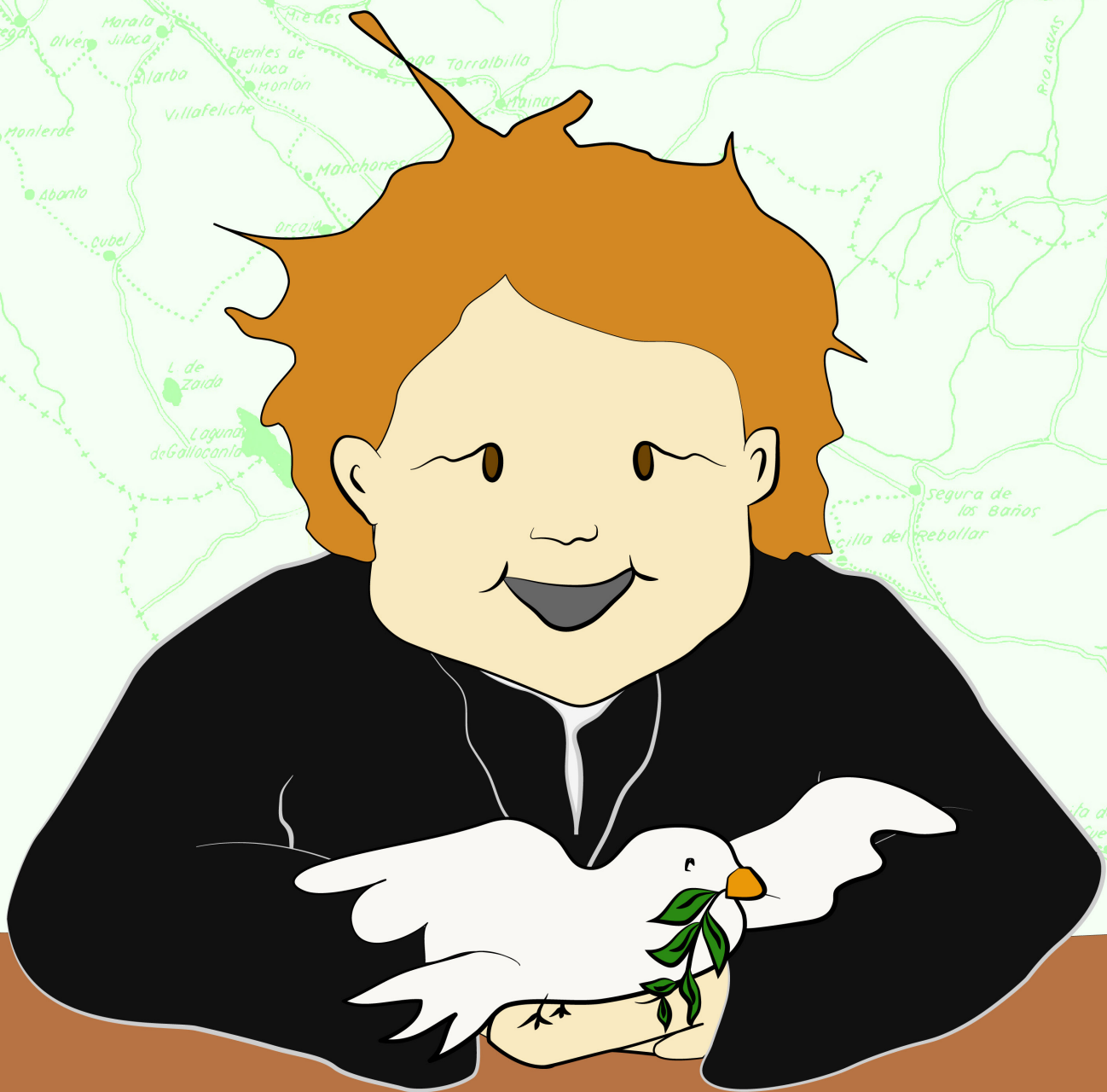


Story of a life

JUAN BONAL





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JOHN BONAL

Story of a life

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CHAPTER 1: CHILDHOOD



JOHN AT SCHOOL HE DREW HIS VILLAGE

- John, I love your drawing —Teacher George said— Is it the town of Terrades that you've drawn among the mountains?
- It might be... I am not sure if it is our town or any other —the young John answered.
- I love it —George exclaimed—. But there's something... I don't understand.
- The town looks uninhabited. What are all those people doing at the bottom of the mountain rather than in their homes? —He asked this time in amazement.
- It's because the town is not big enough to accomodate everyone —he replied while getting the yellow crayon— I want to draw more houses so that more people can live in it, but I have run out of space on the paper.
- You can always erase and start from the scratch.
- I'd rather use up what I have— he said again while colouring the rising sun.
- Is that why people at the foot of the mountain, are trying to climb and build more houses up there? —he asked surprisingly.
- Not at all, rather they're trying to push one another.
- Nobody has ever been able to move the mountains —the Young teacher stated.
- I am doing it! You'll see! In my picture, people move mountains to leave space in order to build the houses that the new inhabitants need —John answered.

JOHN SHOWED THE DRAWINGS TO HIS FATHER

The little town of Terrades, in the province of Gerona, was fantastic that day. The child John Bonal Cortada, was born there on 24th of August 1769. One day when eight year old John was going back home, his brother James was waiting for him outside the door. John was holding the picture he had done in the classroom in his hands. His sister Maria, three years younger than John, was not attending school. The girls, just for the fact of being girls, did not go to school in those days. At home his mother, Francesca and his father Joseph, were waiting for him. As soon as he arrived John went straight to greet his father who was then plowing the land. He leaped on him, kissed his cheek and hugged him. John showed the picture he had drawn in the class to all his family. They all loved it.





PLAYING IN THE FIELD WITH HIS FRIENDS

John continued going to school. He liked to attend school because he could meet his friends there and learn new things. In the afternoon his brothers and he would do their homework together. When they finished, John would run to the square of the town to play with his friends. He always preferred the fields to play in. The main road in town was unpaved. The fields made him feel confident. It was more attractive. Being in contact with nature made him feel close to his father. John, ever since he was a child, admired the way his father grew, watered and tended the trees in minute detail and appreciated every part of his job.

PRAYING WITH HIS SISTER MARIA

At night, before going to bed, John used to pray. He has been doing it since he was very young, as his parents had taught him. One day when he was going to pray his sister Maria entered the room.

—What are you doing? —his sister asked.

—I was about to pray. The other day, the Priest read a passage from the Gospel for us. It was about Martha and Mary. Do you remember? —his sister made a weird face— Jesus was at the house of Martha and Mary and while Mary was listening to everything Jesus had to say, Martha would rather serve at the table. She was going to the kitchen towards the living room a bit upset.

—And what did Jesus ask Martha? —she asked impatiently.

—He said Mary was doing the right thing and she wasn't going to stop.

—Buff! —She rolled her eyes—. Martha was shocked!.

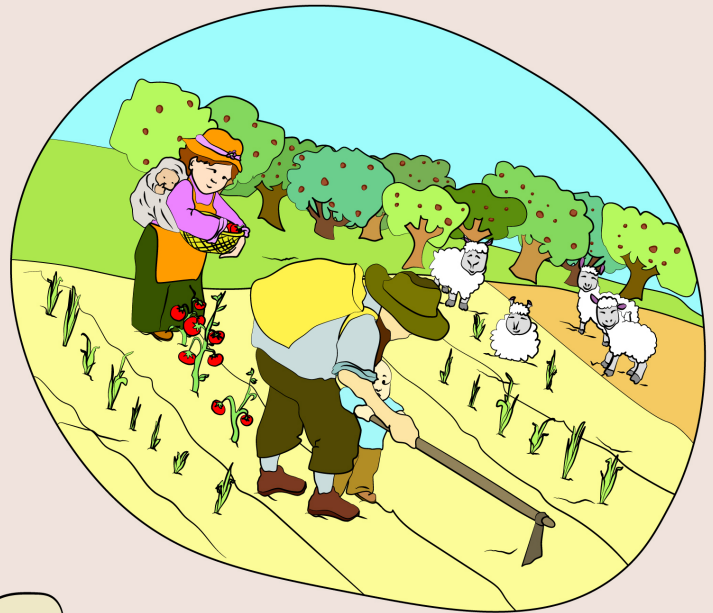
—Oh well, I thought that Mary would also be busy. Perhaps that reaction made Martha see that we are not always right, and sometimes each reason has its moments and time.



CHAPTER 2: ADOLESCENCE

HE GREW UP AND LIVED LIKE ANY OTHER BOY

Weeks, months and even a few years passed by. John was now eleven or twelve years old. He did common things as every teenager would do. He felt and lived as any kid of his age. He had been an altar boy for a few years in the Church of his town, Santa Cecilia, where he, as well as his siblings, had been baptized. He liked everything what he did. It was interesting to see the way he would move on the altar. Anyone looking at him would think he was born for it. He would always help the Priest in whatever work he was asked. As both of them knew each other quite well, a glance was enough for John to understand what he had to do on the other side of the altar.



ALTAR BOY

One day, after the Mass, John spent some time talking to the Parish Priest. He loved the way the Priest would welcome, listen, and say a few good and encouraging words, and of course, his pleasant gestures to everyone. John, ever since he was a child, imitated him in all the ways.

—How's your week going on John? I haven't heard from you for days —the Priest said enthusiastically.

—Well... I have been studying a lot and, at home, my siblings needed my full attention.

—Do not worry. I know it, being a large family, things may not work well if you don't help each other. And it makes a home. —he said this time while walking with the hands at his back—. Yesterday I saw your parents, they are always collaborating with the Parish Church. I appreciate very much the help they always offer. How are they?

—Well, at home we are all fine. You always ask for them and that draws my attention deeply —said John.

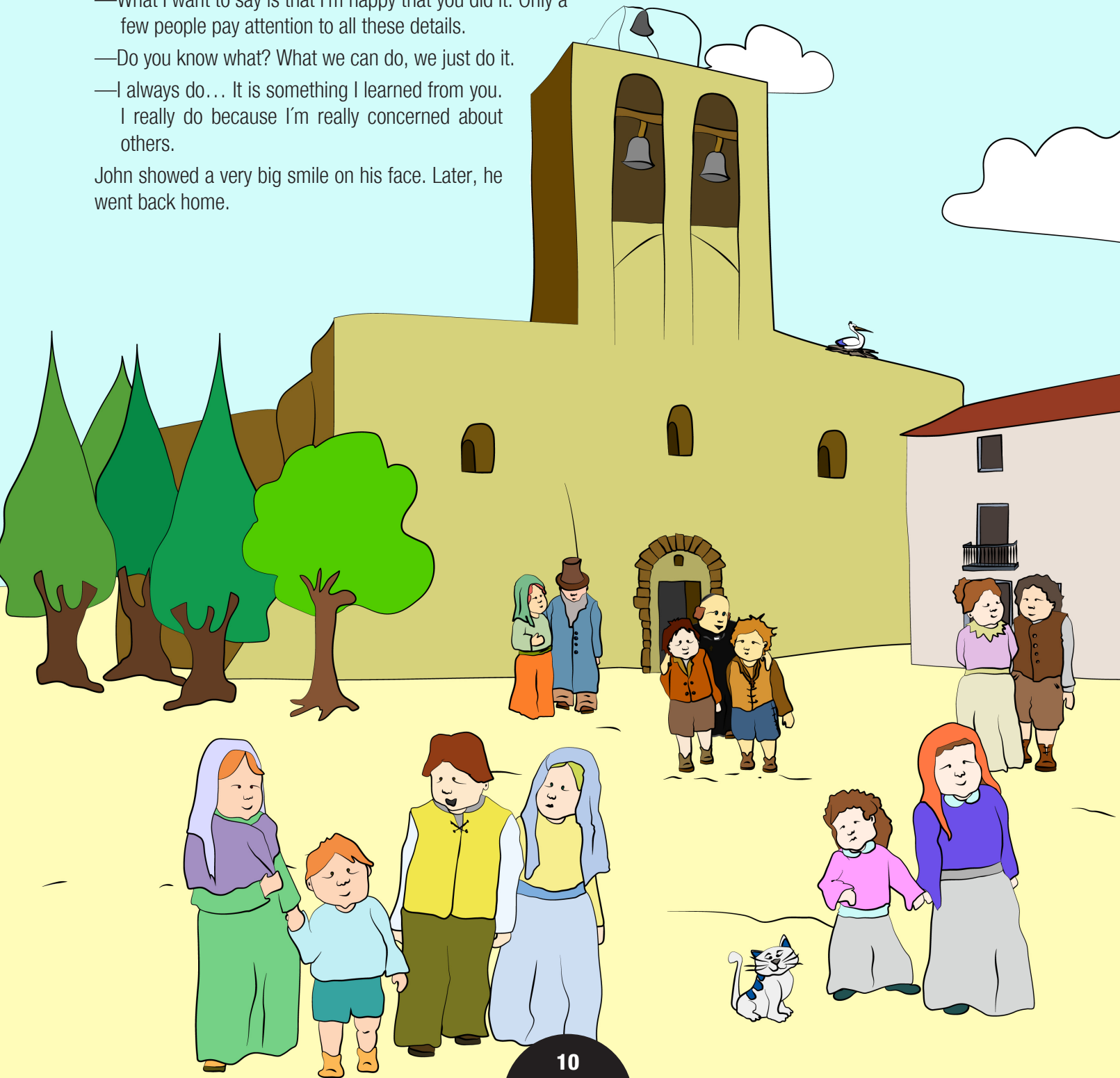
—Why does it draw your attention? We like to have people who care for us and our family and that at certain times people appreciate the work we do in gratitude and generosity.

—What I want to say is that I'm happy that you did it. Only a few people pay attention to all these details.

—Do you know what? What we can do, we just do it.

—I always do... It is something I learned from you.
I really do because I'm really concerned about others.

John showed a very big smile on his face. Later, he went back home.





Years passed by. John and Martin got on well despite their age gap. John was always looking after him.

On Sundays, as usual, all of them went to the Mass. When they woke up that morning, Martin had a problem with his new shoes. He was not able to tie his shoe laces by himself. John, a little bit stressed with the time, discovered that there was a problem with his shoes. He bent and helped him. But before that, he had taught him how to tie them. When both of them were ready to go to the Mass, they went to the Church. They arrived just in time, when the Mass started with the making of the sign of the Cross. After the Mass, John and his brother bought bread from the bakery. Martin was a little bit lost. But John on the other hand was paying attention to the houses made of stone which are on both sides of the Major Street on the way to the bakery. When they arrived, he started counting the pieces of bread in a loud voice, and at the same time John was asking for 4 pieces of bread to the lady.

STUDYING PHILOSOPHY IN HUESCA UNIVERSITY



Though John never liked farewells, it took place. He had to move to Huesca in order to study what he had been considering for some time. He knew he would find it hard to leave for another city but he had no choice.

—I love you very much, my darling. Study and take good care of yourself. I'm sure you'll be the best student —his mother said.

—I will, mum —John said hugging her.

John then turned to his father who was looking at him sadly but with tenderness. The hat which Joseph was wearing fell on the floor. His brother Martin rushed to pick it up, but, when he was about to give it back to him, John was already hugging his father and father hugging his son and his brothers.

SHARING WITH HIS FRIEND JOSEPH PONS



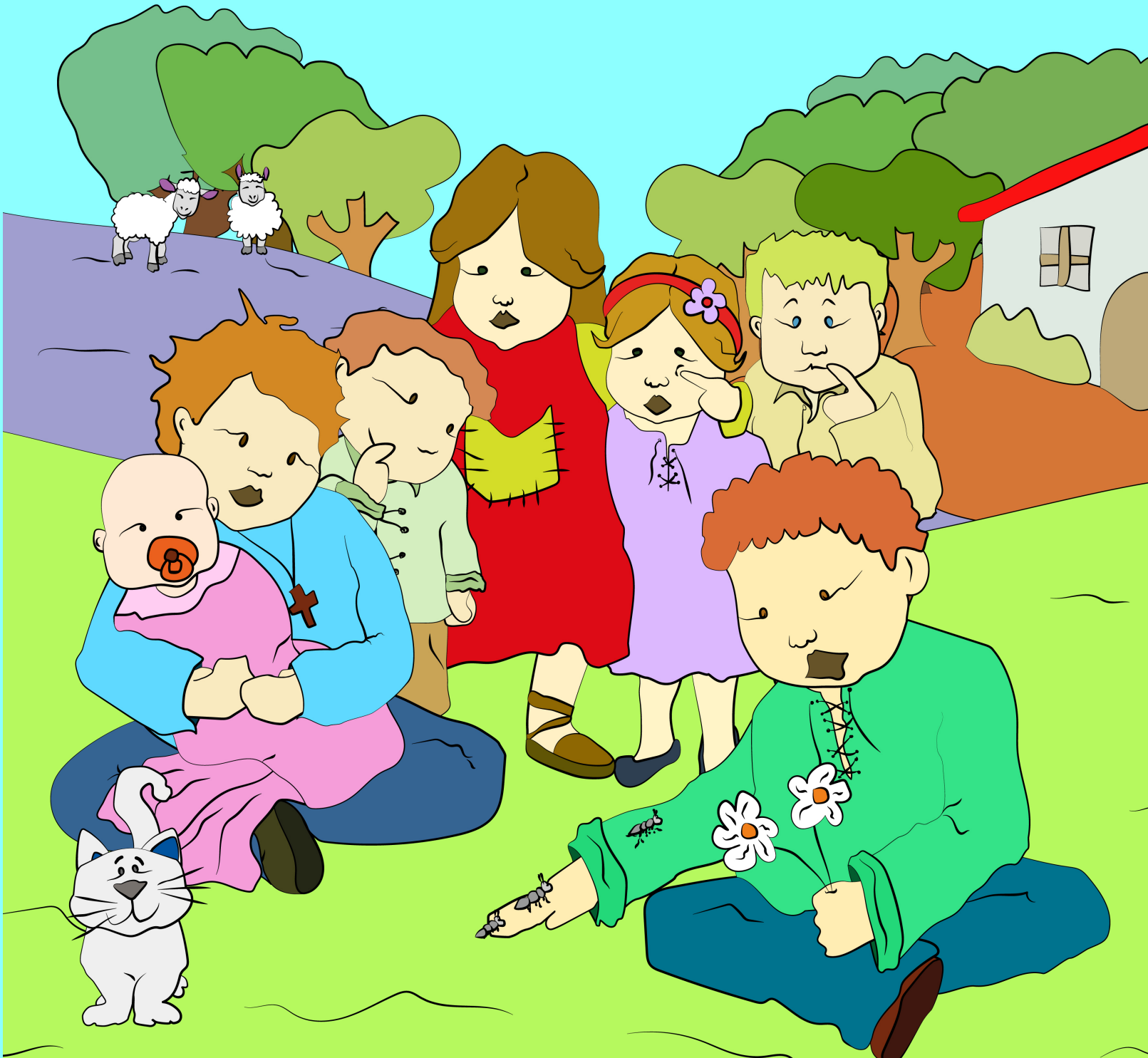
After sometime, John proved to be an excellent student. As time passed by, he progressed in his qualifications. His teacher congratulated him on it.

While staying in Huesca, he found out that a classmate from his hometown was also there studying Philosophy. John was very happy to be in the same class with him because he made him feel calmer and safer for not being the only one to have left the town to start a new life.

HE CAME BACK AND VISITED TERRADES

After a few months, John came back home to visit his parents and siblings. He brought the popular Little Red Riding Hood tale to his sister Margaret and a book of prayers to his sister Mary. John expected his brother James to read those books to them. He dreamt about his sisters being able to go to school one day in the future. He also brought scarves for his brothers, a different one for each of them. He brought a bread basket for his mom and for his father a new hat.

Everybody was pleased to get back together. They ate bread with tomato and different kinds of sausages. Once they had finished, they all went to rest for a while.



Everybody went to rest except his father who spent time talking with John in the porch at the back of the house where they had lunch...

- I know that you are well and I'm happy for you —father said very softly.
- Thanks dad —John answered.
- Why, son?
- For being with me.

A STORY FOR HIS SISTER MARGARITA

After some years his sister Margarita was born. It was really a very happy event for the family. Now, she was 3 years old. She had transparent, intense and clear eyes. The features of her face were naive and the mouth was small when she smiled showing her gums. She was like a doll that walked around the house with 2 ponytails like that of her sister María. John loved some of his sister's mannerisms, how she related everything what she did. Margarita had the habit of talking all day long, she learned how to talk at an early age. She spoke what she did, thought and felt. She always had something to say though she was very small.

—I ate chocolate cookies, my tummy hurts, that is why I'm sad. I want my dad here right now to read me stories — Margarita said while she was in much pain.

—Relax, I can read the story for you —John answered.

—What are you going to read? —asks the small child.

—Tell me.

—I want the Wolf story! John and the Wolf story —she said it playfully.

—You meant Peter and the Wolf story?

—Oh Yes! That's the one!

—Ok



PRAYING BEFORE GOING TO BED

John always prayed before going to sleep. In fact he did it until his death. Praying was one of his necessities. It gave him enough peace and serenity to be tranquil to get to sleep.

When he prayed he always remembered his family and friends and also his Parish Priest because he felt that he was the person who helped him in his doubts of his faith, and his life when he was young and adolescent in Terrades. He prayed for everybody.

John made not only intercessory prayers to God, but also thanksgiving prayers. He established a friendly dialogue with God in which he confessed what he had been doing during the day. It was the moment where he was aware of the good things he did and the areas he needed to improve. It was the encounter with himself and with Christ, the God who dwelt in him. He always woke up with a great desire to conquer the world.





CHAPTER 3: ADOLESCENT

JOHN WENT TO REUS

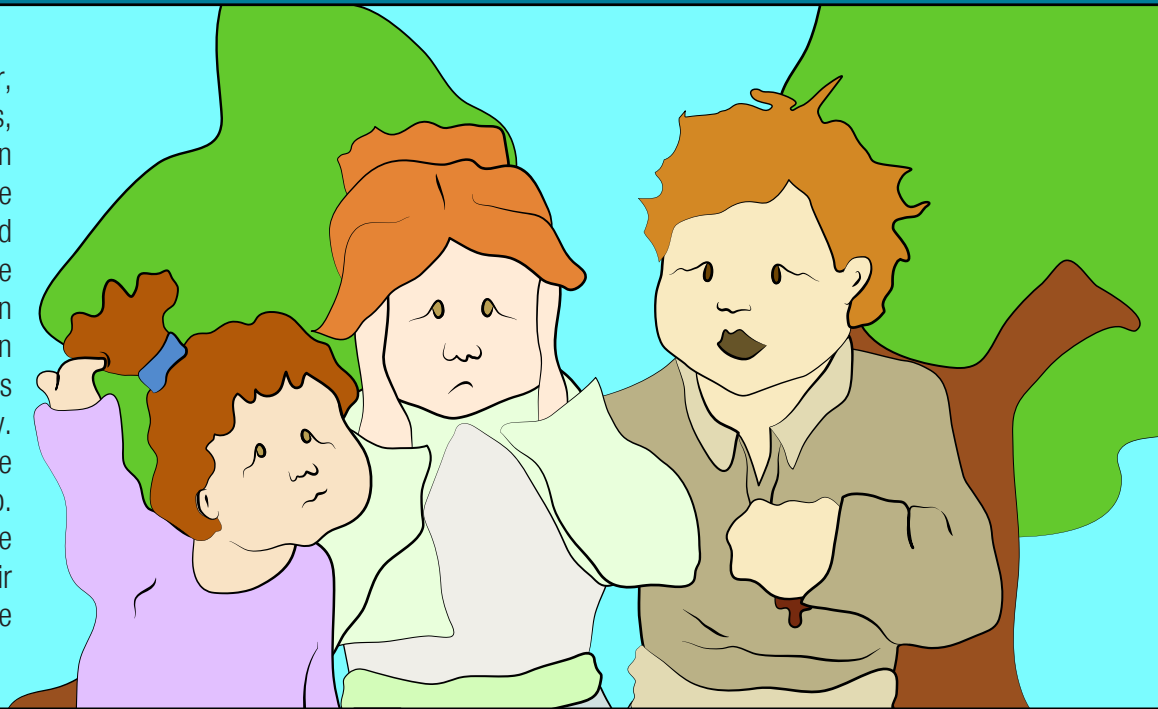
Years went by and John was twenty seven by then. At that age he was crazy about taking on the World. By then, John was someone filled with a wide knowledge. Firstly, he had finished a degree in Philosophy. Secondly, he had passed the first public examination in grammar with excellent marks. He had done it in Villa Ripoll and Saint Peter in Catalonia. Thirdly, he also studied Theology and Ecclesiastic History, of which he had completed the first three years in the city of Barcelona. The fourth and the last course, he completed in the city of Zaragoza. Having completed all these studies, he moved to Villa of Reus, in Catalonia and he stayed there seven long years.

LIVING IN REUS

In Reus, he got a job as a teacher. He loved it. His students were fond of him. They were fascinated by his explanations and asked him all their doubts. He never had a problem with any student. He loved them. He always managed to create enthusiasm and curiosity in them which helped them to learn more.



As a consequence of the war, many injured men, widows, many women, who had been brutally maltreated because of war, many orphaned and abandoned kids came to the Hospital in Reus. The action of helping out others that John carried out during those years in Reus was praiseworthy. The rhythm was frenetic. He always had something to do. He would visit the widows; he would share with them their pain and he would inquire about their sons.



Some days he would visit the prisoners in jail.



On other days, he would visit the sick and the wounded soldiers and the civilians in the Holy Hospital. He reflected on everything at the end of the day. He prayed during the Mass.



TEACHER OF GRAMMAR

It was a Monday. John had accompanied all his students to Mass, which he had been doing since he arrived in Reus. In spite of the unfavourable environment at that moment, John's students continued attending class.

That day John arrived in the school with a special news.

—Today is a great day for me and I would like to share it with everybody —John said while giving away a bar of chocolate to each of his students. They looked at him in astonishment.

—What are we celebrating? —asked the cleverest boy in the class.

—I've been ordained as a Priest —he said as he raised his eyebrows.

—Oh well! —Everybody exclaimed together joyfully. They looked at each other. Many eyes narrowed down and many others blushed as they smiled. Joy flooded in everyone's heart. Each one manifested his joy in his own way.

—It's true guys, from now onwards you can address me Father John or Mosen.

—That's great! —Exclaimed the laziest student in the class.

—That's it, Michael. That's why I invite you to share the chocolate.

—“Thank you,” —this time a stutterer said, with the words stuttering.

—“God has called me to be a priest,” —he said with conviction—. And now let's get to work! The other day we read the second part of Don Quixote. Open the books please...

The students did what the new Mosen asked them to do.



VISITING THE PRISONERS

Once the class had finished with almost no time left to eat, John left immediately in order to visit the prisoners in jail.

—I'm glad to see you, John —said an afflicted prisoner. That day, he seemed to be bored when John came to visit him.

—How are you today, Xavier?

—I've had better days —the prisoner answered.

—From today I am Father John. I took the vows as a priest.

—For the Church?

—Of course! What for otherwise? —he said laughing.

—I am not surprised. The World needs people like you, who do whatever they can in a selfless way. I still can't believe you are here spending every free afternoon with me. It really helps me.

—Thanks Xavier.

—I am telling you the truth. I hope you believe me, and I wouldn't be lying if I told you I would love to meet your God. I hope I will really be forgiven for whatever I have done. I am a prisoner for having committed many crimes, you know well, but I feel sorry for my actions. You have always told me that your God forgives every sin.

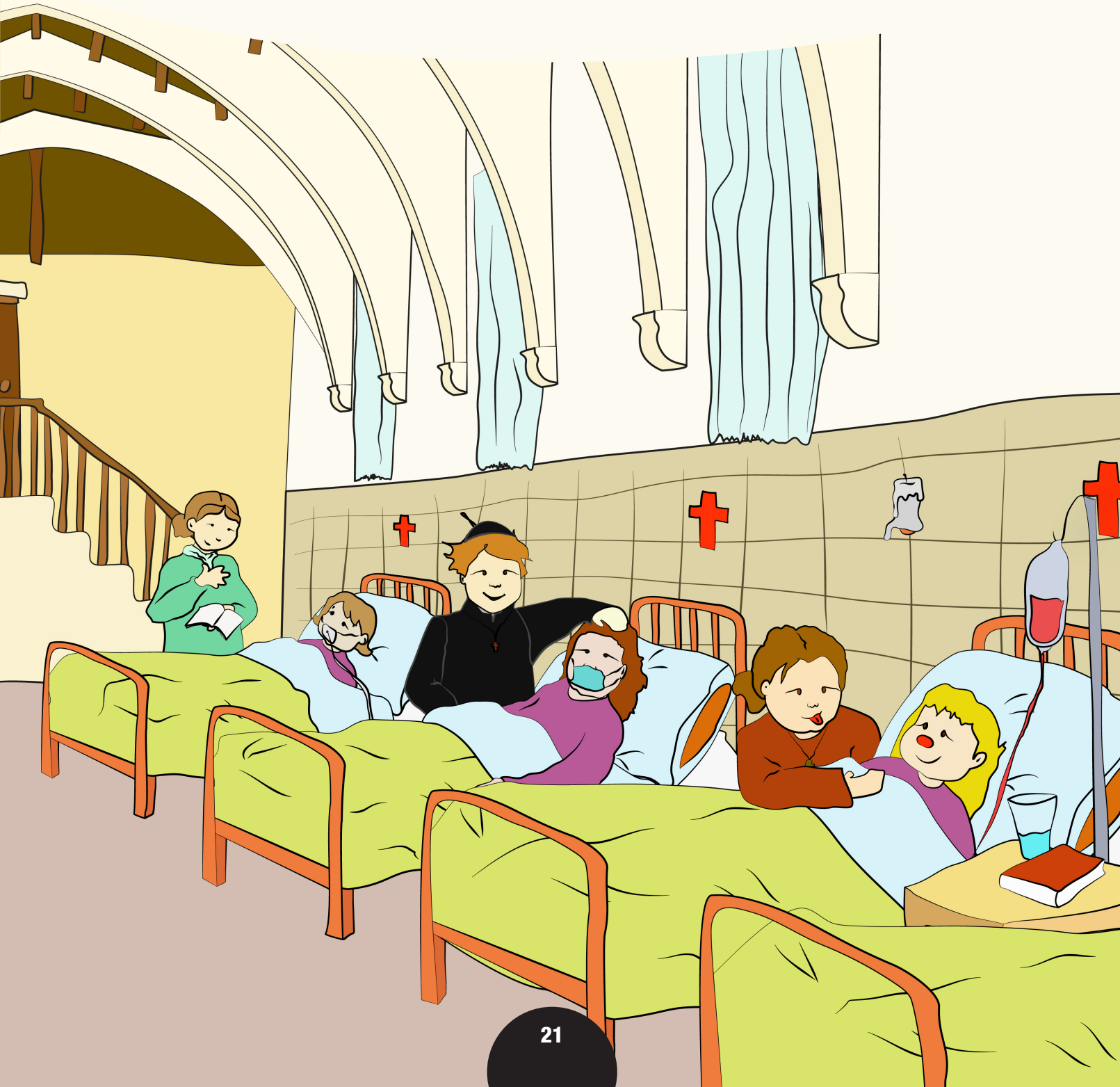
—My God is also your God. He is the God of all. And yes, he always forgives your sins. He loves you as he loves me. He wants the best for everyone.



IN THE HOSPITAL OF THE HOLY CROSS IN BARCELONA.
HE MET MARIA RAFOLS

Time passed by. Fr. John decided to leave his job as a teacher in Reus and after a short experience as Vicar in the Parish of Saint Catherine in Vinyols del Camp. He went to the Hospital of the Holy Cross in Barcelona, which was known for admitting the poorest people. The MIA (Muy Ilustrísima Administración) or Very Illustrious Administration was in charge of the hospital and since he arrived, he took the position of Vicar or Priest. He took care of the spiritual needs of the sick people but he also encouraged volunteers to take part in the hospital services. He stayed there for five months.

One day, while John was visiting the women's ward he found some volunteers taking care of them. He was captivated by the way one particular woman looked after and treated the sick, the way she spoke to them, in her sweet and kind tone, the way she put them to bed and fed them, washed them, nursed them, cheered them up and, above all, she accompanied them. The woman was Maria Rafols.



AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE HOSPITAL OF THE HOLY CROSS HE PLANNED THE ROUTE TO ZARAGOZA

As the days went by, the relationship between Fr. John Bonal and Maria Rafols grew stronger. The work they carried out every day, in coordination with the Brotherhoods (Brothers of Charity of the Holy Cross and The Hospitaller Sisters of the Holy Cross) and the volunteers was very big and efficient. That made the hospital a reference to others. The news reached the Holy Royal and General Hospital of Our Lady of Grace of Zaragoza. The Director of this Hospital asked MIA if some volunteers could go there to take care of the sick people.

Fr. John was gathering volunteers from different places and of both genders who were willing to accompany him for his new functions in Zaragoza. These groups had leaders. Fr. John Bonal appointed Joseph Tarradellas as the President of the Brotherhood and he chose Mother Rafols as the President of the Sisterhood.

Fr. John and Maria finalized the details of the trip. They would leave within three days. With the help of the map they traced the route which they were going to take to reach their destination. Both of them knew that it would take approximately thirteen to fifteen days to arrive from Barcelona to Zaragoza in wagons. It was winter so they had to bear the cold which made their journey very uncomfortable.





THEY ARE ON THEIR WAY

After three days, the Brotherhood and Sisterhood set out very early in the morning. The household goods and food were mounted on the top of the wagon. Each wagon had a guide to lead them. Next to them, ahead and behind, the young Brothers and young Sisters, led by Joseph Torradellas and Maria Rafols walked with full enthusiasm. About ten meters ahead, the coachmen who were in charge of making their way, led them.

As it was winter, it was very cold. On more than one occasion they were caught by storm. Then the sky was illuminated by lightning and thunder. The roads were muddy and so the wagons got stuck in the mud many times. The guides and the coachmen, with the help of the Brothers, untied and released the wagons.

The difficulties they faced on the road did not dampen their spirit, but they were filled with joy at the thought of the task they were going to take up when they arrived in Zaragoza.

Whenever they could, they would spend the night at an inn they found on the road. Since it was very cold they were unable to sleep in the air, but they managed to protect themselves with the blankets and the warm clothes they had. In each and every one of the inns, the Brothers and Sisters were well received and they always paid with coins.

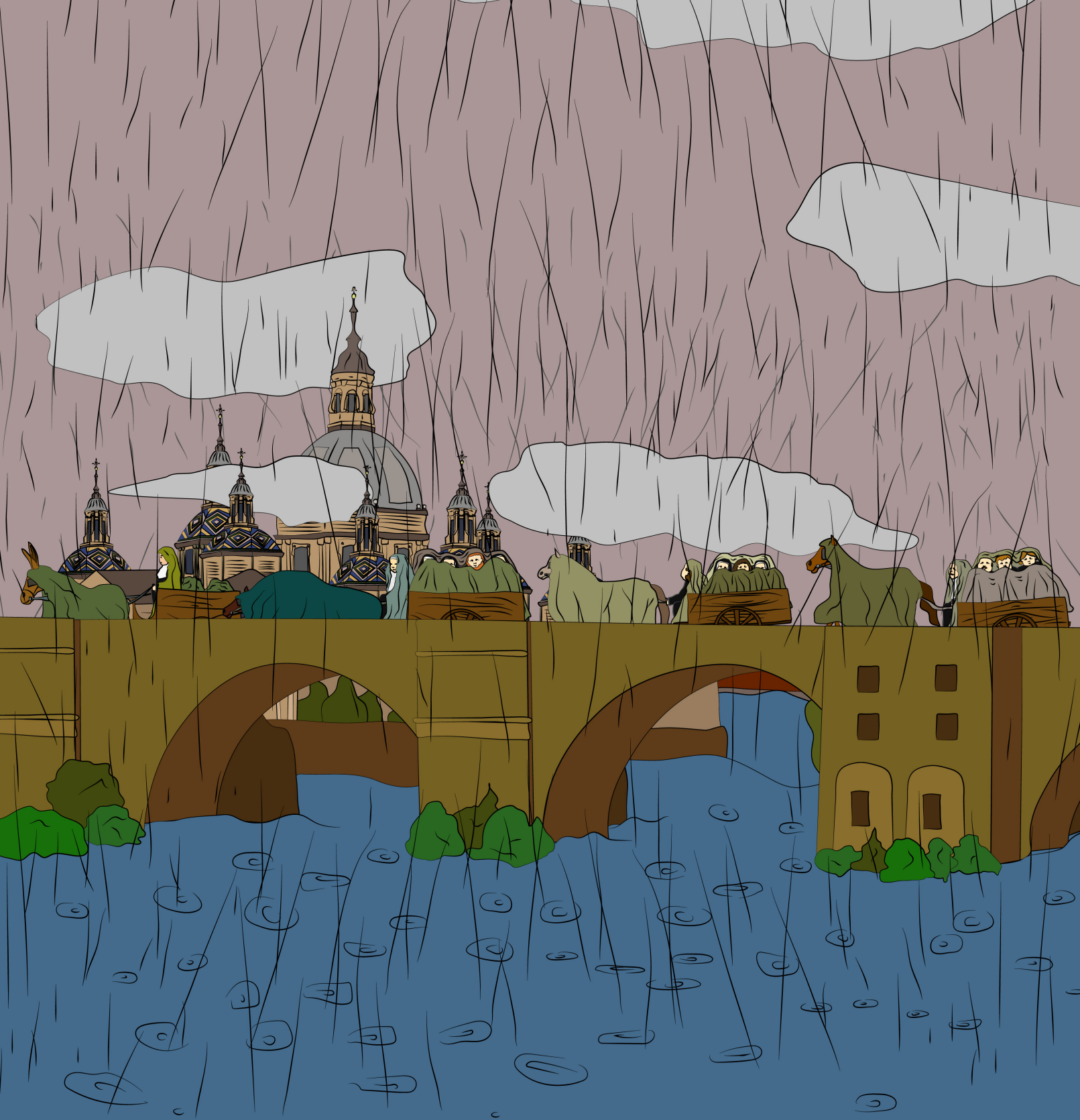
ON THE WAY THEY CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS

They continued their journey. When it was night, they entered an inn. It was filled to its capacity. But the guests being aware of the arrival of this large group made room for everyone to spend the night.

Being grateful to their hospitality Fr. John and Maria set a little Bethlehem with them. They celebrated the Mass and they invited the owner of the lodge with his family, the guests and outsiders. Then they had dinner, talked, laughed and sang Christmas Carols. They celebrated the Birth of Jesus joyfully. It was December 25. They prayed and slept next to each other peacefully. The celebration of Christmas had delayed their journey.

They arrived in Zaragoza on December 28. A few kilometers away from the city of Zaragoza, Fr. John sent one of the Brothers to inform the Government Board of the Hospital of the arrival of the Brothers and Sisters.





ENTRANCE TO ZARAGOZA

The view of the city was very beautiful. They admired the dome of the Basilica of Pillar in the dark night. The brothers and Sisters marveled at this Religious Image, which was so splendid and lovely. It was a feast to their eyes.

Night fell. The sky was blacker than usual and with just two oil lanterns, lit by each Brother and Sister, and held by their hands, they arrived. The road definitely led them to the entrance of the city of Zaragoza. When they arrived there, they stopped. The first drops of rain began to fall on the Stone Bridge. They crossed it, and at the other end, right in one of the twelve gates that gave access to the city, the Hospital Board was waiting for them. The Sisters were transferred in a cart and were taken directly to the Basilica of Pillar. The Brothers, on the other hand, continued their journey in the wagons till they reached the Basilica of Pillar. The Hospital Board took care that they were taken directly to the Hospital by volunteers from the city.



AT THE FEET OF OUR LADY OF PILLAR

The hustle and bustle of the crowd, who knew of the news of their arrival and crowded at the gates, was frightening. They entered the Basilica of Our Lady of Pillar together. The Brothers and Sisters prostrated themselves before the beautiful little image of the Virgin. They thanked her for the safe arrival and asked for her protection, and for the mission entrusted to them.

Then, they went to the Royal and General Hospital of Our Lady of Grace. The Brothers and Sisters were led directly to the main hall. They warmed their feet in a huge fireplace while drinking hot chocolate. They were, now, really tired, but the desire to start working immediately was enormous. The Hospital Board, considering that they had taken a long trip, ordered everyone to rest. They would not start their work until after three days

IN THE ROYAL AND GENERAL HOSPITAL OF OUR LADY OF GRACE IN ZARAGOZA

On January 1st, 1805 the day began with the work of the new Brotherhood and Sisterhood in collaboration with the workers of the place. The Hospital attended to patients of any medical condition, such as fever, skin diseases; insane, pregnant women, nursing mothers, orphaned children who had been abandoned by their mothers, and other helpless people.

Fr. John started his mission as a devout Priest destined for spiritual assistance. He gave everybody the Notebook which he had written himself. It contained the rules or norms for the Brotherhood and Sisterhood. The first was the obedience to the Hospital Board, the second, his spiritual and Community ideal.

The situation of the Hospital was depressing. The workers had become lazy. There was dirt everywhere. They did not sweep. The basins of the sick spilled and remained on the ground without being picked up. The stench of the urine and feces was unbearable.

In a short time, the work of the Brothers and Sisters gave good results. Now everything was clean. The sick were well taken care of, received comfort, attention according to their discomfort, relief from their pains, and they were accompanied personally and spiritually. The Brothers and Sisters were very clear about their Christian vocation. They did everything with the immense love they felt for Christ. And that nothing and nobody could change it.





IN THE HOSPITAL OF OUR LADY OF HOPE IN HUESCA

Two years later, in 1807, the news of the good work of the Brotherhood and Sisterhood spread so fast in and out of the city, especially the work of the female, that they came to ask Fr. John to provide volunteers to the Hospital of Our Lady of Hope in Huesca. And so he obliged, by sending two of the pioneer Sisters of the Zaragoza group and, personally bringing the others from Catalonia, he established the Community of Huesca.

Despite the good work of the Brothers, they had many difficulties, misunderstandings and disagreements with the Hospital's Situation and with its own workers. As a result of all these disputes, the Brotherhood was completely extinguished between 1807 and 1808. Everyone left, including Brother Torradellas who was very friendly with Fr. John. What exhausted them? What made them leave?

THE HOSPITAL OF OUR LADY OF GRACE, GOT BURNED.

First Siege in Zaragoza 15th of June up to 14 of August 1808.

In 1808, the War of Independence began in Spain. The city of Zaragoza was attacked by Napoleonic troops. It was the First Siege in Zaragoza. On August 3th, the French artillery dropped bombs against the Hospital. It was repeatedly bombarded. The Hospital began to burn little by little everywhere. It took hours to evacuate all the sick people who could not walk or who had a hard time doing so.

The sick were quickly transferred to the Central Market, the City Council and the Provincial Council that were able to accommodate and to attend to the sick and the wounded in war. No one died in the evacuation of the Hospital. But many patients got worse because of this event. Everyone had a lot of fear, especially the insane. The latter escaped in terror. The Sisters had to run after them to reassure them and save them. Maria Rafols even went to the French camp to rescue some of the insane people who had been accidentally sheltered in that place.



JOHN BONAL ASKS FOR ALMS TOGETHER WITH THE SISTERS

Now there was extreme poverty. Fr. John Bonal, Maria Rafols and another Sister went out through the streets of Zaragoza, asking for alms at the doors of the Churches and houses. That day they got money with which, later, they would buy the heads of cattle and offal; they got some clothes, medicines, pieces of fruit, bread, some meat and eggs that the wealthiest families gave them for the sick and injured at the Hospital.

—Hey boy! What are you doing? —said Fr. John talking to a young boy.

Fr. John, suddenly discovered with pain how a street boy opened one of the bags of bread they had collected as alms. The boy got scared. He took a step back. They were looking at each other. The little boy rubbed his face. It was dirty. He was missing some teeth. His clothes were worn out and dirty. Fr. John, with a gesture invited him to take the bread he wanted. The boy opened the bag without looking away, and took a piece from inside. He put it in his mouth and left.





A BIG DISASTER!

The Second Siege in December 1808 (four months later).

Days, weeks, even months passed, but the situation did not change. On December 21st, 1808, the city was again attacked by the French who crossed the doors of it. In this Second Siege many symbolic buildings of Zaragoza were destroyed. The whole city was surrounded. The water supply was interrupted. They sought the surrender of the whole city, but instead, it resisted.

One of those who maintained the physical, moral and spiritual resistance was Father John with the Sisters and the Hospital Board. Fr. John Bonal was then running from one hospital to another, for the spiritual care of the sick who needed to understand and accept the reality of the moment. He spent a lot of time comforting and helping them spiritually as a Preacher of Christ's Passion. He was not a doctor, his priestly services went beyond the bodily needs.

Fr. John prayed the rosary with them. He read the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ to them. He visited the abandoned children and played with them. He comforted them and heard the confession of the prisoners of both sides (Spanish and French). He attended to those sentenced to death by the French, and even saved two convicts.



JOHN NOT ONLY HEARD CONFESSIONS...

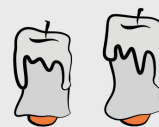
The streets became a real cemetery. The French managed to gain control of the city, but not yet the control of the hospital. Occasionally Fr. John attended to the sick people beyond his duties. He reached out everywhere. If it was necessary he would hear confessions.

—Do you like the soup? —Fr. John asked the old lady to whom he was attending.

The lady could not speak, she was so old and so weak that her voice was very feeble, but her gesture expressed the gratitude she felt for being very well attended.

Between December 1808 and the first months of 1809, the Sisters, thought that the others had less food than them, so they gave part of their daily meals to the Governing Board of the Hospital in order to distribute to the sick. (They are the so-called “despintes”). They fed themselves poorly in favor of the sick and shared their strength as much as they could. In times of shortage of food, they donated seven hundred and twenty portions of food. Nine Sisters died between 1808 and 1809 because of hunger and fatigue. Their heroic deeds were praiseworthy.

PLAYING WITH THE CHILDREN IN THE FOUNDLING HOSPITAL



During 1809, the situation of both the adults and the children in the Hospital of Convalescent already settled well; but the Sisters on more than one occasion were taken aback, when they saw that many mothers, poor and sick, gave birth to children and abandoned them.

They left them at the doors of the Hospital on a lathe that was very close to them. These children, who were always welcomed by the Sisters, became members of the foundling home, a place where they lived with many others, who were sick but they were very well taken care of.



Only Fr. John knew how important it was for the children of the Hospital to play. He believed that playing with them could make them forget for a while the fateful consequences that the war had brought with it. And he also had great interest in teaching them useful trades such as tailoring or shoemaking with which they could earn a living as adults.



CELEBRATING THE EUCHARIST IN THE HOSPITAL CHAPEL

A year passed by and they were now in the year 1810. Fr. John, as a Preacher of the Passion of Christ and Confessor in the Convalescents Hospital, heard the confessions of the sick who approached him seeking comfort and encouragement. He celebrated the Mass and other sacraments. Many children were baptized there. Almost all of them came from the Foundling Hospital.

Since 1809, the Sisters were the godmothers together with other workers from the place of the children whom they baptized and who lived in the area under their care, and care for those who suffered abandonment. There was a real and lasting accompaniment here between the Sisters and the little ones. Above all, with Maria Ràfols.

One day, Fr. John gathered all the sick people who could move from their beds and the Sisters to celebrate the Eucharist in the Chapel of the Convalescent Hospital. The children, well groomed with the help of the Sisters, sat in the front row. They loved that moment. They left the routine. They listened attentively to the homily of Father John and especially when he talked about the Hymn of love from the First Letter of St. Paul to Corinthians 13: 1-13

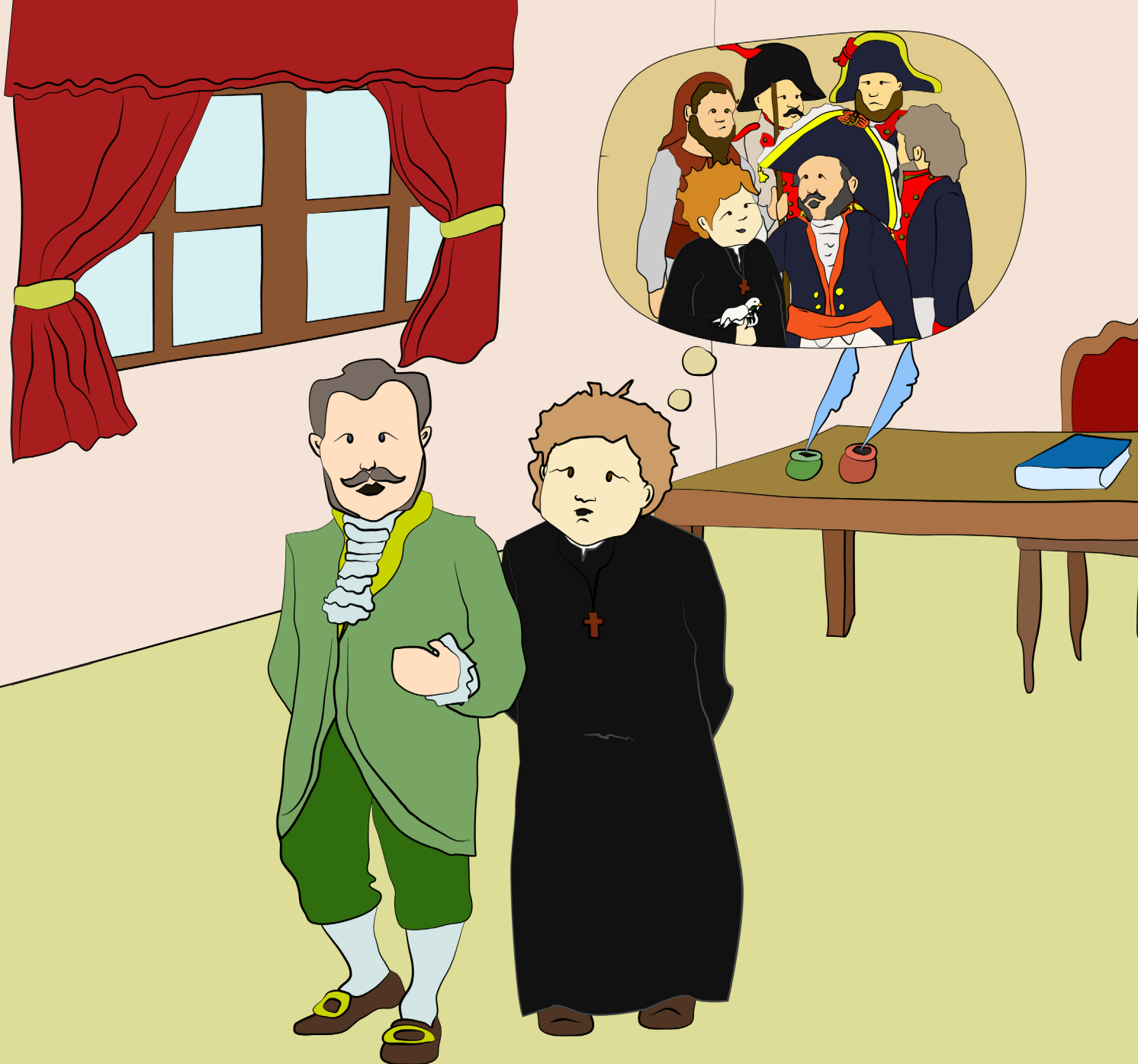
AGAIN IN THE NEW FOUNDLING HOSPITAL, HE TEACHES RESPECT FOR ONE ANOTHER

Another year passed by and on 29th April 1811, the French took the command of the hospital and imposed a new Hospital Board. From that moment, things wouldn't be so favorable for Fr. John Bonal and the Sisters.

When Fr. John got into the room of the children, to his surprise, he found two of them fighting. One of them threw a wooden sphere at another who managed to dodge, that it went through one of the window panes. Fr. John thought if the sphere had hit him, it would have killed him. He didn't get angry with any of them. When the boys saw Fr. John, they were speechless. They stood still in the place. Fr. John held their arms and made them sit facing each other. He asked them if they knew the First Man in history who killed his brother. The boys didn't know anything.



They had never heard that story. Fr. John then told them the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4-1-16). The boys became pale. They didn't know what to do. They were sorry for their actions. Fr. John could read it in their eyes. But not being satisfied with this, he told them the story of two other brothers. In this case, the story of Esau and Jacob (Genesis 25,19-34).



CHAPTER 4: MATURITY

HE BECAME A “BEGGAR” FOR THE HOSPITAL

Talking to the Pro-French Board, he remembered when his friend Palafox sent him to beg around the city. The life of Fr. John changed a lot from that moment, taking a terrible turn. Fr. John was then forty six years old.

In the new Board of Government it was convenient for Fr. John to dedicate himself to others in an official way, on behalf and in favour of the Hospital out of the limits of the city. The goal was the farther the better. In this way he would be kept away from the hospital, from the sick and from his Sisters. They simply didn't want Fr. John to be a confessor and a guide to the Sisters. The fear of the Government was that Fr. John could influence them more than they could. At that moment, Fr. John had to write down in his Notebook everything that was given. He couldn't and he mustn't forget to write down every little thing that he received.

From now on, Fr. John would not go alone. In this first journey he would go with Sanclemente, a helper of the hospital. He was very close to the Hospital Board and he who would follow up Fr. John's exhausting job. Fr. John accepted all the conditions and got ready to go out as soon as possible. From this point he visited small, medium and large villages over the country asking for alms. They were the so called “Journeys” that he prepared and went across for 15 years. Since his departure, he was “veredero” (traveller), beggar and mendicant for others in the name of God for the benefit of the hospital that needed a lot of resources and donations. The Hospital Board used his collection for its proper functioning and for the well-being of patients.

PRAYS AND OFFER ALL HIS PAIN TO GOD

Fr. John left Zaragoza accompanied by Sanclemente very early in the morning. Both of them left riding a horse. In one of the journeys, between the city of Zaragoza and a village, he stopped with the intention of praying. Therefore, he preferred to walk a few meters away from his travel partner. He was entertained looking at the landscape. Fr. John took advantage of that moment to meditate. He needed sometime for himself.

He had a real hard time, feeling sad very deeply. Only he knew at that moment how he really felt. He recalled the difficult moments he had gone through time and again, when he was alone without any brother to accompany him.



The moment when everyone left, leaving him alone as the only possible male to guide the Sisters, made it more difficult for the Sisterhood he had founded to become a Congregation in the future.

His sorrow was deep inside; he was truly sad for being away from his Sisters.

He prayed, and asked God to accompany him. And he trusted; he continued trusting in God, and desired that God might be by his side to help him to face all the difficulties in his life.



ASKING FOR ALMS IN ONE OF THE MANY TOWNS

They spent days walking along the path, Fr. John knocked at the door of a house. He hit the door with his knuckles. A five years old girl opened it. Behind her were, another seven year old, and two more children of about ten and twelve years old.

—Hello sir. What do you want? —the youngest girl asked.

—Are you coming to bless our house? —asked the older one.

—Hello little ones, is your mum or dad at home?

—No. They are working in the fields —answered the oldest one.

—Then I'll pass by in another moment if it is possible —answered Fr. John.

—What do you want Father? —asked one of them.

—I'm begging for the small children like you who are sick in the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace in Zaragoza.

The four of them paid more attention. Their eyes lit up.

—Is it alright if it is only coins? —the oldest asked.

—Of course!

—Get them! —he exclaimed while taking out two coins from his pants pocket —. These are my savings, but I do not mind giving them to you. My brothers and I do not need so much.

—Thank you son, you are a great person.

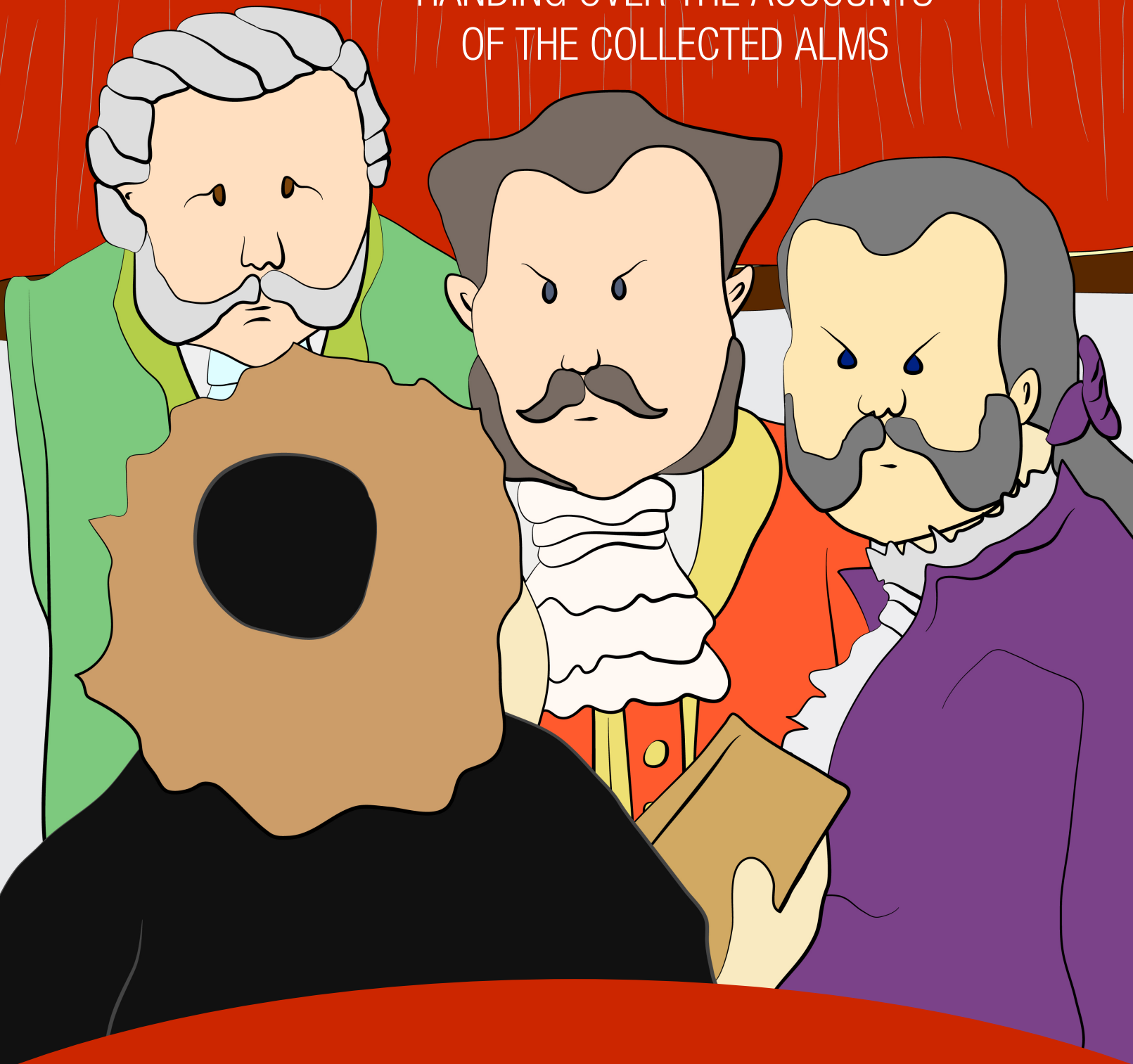
VISIT TO PEOPLE IN NEED OF GOD



The next morning, after having spent that night in the village Parish house, Fr. John asked the Parish Priest who had hosted him and Sanclemente to authorize him to stay and hear confession of those who approached him, and those who came to the Church knowing about his arrival. His request was granted. Fr. John spent a lot of time in the morning hearing confessions. The news spread quickly through the village. People tried to reconcile with their faith.

Sanclemente was upset with Fr. John's decision and against his will, he went for a walk through the village waiting for Fr. John to finish so that they could go ahead collecting alms. Sanclemente was desperate but he knew that, at that moment, he couldn't do much, but Fr. John would obey him.

HANDING OVER THE ACCOUNTS OF THE COLLECTED ALMS



Days went by. After his return to Zaragoza, the Council convinced Fr. John to give account of everything he had collected. Prior to this meeting, Sanclemente had gone ahead to talk to the gentlemen of the Hospital Board. On the one hand, he informed them that he did not trust that all the profits, in terms of currencies, were really entered in the account book by Fr. John and therefore, remained as donation in favor of the Hospital. On the other hand, he said he did not understand the fact that he spent so much time listening, hearing confessions and accompanying so many people who approached him on the roads. At that time, he thought, he could have collected more alms for the Hospital.

The Hospital Board, who listened carefully to Sanclemente, took note of everything. Now they would make Father John aware of all the proceeds. Having heard all these things from Sanclemente about Fr. John, they became stronger and they were eager to meet him. Sanclemente left and Fr. John arrived.

After demanding exhaustive accounts of everything collected, they insisted on not wasting time in other activities other than the “begging”. The Board gradually, recognized the untiring work of father John in favour of the poor of the hospital, and started trusting him.



WITHDREW TO SALZ TO PRAY AND TO PREPARE THE VEREDAS (JOURNEYS)

Fr. John, withdrew a few days to study and prepare the itinerary of the roads and streets that he was going to travel. To do this, he went to Salz, about twenty kilometers away from Zaragoza. In this place Fr. John was staying in a small room attached to a hermitage in honor of the Virgin that was on a hill. He spent time thinking about the life he had in Zaragoza: the busy pace of the Hospital, the fatigue of his Sisters, the sick who were dying every day, those who were awaiting care, those who recovered their health, those who would come, those abandoned children, women who had been mistreated during the Siege, their confessional secrets. He was anxious about all these things! The things of God. And he left everything in the hands of the Virgin.

Fr. John always carried his own coin box, which he had made with some wood that he rescued from the ruins of the old Hospital of Our Lady of Grace of Zaragoza, before it was completely demolished due to the fire that was caused by the Napoleonic bombs. The box, small and with a handle, would be used to keep the coins he received. He dreamt of having it full of money with which he would buy food and other things.



IN THE HOUSE OF MERCY IN HUESCA, HE PLAYS WITH THE ABANDONED CHILDREN

In one of his last journeys, Fr. John woke up early, at 6 o'clock in the morning. He was already preparing to leave Salz and go back to Zaragoza. In his maps he traced a new route which he would take from the city; his aim was to continue begging for the hospital.

This time, his first stop was at the House of Mercy in Huesca, to visit the abandoned children that the Sisters of that community were looking after and also to visit the Sisters, his Sisters.

Everybody was very happy to see each other. Fr. John dedicated a long time of the morning to play with the sick children that the Sisters were taking care of, without any rest. They were taking care of them day and night. It was not a job for a few hours. It was a daily and a committed mission, and so he dedicated some time to talk to the Sisters.



WITH THE SISTERS OF OUR LADY OF HOPE HOSPITAL

Fr. John was not only satisfied with visiting the House of Mercy but he also visited Our Lady of Hope Hospital and there he had lunch with the Sisters and then went back to Zaragoza.

On his way through the streets of Huesca, he recognized a priest wearing a cassock. He gave him two hens trusting that he would use it in the best way. Fr. John accepted the gift. He expressed his gratitude and continued on his way. He had lunch with the Sisters; they were very happy to see him. He visited the patients of the hospital and spent time hearing the confession of some of them. The time passed quickly when he did all this. He continued his way back to Zaragoza, not before saying goodbye to the Sisters who waited for him at the door. He kissed and hugged them all. The last one, saying goodbye was the Mother Superior who was waiting for him and she gave him one more hen.



THE INSANE OF THE HOSPITAL INSPIRE HIS LAST JOURNEY

When Fr. John reached Zaragoza, it was already late. He was tired. He thought he would go out after two or three days for begging. He had just arrived but already thinking about going out.

In those days when he stayed in Zaragoza, Fr. John visited the insane patients of the Hospital. Then, something moved him inside. He felt sad about their condition and how they barely had a really well-equipped place for their treatment. Suddenly many ideas came to his mind as if someone had taken him and shaken him. He was dizzy just trying to organize everything that was around his head. He stopped. He calmed down. And he tried to organize all his ideas. He didn't succeed.

In the midst of this mental chaos, Fr. John began to dream of building a new pavilion, annexed to the Hospital that would house the adult insane. He wanted the best for them. This idea was in his head for several days. He didn't see where he would get so much money, what the building would look like, what minimum needs it should cover, etc. He had so much desire to do something that, he decided to go back to Salz to clarify all these ideas and put them into motion.



HE DIED IN SALZ, PUTTING HIS DREAMS IN GOD'S HEART

In Salz, Fr. John stayed for 2 or 3 days preparing for the new journey which would benefit the insane of his hospital. He carried with him 3 atlases and a folder which was extremely worn out.

Days past by and Fr. John continued working. On the third day he vomited. Yes, he vomited again and again. He did not understand what was happening to him. He slept.

The following morning, he woke up vomiting again. He had a stomach ache too. He did not have any food and did not go out of his bedroom. On the 5th day in the morning he felt worse. He stayed the whole day in his room, in bed without eating. He brought his folder with him. He lay down and took out his Notebook. He had been writing down the details of the Project delivered to the Brotherhood and Sisterhood in 1805. The Sisters lovingly referred to it as "Father John's Little Notebook". In the morning of the sixth day Fr. John felt weak as never before. The noise produced by his retching (vomiting) alerted one of the guests who had stayed at the hermitage's lodge that night. Knowing the sick person could be Fr. John, as for his habit of moving away, he alerted the Sisters of Huesca to call the Sisters of Zaragoza.

Two Sisters from Huesca arrived a little before the Sisters from Zaragoza did. They helped him in the best way they could and the best they knew, without understanding well about the illness he was suffering from.



That night of the sixth day, John was in bed, lost in thought as if paralyzed. He missed his village Terrades. He had not remembered it for a long time. The streets of his town came vividly to his mind. He reached for his folder from the floor again along with his Notebook. He left both the things on the bed. He took only the folder this time. He rummaged through it for a few seconds. Finally, he managed to get a paper. He held it in his hands. A shiver ran through his body from head to toe. He felt butterflies in his stomach. Observing the sheet of paper he was moved with sorrow. Tears fell down his cheeks. Immediately after that he surrendered his soul to God. It was on 19th August 1829.

In his hands, he was holding the colored drawing of his town surrounded by mountains, which he had painted when he was a child at school.





THAT DREAM
WILL COME
TRUE
AS UNIVERSAL
REALITY!



*Congregation of Sisters
of Charity of Saint Anne*