

THE MUSEUM

A Magazine of the Society of Christian Doctrine - Preca Community Australia

ISSUE 26 | 2023

THE INNER
STRENGTH OF
**GILBERT
SIMIANA**



Preca
COMMUNITY



**PRECA COMMUNITY IS A SAFE ENVIRONMENT
FOR CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE ADULTS.**

**SAFEGUARDING OUR
FAITH COMMUNITIES**

The Society of Christian Doctrine -
Preca Community values the dignity
of every person. We are especially
committed to ensuring the care,
well-being, and protection of children,
and vulnerable persons in our
faith communities.

CONTENTS

- 3 "HARMONY"
- 5 A MESSAGE FROM POLAND
- 6 DANIEL'S STORY - FROM NON-BELIEVER TO BELIEVER
- 7 IS THERE A CONNECTION BETWEEN FOOD AND FAITH?
- 7 WELCOME TO THE PHILIPPINES
- 9 THE INNER STRENGTH OF GILBERT SIMIANA
- 11 PRECA ACTION - SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE
- 15 PRESERVING THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF THE SDC
- 16 THE GAZE OF THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST:
A LIFE, A STORY, A VISION
- 17 FEAST OF THE VIRTUES
- A REFLECTION ON ST FRANCIS OF
PAOLA AND EMBRACING HUMILITY
- 19 PRAYING THE QUARTER HOUR
- 21 SECRET POWER OF ADORATION
-ST GEORGE PRECA
- 22 RETURNED TO GOD 2023

THE MUSEUM is issued for friends and associates of the Society of Christian Doctrine in Australia. M.U.S.E.U.M. represents the first letter of a Latin prayer, Magister Untinam Sequatur Evangelium Universus Mundus translating Divine teacher, may the whole world follow the Gospel.

*A Magazine of the Society of Christian Doctrine,
founded by Saint George Preca*

Front cover: Preca Community, and others in Adelaide represented at World Youth Day celebrations in Adelaide. An amazing celebration of young people from across the Archdiocese of Adelaide, filled with workshops, fun, food, a liturgy, live music, and more! *Photo by Ben Macmahon.*

Back cover: Moreton Bay Fig. From The Monastery, Urrbrae, SA. *Used with permission.*

No 26 | 2023

Editor: Peter L Judge

Contact: Society of Christian Doctrine - Preca Community
Preca Centre - Forteviot

500 Sandy Bay Road, Lower Sandy Bay 7005

P: 61 3 6225 1646 **E:** sdcp reca@tpg.com.au

This magazine is also available online at:

www.precacommunity.org

GOT A STORY? sdcp reca@tpg.com.au

Design: Carter & Co. Creative

"HARMONY"

A young woman is here seen playing a hymn on a spinet. Lost in thought, she seems to be unaware of both the angel, and the music score the angel is holding for her. What is the point, then, of holding the sheet thus? St Cecilia was not familiar with music, and the scene was obviously never meant to represent an earthly concert.

This is a painting of *St Cecilia and the Angel* by D'Orazio Gentileschi (1563-1639). The choice clothes and the aspect of the persons give them an aura of calm and dignity. Cecilia is in early 17th century attire and the chubby angel could well be her brother or sister. She bears no halo, and if the angel does have wings, this creates a visual echo for the spinet. Both are of flesh and blood, but they embody a spiritual reality.

St Cecilia has been linked to music because, on hearing a strain of heavenly music on the way to her martyrdom, she burst into song while waiting for the executioner's axe. The harmony between Cecilia, and the angel is not a musical one but seems to point to the voice of God that can be heard at the bottom of the hearts of all who love him.

We don't need to be familiar with musical theory in order to play the hymns of God's love, nor do we need any music score to recollect ourselves, and abandon ourselves into his hands. Thus, while it's true that St Cecilia is the patron of sacred music, in reality she is the patron of us all. Her example inspires us to live in harmony with our belief in God, and with whatever pertains to God.



Harmony in an Australian landscape.

On our part, are we cultivating that harmony in our relationship with God, and with each other? Have we found the rhythm, and the right tone in our prayers? Are our lives in tune with the designs that God has set out for us?

A Harmony that caresses the heart

Harmony, from the Greek *harmonia*, means a collection of musical sounds that are played together, and are pleasing to the ear. Some philosophers consider God to be the best musician, creating harmony with the elements he has created. They talk about the harmony of the cosmos as it reflects the harmony of the heart. On their part Christian philosophers apply this concept to religious music. This penetrates the heart, an action that benefits the listener. Musical harmony turns sadness into joy, and lessens the inclination to anger. It extinguishes evil passions, and stirs towards purity, even transforming feelings of hatred and disgust into a spirit of mercy, and compassion. Harmony in music caresses the soul, and leads the listener to where words alone cannot arrive.

St Clement of Alexandria, a theologian in the second century, says that Jesus Christ came into our world to transform its dissonance into melodious song. According to St Augustine, singing in a choir brings about *consensio cantantium*, meaning that harmony is enjoyed at the same time by several singers. In *The Confessions*, St Augustine bears witness to his experience when he writes: "How warmly I wept as I listened to your hymns and songs! How touched I was when your church echoed in me the sound of the melodious voices of believers. These voices stuck in my ears and the truth melted my heart. From there came feelings of piety, and how beautiful it was for me to cry." (*Confessions* 9,6)

Harmony in art

Painting, perhaps not so much in the modern era, reflects the symmetry, the harmony and the order of creation, in much the same way that cosmic beauty can put humans in touch with the authentic and pure image that God has placed in every person. The art of the Middle Ages tried to reveal the true beauty in nature, even if this may be hidden at times. In every work of art there is the promise of a desired reality. This is particularly true of icons representing saints on a golden background, bringing out the divine light behind each image. Icons transform darkness into light, and bring out the beauty of God. When we look at icons, they may calm us down, even heal us, and give birth to harmony in our soul.



St Cecilia and the Angel,
18th century, D'Orazio Gentileschi,
National Gallery of Arts,
Washington, D.C.

On the contrary, certain contemporary music relies on dissonance because one may perceive in this an advantage over harmony. It expresses the interior tears, and fragility of modern man. This does not hinder us from seeing in modern art the desire for harmony, without which no art is possible. A painting that at first glance may seem to be lacking in harmony may well represent the fragility and frustration of the world. A modern painting can have a provocative character in as much as the viewer can react or propose a criticism of the present situation of human beings. In contemporary works we can see a form of harmony shining in the hope that art proposes. This is so because today we have a new way of looking and listening.

Harmony calls for an effort

Harmony does not come easily. As a matter of fact, harmony in music forms part of advanced music studies. In addition to the theory of harmony, the composer must have a good ear. He must listen carefully to what he has written and be attentive to the details of each instrument that will be taking part in this harmony, as well as to every member of the choir who will be executing his work. Harmony is no easy task, because who among us does not feel the force of the contradictions that hinder us from living in harmony with God, with others and with ourselves?

Even a single person, whether in the family or in larger communities, will be out of tune once he chooses not to live in harmony with the others. The more time people spend together, the more necessary is the spirit of harmony. It would be a pity if an ongoing activity is tarnished by internal disagreement. It is also fair to say that dissonance can enrich music, even that which belongs to the past. Sometimes part of the prestige of music depends on how the composer deals with dissonance. In a way we can even apply this to the way a good leader manages to unite the group in spite of the dissenting characters, and ideas.

To be in harmony one needs to start looking at the faces of others in order to discern the different needs, desires, passions, and impulses that can be addressed. In certain cases, we may have to live together with what is out of tune and, is hurting our ears, but which will ultimately instill joy within us.

If I were to add a 'virtue' to those listed by St Vincent Ferrer, and which Members of the Preca Community profess, I would definitely choose that of "harmony".

Joseph Galea
Preca Community

GREETINGS FROM POLAND

We seemed to have garnered a connection with the young people in Poland, and are happy to share this latest message from them:

The world we live in contradicts the idea of the world that Jesus preached. Wars, blasphemy, anxiety, hatred, betrayal, materialism, consumerism - these are present in today's world. It is a place where there is lack of love, justice, peace, mercy or altruism ... The question arises whether it is easy to be a Christian in today's world. Let's narrow this question down and "limit" it to our situation - Is it easy to be a Christian in today's Poland?

Poland is a special country where the process of secularization of society has been taking place for some time or so, but only visibly for a few years. Many factors, were the cause, such as 'apparent social welfare', 'scandals in the Church', 'no need for God' or simply 'boring' – an 'outdated, medieval' Church according to some. We have to find ourselves in all this – all Christians, not only Catholics, but also Orthodox Christians, Protestants, etc. We have to find ourselves in a world full of challenges, not only physical but also spiritual, and in such a world, we have to proclaim the ideas that Christ preached.

Our actions do not remain unanswered in spite of protests, removal of crosses or religious signs, and "social reluctance" to what is Christian or Catholic. However, the words of Christ saying - *"Go into the whole world and teach all nations"* should be above these social reactions. We should boldly walk through this world, like a bridge leading to God, who stands on the other side, a broken bridge, full of faults, holes and problems. We Christians should help to repair this bridge every day, and we can only do it by spreading the thoughts that Jesus preached.

We cannot allow an alienated society to fall off that bridge into the abyss and lose sight of God, although admittedly it's very difficult when it has been present for a long period of time. We also belong to such a society since in some way or another, we are all sinners, without exception. In this place, the words - "Holy Church, sinful people" fits perfectly.

The Candidate is the messenger of Christ who, as a young person, is often exposed to the greatest social front, that is, young people, often difficult and misunderstood. As a young person, the Candidate fits into this model, thus opening up to the dangers



Three young men in Poznan, Poland begin their formation period in preparation to full incorporation into the Preca Community. At this juncture they resolve to 'fix their gaze on Christ all the days of their life'.

of a young society; but what makes the Candidate different from other young people? The fact is that a Candidate, here in after, referred to as a Christian, who lives Christ's ideal, has a kind of shield against a society in crisis. Of course, the person may not always keep it up, being influenced by society, being subject to sin, but having received sound religious formation, it is very likely that there will be a come back to the Master, and the shield will be raised high once again.

Christianity in today's world is definitely not a smooth journey, but it is possible. Jesus Christ never hid behind words - that's not possible. He was always open to his neighbour: *"Love one another as I have loved you!"* Therefore we, as messengers of Christ, have to be open to other people, and with constant love, deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow the Lord.

Please visit: <https://verbumdei.pl/>

Marcel Rutkowski
Candidate – Poznan Preca Centre Poland

DANIEL'S STORY - FROM NON-BELIEVER TO BELIEVER

Daniel Yuen, a student resident at Preca Centre, Hobart has a wonderful story to share.

After attending the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, in 2021, he became a catholic, and since then he has immersed himself into the life of the Church. Daniel was introduced to the Church, by a friend who had a constant faith.

Daniel has a sound approach to his conversion. He understands that it is ongoing. Here he provides an attitude that we can reflect on. How often do we become complacent in our faith, and when opportunities arise to engage our faith further, we are distracted with other things?

Daniel's introduction to Preca Centre, Hobart was through Maurice a former student resident here who has since moved to Adelaide. Together with a few others, they began a weekly prayer group in the Preca Centre chapel, Hobart.

It was not by accident that he came to live in Preca Centre in Hobart which he says has been providential for him. Living here, sharing in the charisma and spirit of St George Preca, he is able to continue his daily prayer in front of the Blessed Sacrament in the Preca chapel, attend Mass here, and Adoration.

It is noted that the Eucharist has been reserved in the Hobart Centre since 1963. Sixty years has certainly been a blessing for all those who have been connected with the Centre; residents, and those who join us for formation.

Preca Centre also provides a haven for quiet study; with not too many distractions. The house has a peaceful aura wherein harmony, and emotional security for young internationals is provided.

Today Daniel is an acolyte. He sees this as very rewarding. This helps him to connect directly with the Church through seminars, and retreats.

*Daniel Yuen.
(Photo by Josh Low.)*

Daniel constantly gives thanks for becoming involved with the Preca Community in Hobart. This has certainly enriched, and supported his faith journey.

With other international resident students, he shares in the spirit, and charisma of the Preca Community.

We wish Daniel our best wishes in his study of surveying, and also we welcome him into the community of the Church with open arms. And as he says; this conversion is not static, but ongoing.

His response to his continuing journey in faith is catechesis at its best.



Daniel takes part in Corpus Christi process in Hobart, June 2023. (Photo by Josh Low.)

IS THERE A CONNECTION BETWEEN FOOD & FAITH?

We are all aware of the long-standing missionary axiom that ‘one cannot preach effectively to those who have an empty stomach’. Those who minister in the field of formation, and catechetics understand this only too well. This is made ever so clear in the feeding of the 5000; found in Matthew 14:13-21.

For Jesus, feeding the hungry was an important act. Many of his actions are related to food:

- Jesus' first miracle was turning water into wine.
- Jesus feeds the 5,000 in the miracle of five loaves and two fish.
- Jesus feeds the 4,000 along the sea of Galilee.
- Jesus and the miraculous catch of fish.

The Lord's Supper is the last meal Jesus shared with his disciples before his passion, and death. Through this he left us with a memorial of eating together in the Eucharist. This event is a perfect example of the connection between food, and faith.

One of my earliest recollections in attending the meetings of the SDC was the availability of sweets before the meeting. Later on, as our sensibilities developed, the SDC realised that this could be avoided prior to the meeting, and could be easily achieved following the meeting. In some cases,

although I do not recall, it could have been used as an incentive to attend and take part, so that there would be stillness during the presentations. The incentive may have gone like this; ‘pay attention, or no canteen after the lesson’!

The canteen in our Centres has always been a source of joy for our younger people, although in recent times, it is not so common; and the emergence of the ‘tuckshop wars’ in schools has had an influence on our canteens. A healthier approach has evolved. Nevertheless, it had its day with us in our Centres.

Without trivialising the event, it was well known that George Preca would often reward his followers with sweets. In fact, he had a courier for this very task, who distributed the goods when requested. We are told that this person at one time was called Censu (Vincent); who had to stretch the budget by providing sweets to all the children who came in contact with the Founder.

I vividly recall, when Maurice Mifsud, a long-time resident, and pioneer missionary in Australia, returned to his home-land, Malta in 2009, he was greeted by his nieces, and nephews at Luqa airport. Maurice handed out sweets to them. My recollection was this was a wonderful moment, and revealed a gesture of goodwill. The influence of George Preca on these early Members was still intact. Maurice himself; a contemporary of George Preca.

WELCOME TO THE PHILIPPINES

An invitation by Archbishop Gilbert Garcera, from the Archdiocese of Lipa in the Philippines, led the SDC to consider establishment there. This invitation was made in 2020

Following discussions, and a few visits to the Philippines, and an invitation by Archbishop Gilbert Garcera for the SDC to visit his archdiocese in 2020, the SDC announced on 23 May 2023, that a centre would be established in that country.

Following their recent visit to Australia, the Superior General, Roberto Zammit, and Councillor, Joseph Gauci visited the Archdiocese of Lipa in the Philippines from 16 to 23 January.

The Superior General, and Joseph Gauci visited several Church run colleges, seminaries, and experienced different aspects of the life of the local church. At the end of the visit, they also met the members of the community of the Missionary Society of St Paul in Manila.

Also in our gatherings, we usually reward young people with a treat. Our Centres celebrate birthdays, and other events. University graduations are often celebrated in our Centres. We all gather around a cake, pizza, prepared dishes etc. These moments should not be under-estimated.

St George Preca introduced the custom on Easter Sunday wherein a figolla in the shape of a lamb is given to those attending SDC centres; in memory of the 'Lamb of God' who was crucified, and was resurrected for our justification. The figolla is a traditional Maltese sweet cake for Easter, the form of which varies from a human figure to a 'colomba' (= dove).

Returning to the title '**Is there a connection between food and faith?**'; undoubtedly there is. We only need to look to the Eucharist 'the bread of life' to appreciate this.

George Preca presided at the Eucharist with intensity. He understood only too well that the Eucharist was our spiritual nourishment.

The young people who attend our sacramental classes are encouraged to understand the Eucharist in this context: nourishment for the soul that provides real intimacy with Jesus.

I always make it a point to show the young people, and the parents an example of a Communion breakfast celebrated prior to Vatican II.

Given that fasting would have been required, a big deal was made of the event perhaps giving way to the actual event, but nevertheless the connection between Eucharist, and life was present.

Peter L Judge
Preca Community



A Communion breakfast in full swing at St Camillus church, Warrane, Tasmania. Preca Members, and Missionary Sisters of Service are pictured sharing in the celebrations. The parish priest at the time, Fr Tom Garvey is also present.



George Preca distributes Holy Communion.



Figolla making at Preca Centre, Adelaide.



Meeting in the Philippines.

According to the 2020 census, Lipa has a population of 372,931. Lipa is located 78 kilometres, south of Manila in the province of Batangas.

The next stage is to seek Members committed to this mission.



THE INNER STRENGTH OF GILBERT SIMIANA

This year, 2023, we recall the twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of Gilbert Simiana, a Maltese boy who lived a life worthy of imitating. For five years, Gilbert battled with a brain tumour, with great faith, courage, and serenity.

Gilbert Simiana, died on 27 February, 1998, after living an exemplary life. During the fifteen years of his life, Gilbert was able to integrate some of the most profound paradoxes of the Christian life: God who is Love but permits excruciating pain, and that the grain needs to die to bear much fruit.

Providence willed that this young man who was a member of a Preca youth group will not end like many others who grew up in our society and whose name fades like the dew in the first sun rays.

Twenty-three years after his death, the General Chapter of 2021 encouraged the SDC to promote Gilbert as a model for the young (For the Seed to Bear Fruit, Chapter 4) and to the general public (Chapter 9).

Gilbert had a love of the Eucharist, receiving daily; great devotion towards Mary, and the Rosary – to praying fifteen decades every day; solidarity with the most fragile, and the disadvantaged; keen interest towards the Word of God, which he read daily; and respect, and dedication to the Pope, and the Church.

As a young member of a Preca group, he was known for his great love towards Fr Preca, whom he dearly wished to see beatified. He loved learning, and in the early days before his illness set on, never missed one single session; he was keen to wear the Verbum Dei insignia.

Wherever he went; he showed remarkable enthusiasm to teach primarily reflections on the Bible to the other members of his own group. Above all he loved the SDC vocation, and he openly said that when the time comes, he would like to be incorporated into the SDC.

Gilbert shined in his meek attitude when he learned that he was gravely ill. At age ten, after weeks of suffering from acute headaches, the doctor informed Gilbert's family that he had a tumour. The youngster replied: "God has a special preference for me", an expression that he often repeated in his short life. It was incredible how he managed to keep his typical smile, and never grumble, even when he was suffering great pain from the surgeries he had to endure, and the physical limitations hindering him from everyday activity. This does not mean that he didn't miss the fact that he couldn't play with his friends and, moreover, when he couldn't be independent in his daily needs. But, instead of focusing on these impediments, he continued to develop those remarkable qualities that the Lord has endowed him with, mainly his sensitivity towards others and the art of listening.

When he couldn't run, and play at the ground of the Rabat Preca Centre, he sat on one of the benches talking, and listening to his friends. Many expressed how they felt that Gilbert really empathised and showed interest in what they shared with him. Instead of succumbing to his condition, and letting it overshadow his life with sorrow, he transformed his pain into a source of goodness, for as Mgr Sebastian Laboa expressed, Gilbert opted to offer all his suffering for the spiritual success of Pope John Paul II's pastoral visits.

Those unfamiliar with Gilbert's life may quickly come to the wrong conclusion that Gilbert was some kind of 'fanatic' or a religious misfit. Gilbert was far from this. When he was young and healthy, he was as mischievous as any other boy his age. It was easy for him to make friends with his peers as he had a very genial, and cheerful character, mad about sports (especially football, swimming, and cycling), loved playing video games, and also liked to watch TV.

Often, due to illness, he had to miss school or the SDC session, his friends would miss him because they considered him one of them. Gilbert's life is like a hymn to beauty: the beauty of a pure and noble soul, the beauty of a family where love, and peace reigned; the beauty of friendship that enriches life; the beauty of the faith in Jesus Christ, and our Mother the Virgin Mary; beauty towards life, with all its richness and fragility. Above all, the beauty of the person who feels that he is loved by God and considers himself part of a divine plan that culminates in glory.



Gilbert meets John Paul II in 1997.

Gilbert is proof that our vocation has a valuable contribution to give to the Church and that our teaching methods, which at times we don't always cherish, have the power to make saints among us.

One interesting anecdote about Gilbert is his connection with Pope John Paul II. One day Gilbert was asked by a Vatican official, who was to meet the pope; what he would like to say to him. Gilbert replied: "Tell him that I am offering all my sufferings for the spiritual success of his pastoral visits".

On hearing this, Pope John Paul II asked to meet Gilbert. He travelled to Rome and met him on 09 September, 1997. At that meeting, the Pope told him

"You are a truly remarkable boy. God has a very special mission for you".

Stephen Zammit
Preca Community



PRECA ACTION – SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE



Citizen of the Year: Joseph Kielnerowski, Playford City Council, Adelaide.

Citation: Joseph Kielnerowski has grown something truly special within our city. Over the past decade, Joe has been busy building a truly unique garden, one which has broken down walls, and opened up a community.

Cooperating with his neighbours, this local leader has managed to pull his street's resources together – creating a larger space for gardening, education on food production, the significance of food security, and most importantly to establish friendships and connections with those who live next door.

Joe's budding idea has blossomed into regularly held workshops for the wider community, including the local of Elizabeth Grove Primary, and Playford International College.

He has also engaged volunteers through Midway Community House to spend their required volunteering hours at his community garden, many of whom attend more frequently than they are required because they simply love being there.

Joe also offered free workshops at Midway Community House so that learning about food production can be accessible to low-income families.



Joseph Gauci visiting Councillor from the General House ministers with young people in Adelaide.



Adelaide Diocesan Assembly.

The Archdiocese of Adelaide invited the SDC in Adelaide to present some ideas about best practices in outreach to families, children, and young adults at the 2022 Diocesan Assembly on 21 and 22 October at Nazareth Catholic College in Flinders Park. John Micallef gave a short presentation about the topic.



SDC Centre group.

Having finished the Year 12 final exams, a group of seven young adults, together with two Members from the SDC Centre in Adelaide, drove over 800km to Melbourne in late November. There, they met with the Members, and shared in some of the SDC Ministry, visited the Regional Centre, and the several churches attended by the Members. One young man shared his experience of growing up in the SDC with the Sunday congregation at St Paul's, Kealba.



Hobart group begin the year 2023 with a Reflection, and a shared meal.



Returns to Homeland.

After 50 years of dedicated ministry in Melbourne, Victoria, JOSEPH FARRUGIA, a Member of the Preca Community returns to live in his homeland, Malta. We are indebted to his ministry, support, and dedication. A Mass in acknowledgement presided by Fr Philip Gambin was held at the Westmoreland Road centre on Saturday 10 December 2022.



Cenacle prayer group, Carss Park, Sydney with visiting Member from Malta, Natalino Camilleri.



Superior General, Roberto Zammit, and Joseph Gauci, Councillor dining with Adelaide team.



Preca Member, Franco Zardo introduces international student Sidney D'Souza to his new accommodation quarters in Preca Lodge, Croydon, Adelaide.



Holy Trinity Catholic Parish of Laverton, Altona Meadows, and Point Cook in a series of weekly sessions, presented by Preca Members from the Talbot Street centre, 'Understanding the Sacraments Today'.



Acknowledging Incorporation Anniversaries



Rite of Election, Holy Trinity Parish, Laverton, Altona Meadows, and Point Cook.

As we gathered at The Monastery in Adelaide over the weekend of 30 June – 02 July 2023, for our AGM 2023, we acknowledged the mission, and commitment of a number of Jubilarians – eleven in all.

Significant were Gaetan Callus, and Joseph Cauchi, incorporated sixty years ago. Anthony Gatt, and Grazio Falzon, fifty-five years.

PRECA ACTION – SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE CONTINUED



Raymond, Daniel, Michael, and Joseph, Members from Preca Centre, Altona Meadows with Peter Judge visiting from Hobart and resident at the centre, Alwin Jose.



Pictured with farm manager Ajun, former Superior General, Natalino Camilleri, and Hobart Member, Peter Judge on a visit to a large dairy farm in the north of Tasmania. Following this visit, Natalino, and Peter spent a few days with Fr Ben Brooks in Westbury, Tasmania.



A new initiative at Holy Spirit, Sandy Bay. The sacrament candidates were addressed by various ministry groups in the parish. A keen interest was shared by parents, and sacrament candidates.

The bluestone church Holy Trinity, Westbury was built in 1869, during a time when a strong, and consistent catholic population existed. The clock on the tower provides the accurate time for the town of Westbury.



Holy Trinity, Westbury. Photo by Natalino Camilleri.



Gathering at Preca Centre, Carss Park to celebrate the feast of St George Preca; Sam Mercieca, Sam Attard, Fr Laurie Cauchi, Joseph Cauchi, David Strawbridge.



On his recent visit to Australia, the Superior General, Roberto Zammit addresses young people at Preca Centre, St Albans.

International Focus



Incorporation of Kevin Mercieca, Malta, 25.12.22.



On the Feast of St George Preca, the community in Cuba share their joy.



Cuba Incorporation

On 5 February 2023, Karel Cruz Alvarez, from Sagua la Grande, Cuba was received into the Preca Community. Present was the Superior General, Roberto Zammit, who officiated at this Incorporation.



Preca Member from Melbourne, Noel Debono, far right, joins Preca group from Malta for World Youth Day celebrations in Lisbon, Portugal.

PRESERVING THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF THE SDC



SDC represented in a Eucharistic procession in Birgu, Malta in the 1920s. The Birgu centre ran for ninety years, closing its doors in 2011 following a decline in young people in this inner village of Malta.



Sixty years ago, on Saturday 6 July 1963 excitement rages as the statue of Christ the Redeemer is placed on the General House of the SDC in Blata I-Bajda. The navy provided the service free of charge. Joseph Schembri, Secretary General among others was responsible for execution of the project.



Cardinal Norman Gilroy of Sydney meets Members gathered for a General Meeting at Holy Cross, College, Ryde, Sydney, December 1966. Note, Joseph Mifsud second from left, pioneer Sydney Member who died recently on 26.02.23.



The National Archives of Malta.

THE GAZE OF THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST: A LIFE, A STORY, A VISION

On 26 February, this year Dr Pauline Dimech, a Member of the Society of Christian Doctrine, and Professor at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Malta; passed away. Pauline was fifty-nine years of age. Her story is one that reflects courage, in the face of adversity, and a complete trust in God.

Pauline who moved in theological academic circles published a book in 2021; 'The Gaze of the Crucified Christ: A Life, a Story, a Vision'. On reflection, this was her way of coping with her stage in life wherein she was battling with cancer.

Pauline became a Member of the SDC in June 1982. In those days, women Members were restricted in their dress, and general appearance. The post-war experience for women in Malta may also have had an effect on the women's community.

She joined the Naxxar centre in Malta and at her time of Incorporation there were around twenty to twenty-five Members in this centre. She recalls some very curious times with the women Members; some helpful, while others not so helpful. We reflect, and learn from these events today, as situations of 'moments in time'.

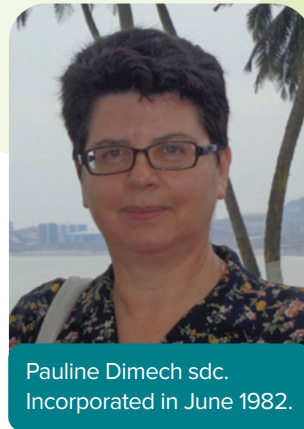
Pauline's life takes a turn when she was diagnosed with cancer, and in 2020 she began chemotherapy. With some moments of remission, the cancer returned.

In 2021, she published her 'memoirs'. Many would be familiar with the Ceremony of Candidates in the SDC. For those who wished to be fully professed; this ceremony begins an intense time of preparation to become a Member.

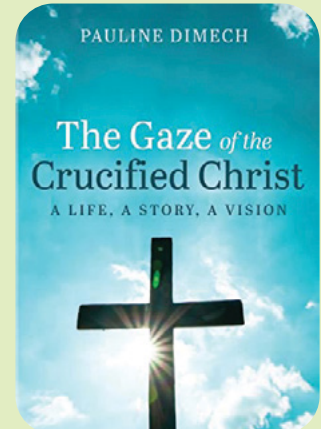
In this ceremony the Candidate looks at the crucifix and says: 'I resolve to fix my gaze on Jesus Christ all the days of my life'. For a young woman taking part in this ceremony; the notion of the 'gaze of Christ' did not leave her.

In her text Pauline affirms that she had a spiritual experience at the age of thirty-four that gave some clearer direction to her life. She experienced the gaze of the Crucified Christ in a very tangible way.

St George Preca's reflection on 'fixing one's gaze on Christ' will assist us in understanding the method behind Pauline's writing. George Preca steers clear of developing a theology on the 'face of Christ', but rather he stresses the state of being, and the



Pauline Dimech sdc.
Incorporated in June 1982.



expression of that being. It expresses not only the whole person but also the possibility of relating to that person; thereby making it possible to encounter the person of Christ, and establish long-life connection to him.

His take is that the 'face of Christ' mirrors the heart. So, to look at the face of Christ is to delve into the heart of Christ. The Christian pilgrim anchors his being while continuing the journey amidst doubts, weaknesses, darkness, fears, and trials. It is the relationship with Christ, that gives us strength to go forward; the joy of being at home in the heart of Jesus. And here we have Pauline's story.

In 1997, Pauline decided to do the Ignatian Exercises. Her intention was to come under the gaze of God, "to open my heart to God's scrutiny, to review her life, and relationships in God's presence."

It was during this retreat that she experienced the gaze of the Crucified Christ. During this retreat, she experienced a spiritual awakening: To quote Pauline from her own words; 'The loving gaze of Christ revealed to me God's desire for time with me, God's appreciation of me, God's acceptance of the whole of me, including my thoughts and feelings, God's desire to experience me, and to always have me by his side'.¹

A sad loss for her family; the Society of Christian Doctrine and, the Faculty of Theology at the University of Malta. "Those we hold in our hearts, remain with us. They live on in the kindness they have shared, and the love they have brought into our lives."

¹ Dimech, Pauline, *The Gaze of the Crucified Christ A Life, a Story, a Vision*. Resource Publications; Eugene, OR 97401. Page 55.

FEAST OF THE VIRTUES

– A REFLECTION ON ST FRANCIS OF PAOLA AND EMBRACING HUMILITY

Humility is a slippery virtue. It can appear as subservience, but is actually the opposite. It has more in common with the terms 'brutal honesty', 'unpretentious service', 'loving kindness' 'fearless defense of the oppressed', 'generosity of spirit' and, 'obedience to the will of God'. This is so unlike the images of 'quiet fawning servants' that we may have soaked up when reading pamphlets which reimagine droll lives of pious saints.

This is especially seen in the life of St Francis of Paola, who St George Preca chose for us as a model of the virtue of humility.

Who was Francis?

Francis was radical. A strict vegan who lived a healthy life until the age of ninety-one in an era when life was brutal, plagued by illness and poverty, and very short. A gentle person who loved animals, preached non-harm, and believed that all creatures (especially his beloved pets) returned to their creator, and were still alive in God. A compassionatae person who repaid evil done to him with good and, made non-violence an intimate part of the rule of his community, hundreds of years before Martin Luther King or Mahatma Gandhi. A lover of plants, a grower of edible veggies, herbs and fruit, a breeder of beautiful varieties to nurture the body, and enliven the spirit. A mystic with remarkable documented gifts of prophecy, and miracles. He was no respecter of persons for their position or rank, unafraid to call a hypocrite a hypocrite, and to call out scandalous behaviour, all of which got him into trouble, and persecution (especially when he called out the King of Naples).

The mark of a humble person is that they see things as they really are. Unveiled. Reality. With Francis, somehow on his life journey, he was able to attain such a degree of harmony with the Ultimate Reality that he interacted with it as if it were a natural part of life. Where he walked, God walked and, where he acted, God was seen acting. This is similar to George Preca, (having heard the personal stories of those who knew him). Similar to the stories we have heard from those who knew Padre Pio. In all of these, the common link is humility.

Among the signs of great humility is a certain naivety. To ignore the trimmings of power in the powerful, or the shortcomings of the powerless is, in a way, naïve. There is a great innocence found in the simple stories of his humility, from which we can learn. But formation

is the key. Under his humility, as a foundation, lie years of self-discipline, ascetic practices, and meditation.

The story of Francis

Francis was born in 1416, in Calabria, now in Italy. When Francis was thirteen years old, in response a remarkable recovery from a debilitating childhood illness, his parents sent him to live for a year in a Franciscan monastery. Following this the family went on pilgrimage to Assisi, Rome, and other places of devotion. On returning home to Paola, he set up residence in a secluded cave on the property, and later moved to a remote cave on the coast. Here he remained alone for about six years, practicing prayer and self-discipline.

When he was around eighteen, two young men joined him, and the hallmark of their new movement was the addition of a vegan lifestyle (i.e. no meat or animal products) and a commitment to radical non-violence to the traditional vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The movement spread, always remaining small, but continually present in several countries. Even now, this is the case. They were eventually called 'minims' by the pope, after their minimalist lifestyle.

Francis, who always shunned the limelight, was called on by kings and popes, because of his gifts, although he had to be ordered by the pope to go, under obedience. King Francis I of France was named after him, after Francis prophesied to the pregnant mother that her son would be king of France, even though it was extremely unlikely at the time. When he was sent to King Louis XI of France in his last illness he cured many sick of the plague in Provence as he passed through - although there was no physical cure he could finally give to a 60 year old King worn out by war and intrigue, whose time had come... instead he cured his soul.

Francis never got to go back home. He was called upon to be tutor of the heir, Charles VIII, then counsellor to Louis XII, each of whom insisted he remain in France. He died in France on Good Friday, 2 April 1507 at the age of ninety-one, still keeping the Good Friday fast of no meat, fish, dairy or eggs, as he had done every day of his adult life. Washing the feet of his friars the night before. Humble, simple, unsullied by the life, and intrigues of the court, in his little hut in the palace garden.

Stories about Francis

Now Francis believed (in his words) that 'for those who love God, anything is possible'. So around him, impossibilities happened. Like walking into the furnace to do repairs while it was still on. Or picking up red-hot coals in his hand to give to a visiting priest who came to berate him for being a fraud – as Francis said to him: 'to warm your cold heart'. He certainly had a wicked sense of humour. A humble person can laugh at adversity, simply because they place their trust in God.

There are many endearing stories of the saint. I especially like the tales of his two favourite pets and that of his pear tree, which I will relate below.

Now Francis kept a trout in his fishpond in Calabria, called 'Antonella'. One day a local priest who came to say mass at their little monastery saw Antonella swimming about in the pond, and she looked delicious. He caught it and took it home, tossing it into a frypan. Francis noticed Antonella was missing, realized who had taken her and asked one of the hermit monks to go to the priest to get her back. The priest was so annoyed by someone wanting to take away his dinner he emptied the frypan on the ground where the cooked fish broke into pieces. The hermit sent by Francis gathered up the broken pieces in his hands and brought them back to Francis. Francis placed the pieces back in the pool and, looking up to Heaven, prayed and said: 'Antonella, in the name of Charity, come back to life.' Suddenly there was a trout happily swimming around his pool as if nothing had happened. It is said that the friars and the workers who witnessed this miracle were deeply impressed.

With Francis, in his humility, anything was possible. Because God listens to the humble person.

Francis also raised another animal from the dead - his pet lamb Martinello. Some builders' labourers on the monastery grounds were in need of food, so they cooked up little Martinello, roasting him in their lime kiln. They were eating when Francis approached them, looking for the lamb. They told him they had eaten it because they were hungry. "Where are his remains?" he asked. They told him they had thrown them into the lime kiln. Francis walked over to the furnace, looked into the fire and called 'Martinello, come out!' The lamb jumped out, completely untouched, bleating happily on seeing his master. It seems the workers suddenly became devout Christians and Martinello's resurrection story got around pretty quickly.

Our final story is about the pear called Williams bon Chrétien - the most grown pear in the world. All canned pears and most of those in the supermarket are this variety. It is also known as Duchess, Bartlett, and Sensation pear. Everyone wanted to put their

names to it, even Mr Williams. But it is still the 'bon Chrétien' pear – the 'good Christian' pear. And who was this good Christian? Francis of Paola. People who live in caves still have to eat. A remote cave means you grow your own. And being Francis, a lover of creation, it is likely that he would rejoice with God in only growing the best that he could find or develop. His gift to the king of France, a gift fit for a king, was the seeds of his favourite Calabrian pear tree. See the humility. The good Christian. Not for himself, but for the world. Still the best (most useful) of the pears, the best in the world, 650 years later. That is probably why so many other (less humble) people have put their name to it.



What we learn from Francis

From the life of Francis of Paola we can not only take away many examples and signs that indicate the presence of the virtue of humility, but also three relevant keys to growth in this virtue, based on the lived experience of Francis.

Meditation – specifically, practicing introspection – looking inside. For us this includes reflecting on our intention, and the quality of our action, and inaction in the daily evening examen.

Self-discipline – for us this is deepening the observance of the disciplines in our constitution: our prayer life, time schedules, study regimes, teaching, fasting, meetings, social interactions etc. – living a regulated life within a framework that gives us freedom to make the world a better place for all.

Attitudes – for us this is the development of respect for all living things that marks a truly humble person – plants, animals, nature, people. This is indeed a sign for our times, when 'care of the earth' is put on a par with the two traditional Christian ethics of 'care for people', and the commitment to social justice in 'fair share for all'.

May the life of St Francis of Paola inspire us to grow in the virtue of humility through love of God, deep, and frequent reflection on our intention in all our actions, living a life that is based on the disciplines of prayer, and service, and fostering an attitude of love that cares for the earth, cares for people, and cries out for fair share, and justice for all.

Joseph Kielnerowski
Preca Community

PRAYING THE QUARTER HOUR

There is a certain mystery in praying every fifteen minutes.

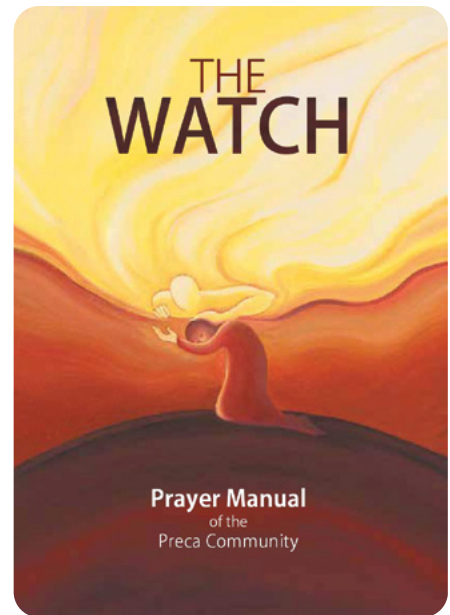
For Members of the Preca Community, many have enthusiastically used it to carry forward the heritage of our Society. Some have struggled with it. But given, we have a time span of ten to fifteen minutes, it seems that George Preca's idea of a fifteen-minute break is a sure way to refocus our thoughts. It was one thing to instruct his Members to pray constantly, and quite another to give them ways in which to fulfill this directive in the midst of practical living. In order to help them practice prayer throughout the day, Fr Preca wrote *The Watch*. This prayer book, which is still in use by the Members of the Society of Christian Doctrine, consists of short commemorative prayers for every quarter of an hour, centering on events in the Life of Christ.

In Maltese it is known as L-Ghassa; in English, "The Watch".

We are able to view "The Watch" as little prayerful habits that are easy to achieve and maintain. They aren't time consuming, or need extra effort to practice; therefore, they are easy to incorporate into our routine. There is no requirement to pray them all.

Today the surge of digital technology poses a distraction. The idea of resetting our thoughts after every fifteen minutes of work etc. is a great way to re-connect with ourselves.

For Members, Associates, Friends, young people, and those involved in the Preca Community, we have a wonderful opportunity each quarter of an hour to be refreshed from the springs of salvation. "The Watch" is George Preca's way of providing mindful living for his followers.



Spirit of Prayer

Life as prayer and action was Fr Preca's desire. He took seriously the directive of St Paul to "pray constantly". He prayed constantly, and wanted his followers to do the same. At prayer, he was always reflective, praying with a sincere voice, articulating with care, word by word; perhaps many times frustrating those who wished to 'get on with it'. Even when praying a universally familiar invocation, such as the "Glory be," he took his time, speaking slowly, his head bowed in profound adoration to the Holy Trinity. He always united his prayers to the merits of Christ, especially to the Divine Wounds, to which he had a very great devotion.

Imagine George sitting at his desk, drafting the constitution of his newly-formed Society, which would have been taxing - frequently every fifteen minutes he pauses for a connection to the Divine. Every quarter-hour he was refreshed, and he made the necessary arrangements for others to experience the same.

"The Watch" is organised cumulatively by schema and divided in such a way wherein every Member is recollected with our Blessed Lord, and all are praying the same prayer at the same time. In addition to chronological events from the life of Christ, "The Watch" contains prayers for the living and the dead, for the Church, for those who assist us, for sinners, and for who are an obstacle to the SDC. "The Watch" has a set time and place for daily reading of the Creed, Commandments, and Beatitudes. There are meditations and readings from Scripture to accompany the praying of the Rosary, and also a daily Litany of the Saints.

“The Watch” also has instruction in “body language” during prayer, and even practical suggestions on what to do when it is hard to sleep at night as well as a special meditation on death.

Some may scoff at fifteen-minute intervals to pray. Although in practical terms this may be difficult to achieve; the idea that we raise our hearts, and minds to God at fifteen-minute intervals, allows us to never let go of the gratitude we owe to God.

When a fifth Sunday falls, “The Watch” is prayed in common by the Members. This is a long-held tradition in the Preca Community. This is a great source of unity for us all.

Accompanying this “choral watch” is a set of chimes that are sounded every fifteen minutes.

Post Office, and Town Hall Clocks

It has been a long-held tradition for post office, and town hall clocks, among others, to chime out the correct time; many every fifteen minutes.

This one in Australia’s third oldest city, Launceston, reminds us of the time every quarter the hour.

No one seems to know exactly when the clock at the Launceston Post Office chimed its first hour over the city, but we do know that it was in 1907, the foundation year of the Society. The clock mechanism bears the stamp A.D. 1907; the foundation year of the Society.



Launceston Post Office clock.



Chimes used on the fifth Sunday of the month when praying The “Choral Watch” in community.

There is also a beautiful prayer attached to the mechanism:

“O Lord our God

Be thou our Guide

That through thy help

No foot shall slide.”

A lovely sentiment indeed, and a timely reminder that we are in God’s hands.

Those who wish to receive a modified version of “The Watch”, please contact us, and we will forward you a copy.

SECRET POWER OF ADORATION -ST GEORGE PRECA



Blessed Sacrament continuously reserved in Hobart chapel since 1963. Many blessings received!

The liturgy was an integral component of the life and the spirituality of Fr George Preca. He celebrated Mass slowly and with profound zeal, due to his great devotion to the Eucharist. Fr Preca yearned to share his deep love towards God, and the Church with the Members of his Society, so he wanted them to commemorate the main liturgical feasts or seasons with certain intensity.

Hence a chapel, or prayer space was set up in every centre. In Australia, we have had the privilege of reserving the Eucharist in a number of our centres. Preca House, Hobart has had the eucharist reserved since 1963.

This has brought to the house many blessings. Adoration has been the consistent way which sees our Lord work through evangelisation, catechesis, in healing ministry, and in countless ways in people's lives.

We do not celebrate the buildings, the new chapel, or the spacious courtyard. But we have celebrated the love that has flowed from the Preca Centre; the truth that has spread from the Preca Centre, the joy that has spread from the Preca Centre. People come to us to feel this power coming from our centres and all those who are connected with the Preca Centre, children, Members, young people, and parents, are

inspired with this power which Fr George instilled in us: love. Lovers have something to celebrate. Those who do not love can hear their death bell tolling. We can celebrate because of a Preca Centre that was dead and is now alive. This is the joy of our Society.¹ The presence of a chapel in our houses provides strength in which all can draw from.

A recent document as a result of the recent General Chapter, and published in 2023 is 'The Dimensions of an SDC Centre'. This document contains a chapter, 'The Contemplative Dimension';

The Centre cultivates "an atmosphere of silence and recollection" where Members yearn for moments of community prayer that draw them closer to God to make them grow in intimacy with him. As a result of this atmosphere, the Centre becomes a holy place, whereby all SDC apostolate is marked by joy and peace.²

We thank God that we are able to provide these spaces, and where we have a dwelling that has the eucharist reserved, we consider this to be an additional blessing.

¹ Giglio, Abel, *The Preca Centre Chapter 14, Frater Fragili.*

² *The Dimensions of an SDC Centre 2.2; Societas Doctrinae Christianae M.U.S.E.U.M. 2023.*



George Preca presides at Mass, St Michael school, 1951.

RETURNED TO GOD 2023

We hold them in prayer:

23.11.22 PATRICIA CASE

11.01.23 DOMENICA STANSFIELD

17.01.23 EMMANUEL MARTINELLI

26.01.23 GIULLERMINA MUJICA

02.02.23 MARIA ABELA

06.02.23 JOSEPH BORG

09.02.23 CARMENA CHIRCOP

26.02.23 JOSEPH MIFSUD

26.02.23 PAULINE DIMECH

23.03.23 MARY SAMMUT

27.03.23 JOHN TOLLAN

28.03.23 ROCCO LOGOSSO

02.04.23 BETTYE MCNAUGHTON

19.04.23 BOB MAGUIRE

29.04.23 JOSEPH AZZOPARDI

29.04.23 LAWRENCE FORMOSA

13.06.23 GLADYS SEQUEIRA

26.06.23 JOHN DEBONO

02.07.23 AUSTIN COOPER

04.08.23 PATRICIA HUNTER

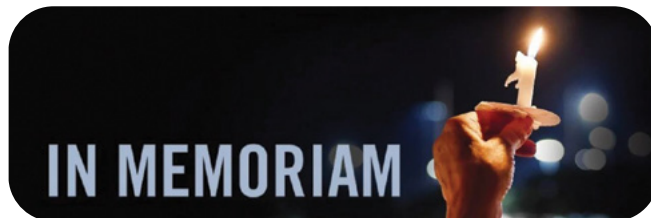
29.07.23 JOSEPHINE GRIXTI

14.08.23 PHILLIP OAKLEY

15.08.23 MERVYN GEORGE

21.08.23 CHARLIE FARRUGIA

25.09.23 JOAN PRITCHARD



Recently deceased Fr Bob Maguire behind the speaker, Mgr Moran. Opening, and Blessing of Preca House, North Sunshine, 28.12.61.

'My deeds done in my Father's name are my credentials'. John 10:25

Disclaimer - While we make every endeavour to include those who have died and have been connected with the SDC, we apologise if we have missed someone.

Pledge Before the Lord

I sincerely approve of every good deed that has been done and will be done until the end of the world.

I sincerely disapprove of every immoral deed that has been done and will be done until the end of the world.

I sincerely forgive all my enemies.

I intend to do all things from a motive of faith without which no-one can please God. Amen.

Attributed to St George Preca



BE THE SUNSHINE

Matthew 5:16