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Helping Hands

Like most boys in Argentina, Jorge was a soccer fan. But he liked playing basketball with his father and friends even more. He also played card games with his parents. On Saturday afternoons, Jorge listened to opera on the radio with his mother and brothers. Jorge didn't have a lot of time to play, however. There was always studying or homework to do for school, or help needed around the house.

As Jorge grew, so did his family. At twelve years old, he was the oldest of five children. But after the birth of the youngest Bergoglio child, Jorge's mother became paralyzed from the waist down. She was no longer able



to keep up with household tasks by herself. “Boys,” said Mr. Bergoglio, “we all need to do more to help your mother. Jorge, you are the oldest. It is important that you set a good example.”

So during the day, Mrs. Bergoglio did as much as she could to prepare the family’s dinner. She cleaned and cut vegetables and meat. She also got together everything needed for cooking. When Jorge and his two brothers came home from school, she was waiting for

them in the kitchen. The boys followed their mother's instructions, and finished making dinner together.

Because he was the oldest, Jorge did most of the cooking on the stove. He really enjoyed it! They all hoped that their mother would be well again. Still, this daily time together in the kitchen was full of joy. It also gave Jorge and his brothers the chance to learn how to cook for themselves.



Going to Work

In time, Mrs. Bergoglio's health did improve. When Jorge was thirteen, Mr. Bergoglio felt that his oldest son no longer needed to help at home.

"Jorge, now that you are old enough, I think it is time for you to get a part-time job. You can learn a lot from trying to balance school and work," said his dad. The family didn't need the money Jorge would be able to earn. Still, Mr. Bergoglio wanted to teach his son the value and dignity of work. "I may be able to get you a job at the sock factory. But you won't be keeping the accounts like I do."

Jorge's days were full. In the morning he worked from 7:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. Then after eating lunch he went to school until 8:00 p.m. If he finished his homework, Jorge met his friends for some fun. Though it was a challenge, Jorge was learning that it was possible to balance all the important things in his life.

During his first two years at the sock factory, Jorge worked cleaning the floors and the equipment. The third year, his boss gave him some administrative work to do.

Since he was studying chemistry at school, however, Jorge left his job at the factory and began to work at a laboratory. It was good to have a job that allowed him to put his studies into practice.

One day his boss at the lab noticed how quickly he finished his work. "Jorge," she asked, "did you really do *all* of the chemical tests?"

"No, not all," Jorge sheepishly replied. "But I don't really know why I should analyze this sample when the result will be like all the ones I did earlier today."

His boss stopped him and said, "Jorge, all work is worth trying your best. Take pride in each thing you do, even when it seems small."

After she spoke to him, Jorge did a complete test of every sample. Work not only put a little money in his pocket, it also made him feel good about what he was doing.

As he closed the door of the laboratory Jorge saw some friends. Waving, he went off to spend some time with them before going to school.





An Unexpected Discovery

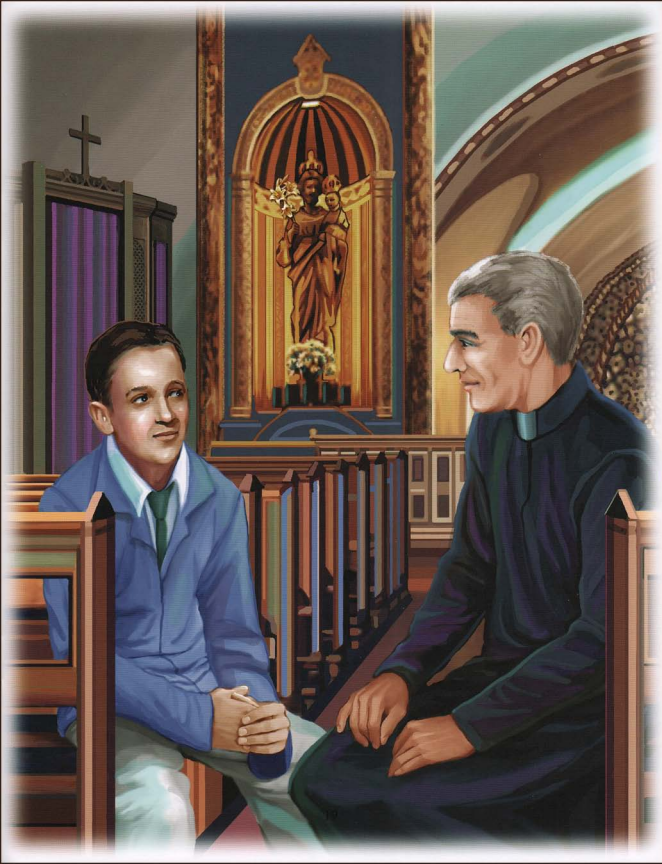
Wow! It looks like it's going to be a great day! thought seventeen-year-old Jorge as he left his house. The sun was shining and there was a nice warm breeze. It was September 21, the Day of the Student, and there was no school. Jorge planned to spend the holiday with his friends. They would have lots of fun—having a picnic, playing a bit of soccer, and perhaps even going dancing later! Jorge really liked to dance the *milonga* with some of the girls he knew. *Yes! It is definitely going to be an awesome day!*

On his way to the train station, Jorge decided it would be a good idea to stop at St. Joseph church in his

neighborhood to pray. He often liked to begin his day quietly with the Lord. And today he had plenty of time before meeting his friends.

Sunshine came in through the beautiful stained glass windows. It made colorful patterns of light on the floor. Jorge noticed a priest seated in the church, a priest he had never met before. After he said a little prayer thanking God for the day ahead, Jorge and the priest began to talk. Father Duarte spoke about God and about life. As they continued to talk, Jorge was moved by the priest's words and decided to ask for the sacrament of Reconciliation.

After his confession Jorge spent a bit more time in prayer. He had started to sense a growing excitement within himself. Jorge felt as if God was giving him a great gift and that filled him with joy and deep peace. *I want to . . . no . . . I MUST become a priest.* He had never thought about it before, but now Jorge felt strongly that God was calling him to help people in their relationship with God, just as Father Duarte had done for him.



Jorge left the church. But instead of meeting his friends at the train station Jorge returned home to reflect on what he had discovered—his life's vocation!