

THE MUSEUM

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

ISSUE 28 | 2025




WE HAVE A POPE!

PAGE 24



Preca
COMMUNITY



THE JUBILEE YEAR OF 2025 beckons us all to be Pilgrims of Hope. Pope Francis in announcing this Holy Year said that “Hope is needed by God’s creation, gravely damaged and disfigured by human selfishness ... Hope is needed by those peoples and nations who look to the future with anxiety and fear.” The Holy Year is a centuries-old tradition of the faithful making pilgrimages to Rome to visit the tombs of Saints Peter and Paul.

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 adults at risk, in our faith communities.

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.

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

Front cover: Flags representing countries that have established Preca Communities. Outside of Malta, the first successful overseas centres of the Society of Christian Doctrine were those of Australia which began in the 1950s when Fr Preca asked for volunteer Members to go to this continent which was receiving thousands of Maltese immigrants at that time. Then in 1983, a surge of missionary activity was actively promoted by the central administration of the SDC, resulting today in centres in Albania, Cuba, Kenya, Peru, Poland, United Kingdom, the USA, and the Philippines in 2025.

Back cover: Franciscvs 1936 – 2025

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PRESERVING THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF THE SDC



Delegate of the Superior General in Australia, Anthony Messina, Superior General, Francis Saliba, and close behind Joseph Schembri, Secretary General, arriving in Hobart for an Annual General Meeting, 17.12.71.



Pope John Paul II visits General House in Malta in 2002. Superiors General, Victor Delicata, and Phyllis Falzon make a presentation to the Pope.



Preca Members gathered at 'Raheen', Kew in Victoria. Waiting to be greeted by Archbishop Daniel Mannix of Melbourne, 1963.



Pope Francis visits the tomb of St George Preca at General House, Malta in 2022.



Visiting Cistercian Abbey, Tarrawarra, Victoria in 2005. Carmel Cauchi, Peter Judge, John Pocock OCSO (guest master at the Abbey), Natalino Camilleri (pre-Superior General days), Victor De Bono.



We rejoice with Joseph Martini, and Cody Harwood, formalised Associates of the Preca Community, inducted in January 2015. Pictured with Archbishop Philip Wilson (1950 -2021).



General House in the 1960s. Not quite ready for the incessant flow of traffic especially from the Marsa side!

The Preca Associates are women and men, single or married, coming from all walks of life who value the charisma of the Community and its contribution to the Church. The vision and mission for associates is: "To unite with the Preca Family in its life of prayer and its task of proclaiming the gospel, and to grow in the realisation of one's own role in that ministry."

PRECA ACTION - SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for all you have done for us through your life, death, and resurrection. You are the living gospel that we should follow in our lives each day. Help us to teach people about you as St George Preca did. May we share your Word with others following his example of faith. Amen.

Annual General Meeting 2025

The Annual General Meeting for 2025 for the Australian Delegation was held from 3 - 7 January at University College, Parkville, Melbourne.

This AGM held in 2025 is the 67th, with the first occurring in 1957.

“God does not look at the action, but at the spirit motivating it.” This captivating statement was the theme for our time together.

Bishop Charles Gauci, Prelate of Darwin and Philip Bezzina from the General House as the Delegate of the Superior General were in attendance.

A number of young people from Melbourne, and Adelaide enthusiastically joined in meetings.

We celebrated with Cody Harwood from Hobart, and Joseph Martini from Adelaide their ten years as formalised Associates of the Preca Community.

The meeting highlighted that we must go wherever the river flows to explore new frontiers of engagement. And as we experienced from the presentations of our ministries that occurred in 2024; we see signs of growth, and sustainability.

During the meetings we prayed that the Preca Community in Australia may experience strong faith in Jesus and advance in grace. A leisurely lunch together concluded the AGM for 2025.

In 2026 we look forward to our celebrations of 70 years of foundation in Australia.



AGM 2025. Gathering at St George Preca bust, St Patrick's cathedral, Melbourne.



AGM 2025. Adelaide team all set for planning.



AGM 2025. Lunch to conclude the proceedings for 2025.



AGM 2025. St Albans team with Robin Lomangkok CSsR of Holy Eucharist, St Albans

Celebrating Our Unity



A time of relaxation followed the AGM 2025. Charles, Philip (General House), Raymond, Peter, Joseph, Cody (Hobart Associate celebrating 10 years as an Associate).

Preca Family Weekend, Wirraway, SA



Superior General, Roberto Zammit addresses an adult group at family weekend in Adelaide.

Guilford Young Chapel

The chapel at Preca House, Hobart was named Guilford Young Chapel after the previous Archbishop of Hobart who invited us to Hobart. Support and recognition from the Archbishop enabled us to bring forth a ministry in Hobart that continues today.



Welcome Ben

Following an intensive time of preparation, Ben Cheesman from the Preca Community in Adelaide was received into the Church at Sacred Heart church, Hindmarsh at the Easter Vigil, 19 April 2025.

Supported by his family, and the Preca Community in Adelaide, we welcome Ben.



'Leave a Little Room for God'

On Saturday 26 April at St Albans Centre a day retreat was organised for youth and young adults. The theme of the day was **'Leave a little room for God'**, related to the Jubilee 2025 Year of Hope.



PRECA ACTION – SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE CONTINUED

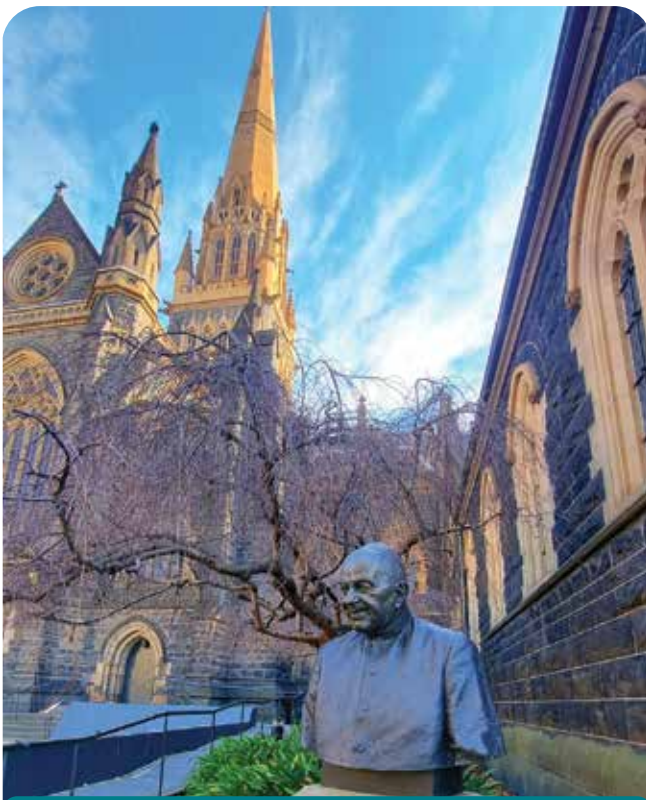
Strength in Mission

St George Precia and Mgr Joseph De Piro, Founder of the Missionary Society of St Paul (MSSP) were contemporaries. There has always been a close connection between the two communities.



Precia Member, Peter Judge and Fr Edwin Agius MSSP at AGM 2025 lunch. Fr Edwin has supported us over the years from early days at St Bernadette's, North Sunshine.

Autumn Splendour



St George Precia in the splendour of Melbourne's Autumn at St Patrick's cathedral. Picture by Johnny Nguyen.

Annual Reflection Weekend

Annual Reflection Weekend was held in Adelaide, The Monastery, 15 Cross Road, Urrbrae, 4.7.25 – 7.7.25. Speaker from Hobart, Passionist priest; Fr Justin Durai Raj.

The theme "Humility: Way to God's heart; our true abode," provided an opportunity to reflect.

Members from all states, and young people from Adelaide, and Melbourne shared in the inspirational deliveries of Fr Justin.



Music ministry at ARW; Noel, Raymond, Michael, and Brandon.



Holiday gathering of participants from St Albans centre. At All Saints Parish Church, Portland, Victoria.

Superior General's Visit



Roberto Zammit, the Superior General of the Society of Christian Doctrine visited all states in July 2025.



Sydney team with Roberto.



Young men's group, Hobart.



Adelaide celebrations with the Superior General.



Visit to St George Preca school, Principal, Michael Ozbun, Roberto, and Joseph.

International Focus - Associates Ceremony, USA

On Sunday 13 July, 2025, Ms Ruth Lasseter was formally welcomed as a formalised Associate of the Society of Christian Doctrine during a ceremony held at Preca Cottage, South Bend, Indiana.

The ceremony was led by the Secretary General, Ruben Pace who offered a reflection on the vocation and mission of an SDC Associate.

Ms Lasseter has played a vital role in fostering connections and friendships that support the SDC's presence in the United States. She continues to maintain Preca Cottage, where she regularly hosts meetings and activities based on SDC spirituality.



PRECA ACTION – SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE CONTINUED

Light from the Crucifix

On 9 April 2025, a prayerful celebration was held in the Auditorium at Blata l-Bajda, centred on the theme Light from the Crucifix. St George Preca frequently urged the faithful to stand at Calvary before Christ Crucified and to learn from him on how to live a life of holiness.



The statue of Christ Crucified, had been gifted to the Founder, St George Preca, by Bishop Pietro Pace in 1910. The crucifix ended up in the Preca centre in Hamrun.

Recent restoration and conservation which was carved in wood around 225 years ago brought about a new life for the image.

Natalino Camilleri shared a reflection on the centrality of the Crucifix in the spirituality of St George Preca who encourages us to fix our gaze on Jesus Crucified in moments of adversity and suffering, and after a few moments of silence, to exclaim: Hail Christ Crucified!



Domus Australia

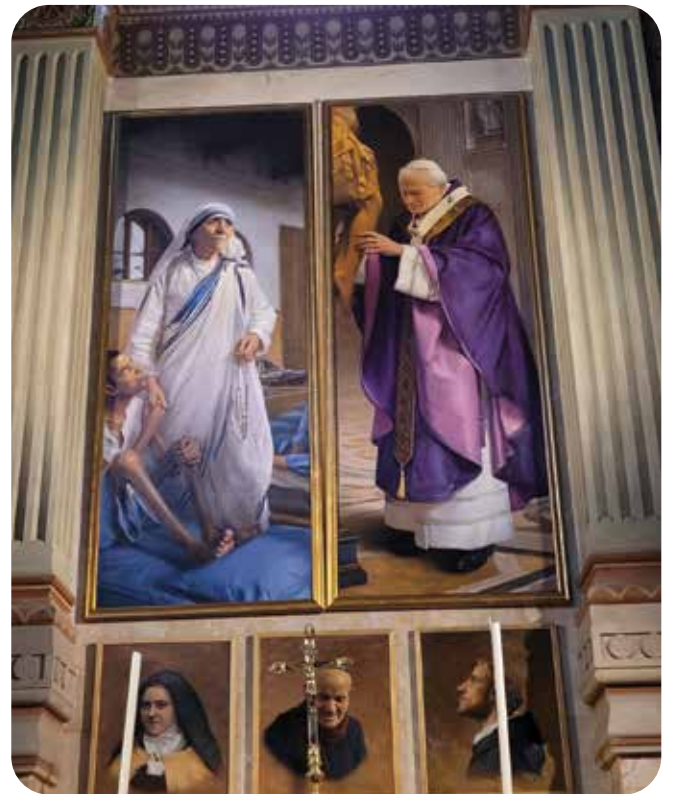
Visitors to Rome should make it a point to visit Domus Australia. The church associated with the Australian guest house contains the Australian artist's Paul Newton painting of St George Preca.

George is in good company with Mother Teresa of Calcutta, John Paul II, St Teresa of Lisieux, and St Thomas Aquinas.

If the church is locked, reception at Domus Australia will provide access.

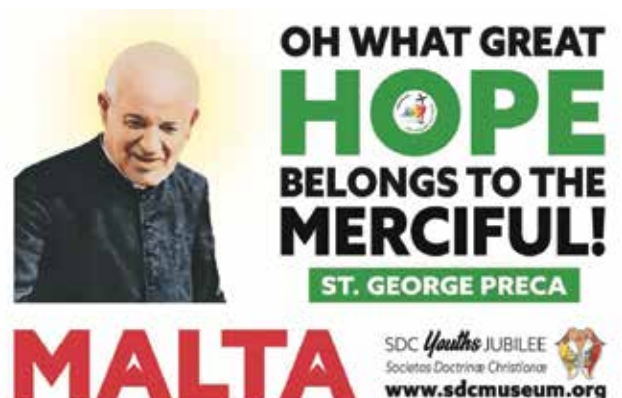
Domus Australia

Via Cernaia 14b, Rome, 00185, Italy. (Close to Termini.)



Jubilee Year of Hope 2025

In this Jubilee Year, the SDC has been well represented at many of the gatherings in Rome. This banner accompanied one of the groups who attended the Jubilee of Youth. This event for youth underlines the vital role of young people in the Church's mission.



OH WHAT GREAT
HOPE
BELONGS TO THE
MERCIFUL!
ST. GEORGE PRECA

MALTA SDC *Youth's* JUBILEE
Societas Doctrinae Christianae
www.sdcmuseum.org

General Meeting Speakers

From the earliest of days in the Australian Delegation adopted the tradition of one day of the week for Members' personal development. Wednesday is the nominated day which has been a mainstay in Malta in the culture of the SDC.



Joseph Gauci

Guest speakers this year in Australia included the Superior General, Roberto Zammit, his Assistant Joseph Gauci, and physician, Stephen Parnis.

Mission to the Philippines

In January 2025, four Preca Community Members embarked on a new mission in the Philippines in the Archdiocese of Lipa. We pray for this new mission. In this Jubilee year, a year dedicated to hope, a new mission indicates hope in the Lord God.



Commissioning of three Members, Oliver Aquilina, Lawrence Fenech, and Gabriel Pace from the Delegation of Malta to the Archdiocese of Lipa in the Philippines.



Daniel Attard from the Delegation of Australia also joins the community with a separate ceremony during the AGM in Melbourne.

Glory and Praise to God who provides us with the strength and opportunity to continue the work of evangelisation.

RETURNED TO GOD

We hold them in prayer:

*May you see God's light on the path ahead
When the road you walk is dark.
May you always hear, Even in your
hour of sorrow,
The gentle singing of the lark.
When times are hard may hardness
Never turn your heart to stone,
May you always remember when
the shadows fall,
You do not walk alone.*

4.10.24 TONY DI FALCO

5.10.24 ELIZABETH HIGGINS

3.11.24 FRANCO ZARDO

25.11.24 STEPHEN JOSEPH VARGA

25.11.24 DIANE EDWARDS

6.12.24 CHRISTOPHER ABELA

10.12.24 MATHIRI LONAPPAN

7.1.25 DENIS CARABOTT

14.2.25 SAM MERCIECA

18.2.25 KEVIN JOHN WALDIE

27.2.25 PETER FRANCIS CARRUCAN

14.3.25 THRESSIYAMMA ANTONY

26.3.25 EMMA BIGGERSTAFF

21.4.25 JORGE MARIO BERGOGLIO

18.5.25 GERRY YOUNG

18.5.25 PAUL GARLAND

11.7.25 EMMANUEL BONELLO

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.

FEAST OF THE VIRTUES

THE APOSTLE OF LOVE: A LIFE SHAPED BY THE WORD AND THE HEART OF CHRIST; ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST

One by one, his mates were killed for the sake of love. Love of their Master, the one who had laughed with them, listened to them, taught them... taught them everything they needed to know about love. And still he loved. Still he taught about love. Still he followed the footsteps of his Master. Still he established and mentored young Churches to bring the word of God's saving love to those who hungered for the good news.... He had been the favourite, the youngest, one of the two noisy 'Sons of Thunder' following Jesus on the way.

His name was John. A son of Zebedee and Salome, from a successful fishing family on Lake Galilee. And one day, when he was a teenager, he and his older brother James left it all behind to follow Jesus.

They were both present at pivotal moments in Christ's ministry: the raising of Jairus' daughter, the Transfiguration, and the Agony in Gethsemane.

John absorbed Jesus. Deeply. So deeply, that he is depicted leaning on Jesus' breast at the Last Supper (John 13:23). So deeply, that Jesus gifted him His mother, and John took Mary into his home, as his mother, and cared for her as a son (John 19:26). So deeply did John absorb Jesus (as Paul would later say of genuine Christians, 'clothed with Christ'), that this intimate connection is reflected in the deep theology of his Gospel, which opens not with a birth narrative, but with a cosmic declaration: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). He knew – knew beyond words – that in Jesus, he had experienced the living God. Even more deeply, in his first letter, he reveals his personal experience... "This is what we proclaim to you: what existed from the beginning, what we have heard... what we have seen with our own eyes... what we have looked at... and touched with our hands... the Word who is Life..." (1 John 1:1-4). Like Moses, John had looked upon the face of the living God, and he would never be the same.

This transformation was about love. "Anyone who loves me" Jesus said, "will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home in him" (John 14:23). This was the source of John's intimate relationship with Jesus,

and this understanding of God as Love profoundly influenced the early Church and continues to inspire believers today. In his Gospel, three letters (Epistles), and the Book of Revelation, John the Evangelist consistently underscores the transformative power of divine love.

The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) offer a chronological account of Jesus' life, but John's gospel delves into the deeper theological significance of Christ's identity and mission. He highlights Jesus' "I AM" statements, revealing his divine nature and unique relationship with the Father. Central to all of this is John's focus on love. He is the one who records Jesus' words "...A new command I give to you: Love one another! As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another". (John 13:34-35). These words are a world-changing moment in the new covenant. It became a catchphrase in the times of persecution that came later – "look at those Christians... how they love one another!"

John's letters further elaborate on this profound theme of love. In his first letter, he emphasises that "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16), a simple and powerful statement that taps in to the very essence of the divine. He also asserts that genuine love for God is intrinsically linked to love for one's neighbour: "Anyone who claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen" (1 John 4:20). John also highlights the active and practical nature of love, way beyond feelings: "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:18).

After Pentecost, John was a key figure in the early Christian community in Jerusalem, alongside Peter. He faced persecution, was imprisoned, and later, according to tradition, exiled to the island of Patmos during the reign of Emperor Domitian. It was on Patmos that it is said he received the visions that form the Book of Revelation, a powerful apocalyptic narrative offering hope and assurance of Christ's ultimate victory, the triumph of good over evil, rooted in God's unwavering love and faithfulness.



St John the Evangelist in good company with Jesus Christ, and St Charles Borromeo. Leadlight window at St John the Evangelist church, Richmond, Tasmania. Oldest church in Australia currently in use.

Tradition holds that John lived to an old age, the only apostle to die a natural death. This allowed him to nurture and guide many of the early Christian communities. It is said that in his old age, when he was too frail to preach, he would simply repeat, "Little children, love one another." Profound and enduring words that are still the mark of a Christian today!

In the Preca Community, John is held up as our model of love between the members of the community. This love does not simply come from feelings, but from a conscious striving for holiness in several ways.

First and most important is **cultivating an intimate relationship with Christ**. It was John's closeness to Jesus that allowed him to grasp the profound truths of his identity and mission. We too are called to draw near to Christ through prayer, Scripture, and the Sacraments, seeking to know him not just intellectually, but intimately.

Secondly, **love must be the cornerstone of our existence**. John wrote... "Love comes from God, and anyone who loves is born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7). John's consistent emphasis on love—both for God and for neighbour—is a radical call to transform our lives. Living a good and holy life means actively pursuing selfless love in all our interactions, extending compassion, forgiveness, and service to those around us. This requires conscious effort to overcome selfishness, prejudice, and indifference. As John teaches, it is in our actions, not just our words, that our love is truly revealed.

Thirdly, **a life of integrity – mirroring truth and light**. John contrasts light with darkness, truth with falsehood. A holy life is one lived in integrity,

embracing truth and seeking to illuminate the darkness of the world with the light of Christ. This means we should stand firm in our convictions, live authentically, and strive for moral purity.

Finally, **perseverance in faith**. John endured persecution and exile, yet his faith never wavered. His brother disciples were killed by the same sorts of people who had tried to kill Love on a cross. But love cannot die. Because, as John knew, "God is Love". In the Book of Revelation John delivers a message of hope and of the ultimate victory of God's kingdom. In our own lives, too, we will encounter trials and difficulties, but by holding fast to our faith in Christ, we can face them with courage and hope, trusting in God's loving plan.

May we also, with Saint John, live and breathe the love of God. May we learn from John that holiness is not simply about adhering to rules, but about being transformed by divine love and sharing that love with the world. His life proclaims the power of a heart united with Christ, a heart which understands that "... there is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18). By walking in the footsteps of John, we too can become true disciples, known by our love, and walk in the light of him who is Love Itself.

Joseph Kielnerowski
Preca Community

READ ANY GOOD BOOKS LATELY?

*'A reader lives a thousand lives.
A non-reader lives only one.'*

George R R Martin

I recall an amusing anecdote in Hobart where a Member speaking to Archbishop Guilford Young said that he 'once read a book . . .' The Archbishop grabbed the moment and quipped to the Member; 'Oh, don't be a one book reader!'

This Member (name withheld) still quotes this moment today, and rejoices in the humour associated with it.

This amusing anecdote sets the pace for reflection on literature, and its role in formation. Besides the meditation texts of 'My Daily Bread' and the 'Imitation of Christ', during my period of formation in the SDC; Candidates were introduced to 'The Way' by Josemaría Escrivá.

'The Way' was a rich summary of the inspirations, stories and experiences of Escrivá's daily life. It certainly made an impact on me.

Regrettably; the technological age has reduced our appreciation of the written word and in many instances if we did not have the bible on hand; a book would not even see the light of day.

We are all familiar with libraries being converted into media hubs with many being re-converted again!

'ON THE ROLE OF LITERATURE IN FORMATION'

In a recent letter '*On the Role of Literature in Formation*, Pope Francis, of happy memory, encouraged every Christian, and especially seminarians, to set aside their screens regularly, and spend time with a book of literature or poetry. Literature, he said, helps us to weather life's storms. It also teaches us to listen to other voices, 'to discern and explore the reality of individuals, and situations as a mystery charged with a surplus of meaning'.

Pope Francis in his letter *On the Role of Literature in Formation*, published on 17 July 2024, underscores the essential role that literature plays in shaping the

human soul and intellect. He begins by acknowledging the profound influence that great literary works have had on individuals and societies throughout history.

Literature, he argues, is more than just an art form; it is a medium through which we encounter the depths of human experience, exploring themes of love, suffering, joy, and hope. It provides a space where readers can grapple with fundamental questions of existence, morality, and spirituality.

Francis emphasised that literature has the power to develop empathy by allowing readers to see the world through the eyes of others, fostering a greater understanding of different cultures, perspectives, and experiences.

This empathetic engagement is crucial for building a more just and compassionate society. Moreover, literature stimulates critical thinking, challenging readers to reflect on their own beliefs, values, and assumptions. It invites them to question the status quo and to imagine new possibilities for the future.

Pope Francis also highlights the importance of literature in the spiritual and moral formation of individuals. Through stories and characters, literature can inspire readers to pursue virtue, wisdom, and a deeper relationship with the Divine. He calls on educators, parents, and leaders to promote the reading of quality literature as a means of nurturing the moral and intellectual growth of the young.

In a world increasingly dominated by superficiality and instant gratification, the Pope urges a return to the contemplative and reflective engagement that literature demands.

Pope Francis concludes by reminding us that literature is not just a private endeavour but a communal one, capable of uniting people across time and space. It is a gift to be shared, and through it, we can contribute to the flourishing of humanity. The letter serves as a call to recognise, and embrace the transformative power of literature in the ongoing formation of individuals, and society.

(Source; Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference)



The Sanctuary of the Spirit of Christ, Spiritual Gymnasium, the Great Book, Spiritual Directory, The Disciple.

TABLE READING

In the 1970s, I visited the Redemptorist Monastery, St Clement's at Galong, NSW which was a house of formation for students entering the Redemptorist congregation. There I experienced my first table reading. "Table Reading", is to promote silence in the monastery rather than unbridled chatter, and enlightenment for the mind as the body is being nourished. I don't recall whether the extract was read in the monotone recto tono, which in religious houses was often the custom. This was so that no one's voice would dominate. Nevertheless, my later reflection on this cemented my belief that the written word could be effective, no matter how it was delivered.

Sadly, we are caught up in a technological age where we are continuously being 'entertained' by images, and graphics. I am frequently bemused by the number of times we stare at a screen for stimulation. Hopefully this may diminish at some level, for we are now being challenged by the impact of AI, Artificial Intelligence.

GEORGE PRECA AND LITERATURE

One pivotal aspect of St George Preca was his capacity to write. In spite of the language rivalry going on in Malta involving Italian, and English during Fr Preca's time, he taught and wrote in Maltese, the language of the common people, so that all could understand.

George understood the role of the written word. He produced many scripts in Maltese that held a deep insight into the spiritual life. Gradually, these are being translated into English, and Spanish.

The translations were slow to begin with but over time, they are emerging. Some still struggle with the SDC's underlying preference to salvage, and maintain the Maltese language, and occasionally the original sentiment may get 'lost in translation'.

The retention of the Maltese is no doubt in respect to George's legacy, and since his death we continue to do so. This gives the *raison d'être* to maintain the relevance of the written word.

The first translation of the bible in Maltese was by Peter Paul Saydon. The book of Genesis was published in 1929, the Apocalypse in 1959 by him. Saydon left the copyrights of his work to SDC, who towards the end of 1995 Preca Publishing printed the whole of Saydon's translation in one volume in order to celebrate the centenary of the translator's birth (1895-1971).

Peter L Judge
Preca Community



Ashtrays and Coin-Operated "Tel-a-Chairs" in a US Greyhound Bus Terminal, 1969. The technological age begins! Public Domain image.

THE GIFT OF FRANCO!

Franco Zardo, a Member of the Preca Community in Adelaide passed into eternal life on 3 November 2024. He was incorporated in 1991. His funeral Mass presided by Bishop Charles Gauci was held on 23 November 2024. Three beautiful eulogies were shared; John Micallef, Delegate of the Superior General in Australia, Steve Cavallo, long-time friend of Franco in the cystic-fibrosis community, and Franco's cousin; Maria Burford. With Maria's kind permission, we provide her reflections here.

EULOGY FOR FRANCESCO ANTONIO ZARDO

Thank you John, for kindly highlighting Franco's spiritual journey, the graces of Franco's "love of God" and 'Perseverance'.

On behalf of my Auntie Nicolina, Peter and Lee-Anne, Brett and Leanne and their families, thank you all for coming together today, it is no surprise to see so many. Your love and respect for Franco is appreciated.

Francesco Antonio Zardo - to us, Franco, Frank, Francino. A son, brother, brother-in-law, nephew, cousin, uncle and friend.

IMPORTANT DATES

Born 22 October 1969 at QEH to parents Angelo and Nicolina Zardo, third and youngest child, older siblings Peter and Rosa.

Baptised 3 January 1970 in this very church, Sacred Heart church in Hindmarsh with godparents Gerardo and Maria Parisella.

Received First Holy Communion while a primary student at Immaculate Heart of Mary School, Brompton.

Confirmation 5 June 1981 with the name chosen of John, proudly sponsored by his uncle Zio Edoardo Paolo.

Secondary education at Christian Brothers College, Adelaide 1979 – 1983.

1984 – Franco completed a year in Bachelor of Arts with the intention to transfer to an accounting course.

1991 - at the age of 21, Franco began full-time study of Accounting at the University of SA.

The full-time load was affecting his health, however Franco listened to advice from Joe and John and Zia Lina (his mother); so the decision was made to continue studying on a part time basis for his well-being.

Franco successfully graduated 1996 with the graduation ceremony March 1997. He then began work with Milanko Chartered Accountants.

Lung Transplant 13 October 2000.

There are many memories and stories of Franco, and there is a common theme in how Franco lived life - **but it is how Franco made each of you feel that you will remember.**

Franco truly understood what being kind means to people and how this makes them feel.

Earlier this year, when Franco was in remission, we went for a beach walk, it was pleasing to see him regaining his strength.

His knowledge and attentive listening skills made him a good conversationalist and talking with Franco often lead to discussions about the World, Religion and Church.





Celebrations with family, and friends following Franco's lung transplant in Melbourne 2000.

During our walk Franco quoted Pope Francis to me and said “The world needs more saints” – we agreed that this meant ‘everyday saints’ – those who walk among us, working quietly without drawing attention to themselves. But what does an everyday saint look like? What do they do, what are their virtues?

I hope that you might now hear examples of virtues in the stories about Franco's life -

To begin, Franco had health challenges from birth (Cystic Fibrosis) at a time when life expectancy was short. Nicolina diligently performed physio, three to four times every day until Franco was sixteen. He never complained, always took his medication, resilient, patient, responsible and quite independent in managing his condition.

Peter, Franco's brother will tell you - “Franco never let his illnesses slow him down. He soldiered through and when he got new lungs, he made the most of life.”

He travelled overseas. Once, a solo visit to Malta.

In 1984 he travelled to Italy with his mother and older sister Rosa.

A visit to Lourdes where Franco immersed himself in the healing waters. Faithful Franco said to his mother “I'm cured mum, I won't need tablets anymore” – Zia Nicolina responded with conviction – that he would continue with his medications just to be sure.

During 1999-2000, while Franco's health was at a critical stage, he made sure that he was fully present for his family, aware of their problems, compassionate and providing consolation during adversity and misfortune. This was evident when our families experienced trouble and tragedy. Peter's serious car accident and the sudden loss of dear cousin Bruno.

Thankfully, just a few short months later, a suitable donor was found, Franco was provided with new lungs.

The support and dedication of his family, especially his mother, and his loved ones during his recovery is something which Franco valued and never forgot.

Franco felt how loved he was by his family.

Arriving back to Adelaide in mid-January 2001 after his transplant, Franco did not hesitate to selflessly make his first priority to see his terminally ill Aunty Carmela who unfortunately died just a few days later. Franco told of how he believed that Aunty Carmela waited long enough in order to see him recovered and to be re-united with her sister Nicolina. He knew how much his recovery meant to all those praying for him and he wanted to reassure and give hope.

In times of sadness, Franco would always consider the welfare of others and after the death of his father Angelo in 2009, Franco kept company for his mother staying with her, sharing meals during the week while working, being active in the Society, and attending to his unit and managing the Unit Stata. In later years, Franco learnt skills for small handyman jobs to help maintain his mother's home.

Supportive of Peter and Lee-Anne, Rosa and Brett, and happy being part of the lives of all his six beautiful nieces, their families and inclusively welcoming extended families. Particularly evident during Rosa's illness and death in 2019, when he generously gave of his time to help manage the financial side of Brett and Rosa's business while also being available to family as needed.

Nicolina is a wonderful influence in Franco's faith formation – Franco always offered a prayer of gratitude before meals, preferring simple and nutritious foods especially those which his mother prepared. He and Nicolina had a ritual of praying the Rosary most nights, deepening their calmness, acceptance and forgiveness – Nicolina noted that no matter how unwell Franco was – he always said “I'm OK”, he didn't want to burden or cause worry.



Bishop Charles Gauci of Darwin presides at Franco's funeral, Sacred Heart church, Hindmarsh, 23.11.24.

Franco's life had many challenges and also much joy. Realising that life is 'what it is' seemed to give Franco a sense of peace. Recently Franco said – "I'm not unfortunate to be ill now, but fortunate to have had another 24 years".

To his cousins, as a young boy Franco formed part of the trio of boys with Gerry and Bruno (cousins). We fondly remember Christmas and special family gatherings where together we would all play various games (especially soccer – Franco being quick on the wing). He may have been the smaller cousin, who tired and got out of breath, however; he quickly recovered, joined back into the game with enthusiasm. Franco never let his condition get in the way of him being a normal kid participating in shared fun. He did not make excuses even when he was on the losing side.

Gerry and his friend Marco, caught up with Franco for a week in Melbourne. Gerry recalls that he and Marco would enjoy a cigarette and respectfully walk behind Franco to avoid him breathing smoke. Franco turned to them and said "Boys, I have new lungs, I'm fine", wanting to walk in joyful companionship, side-by-side.

Pasquii (cousin) remembers a recent phone call with Franco when he asked her to pray for him. She replied that she hadn't prayed in a long time. Franco always thinking of others and not judging anyone gently replied that he would pray for the both of them. Pasquii told him, that she might (pray) and that she hoped he meets the One he follows so faithfully. Like many of us, Pasquii admired Franco's passion and devotions.

Loved by his aunties, uncles and cousins overseas and in Australia. He appreciated the daily catch-ups Auntie Antonietta offered her sister Nicolina especially during difficult times.

Franco was often concerned for Nicolina's welfare, yet in awe of her determination, energy and strength.

He was grateful for his nieces and cousins who visited and helped him and Nicolina on a regular basis, his last wish is for us all to 'make sure mum is ok'.

Friends and family enjoyed Franco's sense of humour and infectious laugh; 'pull my finger'. Sometimes his jokes were somewhat corny but mostly funny and clever.

Associations through the Cystic Fibrosis foundation led to the formation of great and loyal friends, especially with life-long friend Steve Cavallo and family (Nicky and three children). Steve was always available for Franco, someone to debrief with as they both experienced similar health conditions. Franco and Steve offered each other understanding, advice and Pizza. The Cavallo family are so close that Franco was honoured to be the confirmation sponsor of their first child, Massimo.

Working as an accountant for a taxation firm could be demanding at times, however being part of the Milanko Chartered Accountant, with Chris, Tania and team was rewarding, relational and fulfilling. Franco was considered a dedicated employee and like a fond son.

Franco's love of God and commitment to the Society of Christian Doctrine; the Preca Community are outstanding examples of his service to others, learning, and awareness of the daily problems people face.

These stories about Franco are examples of some virtues, such as:

generosity, humility, living a simple life, gratitude, prayer and faith, resilience and perseverance, inclusivity, dedication, avoidance of gossip, non-judgemental and understanding, forgiveness, etc.....

So during our talk as we walked along the beach, I pointed to Franco and said "I think I know an everyday saint!" Franco smiled and gently said "We can try" – **"WE can all try."**

'As Franco mentioned - the world needs more everyday saints'.

When we reflect on the fifty-five years of Franco's life and how he made us feel let's consider that the 3 November 2024, although sad, was the day when Francesco Antonio Zardo, left this world to begin the next stage of his existence in his heaven and that in life he modelled and inspired us to be kind.

Maria Rosa Burford (& Bengy Paolo)

Saturday 23 November 2024

A REFLECTION ON THE NEW MONASTICISM

This article is intended to shed light on similarities between what is essential in the life of a monk and that of an SDC Member.

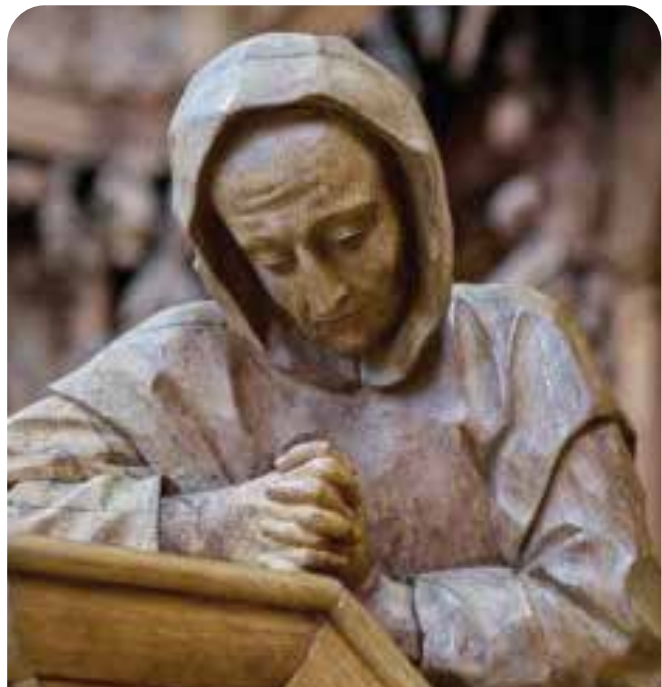
The call to holiness is a universal call as Vatican II has attested. There was a development in the thought and teaching of the Church in this regard. At times the Church regarded non-Christians as being in danger of their salvation. There was also a general understanding that holiness was something that can be aimed for only by people who opted for ordained ministry or those in religious life.

Historically it was in the 12th Century; with the rise of Devotio Moderna, i.e. personal devotion; that these ideas started shifting. Devotio Moderna was a movement for religious reform, calling for apostolic renewal through the rediscovery of genuine pious practices such as humility, obedience, simplicity of life, and integration into the community. Gerard Groote was a chief interpreter of this movement.

Geert Grote (†1384) chose to become what can be referred to as an 'urban monk', i.e. a monk without monastery and a Rule of Life. Grote inspired many followers and created a new and unique "monastic" movement.

What are the basic characteristics of monastic life? A simple research leads one to more or less these general norms:

1. Single mindedness (Soli Deo - God Alone)
2. Metanoia (conversion)
3. Work, silence and solitude
4. Prophetic witness
5. A Learning Community and
6. Intentional living



Geert Grote 1340 – † 1384

SDC MEMBER

At the beginning of 20th Century, George Preca was studying as a seminarian to become a priest. At this time, he was known to visit Malta's Grand Harbour on a regular basis to engage in discussions with the many local and foreign sailors on matters concerning faith and belief. At the same time, he also sought to befriend the young men who used to spend time playing soccer, and socialising in front of the parish church of his home town, Hamrun.

The early Members recall that shortly after his ordination, the newly ordained priest used to recollect himself in his room at his parents' home and spend time in prayer, and reflection. It was during that time of quiet solitary prayer that he sought to discern God's particular ministry for him within the Church. He was inspired by what St Paul wrote to Timothy, "...and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others" (2 Timothy 2:2). The insight from this scripture verse was an inspiration, and a confirmation of all the initiatives he made during his years in the seminary.

Preca was convinced by the truth that through the 'Logos', "all things came into being... and without God not one thing came into being" (John 1:3).

Furthermore, the Logos "became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14) became his endearing motto for himself, and the SDC. And as such this becomes the "witness of God's love" (John 3:16). George Preca felt compelled to share these life-giving riches of the very treasure God shared with humanity: Jesus Christ, with the ordinary people around him.

Originally, Fr Preca was thinking of responding to Pope Pius X Encyclical *Arcebo Nimis*, 'On Teaching Christian Doctrine' by creating a society of deacons to help in the ministry of catechesis in parishes. He further thought that the same ministry can be conducted by all who are baptised. He believed that every Christian is called to participate in the life of God and what he desired for the SDC Members when he called them to embrace their vocation was nothing short of holiness. This is what we find in the Rule of Life. He wrote for the Members: "The foundational aim of the Society is the holiness of its Members. Therefore, keeping in mind the example of Jesus Crucified, they should seek Christian virtue by following the Rule."¹ The Rule is simply pointing towards the authentic living of the theological virtues and the Beatitudes.² These precepts of the first Constitutions were intended to be lived, by lay men, and women from all walks of life, who form part of their local parish community.

The Emanu-El in the person of Jesus Christ has made possible the human aspiration to be like the Father, not through miracles or the casting out of demons, but through obedience (Matthew 7:22). One needs to deny oneself to obey God, "No one will be able to please God if one only wants to please oneself."³ Jesus teaches us in the Gospel that obedience to the will of God makes us one in him: "Pointing to his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother'" (Matthew 12:49-50). Indeed, one can rightly say that obedience does enshroud the universal call for holiness.

This particular Christian way of life was, and still is an ideal model that is open to one and all, irrespective of education, cultural background, age or time. Even the very young can live the basic spirit and ethos of monasticism, if they understand that God is love, that friendship means loyalty, and that family is meant to be a nurturing community.

GOD ALONE

Like the maxim one finds on entering any Benedictine monastery, *Doli Deo* (God Alone) Fr Preca reminds the Members that a true Christian is one who must be dependent on God, and God alone: "led by grace ... seeks only God in everything ... accepts patiently and perseveringly whatever happens to him, be it prosperity or adversity."⁴ He understood that such an attitude generates "peace of heart" in the one who, "treasures obedience above everything else... by imitating Christ who was obedient unto death."⁵ Obedience to God's will leads to complete surrender to God, and George Preca emphasises that this way to holiness is not the result of one's work but God's work: "If the Lord does not build the house, in vain the workers toil."⁶

George Preca had a very clear idea of how to mould the lives of the first Members into a model which is not alien to that lived by monks. The Founder's intention was to imbue the future Members with a burning love of God and then motivate them to have only one unwavering purpose to live for throughout life: God Alone – *Soli Deo*.⁷ In his book *The Course of the Christian Pilgrim*, George Preca writes that the Members are to seek holiness by becoming "True scholars of Jesus Christ; [to let Jesus] be one's own divine teacher [and] to strive to imitate his examples, ... Practice with divine help all that [Jesus] thought... for the greater glory of God, for the salutation of mankind, for one's true peace."⁸ Every Member was encouraged to "engage deeper in this fellowship [and] be strong in his faith in the Incarnate Son of God."⁹ This quest – living entirely for the love of God – that George Preca confirmed as the sole purpose of the SDC Member fits hand in glove with what Jesus himself commanded in Mark 12:30 and with what Benedict of Nursia wrote in his sixth century

¹ SDC Rule C5.

² Constitutions 21 spells out the four aims why the Member is to pray the *Mons Domini*: (i) to live the aim for which every person was created for to know, love and serve God; (ii) to keep in mind The Last Things in order not to befriend the world with all its illusions; (iii) to follow the Word of God and (iv) to reach and rest on the holy Mountain of the Lord.

³ Preca, *Sanctuary of Christ's Spirit*, Ch. 56, 70.

⁴ Preca, *Sanctuary of Christ's Spirit*, Ch. 57, 71.

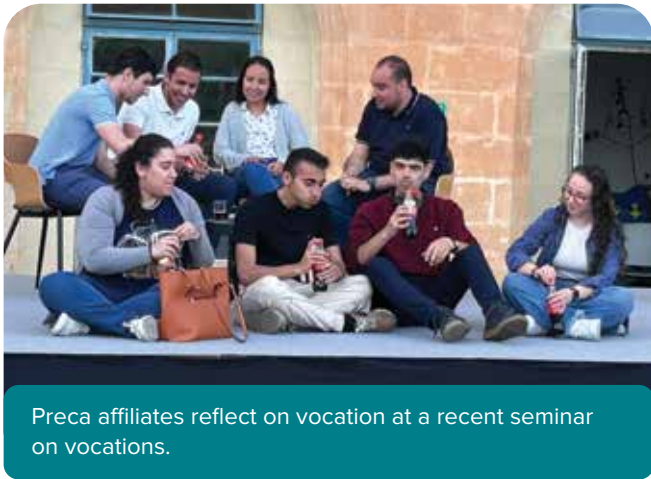
⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ This line from Psalm 127:1 is quoted in the first line of the Introduction to the SDC Rule (2013).

⁷ cf SDC Rule C10.

⁸ Preca, *The Course of the Christian Pilgrim*, 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*



Preca affiliates reflect on vocation at a recent seminar on vocations.

Rule: “Above all, love the Lord God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength; then, your neighbour as yourself.”¹⁰ This is repeated again at the end of Benedict’s Rule when he recapitulates his teaching urging the monks above all to love God, Christ, the abbot and the other members of the community, summing it up with: “Prefer nothing to the love of Christ.”¹¹

A LEARNING COMMUNITY

George Preca wanted the Members to become a learning community; lay men and women who are not only able to teach others but, they themselves thirst for God’s wisdom. Upholding the view that people did not love God because they did not know him, he wanted to teach, for as he used to repeat so very often, “sound teaching is the source of all goodness.”¹² In an era when few Catholics read the Bible, George Preca wanted the Members to become friends of the Gospel; he wanted them to meditate on the Word of God.¹³ Later, he devised his own method for the study and contemplation of Sacred Scripture which he called Qaghda (The Sitting).¹⁴ He wanted the Members to study continuously, and daily. In the first Constitution, there is record of a list, day by day of what the Members were required to study.¹⁵ This method is still practiced with minor adaptations. From the earliest days, George Preca trained the Members through good instruction into the basic elements of Christian discipleship. He created a community

of learners where one and all could be sanctified through the “Assignment”: an exercise of learning and teaching that is to be held daily in the Centres.¹⁶

Both Basil and Benedict of Norcia speak of the monastery as the place where virtue is practiced, especially through a proper rhythm of time: *horarium*. Benedict writes in the Rule that “the goal is precious; there is no time to waste getting there.” In order to reach this goal, he divided the day into three principal activities: work, prayer, and reading.¹⁷ Likewise, George Preca gives due importance to order and guides the Members with the maxim to “Uphold order and order sustains you”. This order is preserved through work, prayer and study: “The Members are called to live in the world and to sanctify it through their lives, work and apostolate;¹⁸ pray without ceasing¹⁹ and attend the daily Assignment as part of one’s “continuous formation”²⁰ and a “process of communal formation.”²¹

As a Benedictine monastery is to serve as a “school for the Lord’s service”²² and a place where one learns how to “progress in virtue,”²³ the SDC Centre was envisioned by the Founder to become a “forge”²⁴ where sin is destroyed and where the young and adult Members meet to befriend the Gospel, listen to the “Voice of the Beloved” and receive adequate training to live the virtuous life: “Everyone in the Company is subject not only to learning, but also to be trained in virtue.”²⁵ The SDC Centre was also intended to serve as a place where “Members meet in an atmosphere of prayer and fraternal union for their own formation and to carry out most of their apostolate.”²⁶ The name in Maltese of the SDC Centres ‘Qasam’ denotes precisely what the Founder intended. ‘Qasam’ is basically associated with a piece of land where one can cultivate and grow fruits and vegetables. Fr Preca intended the Centre not only to serve as an oasis that quenches one’s thirst for the love of God but also where one cultivates the life of virtue and nurture of community of like-minded people whose aim is to love and serve God faithfully.

Tonio Caruana
Preca Community

¹⁰ RB Chapter 4.

¹¹ Feiss, Essential Monastic Wisdom, 183.

¹² Preca, Sanctuary of Christ’s Spirit: PASSUS IV, 11.

¹³ Constitutions 95-98.

¹⁴ This was inspired by the posture Mary the sister of Lazarus used to keep at the foot of Jesus listening to his teaching.

¹⁵ Constitutions 18 -24 list the themes and how much time each of these subjects the members had to spend studying.

¹⁶ SDC Rule C7.

¹⁷ Feiss, Essential Monastic Wisdom, 4.

¹⁸ SDC Rule C14.

¹⁹ SDC Rule C69.

²⁰ SDC Rule C36.

²¹ SDC Rule C37.

²² RB Prologue: 45.

²³ RB Chapter 73.2 – ‘Ma per chi vuole procedure calermente verso la perfezione di tale vita, vi sono i precetti die santi Padri, che fedelmente praticati sono be atti a condurre ‘uomo al culmine della virtù.

²⁴ When talking to the Members, the Founder used to use this allegory of the forge when referring to the SDC Centres, a forge where sin is burnt.

²⁵ Constitutions 130.

²⁶ SDC Rule C87.



Harmony in an Australian setting.

HARMONISING OUR VOICE WITH THAT OF GOD

In the Old Testament, God's voice echoed in thunder, in waters, in the sound of the sea or the wind. For Jews and Christians God still expresses himself in Holy Scripture as he also does by making his Voice heard within us.

ATTENTIVE LISTENING

Once we have heard the voice of God, we attempt to fulfil whatever he is expecting of us; first and foremost, through the Commandments. It is for this reason that Psalm 94 invites us: "If you were today to hear his voice! Do not harden your hearts as at Meribah as on the day of Massa in the wilderness; when your ancestors tested me and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work." Again we find this voice echoing in St Paul when writing to the Hebrews: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the day of rebellion..." (Hebrews 3,15).

St Benedict also, in the prologue of his monastic rule makes this exhortation: "Listen with a careful ear what the Word of God is telling and inviting you." We meet with the Father's invitation in Jesus' Transfiguration when he tells us: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am pleased; listen to his voice." (Mt 17, 5)

Those present before the death of Christ, perceived God's voice in the cry of his Son on the cross. It was precisely then that the centurion, reflected and recognised Jesus as a truly just man.

We expect the voice of Jesus to be a gentle voice, like that in the song of the 'Suffering Servant' (Isaiah 53) whom St Matthew referred to: "He will not quarrel or cry aloud; no one hears his voice in the streets" (Mt 12,19); and also referred to in Isaiah "He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets." (Is 42, 2). The Fathers of the Church compare the Voice of the Risen Christ to the enchanting voice of a soft-voiced singer, the singer we call '*tenore di grazia*'.

THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD

We lend our voices to God when we proclaim his Word, or when we pray together; and when we sing the psalms or pray or sing within the liturgy. Fr Carmelo Scerri, a leading Maltese composer of liturgical music, and an organist, was an *'organista di grazia'*. He is quoted as saying: "When we sing, it is enough to be heard by the one next to us", it is in this way that singing voices, together in choir, become so beautiful.

St Benedict invited the monks to sing in unison: "See that in singing the psalms, you do it in a way that your hearts, and voices will be in perfect harmony with each other."

A VOICE THAT ARISES FROM THE HEART

The voice is something very personal. A monk, who once was an opera singer, likes to tell listeners in his conferences: "The voice, the business card which I distribute to others with my personal details on it." The voice is the common way in which we commonly express the most profound aspects of our personality. A hollow voice, which stems from a desire to impress others, leads to nowhere. The notes fall flat because at times it is our ego that is trying to show off. But if we let go completely to God's voice, there emerges something vaster and deeper, resonating strongly within us.

There was once a singer who used to tell how, in the early days of her career, she felt her heart beating fast at every concert. Instead of resorting to tranquilisers, she accepted the fear and let it express itself. She let her very anxiety break the ego within her so that something beyond her ability took its place. This made some persons in her audience say to her: "It's not you who are singing, but there's something which is singing through you." Invariably, people are struck by a voice that is not trying to impress others, but that is intended only to allow them to perceive that there is something beyond the singer that is making the voice so beautiful. And isn't that the Voice of God?

Years pass, generations replace others, but the voices of those who let go to God's voice will always resound harmoniously. We may say it in all humility, that so many persons we meet remind us how much good, without our own merit, we have brought about into their lives. We barely recognise them, and may have forgotten even their names. Nor do we remember even the least of what they are trying to bring back to our minds. This happens because we do not make

our own voices the message of what we say to them, only allowing God's Word to grow secretly within them, unseen and unsung. The vocation of a certain priest began when he was still a little boy, and his catechist took the class on a visit to the seminary. Who knew how the seed would grow? Not even the least thought had ever passed the catechist's mind of where this visit would lead among the young boys who visited the seminary!

With a bit of reflection, we may be able to realise how the Preca Community possesses all the characteristics that pave the way for God to continue to speak to people. With all that happens within our Centres, and through the witness Members give with their lives, we can reach out to people. Being lost in our respective daily activities, we do not realise this!

However, we may need to be more careful about how better to protect our style of transmitting the faith through the spoken, living word. It is true that we may find valuable help from the useful material offered by today's technology, but this should not win over the word that, from the intimacy of our own hearts, is conveying the heavenly "Voice of the Beloved". May we also keep in mind that so often God speaks in the silence of our hearts, without uttering a word, through the example of good lives observed in other persons. All can harmonise together, with the voice of God setting the tone, and the notes.

Joseph Galea
Preca Community

PIUS X AND GEORGE PRECA

We often ponder on the influences of George Preca, and his motivation in founding the Society of Christian Doctrine. It is well documented that his early intention was to form a cluster of deacons who would assist the local clergy. But more was impacting on his thoughts, and eventually after meeting a group of young men, perhaps idle youth in his parish, he opted for the group that forms our identity today.

In 1905, Pope Pius X's encyclical *'Acerbo Nimis'* - On teaching Christian Doctrine established the Congregation of Christian Doctrine and parish Sunday catechesis, emphasising religious education for children and promoting frequent Holy Communion. In this document, Pius X insisted that parish pastors were obliged to organise catechism classes to give young children sound catechetical instruction; instruction that could truly lead to a life-long embrace of authentic discipleship.

Pius X exhorted all pastors to avoid conducting their teaching ministry in an erudite and unnecessarily elaborate style but, instead, to impart the basics of the faith in simple, plain and brief expositions.

At the beginning of the 20th century, many Maltese lived in poverty and ignorance. Although churches were always filled with people, it was sometimes an expression of faith built on superstition and the lack of knowledge of Catholic doctrine. In 1905, Pope Pius X, in his encyclical *'Acerbo Nimis'*, expressed his concern about religious ignorance that reigned among Christians:

How serious are and how grave are the consequences of ignorance in matters of religion! And on the other hand, how necessary and how beneficial religious instruction is! It is indeed in vain to wait for the performance of the duties of a Christian from one who does not even know them.

The Pope emphasised the need for serious actions in favour of the religious formation of Christians through the canonical founding of the Confraternities of Christian Doctrine.

In each parish the society known as the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine must be established canonically. Through this Confraternity, pastors, especially in

places where there is a shortage of priests, find laypeople helping them with the teachings of the Catechism to take on the work of teaching earnestly for the glory of God.

The call of Pope Pius X found fertile ground in St George Preca. Fr George understood that in the near future even the Church in Malta would soon have to face the ideologies that already confuse Christian values on the European continent. And the way the Christian formation was being given, before the advent of the Society of Christian Doctrine in the Maltese Islands left nothing to hope for in the future. The only solution was the mass formation of children and adults, a formative process that goes on.

Besides the indifference that was creeping into the Church, Pius X was also concerned about Modernism that was finding its way. This was also a cry of Benedict XVI.

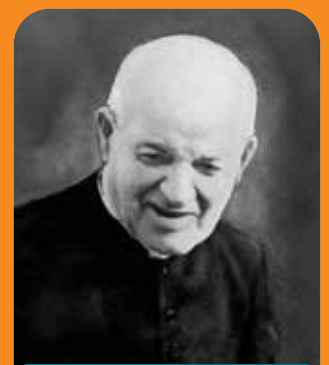
Today there are challenges within the Church of Malta. The attendance records for Mass have considerably reduced. Even the SDC in Malta has received a significant hit; having to close, and/or merge a number of centres.

The reality is clear. The Church needs to find a way to connect with people, to re-engage, and to gain their trust. Nevertheless, the SDC is always open to growth and re-vigour and will never renege on our commitment to evangelisation.

Even on his deathbed, George Preca was convinced of this. It is well documented that he wished the whole world would hear the teaching of Jesus Christ.



Pius X.



George Preca.

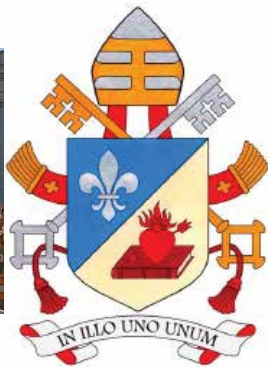
WE HAVE A POPE!

Following the death of Pope Francis, the conclave elected Robert Francis Prevost, who chose Pope Leo XIV as his name as leader of the Church. Pope Leo XIV is an Augustinian monk who missioned for many years in Peru. His latest appointment was to lead the Dicastery for Bishops in Rome.

Pope Leo XIV's coat of arms offers a clear reflection of his Augustinian roots and the values he seeks to promote during his pontificate, particularly unity and communion within the Church.



Photo by Mark Julian Galea



The shield is divided diagonally into two sections. The upper half features a blue background with a white lily, representing Mary, the Mother of God.

The lower half of the shield has a light background and displays an image that recalls the Order of St Augustine: a closed book with a heart pierced by an arrow. This is a direct reference to the conversion experience of St Augustine himself, who described his personal encounter with God's Word using the phrase: "*Vulnerasti cor meum verbo tuo*" - "You have pierced my heart with your Word."

Pope Leo XIV has also chosen a motto that reflects this Augustinian tradition: *In illo uno unum*, which means "In the One, we are one." The phrase is taken from St Augustine's Exposition on Psalm 127, where he explains that "although we Christians are many, in the one Christ we are one."



OUR LADY OF GOOD COUNSEL

26 April - Feast of Our Lady of Good Counsel is one of the most beautiful titles given to Our Lady, venerated and propagated by the Augustinian family.

St George Preca also had a great devotion to Our Lady under this title. It is recorded that his devotion to Our Lady of Good Counsel strengthened during a time of trial when he was ordered to close the Preca centres.

In those days, once he was at home, and as he passed in front of a sacred image of Our Lady of Good Counsel, hanging in his home, he heard a voice telling him "*Serva Silentium*" (Keep Silent).

SALVE PAPA NOSTER

To express the loyalty of the Society towards the ecclesiastical authorities, Fr Preca thought about providing in-house liturgies to commemorate the episcopal anniversary of the local Archbishop and the anniversary of the Pope's election to the pontificate. These liturgies still continue today.



In fact, initially, he wanted the Members of the Society to be called *Papidi* and *Papidissi*, meaning 'Sons and Daughters of the Pope'. This oneness with the Pope influenced Fr George and the Society even in the musical arrangements of the chants that were used during the Assignment and other occasions where Members gathered.

At the conclusion of an Ordination Mass at St John's Co-cathedral on 17.5.25, the Archbishop of Malta, Charles Scicluna led the congregation, and the newly ordained in this familiar chant that Preca Members have chanted for many decades. The actual participation from the congregation was resounding, suggesting that there was a familiarity with the chant!

Salve Papa noster
Salve Petra Fidei
Salve Coeli Janitor
et Jesum ora pro nobis.
We greet you Holy Father
We greet you Rock of Faith
We greet you Heaven's Doorkeeper
and may the Lord be with you.

FLYING UNDER THE RADAR

It is well known, and appreciated in the culture of the Preca Community that we never seek accolades, or acknowledgement.

This is often misunderstood, but George Preca firmly believed that any praise we receive should be directed to God; "To God, all honour, and glory, forever, and ever. Amen".

The consequence of this is that very few know about us, other than the immediate areas in which we conduct ministry. In fact, we are never surprised when we are frequently told that 'we have never heard of you!' This for many of us is a reverberation, but we must live with it.

In recent times, there has been some publicity surrounding the Rosary 'Mysteries of Light' which we believe were originally formed by George Preca in 1957, and taken up by Pope John Paul II in 2002. I have come across one or two articles denying this connection. We are not concerned about this but rather rejoice that the Mysteries of Light have enhanced the Rosary.

What is the real reason behind this? Why was George Preca reluctant for his Members to be praised?

We need to explore the spirituality of George Preca to understand this.

In 2017 Franco Zardo, a now deceased Member from Adelaide was acknowledged for his work in catechesis.

We also celebrated 25 years of service award in the form of a very special Papal Blessing presented to Franco by the new Cathedral parish administrator, Father Charles Gauci, now Bishop of Darwin.

An article written for the Archdiocese of Adelaide, where Franco resides stated; "Franco flies under the radar, quietly following his calling as a catechist with love and dedication". This statement in itself carries a lot of weight. For this statement acknowledges that we do not seek praise, as espoused in this situation of Franco.

Another interesting, and curious aspect of this article is that it did not mention Franco's involvement with the Preca Community! An oversight perhaps, but nevertheless a confirmation of previously expressed sentiments.

George Preca was against the Members showing themselves in public. The early Members certainly maintained this sentiment; perhaps Franco unwittingly was carrying this through. But what would be more accurate is that if we are authentic in following the spirit of George Preca, we do not seek accolades or public gestures of praise.

When George was canonised in Rome on 3 June 2007, it rained endlessly. Many who travelled there were taken aback by the endless torrential rain, so much so that in Rome many escaped under the Bernini colonnades. Many joked saying that George 'rained on his own parade'. Again, what do we make of this?

The exact word expression is "Don't Rain on My Parade". It probably dates to a song written in 1963, but the phrase "rain on (someone's) parade" was commonly understood to mean "spoil (someone's) time" or "disappoint (someone)" as far back as the 1910s and 1920s.

HIDDEN SANCTITY

In 1913, before the Society was officially recognised, some of the Members decided to take part in the solemn procession of the 24th International Eucharistic Congress, which was held in Malta. At that time, the Members were still calling themselves by the title of *Societas Papidum* (Society of the Pope's Children). The Papal Legate, Cardinal Domenico Ferrata was present, and presiding at the Eucharistic Congress. Very few people knew about our foundation, and the banner carried in procession by the "Pope's Children", naturally attracted attention and raised questions.

Fr Preca had not been part of the planning or the procession. When he learned about it, he was not

Rain falls incessantly during the Canonisation of George Preca, 3 June 2007.

happy with this “spectacle”, rebuking the Members for participating. He scolded them for “going out to make a show of yourselves”. Then, after his disdain had subsided, he explained to the Members that they were missionaries sent out to spread Christ’s teaching. In marching with a banner in the procession, they had not only “crashed” the Eucharistic Congress, they had given the wrong impression of their mission. Instead of being apostles, they had made a public parade of themselves for their own vainglory. He reminded them that the *Societas Papidum* was to be known by its ‘hidden sanctity’.

AVOIDING PRAISE

Franco’s encounter reminds us of the disdain George Preca had for praise. George shunned anything that might bring him praise, even the honour of being called “Founder”. During the celebrations to mark the Society’s Golden Jubilee, the aged Fr Preca explained: “I am not the Founder of this Society. Its Founder is St Paul the Apostle since he himself wrote thus to Bishop Timothy: ‘You have heard everything that I teach in public; hand it on to reliable people so that they in turn will be able to teach others’ (cf. 2 Tim 2:2).

Institutor perhaps I am, but Founder? No. Convince yourselves that the Founder is St Paul the Apostle. This is fundamental... the Society is apostolic.”

This insight is precious for us as it brings together the concept of ‘humility for the sake of the Kingdom’, and makes sense of what it means to ‘fly under the radar’.

Peter L Judge
Preca Community



FRANCISCVS 1936 – 2025

"AS ONE WALKS, ONE GOES OUT OF THEMSELVES AND GOES TOWARDS OTHERS, ONE'S EYES ARE OPEN AND THE HEART CONNECTS WITH THE WONDERS OF GOD... A CHRISTIAN IS A PILGRIM, A WALKER, ONE ON A JOURNEY."

– POPE FRANCIS

