences, whether Jews or Gentiles. Missionaries today can learn by being sensitive to the environment around them and adapting their approach to make the message of Christ relevant to people's lives.

Endurance through internal and external struggles

Paul's life was marked by both internal and external struggles. From personal doubts to physical persecution, he faced countless challenges. Yet, he persisted. This teaches us that the missionary journey will not be free of struggles, but perseverance in the face of adversity is essential.

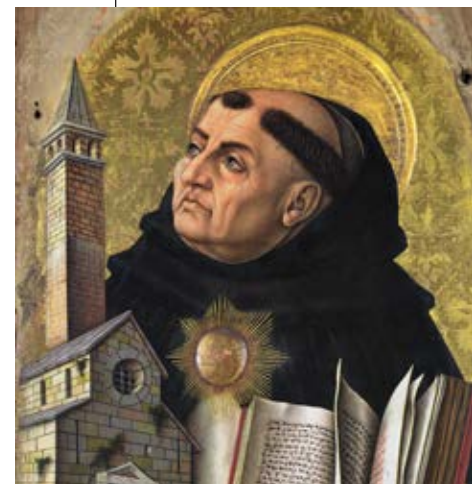
Living and dying for Christ

Paul's ultimate readiness to live and die for Christ is one of the most profound lessons we can draw from his life.

Witnessing through all means

Finally, Paul made use of every opportunity to spread the gospel. Whether through speeches, letters, or personal conversations, he maximised every possibility to bear witness to Christ's love. For modern missionaries, this is a call to be creative and bold in finding ways to share the message of Christ.

Paul's life is a blueprint for missionary work: a blend of perseverance, adaptability, and deep faith.



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For just as the body is one and has many members... so it is with Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:12

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ASK



FR. BITAJU

Fr. Bitaju Mathew, O.S.S.T. belongs to the Order of the Most Holy Trinity and of the Captives (The Trinitarians). He serves as the Director of Formation for students of Philosophy and Theology of their order at Bangalore and is currently the Chaplain of the Jesus Youth International Formation Team.

What does the Church teach about the existence of Satan?

The Catholic Church teaches that Satan is a real being, not just a symbol or metaphor of evil. This teaching is rooted in Scripture and is reflected in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. According to the *Catechism*, Satan is a fallen angel who rebelled against God and now opposes God's plan and seeks to lead humanity away from God.

Existence of Satan: The Church affirms the existence of Satan as a personal being. According to the *Catechism*, 'The devil and the other demons were created good by God, but they became evil by their own doing' (CCC 391). This would mean that Satan was originally created as a good angel but chose to turn away from God.

Role of Satan: The Church teaches that Satan is the adversary of God and humanity. He seeks to lead people away from God and into sin. His role, in other words, is to tempt and deceive people, leading them into sin. The *Catechism* explains 'he is the one who "sows" the seeds of doubt and temptation in the hearts of human beings' (CCC 395). He is the liar and the father of lies (John 8:44; CCC 391). So, the primary role of Satan is to lead people away from the truth of God and the divine plan for the salvation of souls.

Spiritual Warfare: The Church

acknowledges that Christians are engaged in a spiritual warfare against evil forces, including Satan (Ephesians 6:10-17). St Peter admonished believers to be vigilant and to resist temptation, as he says, *Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour* (1 Peter 5:8; CCC 409).

Ministry of Jesus Christ: One of the primary ministries of Jesus Christ was setting people free from the bondage of Satan (Mark 1:21-28; Matthew 8:28-32; Luke 11:14-23). Moreover, Jesus gave his disciples authority to cast out demons (Luke 9:1-2; Mark 6:7-13; 16:17; Matthew 10:1). Importantly, Jesus Christ triumphed over Satan through His death and resurrection. The *Catechism* explains that Christ's victory provides hope and strength for believers to resist evil (CCC 395). This underscores the belief that while Satan exists and poses a threat, believers have the means to overcome his influence through their relationship with Christ.

In summary, the Catholic Church firmly teaches that Satan is a real and personal being who opposes God and seeks to lead humanity into sin. This belief is rooted in Scripture and emphasises the need for vigilance, prayer, and reliance on God's grace to resist evil.



YOUCAT 280

WHAT REASONS DO CHRISTIANS GIVE FOR HUMAN DIGNITY?

Every person, from the first moment of his life in the womb, has an inviolable dignity, because from all eternity God willed, loved, created, and redeemed that person and destined him for eternal happiness. [CCC 1699-1715]

If human dignity were based solely on the successes and accomplishments of individuals, then those who are weak, sick, or helpless would have no dignity. Christians believe that human dignity is, in the first place, the result of God's respect for us. He looks at every person and loves him as though he were the only creature in the world. Because God has looked upon even the least significant child of Adam, that person possesses an infinite worth, which must not be destroyed by men.



DR. KOCHURANI JOSEPH

Prayer Intentions April

For the use of new technologies

Let us pray that the use of new technologies will not replace human relationships, will respect the dignity of the person, and will help us face the crises of our times.



Pope talk



As pilgrims of hope in this year of jubilee, a pilgrim's journey does not end in Rome but is part of a lifelong commitment to discipleship and evangelisation. A pilgrimage does not end but shifts its focus to the daily 'pilgrimage of discipleship' and the call to persevere in the task of the mission. I would encourage your vibrant Catholic communities to cooperate with your fellow Christians, for in these challenging times, our human family needs a unified witness to the reconciliation, healing, and peace that can come only from God.

The gift of indissolubility of marriage is not a limitation on freedom but something married couples live with God's grace. A declaration of nullity, often referred to as an annulment is a ruling by a tribunal that a marriage did not meet the conditions required to make it valid according to Church law. Spouses united in marriage have received the gift of indissolubility, which is not a goal to be achieved by their own effort, but a promise from God, whose fidelity makes that of human beings possible.

Ask the Lord for the grace to listen more than we speak and to dream God's dreams just like St Joseph. When faced with difficult decisions, the great faith of Jesus' foster father enabled him to turn his prayer into action after listening to the word of God. Faced with this revelation, Joseph does not ask for further proof; he trusts in God, he accepts God's dream for his life and that of his betrothed. He thus enters into the grace of one who knows how to live the divine promise with faith, hope, and love.

JESUS YOUTH



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

Bringing the Young to Jesus or Jesus Youth?

→ It was a local gathering of JY leaders. During the discussion, Maria raised a question: 'I am active in my parish. When I work with youth, I feel that bringing them to Jesus is essential. Should I also bring them to Jesus Youth?'

People remained quiet for a while, and another young person spoke up, 'That is true. In our work with the youngsters, should our goal be to bring them to the movement?'

I wondered where the question came from. Had she encountered overzealous Jesus Youth who compelled people to join the movement, or was it from some shame about being a Jesus Youth, belonging to this community, and her wanting to hide this as her identity?

Regardless, discussing her question is essential. First, is there a conflict between bringing people to Jesus and bringing them to Jesus Youth? Second, what is the importance of welcoming others to the Jesus Youth movement?

IS THERE A CONFLICT?

After a period of silence, George replied, 'Why do you think there is

a conflict between bringing people to Jesus and introducing them to Jesus Youth? I believe we bring young people into the movement so they can gradually grow in their relationship with Jesus. In other words, we introduce them to the community to help them effectively develop their connection with Jesus.'

But Maria became a bit argumentative. 'But is Jesus Youth the only way to deepen one's faith? There are so many paths to holiness in the Catholic Church.'

I then felt compelled to intervene. 'On one hand, we need to appreciate the beauty of various movements and approaches within the Church and be ready to appreciate and connect with them. However, if we are not convinced that the Jesus Youth movement has something special and unique about its approach to bringing people to the Lord, we wouldn't be active Jesus Youth. In other words, each of us invests so much time and effort into Jesus Youth because we believe the Holy Spirit is doing something extraordinary through this movement and wants us to be an active part of it.' Should we look down upon others? No. But we should be confident in who we are,

discover the beauty of our family, and be ready to share with others the beauty and uniqueness of what the Lord is building through this community.

WELCOMING SOMEONE TO A JOYFUL FAMILY

My thoughts turned to the story of John, a young person deeply involved in Jesus Youth, who later moved to a new country where the movement was already well established. Although he began his journey in the new country with Jesus Youth, John eventually wanted to explore other movements. That was fine. However, he gradually disconnected from his parent community and became very active in another movement at the parish. Years passed. When I eventually met him, the Jesus Youth movement had spread and flourished there, achieving many wonderful things in that country, but John was not involved in it. He felt pretty bad about this. It was akin to a family member distancing himself from connections for a long time, only to return and realise he had forgotten to build relationships, feeling a bit out of place.



'... Each of us invests so much time and effort into Jesus Youth because we believe the Holy Spirit is doing something extraordinary through this movement and wants us to be an active part of it.'

Lesson #1. The journey of meeting the Lord and growing in relationship is not just a spiritual matter. As Saint Paul repeatedly emphasises, it involves actively belonging to a community of believers. While you may introduce Jesus to someone and address their questions and doubts, true faith journey is about participating in and actively engaging with a community of the faithful. This applies to all faith journeys, especially within Jesus Youth.

Lesson #2. Every family has many gifts and strengths, as well as typical weaknesses. Not everyone needs to come together in one group, but those who choose to journey in a community must recognise the beauty and strengths while humbly accepting the weaknesses and failures. Suppose you choose to be part of a group, your responsibility is to love the group and its members, even if you may argue and express differing opinions to build rather than destroy. It is essential that you

decide to belong and contribute positively.

Lesson #3. You should be eager to help young people belong to a family you know and love. This is true evangelisation. It involves not merely introducing Jesus theoretically but helping others see and love the Body of Christ that you understand. Of course, this should begin by sharing your personal experience with Christ.

THE CRISIS OF NON-BELONGING

Maria's question and the ensuing discussion prompted me to reflect on the dangers of living a theoretical Christian life, devoid of affiliations or attachments. 'I follow Jesus, pray, and lead a good life. What more is needed?' But is that the life the Lord is inviting you to? Without doubt, today's study-focused and intellectual spiritual journey, along with the rise of do-it-yourself YouTube learning culture and increasing urban living, make it easier to disconnect from a genuine Christian community and

follow a solitary yet convenient and comfortable life path.

A call to commitment means accepting Jesus as the Lord and Master of my life. However, it implies more. It is a call to love and live in community, which is incarnational – the word becoming flesh. My commitment to Jesus will be tested by how I live within the family of believers that I find here and now. Therefore, I wanted to tell Maria and her friend, 'You needn't bring everyone to Jesus Youth, but you should actively belong there and be ready to share the beauty of the Christian life you experience in your circle of friends. If that beauty and love attracts someone, don't stop them. Let them also experience the great joy that you have come to discover.'

.....


One of the pioneers of the Jesus Youth movement, an international preacher and author, **Dr Edward Edezhath** is a retired professor from St Albert's College, Ernakulam. He is presently a researcher at Amoris Christi in Florida, USA.

ENGAGE

A large, circular, stone-lined cistern in a desert landscape. The cistern is built with rough-hewn stones and is empty. A metal bucket is placed on the rim of the cistern. The background shows rolling sand dunes and sparse desert vegetation under a cloudy sky.

Time to Fix our Broken Cisterns

We are in the perfect time to cast away our selfish mentalities and drink the living waters that quench our thirst, writes **Basil DCunha**, in this Lenten reflection.



Jeremiah 2:13 says, *For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water.*

What better time to return to the living waters than during this holy period of Lent. Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that if she drinks of the water He gives her, she will never be thirsty again (John 4:14).

We thirst again and again because we drink of the waters of immorality. That thirst keeps recurring because we never tire of wanting more – be it ill-gotten wealth, dishonesty, infidelity, etc.

St Augustine puts it very succinctly, ‘The Lord therefore cries aloud to us to come and drink, if you are thirsty within; and he says that when we have drunk, rivers of living water will flow from our heart...What is the river that flows from the heart of the inner man? The love of his neighbour. For if he thinks that what he drinks ought to only satisfy himself, there is no living water flowing from his heart. But if he does good to his neighbour, the stream is not dried up but flows.’

God in His wisdom tells us that there are only two commandments: 1. Love God and 2. Love your neighbour as yourself.

Every day we hear of scams, thefts, rapes, drugs, cheating, revenge murders, corruption in high places, etc. Simultaneously we hear of the effects of these crimes on our neighbours and friends. Some have lost their husbands or parents or children, others have lost their homes or jobs, still others have their hard-earned pensions stolen, some though innocent, are in prison without a trial and the list goes on. Why? It is only because the perpetrators have only one aim – I, ME and MYSELF. Result – the thirst recurs.

David shows us how to forgive. We all know how Saul was furious, when David was endorsed heavily by the people. He decides to eliminate David. He takes 3000 soldiers to find and kill him. The story then unfolds when King Saul decides to rest at a cave at night. As it happens,

David was hiding in the very same cave, but deep inside, unknown to Saul. David has a huge opportunity to kill his adversary. His men also push David to take the opportunity to kill Saul but he decides against it, for Saul is an anointed king. (1 Samuel 24:1-7). Clearly David had his heart full of living waters.

We know similarly how St Faustina was taunted by her fellow sisters due to her poor health, falsely accusing her of faking ill-health to avoid work in the kitchen. She bore both the pains silently – as Jesus was giving her grace-filled water, to withstand her physical pain as also false accusations.

So, during this Lenten season, let us take the example of Jesus Himself – He was falsely accused, betrayed by His own apostle. Peter denied knowing Him, though he was chosen by Jesus to be the first pope. Jesus was scourged, crowned with thorns and mocked. He was sentenced to death though totally innocent. He was forced to carry His own cross and then nailed to it. But He said before breathing His last, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’

Let it not be too late to turn away from perdition. The Jubilee Year is a year of hope. Let’s take the opportunity to show our gratitude to God and express our deep sorrow for choosing the wrong road. Let’s use the indulgence made available to us, to clean our slates and start afresh, so His fresh waters flow in our hearts. Time to reach out and dump the ‘I, Me and Myself’ approach, but choose **we** and **us**. Together we can love and assist each other and imitate His love and mercy. Time to repair our broken cisterns, Jesus will gladly assist us, if we humble ourselves and seek forgiveness. We will then never thirst. ■■

EXPERIENCE

THE EUCHARIST-CENTRED LIFE OF JOICY JAISON

Silvy Santhosh shares about how her friend, Joicy Jaison, who recently entered her eternal reward, had been ardently devoted to the Holy Eucharist.



A Eucharist-centred life is often spoken of as an ideal, it is rarely easy to live – especially when one faces extreme trials. As Scripture reminds us: *In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ* (1 Peter 1:6-7).

Many Catholics presume that such a life is reserved only for priests, religious, or the elderly. However, the Catholic Church points us to the lives of saints who have exemplified extraordinary Eucharistic devotion amidst modern challenges.

In a world filled with work obligations, family responsibilities, and the distractions of modern technology, many struggle to keep the Eucharist at the centre of their lives. This is why we need saints and role models from our own time.

Blessed Carlo Acutis, a young boy, who skilfully surfed the waves of the digital era, lived a life of profound love for the Eucharist. His path toward canonisation (anticipated April 2025) is a beacon for young Catholics today.

A few years ago, our dear sister from Jesus Youth, Kerala, Ajna George, showed that a Eucharistic-centred life is possible even for a young woman enduring extreme physical suffering.

Now, Joicy Jaison's life shows us that it is possible to give the highest priority to Jesus in the Eucharist, even for a Catholic wife and mother of five, amidst unimaginable pain.

Embracing Suffering with Faith

I came to know Joicy very late during her earthly life, yet in that short time, I experienced so much love from her. What amazed me most was Joicy's love for:

- Jesus in the Eucharist
- Jesus in the Word of God
- Jesus in others around her

Joicy was a devoted wife, mother, a dedicated nurse, and a cancer fighter. Her life was marked by a deep, unwavering trust in God, even as she faced severe trials. During the Covid-19 pandemic, living in Kerala with her children while her husband worked in Abu Dhabi, Joicy

detected a small lump in her breast. Her fifth child was just three-years-old at the time.

Although initially diagnosed as a benign fibroadenoma, prayer and discernment led Joicy and her husband Jaison Poulouse to seek further medical evaluation. A biopsy soon revealed rapidly growing malignant cancer. She once shared with me that Mark 13 gave them a crystal clear prophecy about the sufferings that were to come their way; it is in this chapter that Jesus prepares the disciples for upcoming persecution.

Over the course of her cancer battle, Joicy underwent 17 surgeries – including a mastectomy, thyroidectomy, lobectomy, and leg surgery – and endured more than 40 rounds of chemotherapy and radiation.

Even at the height of her suffering, Joicy remained steadfast in her Eucharistic devotion. When her health prevented her from attending Holy Mass, she would request for a priest to come and give her the Holy Eucharist. Her humble declaration, 'This is all I have come to,' echoed the faith of Job in the Bible and left a lasting impact on all who witnessed her journey.

One of her social media posts that captured her spirit stated: *Cancer is called The Big C. But there is a Bigger C. His name is Christ.* This simple yet profound statement influenced and consoled many who were suffering.

A Home Inspired by the Holy Family

From all the testimonies shared at her funeral, which I attended online, and those I heard about Joicy's family from her dear friends, it is clear that her home was a living testament to the sanctity of the domestic Church.

Together with her husband, she nurtured a family where the Eucharist was the centre of daily life. Even in moments of weakness, her desire to attend Holy Mass remained undiminished. She often asked, 'Silvy, I am going to Holy Mass today, but I don't have the strength to stand. Please pray that I can stand and kneel reverently before Jesus.'

Her commitment to her children's holiness was profound. For instance, she once shared that while searching for a hostel for her son Joshua, her top priority was to find one near a Catholic

church so that daily Mass would always be accessible.

She always said that her husband Jaison was the backbone of her spiritual life and that he attends Holy Mass every day. Both Joicy and Jaison have modelled their family life after the Holy Family of Nazareth. The fruits of their precious family, their five children, are the testimony to their holiness! It was amazing to watch them pray the Rosary on the day of Joicy's funeral, giving the whole world an important message: Stay with Jesus and His mother even on your most difficult day!

Joicy's Children speak about her Eucharistic-Centred Life

Jaison and Joicy have five amazing children, who follow their parents' example in keeping Christ the centre of their life: Julia Rose, Jovan Maria, Joshua Jaison, Jianna Therese and Jessica Elizabeth.

I asked them, 'How did your Mom influence you with regards to the importance of Holy Mass in your life?' The answer they gave me is a testimony to Jaison and Joicy's holy family life:

Mom always made sure we valued and understood the joy of the Eucharistic Celebration. She was always enthusiastic about bringing us closer to Christ and the Church through active participation in church services and by attending Holy Mass every day. She would tell us to prepare ourselves the day before Holy Mass, encouraging us to submit all our worries and prayers to the Lord. She especially wanted us to pray for all the souls in purgatory. As we grew, one of the things we loved most about Mom's way of parenting was that she never forced anything upon us. Instead, she showed us the beauty and grace that flow from the Eucharistic Celebration, leaving it to us to see and appreciate it for ourselves. This allowed us to develop our own understanding of what makes the Eucharistic Celebration truly special. Over time, we could feel and experience the power of the Holy Mass in our daily lives. Even after Mom was diagnosed with cancer, her faith never wavered. She would undergo surgery in the morning and still take us all to attend Holy Mass by evening. For our family, attending Mass became a source of strength, bringing us closer to



One of her social media posts that captured her spirit stated: Cancer is called The Big C. But there is a Bigger C. His name is Christ. This simple yet profound statement influenced and consoled many who were suffering.

each other and to the Lord. Her unwavering commitment to prioritising Holy Mass above all else was deeply inspiring. Through this, we came to understand that nothing in life comes before Christ.

Let this answer be a source of inspiration for all of us to keep our lives centred upon the Eucharist.

Jesus Youth Nurses' Ministry

Joicy's spiritual formation was significantly enriched through her involvement with the Jesus Youth Nurses' Ministry. Here, she had a very deep personal encounter with Jesus, which led her to grow in faith and surrender all to Christ.

Not only did she receive abundant graces, she also gave back generously by mentoring, encouraging, and guiding others – always pointing them toward the Eucharist. Her tireless service made her a pillar of the Jesus Youth community.

Today, Joicy stands as our intercessor in heaven – a beloved sister who prays for the Jesus Youth family and for all who seek a Eucharistic life. Many Jesus Youth

friends have shared how Joicy inspired them to lead a Eucharistic-centred life.

Seena Oliapurath (Jesus Youth, Dallas) writes about Joicy:

When I was first introduced to Jesus Youth, I wondered: how can they love this much? Is this genuine love? My senior brought me into the JY movement and introduced me to her friend Joicy. I was from Jubilee Mission Hospital, and Joicy was from Amala Hospital – two hospitals in the city of Thrissur, Kerala. We usually competed against each other in zonal-level competitions. Regardless, she hugged me, and a new sisterhood began from there. She was very open and shared things that helped me grow spiritually. Her Eucharistic devotion and fire for the Word of God inspired me a lot, especially in areas where I was struggling. Coming together on weekends and working with the Thrissur Nurses Ministry shaped me deeply. Her immense joy and selfless love were contagious. I am very grateful for the time we had together. If you see any good fruit in me, it is because I had, and still have, great

elders and beautiful friends in JY. All glory to God alone.

Joicy's JY friend, Leo Tom (Member of JY Formation Team) writes about Joicy:

Joicy's deep love for the Eucharistic Lord was evident from the early days of her involvement with Jesus Youth, beginning around 1998. She was an active member of the JY Thrissur Nurses Team and later served in the then JY Zonal Service Team. Despite the demanding nature of her profession as a nurse, with frequent nights and rotating shifts, she remained steadfast in her commitment to the ministry. Beyond attending team meetings, she took the initiative to visit hospitals to establish nurses' prayer gatherings, fostering a spirit of faith among her colleagues. Even late at night, she would spend time in Eucharistic Adoration, seeking the Lord's guidance in prayer. For Joicy, every significant life decision was discerned before the Eucharistic Lord, through deep meditation on the Word of God. Her life was a testament to the power of unwavering faith and devotion to Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.

A Legacy Poured Out for Christ

Joicy's life is a radiant testimony that the Eucharist is not merely part of our day – it is the source of our very life. Her unwavering commitment to Christ, even amidst profound suffering, continues to inspire us all. As Psalm 116:15 reminds us, *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones.*

Joicy left for her heavenly abode on 3 February 2025, to be with her biggest C: Christ.

Her life reminds us that our true home is in heaven, and our mission on earth is to love, serve, and lead others to Jesus. May her witness inspire us to live Eucharistic-centred lives, embracing our crosses with joy, and keeping our eyes fixed on Christ. ■

Silvy Santhosh is a parish member of St. Alphonsa Syro-Malabar church in Coppell, Texas, where she prepares children and adults for their First Holy Communion and Confirmation. She works as a Paediatric Nurse Practitioner, sharing the love of Christ with children and their families through her healing ministry. She lives in Dallas with her husband Santhosh Kurian and her children Sophia, Sonia and Solomon.

A CATHOLIC MAGAZINE FOR CHILDREN

VOLUME 5 ISSUE 52

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Faith, Struggle, and God's Perfect Plan

When the path towards her PhD journey in Singapore was filled with obstacles at every turn, **Maria Ruban** chose to rely on the promises of God instead.

I came to Singapore in the year of 2019 and embarked on my PhD journey (part-time) with great dreams of building a career as a professor. However, little did I know that God had a far greater plan for my life – one that would test my faith, strengthen my trust in Him, and reveal His mighty hand in every challenge I faced.

After our marriage, we longed to start a family, but doctors told us that it would be impossible for me to conceive without surgery. Yet, through hours of prayer and surrendering the matter before the Blessed Sacrament, Jesus miraculously healed me. To the amazement of doctors, I conceived naturally, proving once again that with God, nothing is impossible, (Matthew 19:26).

The journey of my first pregnancy during Covid-19 was filled with uncertainty and solitude. I was alone in Singapore, during the lockdowns while expecting a child. But during those isolated moments, God sent His beautiful people into my life – unexpected encounters that turned into sources of strength and encouragement. Miraculously, Covid-19 restrictions eased and enabled me to travel back to India earlier than expected for my delivery, allowing me to be with my family during that crucial time. The extended seven-month stay due to flight restrictions felt like a divine gift, offering me the rest and care I needed.

When it was time to return, I faced an agonising decision – should I continue my PhD in Singapore or stay back with my baby in India? My heart longed to remain with my child, but financial obligations due to an MOE subsidy left me no choice but to return. It was one of the heaviest moments of my life, but once again, God intervened. Against all odds, my husband and baby were granted a special visa approval in a week, allowing us to reunite in Singapore even amidst the strict travel restrictions during Covid-19. This was nothing short of a miracle from heaven, made possible through the kindness of doctors, immigration officers, and divine intervention.

My PhD journey was far from easy. The first major milestone, the Qualifying Examination (QE), became an overwhelming challenge. Just before the exam, I received news that my baby's visa extension was denied, leaving me heartbroken and unable to concentrate. Every mock presentation leading up to the exam had been disastrous. But on the day of the actual exam, something miraculous happened – without any logical explanation, I was able to present confidently, filled with a peace that surpassed understanding. It was the Lord's hand upon me, guiding me through. *The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?* (Hebrews 13:6)

Amidst all these situations, God blessed us with our second child. Many around me questioned how I would manage PhD studies with two babies. In the professional environment of Singapore, this was seen as nearly

I now see how God fought every battle for me – not just the external struggles but also the deep spiritual warfare within my heart. The moments of separation, the pain of uncertainty, the weight of expectation – each was a test of faith. But through it all, He was preparing something greater.

impossible. Yet, God strengthened me through my mentors who encouraged me, and through my mother, who made a great sacrifice – taking early retirement to care for my children. Praise God! Despite the criticism from some of my colleagues, I pressed on, knowing that God's plan never fails.

The struggles of frequent travels, visa uncertainties, and the emotional turmoil of separation from my children often pushed me to the brink of quitting. But each time I reached my breaking point, God sent help in unexpected ways. He provided for every need, renewed visas at just the right moment, and surrounded me with people who carried me through. There were countless moments of exhaustion, depression, and helplessness, but in every season, God remained faithful.

Finally, after submitting and defending my thesis victoriously within three years and eight months (excluding a one-year break), I stood in awe of what God had done. He also blessed my research abundantly, allowing me to file two patents, publish eleven research papers in top-tier journals and conferences, and receive two awards. My colleagues often asked how I managed it all, and I could confidently answer: All glory to God! For when I look back, it had been a series of miracles, amidst the depression and hopelessness.

I now see how God fought every battle for me – not just the external struggles but also the deep spiritual warfare within my heart. The moments of separation, the pain of uncertainty, the weight of expectation – each was a test of faith.

But through it all, He was preparing something greater. Today, as our family moves towards the next chapter, with long-term visas for our kids, allowing us to stay together as a family, I stand firm in the promise given to us in Romans 10:11, *Anyone who believes in Him will never be put to shame.*

I praise and thank our Lord Jesus for His unfailing love, His perfect timing, and the incredible people He placed in my life – my wonderful family, my mentors, my friends from Jesus Youth, CRC & MCG, and all those who stood by me in prayer. There are too many stories to share, so many miracles to count. My professor who witnessed this journey of mine in Singapore, once joked that I should write a book about my life after finishing my PhD – perhaps one day, I will.

But for now, I hold on to these truths:

- My dreams are His dreams too.
- He makes everything beautiful in His time.
- He will fight every battle for us; all we need to do is to trust Him.

All glory to my Lord Jesus, now and forever! Amen



Dr Maria Merin Antony has been married to Ruban Whenish since 2019, and is mother to two wonderful kids, Luke and Amelia. She is currently an active member of JY Singapore, where she continues to nurture her faith and community.

FAITH & REASON



The Personalism of Aquinas

Existence, Relation, and the Fulfilment of Being

'Human beings are not mere accidents in an indifferent universe. Rather, they are purposeful participants in the divine reality, called to communion with God and one another,' writes **George Paul** as he explains Aquinas' philosophy on the fundamental nature of reality.

What is the Fundamental Reality?

Throughout history, philosophers have sought to answer one of the most profound questions: What is the fundamental nature of reality? Different philosophical traditions have provided varying responses. Materialists argue that physical matter constitutes the most fundamental reality, while idealists claim that ideas or consciousness precede material existence. Existentialists assert that human existence defines reality, whereas Platonists contend that eternal Forms represent the ultimate truth.

Amid these competing perspectives, Saint Thomas Aquinas offers a distinct philosophical answer that synthesises Aristotelian metaphysics with Christian theology. At the core of his philosophy is the primacy of existence (*esse*), which serves as the supreme actuality and perfection. Unlike essentialist views that define reality in terms of static properties, Aquinas asserts that existence itself is the act that makes all things real. This insight provides the foundation for

his personalism, which finds its fullest expression in the doctrine of the Trinity and human personhood.

The Primacy of Existence: The Foundation of Personalism

Aquinas's most distinctive teaching in metaphysics is the primacy of existence (*actus essendi*). Unlike mere essentialism, which would reduce being to a static set of properties, Aquinas asserts that existence itself is the supreme perfection. In this view, essence serves as a limitation on existence, much like the shape of a statue defines but does not exhaust the marble from which it is carved. Existence actualises essence, giving it reality. This distinction allows Aquinas to argue that God, as *ipsum esse subsistens* (subsistent being itself), is not a mere abstraction but the fullness of being itself.

Aquinas states: *Being is not an accident superadded to essence, but is rather its act. (De Ente et Essentia)*. This means that for a thing to exist, it must receive its act of existence from an external cause – except

in the case of God, whose essence is identical to His existence. To illustrate, consider a sculptor carving a statue. The shape of the sculpture (essence) is not enough to make it a reality; it must be chiselled into marble, actualising its form into existence.

God as Pure Existence: Transcendence and Immanence

Since God is pure existence, Aquinas argues that God is both totally transcendent and fully immanent. God transcends all beings because He is not limited by any essence; He is *ipsum esse* – pure being without restriction. At the same time, because existence is the innermost principle of all beings, God is present at the heart of everything that exists. This paradox – that God is at once beyond all things and more intimate to them than they are to themselves – forms the basis of Aquinas's understanding of divine personalism.

Aquinas references Exodus 3:14, where God reveals His name as *I AM WHO AM* to

Moses, affirming that God's very nature is existence itself. In *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 4, a. 1, Aquinas states: *Whatever belongs to perfection absolutely speaking, is found in God... and since existence itself is the actuality of all things, it follows that God possesses existence in its most perfect way.* This profound insight establishes that God is not one being among many but the very act of being itself.

Person as the Highest Mode of Being

Aquinas states that 'person' is that which is 'highest in being' (*persona est quod est perfectissimum in tota natura*). This follows from his assertion that a person is a rational subsistent, which means that personal existence is not merely a subset of being but its most complete actualisation. Personal existence entails intellect and will – the capacities for knowing and loving – which are not extrinsic additions to being but its highest expressions.


This insight aligns Aquinas with modern personalist thought, which emphasises the irreducibility of the person. Unlike impersonalist metaphysical systems, which subordinate the individual to abstract categories, Aquinas's view ensures that personhood is central to the structure of reality. This understanding is deeply intertwined with the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

Trinitarian Personalism: Relation as Constitutive of Personhood

Aquinas's personalism reaches its fullest expression in his Trinitarian theology. While human persons exist in a way that is complete in themselves, divine persons exist as relations. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not three separate substances but three distinct subsistent relations. For Aquinas, relation in God is not accidental but substantial – each divine Person is His relation to the others.

Aquinas explains in *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 29, a. 4: *The divine persons are distinguished from each other by the relations of origin. These relations, however, are not accidents but subsistent realities.* This means that the Father is not distinct from the Son because of a separate essence but because of His relation to the Son. This relational ontology underscores that personhood in God is not about





If existence is the supreme perfection, then to exist as a person is to participate in the highest reality. This means that personhood cannot be reduced to biological, psychological, or social functions; rather, it is rooted in the very structure of being itself. Such an understanding provides a firm foundation for the inviolable dignity of every human person, regardless of conditions such as disability, dependency, or suffering.

individuality but about communion.

This Trinitarian framework has profound implications for human personalism. If the highest mode of being is personal and relational, then human personhood also finds its fulfilment in relation. This contrasts with the modern tendency to conceive of the self as an autonomous, self-enclosed individual. Instead, Aquinas's thought suggests that persons are most fully realised not in isolation but in communion.

Essence and Existence in the Human Person

Aquinas applies his metaphysics of existence to the human person, showing that individuals are not merely static entities but beings-in-act. Unlike God, whose essence is His existence, human persons have an essence distinct from their existence. This distinction explains why humans are contingent and dependent beings. However, it also means that human existence is fundamentally a journey – a movement toward the fulfilment of one's potential in truth and love.

This insight grounds a Thomistic personalism that is dynamic rather than static. Personal existence is not a given but a task – to grow in wisdom, love, and participation in the divine life. This stands in contrast to modern existentialist personalisms, which often emphasise self-definition without an objective *telos*. For Aquinas, the ultimate fulfilment of personal existence is found in the *beatific vision*, where the human person fully participates in God's own being.

A Vision for the Human Person

Aquinas' personalism provides a crucial corrective to both collectivist and individualist understandings of the person. Against collectivism, his emphasis on existence as a unique act affirms the irreducibility of the individual. Against radical individualism, his Trinitarian vision of personal existence as relational underscores the necessity of community and love.

Moreover, his metaphysics offers a way forward for contemporary discussions on the dignity of the person. If existence is the supreme perfection, then to exist as a person is to participate in the highest reality. This means that personhood cannot be reduced to biological, psychological, or social functions; rather, it is rooted in the very structure of being itself. Such an understanding provides a firm foundation for the inviolable dignity of every human person, regardless of conditions such as disability, dependency, or suffering.

Aquinas's vision reminds us that human beings are not mere accidents in an indifferent universe. Rather, they are purposeful participants in the divine reality, called to communion with God and one another. By grounding personalism in the primacy of existence and the relational nature of the Trinity, Aquinas provides a compelling vision of what it means to be fully human. ■

George Paul is a Communication Designer currently working with the Catholic Health Association of India. An avid student of Theology, Philosophy and History, George is still active in JY, helping youngsters connect with the Catholic intellectual tradition.

SPECULATIONS, SICKNESS AND *SPERANZA* (HOPE)



The month of March was indeed very chaotic, not just in Rome but all over the world, I suppose. As far as Rome is concerned, it is common news now that Pope Francis has been hospitalised (Gemelli hospital) since 14 February (after I wrote the previous Jubilee article). The Pope was admitted after his bilateral pneumonia took a turn for the worse. Everything happened quite fast after that. There was a barrage of fake news and reports that the Pope had passed away and people started calling me to know whether it was true, even in the middle of the night. Some even sent me news clips about the Pope's passing and that the Vatican was preparing for a conclave.

It seems that there was more fake news than real news. TikTokers Ottavo, and Er Bombolino entered the hospital unchallenged to see for themselves. Ending up in the wrong ward, they concluded that since there was no security detail, the Pope had already passed away and that the Vatican was refusing to reveal it. I urge you to always check the Vatican News website (www.vaticannews.va) to verify any news that you hear. We now know that on 22 February, the Pope suffered a 'prolonged asthmatic respiratory crisis' and on 28 February had 'an isolated crisis of bronchospasm' – a tightening of the

muscles that line the airways in the lungs. He was on non-invasive ventilation for some time. As I write this, he has improved a lot, they have reduced the oxygen support, and doctors revoked the 'prognosis being guarded', a statement which caused the confusion and no information was ventured in concrete. The Pope is, at present, stable and still at the hospital under treatment.

As soon as news reached that the Pope was critical, speculations began to form. Arriving at the university every day for class, the first thing was to ask my Italian friends, 'What's cooking?!' I suppose the whole world was watching and speculating, who the next pope would be, how many would make it to the conclave, from which continent, etc. The speculative atmosphere was electric. I even heard people mention about a trial conclave happening, that preparations had started, etc. It was a good thing that Pope Francis kept sending intermittent voice messages, which reassured us.

What really happened was that journalists began flocking to the Vatican day by day. The press office of the Holy See began to struggle and they asked our university (Santa Croce) to help out at their front desk. According to reports, during the first few days of the Pope's hospitalisation, more than 400 journalists





turned up from all over the world. When it was my turn to man the front desk, we were shown around the press office, the briefing area, the hall where press meets are conducted, etc. And when I met some American journalists, they were more eager to hear a press release from the doctors than from the press office. The

hubbub died as Pope Francis got better. The Vatican organised prayers for the Pope, especially Rosary at 7.30 pm at St Peter's Square, where large numbers turned up. The hospital always had crowds gathered at all times, praying for the Pope.

In between all this the Jubilee for Volunteers took place on 8th and 9th March. Around 25,000 (15,000 from Italy alone) people gathered for this from around 100 countries. Though they all missed the Pope, they showed their solidarity by their presence and prayer. The Mass for them was presided over by Cardinal Michael Czerny, SJ, the Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, on Sunday, 9th March in St Peter's Square.

Rome is still under construction, the weather has been horrible, alternating between cold winds and rain and humid heat. During the past weeks, my friends and I visited St Peter's Square a few times as part of our study to shoot videos and create reportage. We also interviewed people at random. Though the influx of visitors is huge, I feel that only half of them come in faith. Many come out of curiosity and though they seem to sympathise for the Pope, they really don't know what's going on. It's a sad story, but one that could also be the first chapter; who knows, for God works in mysterious ways.

Let's pray in Hope!



Fr Justin Panachickal MSFS is currently doing his licentiate in social communications at the Pontifical University of Santa Croce, and will share with us throughout the Jubilee year ground reports from Rome.

IN FOCUS



PAUL

A MISSIONARY OF UNITY

A Glimpse into Paul's Heart Through His Letters

As the Church began to grow and differences began to seep in between Jews and Gentiles, St Paul played a crucial role as a healer of division. **Brother Mathew Jacob** throws light on this aspect of the great apostle.

A divided Christian community is a scandal, whether in St Paul's time, throughout Christian history, or today. As one of the most influential figures in Christianity, Paul played a crucial role in shaping theology and spreading the faith through his missionary efforts. Yet, beyond doctrine and evangelisation, unity was at the heart of his mission. As the early Church grew, so did tensions among its diverse members. Every letter Paul wrote, in some way, sought to heal divisions and foster unity. Whether addressing the master-slave relationship in Philemon, confronting disparities among the rich and the poor in Corinthians, or navigating the deep rift between Jews and Gentiles in Romans and Galatians, Paul worked tirelessly to unite believers under Christ. His message was clear: the Church is not defined by ethnicity, status, or gender but by its shared identity in Christ. As he boldly declared: *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Galatians 3:28).

The Letter to the Romans: A Call for Unity

Christianity first took root among the Jews, spreading with them to various diasporas. Yet, it quickly began attracting Gentiles – non-Jews unfamiliar with Jewish law and customs. This sparked a pressing question: Should Gentiles be required to observe Jewish laws, such as circumcision and dietary restrictions, to be part of God's people? This debate threatened to fracture the early Church, and Paul addressed it head-on in Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians. Paul rejected the idea of a two-tiered Christian identity. He didn't merely call for tolerance but for a radical reimagining of God's people as a new creation in Christ, where faith – not ethnicity or adherence to the Mosaic Law – determined one's place in the community. This was revolutionary in a world where ritualistic and social barriers were deeply ingrained.

The Letter to the Romans stands as one of the most influential writings in history, shaping theology and inspiring conversions, including that



of St Augustine. While it is Paul's most systematic theological exposition, its immediate purpose was pastoral. He wrote to heal the deep divisions between Jewish and Gentile believers in Rome. A look at the historical context clarifies this conflict: In AD 49, Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome, likely due to disputes over a figure called 'Chrestus' (a reference to Christ). For five years, the Roman Christian community was predominantly Gentile, developing its own leadership, mission, and theological expressions. When Jewish believers returned after Claudius' death, they found a Church that had moved away from Jewish customs. This sparked tensions over dietary laws, circumcision, and religious observances, creating a crisis within the church in Rome.

Paul's response was to emphasise a faith that united all believers. He argued that both Jews and Gentiles have sinned and stand in need of salvation – not through the law, but through faith in Christ (Romans 3:9-20). One of the most brilliant moments in Romans comes in chapter 4, where Paul presents Abraham as the unifying figure. For the Jews, Abraham was their patriarch, the most important figure of faith. Yet Paul highlights that Abraham was justified by faith *before* he was circumcised – meaning he was, in a sense, a Gentile at the time. Thus, he is not the father of just the Jews but of all who believe, even Gentiles. By rooting unity in faith rather than ethnicity or legal observance, Paul paves the way for a truly universal Church.

This is a profound lesson for us: to

seek out and emphasise the elements of unity rather than focusing on differences that lead to division. Paul's call is not a passive appeal for inclusivity or mere tolerance, but a deep and active pursuit of unity – one that is rooted in truth and flows from a genuine desire to see all believers as one in Christ.

The First Letter to the Corinthians: Unity in Love

Another powerful letter addressing division is 1 Corinthians, where Paul confronts the fragmentation within the community: '*I belong to Paul,*' or '*I belong to Apollos,*' or '*I belong to Cephas,*' or '*I belong to Christ.*' (1 Corinthians 1:12). This factionalism reflected a broader cultural tendency to align with particular teachers, but Paul dismantles this mindset with

piercing rhetoric: *Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?* (1 Corinthians 1:13). He reorients the community's focus, emphasising that the Church belongs to Christ alone. Paul goes further, warning that such divisions threaten the very foundation of the Church (1 Corinthians 3:17). Church history – and even our own times – offer ample evidence of the damage factions can inflict on the body of Christ.

One of Paul's most enduring images of unity is the Body of Christ, a metaphor he employs in both Romans and 1 Corinthians: *For just as the body is one and has many members... so it is with Christ.* (1 Corinthians 12:12). While the image of the body was common in Greco-Roman society to describe social order, Paul radically reinterprets it. Instead of reinforcing hierarchy, he elevates the weak and the marginalised, declaring that in Christ's body, *the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable* (1 Corinthians 12:22). Every believer – regardless of status or background – is vital to the Church's life and mission.

For Paul, the Eucharist was the ultimate sign of unity. He writes, *Because there is one bread, we who are many are one*

body, for we all partake of the one bread. (1 Corinthians 10:17). Yet in Corinth, the way the Eucharist was being celebrated deepened social divisions, as wealthier believers feasted while the poor were left hungry. Paul condemns this practice in no uncertain terms (1 Corinthians 11:17–34), making it clear that the Eucharist is not merely a ritual but a call to genuine communion – a visible expression of the unity Christ calls His Church to embody.

The Irony of Division

History presents us with painful ironies. Despite Paul's tireless efforts to foster unity, the very letters he wrote for that purpose became sources of division. During the Protestant Reformation, debates over justification centred on Paul's words, particularly Romans. Was salvation by faith alone (*sola fide*), or did works play a role? Both sides bore responsibility, and misunderstandings fuelled the conflict. Yet the tragic reality remains: what was meant to unite became a cause of schism. A similar irony surrounds the Eucharist – the supreme sacrament of unity, has become a point of contention and division even today – a grave scandal!

The Call to Work for Unity

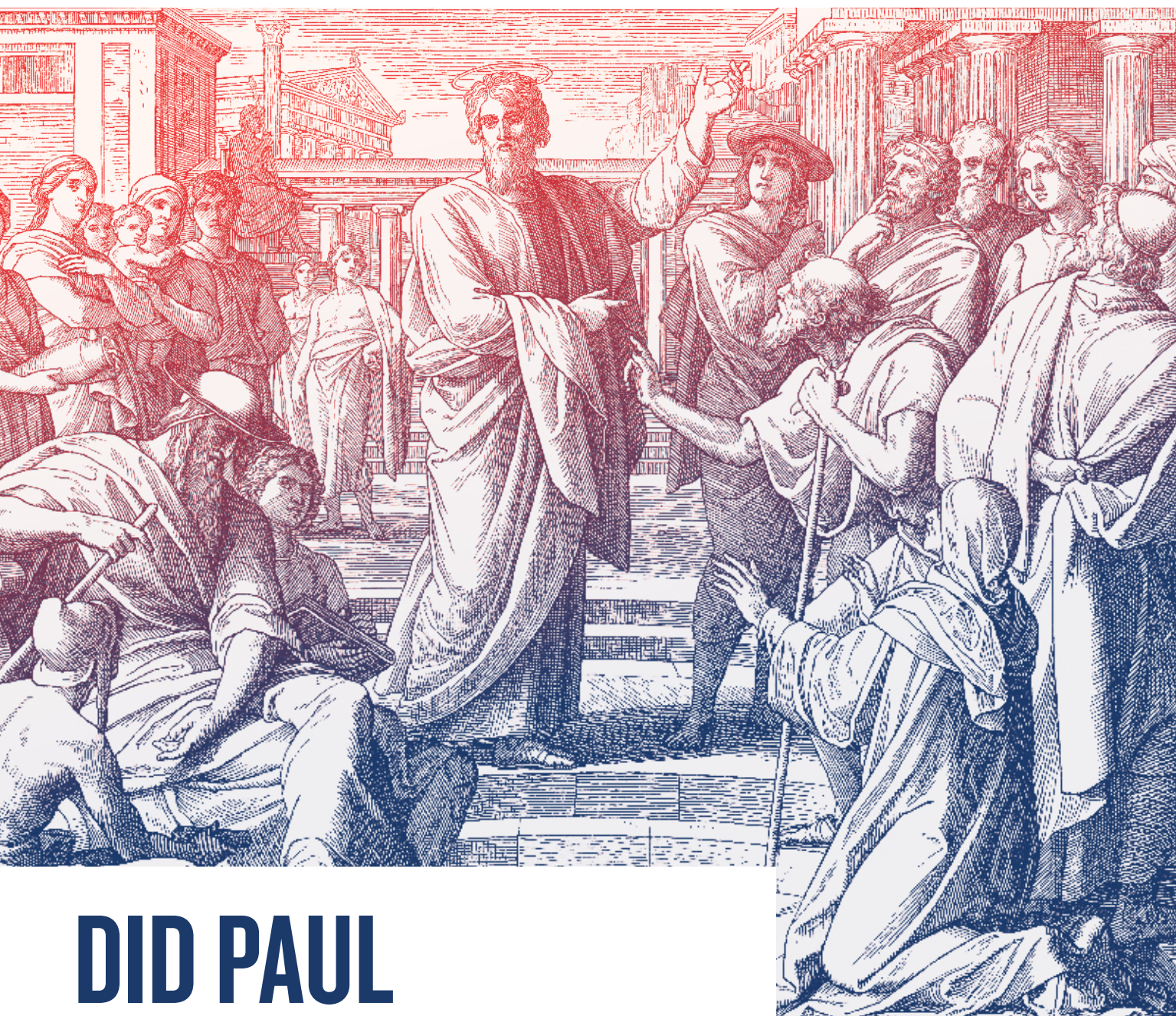
For Paul, unity was not a theoretical ideal – it was essential to the Church's witness. Jesus Himself prayed, *That all may be one... so that the world may believe that you sent me.* (John 17:21). The divisions of the past and present challenge us to seek renewal. While theological differences remain, the heart of Christian faith is love. As the Taizé community expresses it, we must seek unity among 'all who love Christ.'

On the ecumenical front, the Church has taken significant steps toward reconciliation, particularly since the Second Vatican Council. A major milestone was the 1999 Joint Declaration on Justification between the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation, the result of 30 years of dialogue that clarified shared beliefs and resolved doctrinal misunderstandings. Since then, other denominations, including the Methodist Church, have joined, with the latest signatory in 2017.

Even today, the scandal of disunity continues to prevail in our personal lives, families, movement, and Church. In the spirit of St Paul, we must be a missionary of reconciliation embodying Jesus' words: *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.* (John 13:35). Paul's letters remain an urgent call to unity – one we must heed in our Church, movement, families, and in our own hearts. May we take up this mission with conviction, striving for the unity that Christ desired and that Paul so tirelessly sought to preserve. ■

One of the most brilliant moments in Romans comes in chapter 4, where Paul presents Abraham as the unifying figure. For the Jews, Abraham was their patriarch, the most important figure of faith. Yet Paul highlights that Abraham was justified by faith *before* he was circumcised – meaning he was, in a sense, a Gentile at the time. Thus, he is not the father of just the Jews but of all who believe, even Gentiles. By rooting unity in faith rather than ethnicity or legal observance, Paul paves the way for a truly universal Church.

Brother Mathew Jacob is a Jesus Youth seminarian studying at St Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary, Florida, USA. God willing, he will be ordained a deacon this August.



DID PAUL DISCRIMINATE AGAINST WOMEN?

Aleena Joy counters the oft-held assumption by feminists that St Paul was 'anti-woman'. In fact, she shows how the apostle valued and upheld the dignity of women.

St Paul played a prominent role in the spread of Christianity during the first century. Despite not being a direct disciple of Christ, he was a witness to the resurrection of our Lord (1 Corinthians 15:8). In fact, it is Paul who gives the first written account on the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 (AD 57). However, in his epistles where women are asked to veil (1 Corinthians 11:2-16), where women are asked to keep silent in the assembly (1 Corinthians 14:34-35), where the wife is asked to submit to her

husband (Ephesians 5:22), Paul faced a lot of criticism. Often he is thought to have discriminated against women, especially in feminist circles. Unfortunately, many today tend to buy a lot of feminist ideas and hence Paul is infamous among them. This article is a humble attempt to analyse Paul's teachings concerning women and the objective side of the above-mentioned teachings.

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28). Paul asserts that all of us have equal dignity before Christ. This is one of the most vigorous texts in the New Testament on the fundamental equality of men and women, as children of God in Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 11:12-16, women are asked to veil their heads while praying and prophesying. Paul doesn't prohibit women from praying or prophesying, but asks them to follow their tradition of veiling during the service. Ancient Corinth served as a transshipment hub for the Roman Empire. The city hence had a lot of urban ways. It is in this context that Paul urges them to hold fast to their identity as male and female (1 Corinthians 11:2-16). This was to be considered a disciplinary practice of minor importance. Such requirements do not have a normative value today. Paul in this passage points to the creation order established by God when calling the husband as the head of the wife. The husband, being the head of the wife, is called to serve and not to rule. Christ, the head of His bride the Church, served and laid down His life for her. Similarly, the husband is called to love his wife with a sacrificial love as mentioned in Ephesians 5.

In 1 Corinthians 14, we read: *As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.* We see here that Paul forbids women from speaking. But this has a cultural context. Since Jewish women back then did not have access to education, elementary questions were raised by some of them

which interrupted the assembly. It is to them that Paul instructs. There is also a popular opinion that 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 is interpolated. In 1 Timothy 2:12, we see Paul forbidding women from teaching. The declaration *Inter Insigniores* comments that this prohibition is solely for the official function of teaching in the Christian assembly. For St Paul, this prescription is bound up with the divine plan of creation.

In Ephesians 5, Paul writes: *Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Saviour. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.* (5:22-24) Paul is often mistaken as using male dominant language and pictured as a male chauvinist based on this. While analysing the passage in detail, we see that it speaks about the great mystery of marriage. While Paul advises the wife about submission, a greater duty is assigned to the husbands – to love their wives as Christ loved His bride, the Church. The passage gives more emphasis on how a husband should love his wife than the wife's submission. It is interesting to note that through the very previous verse (verse 21), Paul encourages spouses to be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Altogether, this passage can't be considered as treating women as inferior to men. We also see this submission in the Holy Trinity. The Son submits to the Father, but is never inferior. They are one in essence.

There is one major aspect of Paul that is quite overlooked when he is criticised for being 'anti-woman'. There were a number of women Paul worked with and who are named in the Acts of the Apostles (attributed to St Luke the Evangelist, a disciple of Paul), and in the Pauline letters! Prisca, Phoebe, Mary, Junia, Julia, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Euodia, Syntyche, Chloe are women mentioned in these books. And he treated them with dignity and honour.

Paul meets Prisca (Priscilla, in some translations) along with her husband Aquila (Acts 18) during his first trip to Corinth. Paul greets them in his first letter to the Corinthians, and in Romans.

He mentions them as his 'co-workers'. From Romans 16:3-4, we understand that their home was a house-church – a place of worship and ministry. In Acts 18:26, we see that this couple play the role of teachers as well. It is interesting to note that they ministered as a couple.

Phoebe is another woman mentioned by Paul. *I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the Church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.* (Romans 16:1-2). Deacon here is a translation from the Greek word *diakonos* which can be translated as helper, protector or patron. It can be understood that the title involved official function of some kind, but not the present day understanding of a deacon. Paul appeals to the Roman community to welcome Phoebe with hospitality. In Romans 16, we see many other women whom Paul mentions – Mary (16:6), Junia (16:7), Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis (16:12), mother of Rufus (16:13), Julia and sister of Nereus (16:15).

Paul also mentions Chloe ('Chloe's people' – 1 Corinthians 1:11), Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4) – who struggled beside him in the work of the Gospel, and Apphia as 'our sister' (letter to Philemon). From all these it can be concluded that there were women in active ministry along with Paul.

Through all the thirteen letters attributed to Paul, it is very evident that Paul upholds the dignity of women by speaking the truth that adheres to divine order. There is always a danger in interpreting the Scripture out of context of the entire divine revelation. In a fallen world, we often tend to compartmentalise the teachings of Paul to fit our narrative. Let us seek the intercession of St Paul to treat both men and women with equal dignity in Christ. ■

Aleena Joy, wife of Kevin Jerome and mother to Mikhael, works with her ABBA FATHER. She is a member of the Syro-Malabar theology forum and is active in apologetics and pro-life circles.

A photograph of a man with long brown hair and a beard, wearing a black robe, standing on a city street. He is holding a large, thick book with a dark cover and gold-edged pages. He is looking down at the book. In the background, there are multi-story buildings, a street with cars, and a few pedestrians. The scene is slightly blurred, suggesting a shallow depth of field.

BEING THE PAUL OF TODAY



Sali Santhosh writes about some of the qualities that made St Paul the person he was – afire for Christ, and how we too can imitate this great apostle.

One passage from the Bible that has always left me awestruck is the ranting of St Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:24-28 *Are they ministers of Christ? I am talking like a madman—I am a better one: with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death. Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked.* His long tirade presents a person who is oblivious of human pain. It is almost as if neither physical torture nor mental humiliation has any effect on him.

Paul cannot be written off as a man out of his senses. The shrewdness, wisdom and calm with which he tackles the mob that wanted to destroy him when brought for trial, would defy that argument. Not only did the atrocities inflicted fail to instil fear or discourage him from sharing the message that was exploding within him but it seemed to fortify him all the more with boldness. External situations of life could not stop the journey that he started for Jesus. There is a determination that he exudes while seeming to ignore all pain while pressing on towards something else – toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:14). I see in Paul a person who has made a proactive choice to die to himself. He appears to be a person who has his whole being focussed elsewhere and not on what the world is serving him.

Hebrews 12:2 talks of Jesus as, *the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for*

the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame. A perfect reflection of Jesus is seen in St Paul, who disregards all shame to take on the pain. It is not that he was beyond temptation or sin. We hear his cry in Romans 7:19-20 *For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.* He was a weak man like any of us but with a passionate love for the Lord. The sufferings and hardships of life that any man would run away from are in a way disregarded by Paul in his mad zeal to serve the One whom he experienced as the Saviour of his soul. This same fiery zeal is experienced by so many who fell in love with Jesus. Be it the early Christians of the first century who were martyred for their faith, or those numerous saints who have paved the way before us leading exemplary lives of embracing the hardships of their lives, or those numerous unsung heroes of our time who are suffering for the Gospel in prisons, or even those of the Jesus Youth Movement like Ajna George or Joicy Jaison who battled cancer, victorious in the face of suffering. All of them have a lesson to tell. Falling in love with that Nazarene emboldens one to face any suffering and to sail through the storms of life.

Often when we are faced with crosses in our life it turns out to be times when we begin to question God's love and protection for us. I remember when I was diagnosed with tuberculosis of the bone more than two decades back, how it took me through a journey of doubting God's care for me. It took me time, and His patience and love, to learn that He is the one battling for me faithfully at my side, that my understanding of God, the world and situations of life needed so much more light.

At times suffering makes us conclude that God is against us. The life of all those

who gave themselves over to the Lord in a total surrender tells us something else. It is in the midst of our suffering that God speaks the loudest to us. God does not permit any evil out of which he is incapable of bringing about good. As CCC 312 says, 'In time we can discover that God in his almighty providence can bring good from the consequences of evil... From the greatest moral evil ever committed - the rejection and murder of God's only Son, brought the greatest of goods: the glorification of Christ and our redemption.'

St Paul had no turning back after he experienced the saving touch of the Lord. He joyfully received whatever came his way but he did not stop at that. He went out of his way to great extents to spread the Gospel. He took upon himself more troubles. The extensive journeys he conducted under very challenging situations speaks of his zeal. All the epistles he wrote exhibit for each soul the love and concern he received from the Gospel – the love of a father toward his child and, as he himself says, as a mother going through birth pangs he desired, prayed and laboured to see Christ fully formed in them.

One of the reasons he is recognised alongside St Peter as the two strongest pillars of the Church, was also the sound instruction that he had received at the feet of Gamaliel. The fact that St Paul studied scripture under a learned instructor of his time indicates the importance that he gave to God and His Word in his life. I am sure that because he was grounded in the Jewish traditions and had a thorough knowledge of the prophecies about the Messiah, when the light of Christ shone on him, it took him off his feet. *In the brilliance of this new light* that was enlightening his soul, each thing that he heard and understood about the Messiah from his earlier studies *would have filled him with repentance for what he did and the desire to serve Jesus all the more.*

Another notable detail of St Paul's life is his visit to meet Peter. We see this in Galatians 1:18: *Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days.* This speaks of Paul's desire to remain subject to the ordained authority conferred upon Peter by Jesus. I am sure when Paul went to visit

External situations of life could not stop the journey that he started for Jesus. There is a determination that he exudes while seeming to ignore all pain while pressing on towards something else – toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:14). I see in Paul a person who has made a proactive choice to die to himself. He appears to be a person who has his whole being focussed elsewhere and not on what the world is serving him.



Peter, he already had a good following of people. He surely would have been leading some major gatherings, healing people and quite capable of heading a congregation. Yet the fact that he went to meet Peter to be acquainted with him shows that he recognised and respected the authority of Peter.

Paul lived at a time when there was so much animosity to the Christian faith. We are in no different a situation, yet his resilience and commitment to face hardship made it possible for so many churches to be established. Am I not called to face the hardships that come my way with a similar resilience when I live out the Gospel? Paul went out of his way to carry that message that was burning within him. Is there any cross that the Lord would want me to go out of my way

and carry for the sake of the Gospel?

The foundation of St Paul's missionary zeal was his grounding in the scriptures at the feet of a learned instructor. What is my commitment to read, meditate and assimilate the Word of God in my life? Am I willing to subject myself to an elder who can guide me through the intricacies of living out my faith? I hope and pray that each of us hear the gentle whispering of the Holy Spirit, inviting us to be another St Paul of these times. May He give us grace to do so.



A professionally qualified teacher and mother of six, Sali Santhosh is a full-time missionary of the Santvana Community for almost 28 years.

Saints – real life super-heroes: journey and calling



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

WHO IS A SAINT?

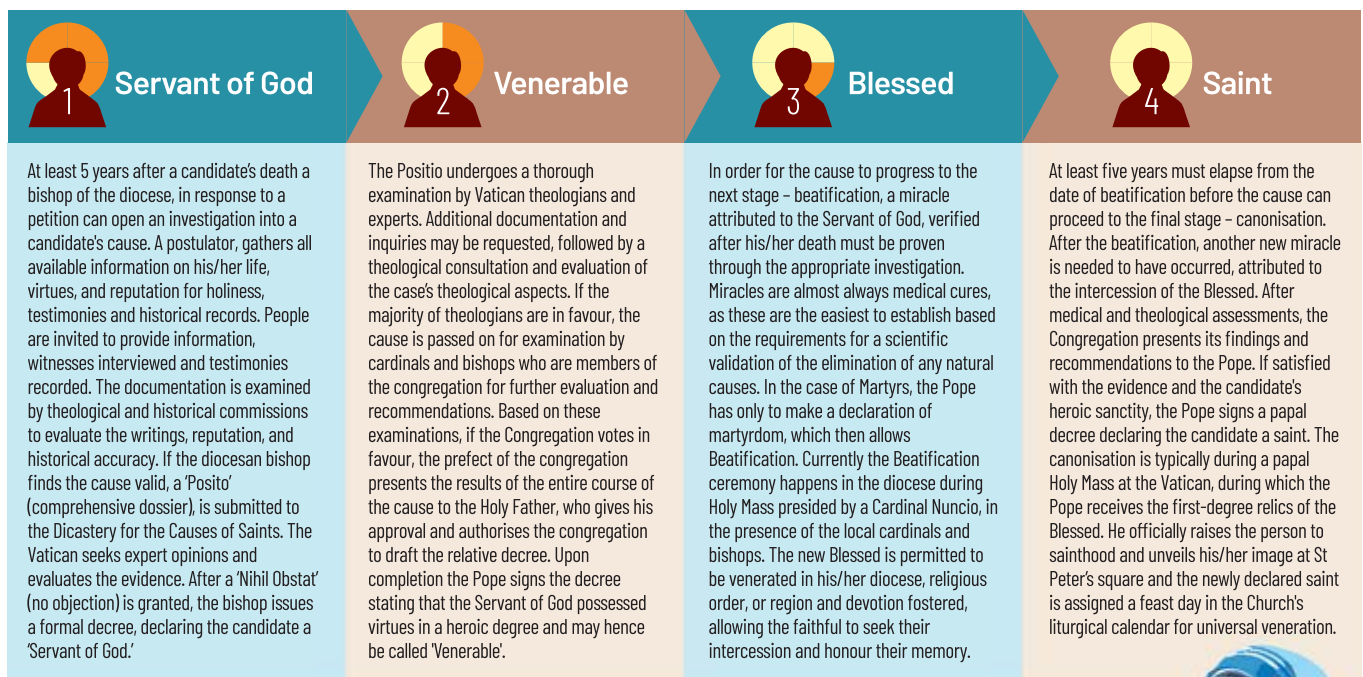
Despite a media caricature of saints as old, bearded, apathetic monks whose pictures are enclosed in glass cases, real saints are not freaks – but true life superheroes. In a biblical sense, all believers are saints because we bear the sanctity of being created in God's image (Genesis 1:26). The Bible speaks of glorified saints as a *great cloud of witnesses* (Hebrews 12:1) and mentions that *the prayers of all the saints (rise) upon the golden altar before the throne* (Revelation 8:3) of God. The Church is the *assembly of saints* (CCC 946), uniting both the living and the dead in Christ as the Mystical Body of Christ. This is why we profess the 'Communion of Saints' in the Apostles' Creed and celebrate All Saints' Day. Saints are canonised to serve as our models, intercessors and friends who show us the path to holiness and help us on our journey of faith.

CANONISATION – A CALENDAR SET IN HEAVEN

Canonised saints are those the Church guarantees us are in heaven, enjoying beatific intimacy in God's direct presence. They include heroic men and women of all races and ages – kings, popes, soldiers, monks, priests, nuns, and laypeople from various occupations, including doctors and computer geeks.

But how can the Church make such an astounding guarantee? This involves the 'greatest inquest on earth,' a rigorous process examining the lives of candidates in detail. Every word they preached or wrote is scrutinised, with theologians and canon lawyers presenting findings for and against the cause. The term 'Devil's Advocate' comes from this role. Once the Dicastery for the Canonization of Saints gives a positive response, the formal journey toward sainthood begins. However, a candidate's advancement depends on a calendar, literally set in heaven, requiring at least two scientifically verifiable miracles obtained through the intercession of the Venerable / Blessed.

THE LONG JOURNEY TO BE DECLARED A SAINT



ALL OF US ARE CALLED TO BE SAINTS!

St Teresa of Calcutta said: 'Sanctity is not the luxury of a few, it is a simple duty, for you and for me.' All Christians are called to 'the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity, which is the measure of the life of heaven' (CCC 1807) and to *know what is the hope... (and) the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints* (Ephesians 1:18). 'We can imitate the saints by following their example, asking for their intercession, and celebrating their feasts' (CCC 829).



ART

Paul in Paintings

Shaji Joseph Arakkal takes a look at two paintings on St Paul.





In keeping with the theme of this issue, in this article, we take a look at two famous paintings depicting St Paul.

The Apostle Paul in Prison

The oil painting, *The Apostle Paul in Prison*, was painted by the Dutch master-artist Rembrandt around 1657. It is a Baroque composition with a distinctive use of light and shadow. The 131.5 x 104.4 cm work of art is currently housed in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, Austria.

Rembrandt was fascinated by the Apostle Paul throughout his life, perhaps because the most important source of Reformation theology was the epistles of Paul in the Bible, or because he personified the Christian ideal of grace that he had received independently of merit. The Apostle Paul, sitting in prison, ponders the words he is about to write in the epistle.

One of the most striking features of Paul is his fervent sense of purpose in his mission to spread the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles, to whom he had been called. The sword depicted above the book on the

right side is 'the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God' (Ephesians 6:17). It can also be interpreted as a symbol of Paul's military prowess before his conversion and his eventual beheading and martyrdom.

The soft light seen on Paul's face, hands, and the writing surface has no defined point of origin. This is Rembrandt's natural style. By depicting the apostle at half-length rather than a full-length portrait, the painter brings the viewer closer to the figure of the saint.

The Conversion of Saint Paul

The painting, *The Conversion of Saint Paul*, commissioned by Charles IV of Spain and now housed in the Prado Museum in Madrid, was painted in oil by the famous painter Bartolome Esteban Murillo between 1675 and 1680. It is based on verses 3 to 6 of the 9th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, and is a Baroque composition with a brilliant arrangement of light and shadow.

The risen Christ is depicted in the light with the cross. As Saul journeyed and came near Damascus, suddenly a light

flashed from heaven and toppled him to the ground. And he heard a voice saying to him: 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' The Bible only records that he heard the voice of Christ; he did not see anything. However, the painter Murillo has made Christ the central figure of the painting, the source of the voice at that moment that led to Saul of Tarsus in Cilicia, a Jew who was persecuting Christians, to become Paul the Apostle of Christ.

The dark second half of the work is made visible only by the light emanating from Christ. The scenes of the horse and the frightened companions falling to the ground illustrate the severity of the fall during the journey with the threat of death. In the dark right corner, an indistinct dog is depicted, and in the left corner, the dark outline of the city of Damascus.



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Chandeliers

☼ *Heaven Spoke, a Child Listened: Bernadette Soubirous*



The sun hung low in the February sky, casting a golden glow over the countryside of Lourdes. Fourteen-year-old Bernadette, frail and wrapped in layers against the winter chill, picked her way carefully over the rocky ground near the Massabielle Grotto. She had come with her sister and a friend to gather firewood. As the cold wind swept through the air, she heard a rustling near the river.

Turning toward the grotto, her breath caught in her throat. There, in a hollow of the rock, stood a beautiful woman – radiant, dressed in white with a blue sash, who made the Sign of the Cross with a

rosary draped over her hands. The woman smiled gently at her, and Bernadette, despite her pounding heart, instinctively reached for her own rosary and began to pray. When she finished, the woman vanished. Feeling drawn back to the grotto, she returned multiple times in the coming days and weeks, and the vision returned. Over the course of eighteen apparitions, the lady spoke to Bernadette, urging her to pray for sinners and to have a chapel built on the site.

Word spread quickly through Lourdes, and as curiosity grew, so did the opposition. The townspeople were divided – some believed Bernadette, while others mocked her. She was not the kind of girl anyone in Lourdes would expect to have visions. The Soubirous family lived in utter poverty, so poor they had been forced to take shelter in a former prison cell. Her father, François, was a miller but had lost his work, and food was scarce. Bernadette herself suffered from severe asthma since childhood and was often too weak to attend school.

She could barely read or write and had not even learned her catechism properly. Yet Bernadette reported that when she asked the lady her name, she replied, ‘I am the Immaculate Conception.’ It was an astonishing statement – the doctrine of the ‘Immaculate Conception’ had been defined by the Church merely four years ago, and this simple village girl, uneducated and unaware of theological doctrines, could not have invented it on her own!

Despite this, sceptics kept on accusing her of lying or seeking attention. Authorities subjected her to relentless questioning, treating her like a criminal rather than a child. Police even threatened to imprison her if she did not retract her statements. Yet Bernadette, always calm, would answer simply: ‘I am charged with telling you, not making you believe.’

Despite the mounting pressure, the crowds at the grotto swelled. During the ninth apparition, Bernadette, at the lady's request, dug into the ground and uncovered a spring. People who bathed in its waters began reporting inexplicable healings. Lourdes was no longer just a local curiosity; it was becoming something much greater.

The publicity kept on increasing, but Bernadette was not interested in any of it. Five years after the apparitions, she joined the Sisters of Charity in Nevers, far from the commotion of Lourdes. The young girl who once stood in the spotlight now sought the quiet of a cloister. There, she spent the rest of her short life in humility and service, though her health never improved. Tuberculosis of the bone wracked her body, leaving her in constant pain. When asked if she wanted to return to Lourdes, she only smiled and said, 'The grotto is in my heart.'

Even within the convent, Bernadette was treated with the same scepticism she had faced in Lourdes. Some of the nuns believed she had sought fame, while others thought she exaggerated her illness. Despite this, she bore everything with patience. She never complained, even when her condition worsened to the point where every movement caused her agony. Doctors could do little for her, and she was often left to suffer in silence.

Even in her final days, Bernadette continued her prayers, offering up her pain for the souls of sinners. When a fellow nun asked what she was thinking, Bernadette replied, 'I must become a saint' – not a self-righteous claim, but the quiet acceptance of someone who understood the path set before her.

On 16 April 1879, at the age of thirty-five, she died quietly, whispering: 'Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for me, a poor sinner.' Her suffering was finally over.

Thirty years later, when her body was exhumed, onlookers were stunned to

discover that the body had not decayed. Her skin remained intact, as though she had merely fallen asleep. As part of her canonisation process, the investigation into her incorrupt body was meticulous. Scientists examined her remains multiple times, yet no natural explanation could be found for the lack of decomposition. Some skeptics argued that her body had been preserved through unknown embalming techniques, but no traces of such methods were ever detected. The Church recognised this as a sign of divine intervention, something that went beyond human understanding.

Meanwhile, Lourdes had become one of the most visited pilgrimage sites in the world. The spring Bernadette uncovered continued to flow, and countless reports of miraculous healings poured in. Doctors and scientists conducted studies on the water, yet nothing in its composition suggested it had medicinal properties. The healings defied logic—paralysed limbs regained movement, terminal illnesses vanished, and the blind regained sight. The medical community, despite its

Despite this, sceptics kept on accusing her of lying or seeking attention. Authorities subjected her to relentless questioning, treating her like a criminal rather than a child. Police even threatened to imprison her if she did not retract her statements. Yet Bernadette, always calm, would answer simply: 'I am charged with telling you, not making you believe.'

skepticism, could not dismiss the sheer number of unexplained cures.

In 1925, Pope Pius XI beatified Bernadette, acknowledging her holiness and the impact of her visions. Eight years later, in 1933, she was declared a saint. The little girl from Lourdes, once mocked and doubted, had been recognised by the Church. Pilgrims from all over the world flocked to her resting place, gazing upon the serene face of the girl who had seen the Virgin Mary.

Decades after her death, Bernadette's story still captivates believers and skeptics alike. Lourdes remains a place of faith, hope, and mystery, where the spring still flows and the faithful continue to gather, seeking healing and reassurance. And in the quiet town of Nevers, St Bernadette Soubirous rests peacefully, untouched by time, a silent witness to the mystery of faith. ■■

Maria Teres is a social worker by education, and writer by passion and profession. In her spare time, you may find her curled up on a couch crocheting, reading, or sketching.



Unashamedly Yours

Reflecting on the transformation of St Paul and his intense life as a missionary, **Anil Israel** invites us to introspect upon our commitment and call as followers of Christ.

Among the followers of the way of the Lord, St Paul stands tall as an outstanding example of one who lived the life of a Christian. Born as Saul, from *the tribe of Benjamin* (Philippians 3:5) at *Tarsus in Cilicia, educated according to the strict manner of the law under Gamaliel* (cf. Acts 22:3), initially *persecuted the church of God* (1 Corinthians 15:9) but eventually went on to be *the apostle of the Gentiles* (Romans 11:13). He even authored the largest number of books in the New Testament.

While on the road to Damascus, he was struck blind by a light from heaven. *For three days he was without sight* (Acts 9:9). This, being in the absence of light, surely must have caused him to hit rock-bottom and ponder on what he could be doing for the rest of his life. God in His mercy, paved a way for his sight to be restored, for God had a great plan for a converted Saul. After his sight was restored,

Saul became Paul and lived a radically transformed life.

His drastic conversion played a significant role in the spread of Christianity in the first century. The Church celebrates the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul on 25 January. May we learn to draw our attention to what a transformed life ought to look like. As we carefully examine our Saviour's life and the lives of His faithful, may we endeavour to expand our humble efforts to *imitate Christ* (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Paul calls himself as one *abnormally born* (1 Corinthians 15:8), for his early life was a counter example. When we look at our old self – before our Christ encounter, we too can relate to having hardly done anything for Christ. However, after our Christ encounter, if we are to examine our transformed lives, are we able to identify something significantly done for Christ?

Paul claims to have two drastically astonishing experiences – to have been transported, in some sense, *to the third heaven* (2 Corinthians 12:2) and to have been given *a thorn in the flesh... to keep him from being too elated* (2 Corinthians 12:7). We too need to experience moments of divine intimacy to be able to relate to heavenly closeness and at the same time not to be puffed up with

spiritual experiences, but to remain aware of our human limitations so that we may continuously rely only on Him.

Anyone who has encountered the risen Saviour, by virtue of becoming a member of the family of the faithful, inherently receives the call to respond to the great commission to *go and make disciples of all nations* (Matthew 28:19). The Book of Acts records Paul's three missionary journeys. A missionary is one who is always on the move for the work in the Lord's vineyard. Zeal for souls is what kept Paul on the move. *For his sake I have thrown everything away; I consider it all as mere garbage, so that I may gain Christ* (Philippians 3:8). *Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel* (1 Corinthians 9:16). May we too be motivated by Paul's enthusiasm and echo: *Christ's love compels us* (2 Corinthians 5:14).

Paul embraced immense suffering for the sake of the Gospel. *Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea* (2 Corinthians 11:25). *In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions* (Colossians 1:24). Am I willing to endure persecution to bear witness to the Gospel?

Paul lived a life totally dedicated to the Lord. *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain* (Philippians 1:21). *It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me* (Galatians 2:20). *If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord* (Romans 14:8). To whom do I belong? We do not belong to ourselves, for we have been *bought with a price* (1 Corinthians 6:20). Am I living my life for Jesus?

If we consciously embrace every cross sent our way, we too can become a joyful contradiction wherever we are. *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there* (Galatians 5:24). Am I willing to let my

OF THE GOSPEL, BECAUSE IT IS THE POWER OF GOD › ROMANS 1:16



Paul calls himself as one abnormally born (1 Corinthians 15:8), for his early life was a counter example. When we look at our old self – before our Christ encounter, we too can relate to having hardly done anything for Christ.

old-selfish-self be put to death, and be a *new creation* (2 Corinthians 5:17)? When we let go of our stinking fallen nature and emit the radiance of good works, by putting faith into action, we opt to personify a *sweet-smelling offering and sacrifice that pleases God* (Ephesians 5:2).

Holy Scripture repeatedly exhorts us to will the good of the other by offering our lives as a *living sacrifice* (Romans 12:1) and make a sincere gift of ourselves for the wellbeing of others, *for we are the sweet fragrance of Christ to God* (2 Corinthians 2:15). What am I doing about it? What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I to do for Christ? If not me, then who? If not now, then when? If not here, then where?

May the *exceedingly abundant* (1 Timothy 1:14) grace of our Lord and the inspiring witness of St Paul encourage us in our pursuit to be a *servant of Christ Jesus... set apart for the gospel of God* (Romans 1:1). May we too learn to echo his words: *I am unashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God* (Romans 1:16). Let us heed to the words of our Lord in the Gospel: *Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels* (Mark 8:38).

Let our daily prayer be: *Only one life, 'twill soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last.* (Charles Thomas Studd, British Missionary). *Lord, what do you want me to do?* (Acts 9:6; 20:10). Teach me to be unashamedly yours. ■

SOUNDREPLY



BOOKS | MOVIES | TV SHOWS

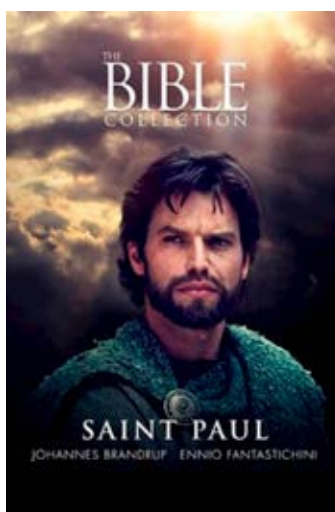
ST PAUL

St Paul, persecutor turned apostle, has had a profound impact on people's lives, not only through his letters but also through various books, movies and TV shows made on him. Here's a look at a few of them.

MOVIES AND TV SHOWS

Paul, Apostle of Christ [2018]

Perhaps the most well-known movie on him is Paul, Apostle of Christ, a visceral narrative of the final days of St Paul, beaten up in prison. He is visited by St Luke, who interviews Paul, taking the viewers through his life. A movie with no over-the-top elements, it showcases the reality of Christians in Nero's Rome. More than an account of Paul's life, it depicts the fundamentals of Christianity, persecution, and



faith, and reminds us of the reason for living as Christians.

A.D. The Bible Continues [2015]

The story of the Book of Acts is depicted in this miniseries in the most gruesome and unadulterated way complete with fantastic visuals of the Pentecost, the apostles' missions and the cruel regime of Rome. Emmett J Scanlan portrays the journey from Saul to Paul, highlighting aptly his struggles and zeal for Christ.

Paul the Apostle [2000]

Part of a film series called

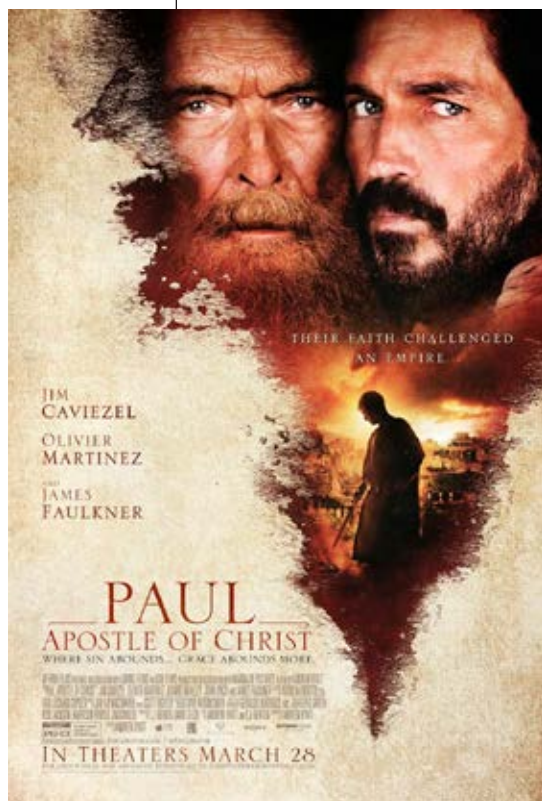
'The Bible Collection', this 2000 classic, is a complete account of St Paul's life. How he transformed from Saul to Paul, and his subsequent missions among the Gentiles, while Romans and Jews sought to kill him. Shot in the Moroccan Desert, this movie is a beautiful work of art and has led many to Christ.

To the Ends of the Earth [2018]

Based on a small portion of Acts of the Apostles, this 38-minute short film logs Paul's missionary activities in Philippi. He ponders, along with the people of Philippi, about who can really be saved. His words and actions attract many, providing answers to his own and others' questions.

The Apostle Paul [2006]

Part of the film series, 'The Great People of the Bible', this feature is a record of Paul's life, from persecutor to preacher, narrated by Sir Ben Kingsley. The life of St Paul is perfectly integrated with a glimpse into the beauty of his mission sites of Jerusalem, Antioch, Philippi, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Malta, and Rome where he was executed for the faith he once denounced.



BOOKS

Saint Paul by Pope Benedict XVI [2009]

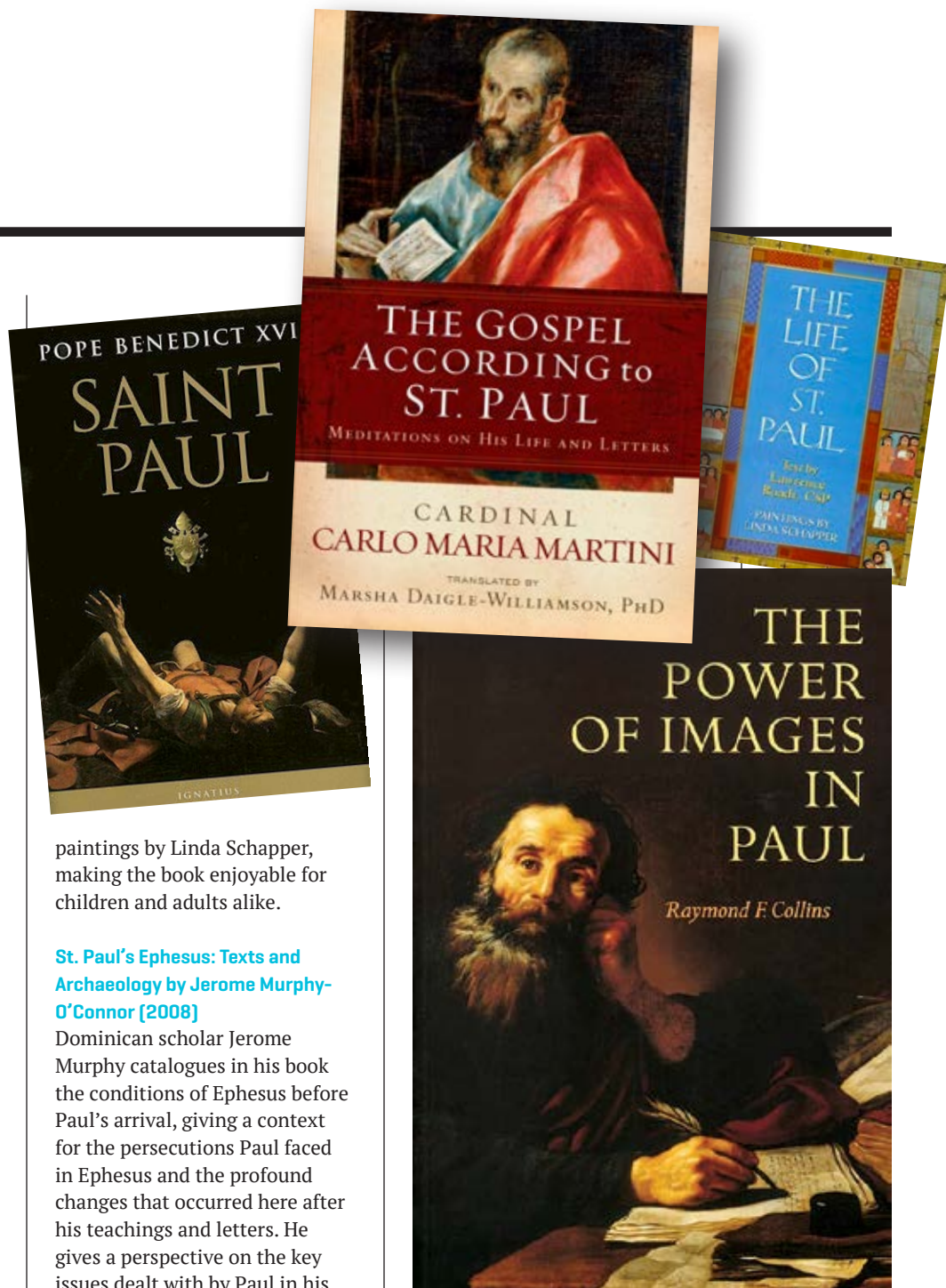
Pope Benedict XVI, is known for his profound writings, especially his commentary on Paul's life, missions, and legacy. The Holy Father, through the text, explores seminal questions that exist on St Paul, including whether he had met Christ in his life. He also uses Paul's teaching to draw a bridge between Protestant and Catholic theologies and highlights the relevance of his teachings in the modern day.

The Gospel According to St Paul: Meditations on His Life and Letters by Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, SJ [2008]

Through this collection of meditations, Cardinal Martini takes us through St Paul's conversion, sufferings, and lessons that can be echoed from his teachings, including love for the community, suffering and consolation and reconciliation. At the end of each chapter, a series of questions are provided to help us reflect on our own lives in light of St Paul's experiences.

The Life of St Paul by Lawrence Boadt C.S.P [2008]

Boadt provides a historical account of St Paul, based on his life recorded by St Luke in the Book of Acts. He places all the important events of Paul's life and teachings in their geographical and historical context. The topics dealt with in the book include Paul's conversion, his stay in Athens, letters, his arrest in Jerusalem, and his arrival in Rome. For every chapter, there are 'icon-like'



paintings by Linda Schapper, making the book enjoyable for children and adults alike.

St. Paul's Ephesus: Texts and Archaeology by Jerome Murphy-O'Connor [2008]

Dominican scholar Jerome Murphy catalogues in his book the conditions of Ephesus before Paul's arrival, giving a context for the persecutions Paul faced in Ephesus and the profound changes that occurred here after his teachings and letters. He gives a perspective on the key issues dealt with by Paul in his letter to Ephesus. With glimpses into archaeological evidence, Murphy takes readers back to the glory days of Ephesus, centuries after their destruction. This book was a sequel to *St Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* (2002).

The Power of Images in Paul by Raymond F. Collins

St Paul, in his letters, made use of intense imagery and metaphors, which, according

to Collins, Paul drew from his own experiences, his Jewish background, and his Roman cultural ties. This book details how these metaphors connected with his first readers and further audiences to shape Christianity into its current form. ■

Benita Elissa Benny lives in Ernakulam, India with her parents, sister and brother.

NewsWatch

Vatican Declares Visions of Maria Valtorta Not of Supernatural Origin



The Vatican's Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith recently declared that

the messages in the writings of Italian Catholic mystic Maria Valtorta (1897-1961) are not considered supernatural in origin. In a statement issued on 22 February, the Dicastery noted that both clergy and laypeople frequently request clarification on the Church's stance regarding Valtorta's works.

Valtorta, who spent over 30 years bedridden following an injury, claimed to have received visions and revelations from Jesus and the Virgin Mary. These experiences formed the basis of her extensive writings on the life of Christ, which include details absent from the canonical Gospels. Her most famous work, originally titled *Il Poema dell'Uomo Dio* (The Poem of the Man-God) and now known as *L'Evangelo Come Mi è Stato Rivelato* (The Gospel as Revealed to Me), spans 13,000 pages. Despite its popularity and the support of Pope Pius XII, the text was placed on the Index of Prohibited Books in 1959 due to concerns about its alignment with Church teachings. This index, which identified texts deemed heretical or dangerous to the faith, was later abolished in 1966. In reaffirming its stance, the Vatican emphasised that Valtorta's alleged 'visions', 'revelations' and 'messages' are literary devices she employed to present her interpretation of Jesus' life. The Dicastery further explained that the Church has a long-standing tradition of rejecting apocryphal gospels and similar writings as authoritative since they are not recognised as divinely inspired. Instead, the Church relies on the canonical Gospels as the definitive accounts of Christ's life and teachings.



STATUE OF OUR LADY OF FATIMA TO TRAVEL TO ROME FOR JUBILEE OF MARIAN SPIRITUALITY

The revered statue of Our Lady of Fatima, recognised globally for its spiritual significance, is set to visit Rome on 11-12 October 2025, during the Jubilee of Marian Spirituality. This iconic image, a symbol of enduring hope, will be present for a special Mass in St Peter's Square on Sunday, 12 October 2025, enhancing the sacred atmosphere of prayer and reflection. The Vatican Dicastery for Evangelization announced on Thursday that entry to the Eucharistic Celebration will be free, and registration for the Jubilee event is now open on its official website.

This upcoming visit will mark the fourth time the statue has travelled from its home in Fatima, Portugal, to Rome. The first occasion was in 1984 for the Extraordinary Jubilee of Redemption, during which Pope St John Paul II consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary on 25 March. The second visit occurred in 2000 for the Great Jubilee, and the third was in October 2013 during the Year of Faith with Pope Francis.

Archbishop Rino Fisichella, the Pro-Prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization, emphasised the statue's importance, describing it as one of the most cherished Marian icons for Christians worldwide. He referenced Pope Francis's Bull of Indiction

for the Jubilee, *Spes non confundit*, which highlights Mary as the 'most affectionate of mothers, who never abandons her children.' The Archbishop added that the Virgin Mary's message to the three shepherd children at Fatima remains relevant today: 'I will never leave you. My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the path that will lead you to God.' Father Carlos Cabecinhas, Rector of the Sanctuary of Fatima, explained that the statue leaves the Cova da Iria sanctuary only in exceptional circumstances and strictly at the Pope's request. He described the Virgin of Fatima as a 'pilgrim of hope,' representing Easter joy amid the world's challenges.

In this visit, the 'Lady dressed in white' will join the 'bishop dressed in white,' a phrase the shepherd children affectionately used for the Pope. The statue, created in 1920 by Portuguese sculptor José Ferreira Thedim, stands 104 cm tall and was carved from Brazilian cedar based on the descriptions given by the shepherd children. It was crowned on 13 May 1946, and the crown was later adorned with the bullet that struck Pope John Paul II during the assassination attempt in St Peter's Square on 13 May 1981.

By Sam Biju

Vatican conveys Ramadan greetings

The Vatican has expressed its support for Muslims observing Ramadan, emphasising similarities between Ramadan and the Christian season of Lent. The Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue released a statement on 7 March, encouraging stronger dialogue and friendship between the two faiths. The Vatican highlighted the importance of hope, describing it as a virtue grounded in faith in God, the Merciful and Creator.

Ramadan in 2025 is expected to run from 28 February to 29 March, ending with Eid al-Fitr. Lent, which started on 5 March, will conclude on 17 April, followed by Easter Sunday. The Dicastery noted that this rare overlap offers an opportunity for both religious communities to connect through prayer, reflection, and acts of charity. Cardinal



George Jacob Koovakad, recently appointed Prefect of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, co-signed the statement with Secretary Father Indunil Janakaratne Kodithuwakku Kankanamalage. Koovakad, who

succeeded the late Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, is a member of the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church and previously played a significant role in organising papal visits. The Vatican's message acknowledged that both Ramadan and Lent emphasise self-discipline and spiritual reflection. Muslims fast during Ramadan to cultivate self-control and focus on their connection to God, while Lent encourages Christians to pursue purification through fasting, prayer, and charitable deeds. Despite differing practices, both traditions prioritise inner transformation. Koovakad's statement stressed the shared values of human dignity, peace, and unity. He encouraged Christians and Muslims to reject violence and discrimination while promoting solidarity and respect. The Vatican expressed hope that the 2025 convergence of Ramadan and Lent would inspire both faiths to build bridges of understanding and harmony.

ENGLISH TRADITIONALIST RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY TO LEAVE SCOTLAND

A Scottish bishop announced that traditionalist religious communities, residing in his diocese since 2022, will return to their original English diocese. However, one of these communities claims they are being forced out, leaving members 'homeless.' This situation reflects ongoing global tensions between dioceses and religious groups practicing older liturgical traditions. On 23 February, Bishop Andrew McKenzie of Dunkeld stated that after careful consideration and consultations, it was decided that the Marian Franciscan Sisters and Friars would return to the Diocese of Portsmouth, where they were originally established. The Diocese of

Dunkeld will continue to offer Mass in the Extraordinary Form for those interested.

The Marian Franciscans follow the teachings of St Maximilian Mary Kolbe and commit to vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. Their strict prayer schedule runs from 1:30 am to 9:30 pm. The men's community was founded in 2015 in the Diocese of Portsmouth before expanding to Dunkeld in 2022 at the invitation of then-Bishop Stephen Robson, who supported traditionalist practices. Upon their arrival, the friars established Lawside Friary, while the sisters occupied St Joseph's Convent. The communities expanded significantly, growing from an

initial seven friars and 20 sisters to 20 friars and 30 sisters. Bishop Robson resigned in December 2022 due to health reasons, and his successor, Fr Martin Chambers, passed away unexpectedly before his installation in April 2024. Bishop McKenzie took over in May 2024. Bishop Philip Egan of Portsmouth confirmed that while the Marian Franciscans previously had extensive facilities in his diocese, they were relocated to Dunkeld in 2022. Now, following their dismissal from Dunkeld, Egan pledged to support them as they seek new accommodations. The Marian Franciscans have a significant media presence through Radio Immaculata, Co-Redemptrix magazine, and the Mary House Press, and they organise a Mariological symposium annually.

This situation has drawn

comparisons to the Transalpine Redemptorists, a traditionalist group expelled from New Zealand's Christchurch diocese in 2024 after a Vatican investigation. The Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter (FSSP) also announced in September 2024 that it would undergo an apostolic visitation, which has already started in the United States. This traditionalist priestly community comprises nearly 600 members with an average age of 39. Since its establishment in 1988, its membership has grown consistently. However, there are no signs that the Marian Franciscans' dismissal followed any Vatican probe. Despite the uncertainty, Marian Franciscan priest Fr Philomeno James Mary expressed sadness but emphasised faith in divine providence, encouraging the faithful to trust in God's plan.

SPECIAL

GOD'S AMAZING PLAN TO GO GLOBAL

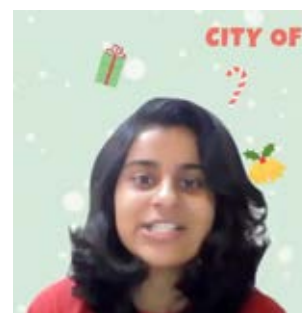
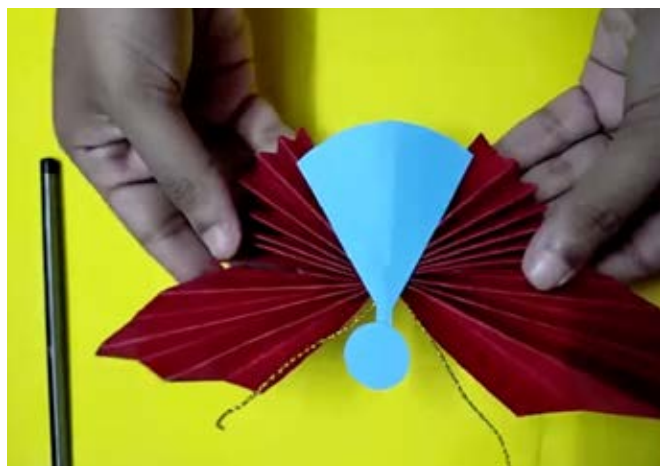


A few months after *Kairos Buds* magazine was introduced during the pandemic in the year 2021, several discussions on how to promote the magazine or to improve its reach took place. Then came the idea of an online children's programme filled with fun, faith and creative elements, just like the magazine.

In the month of July 2021, the first online programme was introduced, 'CraftCity'. Its major highlight was the biblical craft session, which was what attracted many. CraftCity was planned as having three sessions, namely Bible story, action songs and crafts aimed children in the category 6-12 years.

For the first CraftCity, though online, we expected only children from India. However, the response was overwhelming as its poster was shared widespread through different social media platforms. For the initial programme, we had more than 100 children from different countries. It was after this that the





FEEDBACK

It was a pleasure to have attended Buds Craftcity. It was a very enriching session with beautiful stories, song and activity. My kids sat through the session and they enjoyed it. Appreciate the effort for making the activity very simple and short yet powerful. Thank you team Kairos for paving the way to bring children closer to Jesus Christ.

Nimisha Tom, Bangalore (Participant)

I had an amazing experience hosting Craftcity's workshop. It brought me so much joy to be among so many little children who were so knowledgeable in Bible stories. I felt at home with them! I hope more workshops like this are held so that they all may grow within a strong foundation!

Seba Shobi, Georgia (Volunteer)

I have always wanted to be part of a group that provides a platform to nurture and inspire young children, and Kairos Buds Craft City offered a wonderful opportunity to do just that. I was truly overwhelmed by the number of children who participated in the session. It was a joy to share the story of Joseph and his brothers with them, and I was delighted to see their enthusiastic responses and engagement. Ms. Asha's craft activity, where the children created Joseph's colorful coat, beautifully complemented and concluded the storytelling session. I am grateful to the organisers and my fellow volunteers for making this session such a meaningful and memorable experience.

Josephine Mary Prabha, Bangalore (Volunteer)



name 'CraftCity' went from theme name to brand name, and later programme titles were given based on the themes selected.

At present, CraftCity has become a global Jesus Youth online kids workshop from Kairos Media. In the year 2024, online workshops for US and Australia also began.

The latest CraftCity for the Indian region was the 7th edition, with more than 200 participants from around 16 countries. This boasted a dramatic presence of more than 80 African children from four African nations, thanks to the mission sisters and priests of Africa.

We had always hoped that CraftCity would also take off as an offline programme for children, and this has already taken place in the US. Plans are also underway to conduct a similar offline CraftCity programme in Singapore. The volunteers for these are teenagers or youth, whom we expect as future Jesus Youth forerunners for the Lord.

As with the title of our latest CraftCity, 'God's Amazing Plan,' we place all our hopes and dreams for CraftCity in His hands, and wait for His amazing plans to unfold.



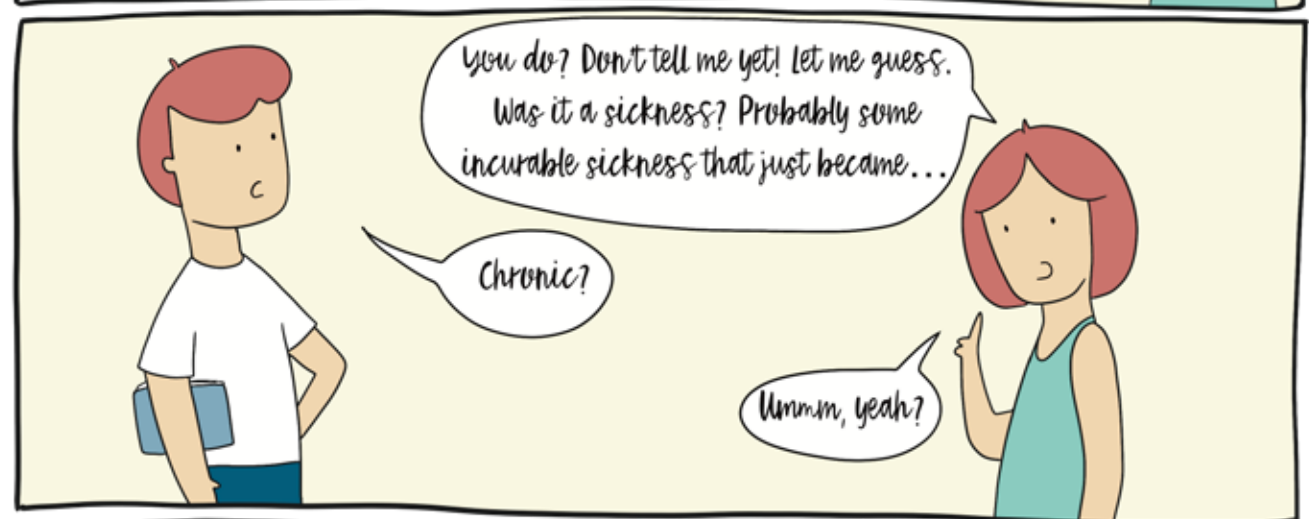
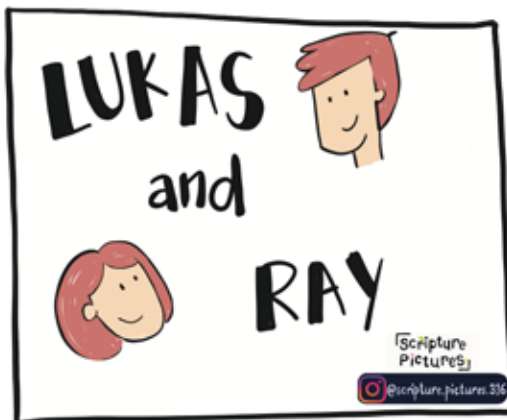
A mother of five, **Jeena Kuruvilla** was an assistant professor for twelve years. She is now an entrepreneur based in Bangalore, India.



Take a picture of the solved image and send it to quiztime@jykkairosmedia.org before 25th April 2025.
The winner will be rewarded with 1 year subscription of Kairos Global

WHICH SOCK HAS NO PAIR?





A woman with dark hair is smiling and looking down at a magazine titled 'GLOBAL' which she is holding. She is also holding a glass of coffee with a latte art design. The background is a wooden table.

Dear Friend in Christ,

If you have been touched by *Kairos Global* or any of the Kairos magazines (*Kairos Buds/Kairos Malayalam*), please consider supporting our mission to spread the Hope, Love and Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ to the multitudes in need of it.

In truth, Kairos would not exist without FRIENDS OF KAIROS. Being a non-profit initiative of Jesus Youth yet keen to give the best for the Lord, staying above rising production costs is often challenging. It is here that FRIENDS OF KAIROS – through their love and support – financially sustain the mission of Kairos. Through their regular monetary contributions, Kairos is able to go ahead and spread the Good News of Christ through the numerous initiatives under its umbrella.

For we know that the 'one who calls us if faithful' and 'his power is at work within us to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ever ask or imagine.' If the Holy Spirit inspires you, dear friend, we welcome you to support our mission of evangelisation by becoming a FRIEND OF KAIROS.

Please get in touch with us at
+91 62382 79115

KAIROS GLOBAL