

Don Bosco's dream is more alive than ever

Faced with everything that I am seeing in the Salesian world, I feel I can say with some authority: Beloved Don Bosco, your Dream continues to be fulfilled.

Dear friends, readers of the Salesian Bulletin, as I do every month I send you my personal greetings from my heart and I am offering you my reflections, motivated by what I am experiencing, because I believe that life comes to us all and that what we share, if it is good, does us good and gives us new enthusiasm.

Lent and Easter invite us to be born again. Every day. To be reborn to trust, to hope, serene peace, the desire to love, work and create, to cherish and cultivate people and talents and creatures, the entire little or large garden that God has entrusted to us.

For us Salesians, Easter always reminds us of the feast in 1846 at Valdocco, when Don Bosco went from the tears of the Filippi field to the poor Pinardi shed and the strip of land around it, where the dream began to become reality.

I have seen the dream continue being fulfilled.

I am writing to you now from Santo Domingo, in the Dominican Republic. I previously made a magnificent, very meaningful visit to Juazeiro do Norte (Recife, northeast Brazil) and these last few days have been in the Dominican Republic.

In a few hours I will continue on to Vietnam, and in the midst of this "hustle and bustle" which can also be experienced with much tranquillity, I have nourished my Salesian heart with beautiful experiences and comforting certainties.

I will tell you about them, because they speak of the Salesian mission, but let me start with an anecdote that a

Salesian told me yesterday, which made me laugh, moved me and spoke to me of a "Salesian heart".

A little stone-thrower

A confrere told me that a few days ago, while travelling along one of the roads in the interior of this country, he passed by a place where some children had taken up the habit of throwing stones at cars to cause minor accidents – like breaking a window – and in the confusion, stealing something from the traveller.

Well, that is how it happened to him. He was driving through the village and a child threw a stone to break one of the car windows and succeeded. The Salesian got out of the car, picked up the child and let his parents take him. It was just that there was no father in the family (he had abandoned them long ago). There was only a suffering mother who was left alone with this child and a younger girl. When the Salesian told the mother that her son had broken the car window (which the boy admitted), and that it cost a lot of money, and that she would have to pay him back, the poor woman apologised tearfully, asking for forgiveness, but making him understand that she had no way to pay him back, that she was poor, that she would deal with her son... At that moment, the little girl, the sister of this 'Don Bosco's little Magone', timidly approached with her little fist closed, opened it and handed the Salesian the only almost worthless coin that she had. It was her entire treasure and she told him: "Here, sir, to pay for the glass." My confrere told me that he was so moved that he could no longer speak, and ended up giving the woman some money for a little help for the family.

I did not know quite how to interpret the story, but it was so full of life, pain, need and humanity that I vowed to share it with you. And a few hours later, very close to where I was staying in the Salesian house, I was shown another small Salesian house where we take in children who have no one and who are living on the streets.

Most of them are Haitians. We know well the

tragedy that is unfolding in Haiti where there is no order, no government, no law.... Only mafias rule over everything. Well, to know that these children who arrived here (nobody knows how), who have nowhere to stay, are welcomed in our house (20 in all at the moment), to then move on to other houses, once stabilised, with other educational objectives (where we have, between various houses and always with Salesians and lay educators, another 90 children) – it filled my heart with joy and made me think that Valdocco in Turin, with Don Bosco, was born this way, and this is how we Salesians were born, and a small group of those Valdocco boys, together with Don Bosco, gave “de facto” life to the Salesian Congregation on that 18 December 1859.

How can one fail to see “the hand of God in all this”? How can one fail to see that all this work is the result of much more than a human strategy? How can one fail to see that here and in thousands of other Salesian places around the world, good continues to be done, always with the help of so many generous people and so many others who share a passion for education?

This year, in Madrid in Spain and other places (including America), the magnificent short film “Canillitas” was presented, showing the lives of so many of these young people. I was happy to touch this scene with my own hands and eyes. And it is indeed true, my friends, that Don Bosco’s dream is still being realised today, 200 years later.

Then yesterday I spent the whole day with young people from the Salesian world who call themselves and feel themselves to be leaders throughout Salesian Latin America of a movement that seeks to ensure that at least the Salesian educational world takes care of creation and ecology very seriously with the sensitivity of Pope Francis expressed in *Laudato Si’*. Young people from 12 Latin American countries were there (in person or online) in their “Sustainable Latin America” movement. It is beautiful that young people dream and engage in something that is good for them, for the world and for all of us. So that the world may be saved: saving means

preserving, and nothing will be lost, not a sigh, not a tear, not a blade of grass; no generous effort, no painful patience, no gesture of care, however small and hidden, will be lost: if we can prevent a Heart from breaking, we will not have lived in vain. If we can ease the Pain of a Life, or soothe a Pain, or help a child to grow, we shall not have lived in vain.

I feel, in the face of all this, that I can say with some authority: beloved Don Bosco, your Dream is still VERY MUCH ALIVE.

Stay well and be happy.

The pleasure of loving God like St Francis de Sales

In his famous *Treatise on the Love of God*, St Francis de Sales wanted to present his reader with a summary of his entire doctrine in twelve points. Like Jesus, who practised twelve “acts of love”, he wants to encourage us to practise the following acts in our turn: complacency, benevolence and union; humility, ecstasy and admiration; contemplation, rest and tenderness; jealousy, sickness and the death of love. In speaking of acts of love, he by no means downplays the role of feelings, but proposes the practical exercises that true love requires. It is not surprising that the author of this treatise was proclaimed to be the “doctor of love”.

The pleasure of the human heart

The first act of love for God – but this also applies to love of neighbour – is to practise “complacency”, that is, to seek and find pleasure with him and in him. There is no love without pleasure, as they say. To illustrate this

truth, St Francis de Sales offers the example of the bee: "And as the bee being born in honey, feeds on honey, and only flies for honey, so love is born of complacency, maintained by complacency, and tends to complacency." This is true of human love, but it is also true of divine love.

When Francis was a young student in Paris, he had sought and found this pleasure in the love story told in that marvellous book of the Bible called the Canticle of Canticles, or Song of Songs, to the point of exclaiming in a transport of joy: "I have found Him whom my heart loves, and I shall never leave Him!"

Pleasure moves our hearts in the direction of a beauty that attracts us, of a goodness that delights us, of a kindness that makes us happy. As in human love, pleasure is the great motor of God's love. The beloved of the Canticle of Canticles loves her beloved because his sight, his presence, all his qualities bring her great happiness.

Meditating on the Canticle of Canticles, the doctor of love did not want to dwell on the carnal pleasures described therein. Not that they are bad in themselves, for it is the Creator who has ordained them in his wisdom, but in certain cases they can give rise to wrong behaviour. Hence this warning, "The one who does not know how to spiritualise them well will only enjoy them in wrongdoing."

In order to avoid any difficulties, Francis de Sales often prefers to describe the child's pleasure at his mother's breast: "The bosom and breasts of the mother are the storeroom of the little infant's treasures: he has no other riches than those, which are more precious unto him than gold or the topaz, more beloved than all the rest of the world."

With these considerations on human love, St Francis de Sales wants to introduce us to the love of God. We know by faith that "the Divinity is an incomprehensible abyss of all perfection, sovereignly infinite in excellence and infinitely sovereign in goodness." If, therefore, we carefully consider the immensity of the perfections that are in God, it is impossible for us not to experience great pleasure. It is

this pleasure that makes the beloved of the Canticle say: "How beautiful you are, my love, how very beautiful You are all desirable, indeed you are desire itself!"

God's pleasure

The most beautiful thing is that in divine love, pleasure is reciprocal, which is not always the case in human love. On the one hand, the human soul receives pleasure in discovering all God's perfections; on the other hand, God rejoices in seeing the pleasure He gives it. In this way, these mutual pleasures 'make love of incomparable delight'. Thus the soul can cry out: "O my king how lovable are thy riches and how rich thy loves! Oh! which of us has more joy, thou that enjoyest it, or I who rejoice thereat!"

In the love duet between God and us, it is actually God who has more pleasure than we do. Francis de Sales states this explicitly: God has "more pleasure in giving his graces than we do in receiving them." Jesus loved us with a love of complacency because, as the Bible says, "*Verily his delights are to be with the children of men.*"

God did not become man reluctantly, but willingly and joyfully, because he loved us from the beginning. Knowing this, and knowing that God himself is the source of our love, "we delight in God's pleasure infinitely more than in our own."

When we think of this mutual happiness, how can we not think of a meal shared with friends? It is this happiness that makes the Lord say in Revelation: "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me"

Another image, also found in the Canticle of Canticles, is that of the garden full of "apple trees of his delights". It is in this garden, the image of the human soul, that the divine Bridegroom comes to dwell with all his gifts. He comes there willingly, for he delights to be with the children of men whom he has made in his image and likeness. And in this garden it is he himself who has planted the loving

delight we have in his goodness.

Nothing expresses the mutual happiness of those who love each other better than the expression used by the bride in the Canticle to describe their mutual belonging: "My beloved is mine and I am his." In other words, she can also say: "God's goodness is all mine since I enjoy his excellences, and I again am wholly his, seeing that his delights possess me."

An endless desire

Those who have already tasted God's love will not cease to desire to taste it more and more, because "while satiating ourselves we would still eat, as whilst eating we feel ourselves satisfied." The angels who see God continue to desire him.

Enjoyment is not diminished by desire, but perfected by it; desire is not stifled, but refined by enjoyment. The enjoyment of a good that always satisfies never withers, but is continually renewed and flourishes; it is always lovable and at the same time always desirable.

It is said that there is a herb with extraordinary properties: whoever holds it in their mouth is never hungry or thirsty, so full is it, and yet it never makes one lose their appetite. Rest of heart does not consist in remaining still, but in needing nothing but God; it does not consist in not moving, but in having no impediment to move.

The chameleon is said to live on air and wind; wherever it goes, it has something to eat. So why does it always go from one place to another? Not because it is looking for something to satisfy its hunger, but because it is always practising feeding on the air of time. He who desires God by possessing Him does not desire Him to seek Him, but to exercise the affection he enjoys.

When we walk to a beautiful garden, we do not stop walking once we get there, but we take advantage of it to stroll and pass the time pleasantly.

Let us therefore follow the exhortation of the

Psalmist: *"Seek ye the Lord and be strengthened, seek his face evermore."* Let us always seek the one we love, says St Augustine; love seeks what it has found, not to have it, but to have it always.

Pleasure beyond suffering

Suffering is not contrary to pleasure. According to St Francis de Sales, Jesus took pleasure in suffering, because he loved his torments. At the height of his passion, he was content to die in pain for me. It was this pleasure that made him say on the cross: "All is accomplished."

It will be the same for us if we share our sufferings with his. "The more our friend is dear to us," says the doctor of love, "the more we enjoy sharing his joys and sorrows." *"Now shall I die with joy,"* said Jacob after seeing his son Joseph, whom he thought dead. It was the delight in Jesus' passion that drew his stigmata to St Francis and St Catherine of Siena. Curiously, honey makes absinthe even more bitter, but the sweet scent of roses is sharpened by the proximity of sour garlic. Similarly, the compassion we feel for Jesus' sufferings does not take away our delight in his love.

St Francis de Sales wants to teach us both the suffering that comes from love and the love of suffering, loving compassion and sorrowful complacency, lovingly sorrowful ecstasy and sorrowfully loving ecstasy. When the great holy souls suffered the stigmata, they tasted the "joyous love of suffering for a beloved one" who died on the cross. The love gave them such happiness that sharing in Jesus' sufferings filled them with a sense of consolation and happiness.

St Paul's love for the life, passion and death of his Lord was so great that he derived extraordinary pleasure from it. We see this clearly when he says he wanted to glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Elsewhere he also says: "'it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in

the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” St Clare so delighted in the Saviour’s passion that she drew upon herself all the signs of his passion, her heart “being made such as the things it loved.”

Everyone should know how much the Saviour longs to enter our souls through this love of sorrowful compassion. In the Canticle of Canticles, the beloved implores his beloved: “Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night.” This dew and these drops of the night are the afflictions and pains of his passion. The divine Lover, laden with the sorrows and sweats of his passion, also says to me: “Open then thy heart towards me as the pearl-mothers open their shells towards the sky, and I will shed upon thee the dew of my passion, which will be changed into pearls of consolation.”

Wonders of the Mother of God invoked under the title of Mary Help of Christians (3/13)

[*\(continuation from previous article\)*](#)

Chapter III. Mary manifests her zeal and power with her son Jesus at the wedding feast of Cana.

In the Gospel of St John we find a fact that clearly demonstrates Mary’s power and zeal in coming to our aid. We report the fact as told to us by the evangelist St. John in chap. II.

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.' Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Here St John Chrysostom asks: Why did Mary wait until this occasion of the wedding in Cana to invite Jesus to perform miracles and did not beg him to perform them before? And he answers, that this Mary did out of a spirit of submission to divine providence. For thirty years Jesus had led a hidden life. And Mary, who treasured all the acts of Jesus, *conservabat haec omnia conferens in corde suo*, as St Luke says (chapter II, v. 19), venerated with respectful silence that humiliation of Jesus. When he then realised that Jesus had begun his public life, that St. John in the desert had already begun to speak of him in his sermons, and that Jesus already had disciples, then he followed the initiation of grace with that same spirit of union with Jesus with which he had for thirty years respected his concealment and interposed his prayer to urge him to perform a miracle and manifest himself to men.

St Bernard, in the words *Vinum non habent*, they

have no wine, sees a great delicacy on Mary's part. She does not make a long-winded prayer to Jesus as Lord, nor does she command him as a son; she only announces to him the need, the lack of wine. With beneficent hearts and inclined to liberality, there is no need to wrest grace from them with industry and violence, it is enough to propose the occasion. (St Bernard serm. 4 in cant.)

The angelic doctor St Thomas admires Mary's tenderness and mercy in this short prayer. For it is characteristic of mercy to consider the needs of others as our own, since the word merciful almost means a heart made for the miserable, to lift up the miserable, and here he quotes St Paul's text to the Corinthians: *Quis infirmatur et ego non infirmor?* Who is weak, and I am not weak? Now since Mary was full of mercy, she wanted to provide for the needs of these guests and therefore the Gospel says: Lacking wine, the Mother of Jesus said to him. Hence St Bernard animates us to turn to Mary, because if she had such compassion on the shame of those poor people and provided for them, even if she did not pray, how much more will she have mercy on us if we invoke her with confidence? (St Bernard *serm. 2 domini*ate II *Èpif.*)

St Thomas again praises Mary's solicitude and diligence in not waiting until the wine was completely lacking and the guests came to realise this to the dishonour of the invitees. As soon as the need was imminent, she drew help according to the saying in Psalm 9: *Adiutor in opportunitatibus, in tribulatione.*

Mary's kindness towards us demonstrated in this event shines out even more in her behaviour after her divine son's reply. At Jesus' words, a less confident, less courageous soul than Mary would have desisted from hoping further. Instead, Mary, not at all disturbed, turned to the servants at the table and said to them: Do whatever he tells you. *Quodcumque dixerit vobis, facite* (ch. II, v. 4). As if saying: Although he seems to deny doing, nevertheless he will do (Bede).

The learned Fr Silbeira lists a great range of

virtues that shine in these words of Mary. The Virgin gave (says this author) a shining example of faith, for although she heard from her son the harsh reply: What have I to do with thee, yet she did not hesitate. When faith is perfect, it does not hesitate in the face of any adversity.

She taught trust: for although she heard from her son words that seemed to express a negative, indeed, as the above-mentioned Bede says, she could well believe that Christ would reject her prayers, nevertheless she acted against hope, trusting greatly in her son's mercy.

She taught love of God, while she procured that by a miracle his glory might be manifested. He taught obedience as he persuaded the servants to obey God not in this nor in that but in everything without distinction; *quodcumque dixerit*, whatever he tells you. She also gave an example of modesty when she did not take advantage of this occasion to boast of being the mother of such a son, for she did not say, 'Whatever my son will tell you;' but spoke in the third person. She still inspired reverence towards God by not pronouncing the holy name of Jesus. I have never yet found, says this author, in Scripture that the blessed Virgin pronounced this most holy name because of the great reverence she professed for it. She gave an example of readiness, for she did not exhort them to hear what she would say, but to do it. Finally, he taught prudence with mercy, for he told the servants to do whatever he told them, so that when they heard Jesus' command to fill the jars with water, they would not consider it ridiculous: it was a supreme and prudent mercy to prevent others from falling into evil (P. Silveira, *tom. 2, lib. 4, quest. 21*).

Chapter IV. Mary chosen as the help of Christians on Mount Calvary by the dying Jesus.

The most splendid proof that Mary is the help of Christians we find on Mount Calvary. As Jesus hung agonisingly on the cross, Mary overcoming natural weakness assisted him with unprecedented strength. It seemed that nothing more

remained for Jesus to do to show how much he loved us. His affection, however, still made him find a gift that was to seal the whole series of his blessings.

From the top of the cross he turned his dying gaze upon his mother, the only treasure he had left on earth. Woman, said Jesus to Mary, behold thy son; thence he said to his disciple John: behold thy mother. And from that point, the evangelist concludes, the disciple took her among his possessions.

The holy Fathers in these words recognise three great truths:

1. That St John succeeded Jesus in all things as the son of Mary;

2. That therefore all the offices of motherhood which Mary exercised over Jesus passed over to the new son John;

3. That in the person of John Jesus intended to include the whole human race.

Mary, says St Bernardine of Siena, by her loving co-operation in the ministry of Redemption has truly begotten us on Calvary to the life of grace; in the order of health we are all born from Mary's sorrows as from the love of the Eternal Father and the afflictions of his Son. In those precious moments Mary became strictly our Mother.

The circumstances that accompanied this solemn act of Jesus on Calvary confirm what we assert. The words chosen by Jesus are generic and appellative, observes the aforementioned Father Silveira, but they are sufficient to make us know that we are dealing here with a universal mystery, which includes not just one man, but all those men to whom this title of beloved disciple of Jesus befits. Thus the words of the Lord are a most ample and solemn declaration that the Mother of Jesus has become the mother of all Christians: *Ioannes est nomen particulare, discipulus commune ut denotetur quod Maria omnibus detur in Matrem.*

Jesus on the cross was not a mere victim of the malignity of the Jews, he was a universal pontiff working as a

repairer for the whole human race. So in the same way that by begging forgiveness from the crucifiers he obtained it for all sinners; by opening Paradise to the good thief he opened it to all penitents. And just as the crucifiers on Calvary according to St Paul's energetic expression represented all sinners, and the good thief all true penitents, so St John represented all the true disciples of Jesus, the Christians, the Catholic Church. And Mary became, as St. Augustine says, the true Eve, the mother of all those who spiritually live, *Mater viventium*; or as St. Ambrose says, the mother of all those who believe; *Mater omnium credentium*. Mary therefore becoming our mother on Mount Calvary not only had the title of helping Christians, but she acquired the office, the magisterium, the duty. We therefore have a sacred right to have recourse to Mary's help. This right is consecrated by Jesus' word and guaranteed by Mary's maternal tenderness. Now that Mary interpreted Jesus Christ's intention on the cross in this sense and that He made her the mother and helper of all Christians is proven by her subsequent conduct. We know from the writers of her life how much zeal she showed at all times for the health of the world and for the increase and glory of holy Church. She directed and advised the Apostles and disciples, exhorted and animated all to keep the faith, to preserve grace and to make it active. We know from the Acts of the Apostles how regular she was at all the religious gatherings that those first faithful of Jerusalem held, because never were the divine mysteries celebrated without her taking part in them. When Jesus ascended to heaven she followed him with the disciples to Mount Olivet, to the place of the Ascension. When the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, she was in the Upper Room with them. So says s. Luke who, after naming one by one the Apostles gathered in the Upper Room, says: "ll these persevered in prayer together with the women and with Mary the mother of Jesus."

The Apostles, moreover, and the disciples and as many Christians as lived in and around Jerusalem at that time, all flocked to Mary for advice and direction.

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Salesian Protomartyrs: Aloysius (Louis) Versiglia and Callistus Caravario

Louis and Callistus: the same missionary vocation for the salvation of souls, but a different story.

25 February this year marks the 94th anniversary of the martyrdom of Bishop Aloysius (Louis) Versiglia and Fr Callistus Caravario, missionaries to China.

Louis Versiglia and Callistus Caravario: two figures different in many respects but united by a great apostolic zeal and their last act of pure love in defence of the Catholic religion and the purity of three Chinese girls.

Louis: the aspiring vet who became a Salesian missionary

Aloysius Versiglia, born on 5 June 1873 in Oliva Gessi (PV). As a child, although a regular altar boy at the parish church of his village, he had no intention of becoming a priest. In fact, he was annoyed when his fellow villagers, seeing him so devout in church, prophesied his future as a priest. This was not part of his life plan at all, not even when at the age of 12 he was sent to study in Valdocco in Turin. He loves horses and dreamt of becoming a veterinarian. Studying in Turin reinforced in him the hope of later enrolling in the prestigious Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at Turin University.

At Valdocco, however, he met Don Bosco, by then old and ill, and was charmed by his charism.



Versiglia with Fr Braga and the students of the St Joseph Institute in Ho Sai

During these years at Valdocco, something began to take shape in Versiglia's soul. The charity and devotion radiated by the Salesian environment, together with the fascination of Don Bosco, slowly worked their way into Louis' soul, until a decisive event, and from that day on he would no longer have any doubts. On 11 March 1888, in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, while attending the farewell ceremony for a group of missionaries leaving for Argentina, he was impressed by the modest and recollected demeanour of one of the six young men leaving. Hence his vocation. From that day, the strong desire to become a priest, a Salesian missionary priest, was born in him. (The story of his missionary vocation is well described in the letter he wrote to his Rector Fr Barberis in 1890).

Louis therefore made his novitiate in Foglizzo (1888-1890), where he was irreproachable in everything: charitable with his companions, very pious and at the same time enterprising and full of life. He then won a scholarship for a course in philosophy at the Gregorian University in Rome and received a bachelor's degree in philosophy at the age of twenty.

He was ordained a priest when he was only twenty-two years old with a dispensation granted by the Holy See given his psychological and moral maturity, superior to his age. He was immediately sent to teach philosophy to the novices at Foglizzo, where, with his outspoken and always cheerful character, he was respected and admired by everyone for his competence, friendliness and impartiality. He demanded observance of the rules, leading everyone by example.

After Foglizzo, he was entrusted with the direction of the new novitiate in Genzano outside Rome, where he also transmitted the missionary ideal to his clerics.

Callistus: a pure young man eager to be a missionary



Cleric Caravario in Shanghai with Fr Garelli and 20 baptising students

Callistus Caravario's vocation, on the other hand, has a completely different story. He was born on 8 June 1903, exactly thirty years after Louis Versiglia, in Courgnè (TO), and moved to Turin with his family at the age of five. He was good-natured, very attached to his mother, who showed him special attention, and from an early age showed a marked vocation for the priesthood. His first amusements were imitating the gestures of the priest celebrating Mass. He soon learnt to serve Mass, did so with devotion, and attended the St Joseph's oratory in Turin with passion and commitment. It became his second home.

In primary classes in St John the Evangelist college, for two years he had cleric Charles Braga, now Servant of God, as his teacher.

He constantly told his mother that he would become a priest when he grew up.

In 1914 he began secondary classes at the Valdocco Oratory, where he was particularly attracted by the missionaries who visited the Superiors there and with whom he often spent time in recreation, feeding his desire for the Missions.

In 1918 he began his novitiate in Foglizzo and took his religious vows the following year. He attended the Saint Aloysius Oratory in Via Ormea where he introduced more than one young man to the priesthood.

In 1922 he met Bishop Versiglia, who had arrived in Turin from China to attend the General Chapter, and expressed his strong desire to follow him in the Mission. The Superiors, however, did not allow him to realise his dream immediately, because this would oblige him to cut short his studies, but Callistus assured Versiglia: "Bishop, you will see that I will be true to my word: I will follow you to China. You will see that I

will certainly follow you.”

The following year, through a group of missionaries leaving for China, he sent a letter to Fr Braga, missionary in Shiu-chow, asking him to “prepare a little place for him.”

Louis and Callistus: different missionary experiences but united by their complete dedication to their neighbour and by winning the affection and attachment of young people

Fr Versiglia kept his missionary ideal alive over the years and the opportunity to go on mission presented itself to him in 1906, when the Rector Major of the Salesians, following negotiations with the bishop of Macao, appointed him head of an expedition to Macao, a Portuguese colony on the southern coast of China, to run and manage an orphanage.

The expedition consisted of two other priests and three brothers: a tailor, a shoemaker and a printer. The missionaries arrived in Macao on 13 February 1906.

Fr Versiglia adopted Don Bosco’s educational method, trying to create a family environment based on loving-kindness. For the orphans their “Luì San-fù” (Father Louis) had total and loving dedication which was fully reciprocated by them. As soon as he arrived they ran to him and greet him warmly. This is why Fr Versiglia became known in Macao as the “father of the orphans”.

In the orphanage run by Versiglia, games and music were fundamental educational tools. This inspired him to open a festive oratory and establish a band with brass instruments and drums, which immediately captured the curiosity and sympathy of all the Chinese, in whose eyes the little musicians seem to be “a fantastic group from another world.”

Over the years, Fr Versiglia transformed the orphanage into a professional Arts and Crafts school for orphaned pupils that was so highly regarded that it was adopted as a model for other schools in Macao. The children who graduated from there immediately found employment in the city’s administrative offices or managed to open their own handicraft shops. This school made a valuable contribution to social and cultural

promotion and its importance was recognised by all.

In 1911, the Bishop of Macao entrusted Versiglia with the evangelisation of the Heung Shan district, a region in the vast delta of the Pearl River.

In this territory, the task of evangelisation was particularly difficult. "There is everything to do, preparing catechists, teachers, schools..." wrote Fr Versiglia. A difficult task above all because of the lack of personnel, both male and female, and the great distrust of the Chinese people towards missionaries, considered as foreigners sent by colonialist countries and therefore enemies.

A few months later, the thousand-year Chinese monarchy was overthrown and the Republic was established in October 1911, but clashes between imperial and revolutionary troops continued. Piracy flourished again and epidemics broke out. The bubonic plague even spread and Fr Versiglia spared no sacrifices to help anyone in need, visiting the poor, comforting the sick and administering baptisms. Once a month he also visits lepers relegated to a nearby island.

In Versiglia's firm desire to help everyone, even the most wretched, estranged and forgotten, to assist them both materially in the daily needs of life, and spiritually by saving their souls, we cannot but see in him a boundless love for his neighbour.

In 1918, the first completely autonomous Salesian Mission in China came into being, the Shiu-Chow Mission, which encompassed a vast mountainous region, where one could only move around by boat, on foot or on horseback, and the inhabitants were scattered in villages far away from each other.

In 1921, he was consecrated bishop.

The various confreres all gave testimony to Versiglia's great charity, which led him to be almost the servant of his missionaries, and when they were sick he assisted them day and night. Charity even in small things. Fr Garelli, for example,

would recount that when he arrived from Italy at the residence in Shiu-chow, which was small, poor and unfurnished, Versiglia told him, "You see, there is only one bed here. I am now broken in to missionary life, but you are not! You are still used to the comforts of civilised life. So, you sleep on that bed and I will sleep here on the floor."

Even as a bishop, he continued to sacrifice himself for his confreres and for the Chinese, and offered himself for any service: printer, sacristan, gardener, painter, even barber.

He undertook very tiring and very long pastoral visits, some lasting up to two months, in very uncomfortable conditions, he slept on the decks of public boats in the midst of people trampling over him, in dilapidated hotels, in the midst of a deluge...

He built schools, residences, churches, dispensaries, an orphanage, an old people's home, all thanks to his special skills: 1) he had skills as an architect; in fact, he designed and planned all the buildings himself and then directed the work, 2) he had great oratorical skills that enable him to raise the necessary funds. On his only two trips to Italy in 1916 and 1922 and on his trip to the Eucharistic Congress in Chicago, where he went for specific health reasons, he gave several seminars in which he charmed people, opening the hearts of many benefactors.

The years in Shiu-chow were even more difficult years. The republican government, in order to drive out powerful generals who still controlled vast areas of the north, asked for help from Russia, which sent its armaments, but also began to engage in Bolshevik propaganda against Western imperialism, and the missionaries were seen as enemies who must be driven out, their residences often occupied by the military, etc. Over the years, the scene became increasingly difficult, it became more and more dangerous to travel, piracy raged, some missionaries were kidnapped by pirates.

Bishop Versiglia did his utmost to defend the residences and people in danger and said, "if a victim is needed for the Vicariate, I beg the Lord to take me."

Callistus: young missionary passionate about Christ to the point of total self-giving

Callistus' missionary experience was different and shorter, but equally conducted with the greatest dedication of self.

He succeeded in realising his missionary dream at the age of twenty-one (1924), when he obtained permission to follow Fr Garelli to Shanghai, where the Salesians were entrusted with the direction of a large vocational school.

At the handing over of the missionary cross in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, cleric Caravario formulated this prayer: "Lord, I do not wish my cross to be either light or heavy, but as You wish. Give it to me as You wish. I only ask that I may bear it willingly." Words that tell us so much about his willingness to accept God's will even in suffering and hardship.

Caravario therefore arrived in Shanghai in November 1924, and here, in addition to studying Chinese, he was entrusted with a huge amount of work: the complete care, twenty-four hours a day, of one hundred orphans, catechism, preparation for baptism and confirmation, animation of recreations. Pursuing his ideal of becoming a priest, he also began to study theology with great seriousness.

In 1927, he had to leave Shanghai due to the outbreak of the revolution and was sent to the distant island of Timor, a Portuguese colony in the Indonesian archipelago, ecclesiastically dependent on the Bishop of Macao, to open an arts and crafts school. He would stay in Timor for two years, which he would take advantage of to enrich his religious culture and his relationship with God in view of the Priesthood. In Timor, as in Shanghai, his apostolate bore the fruit of various vocations, and he earned the trust and affection of the young people "who all mourned his departure" when the Salesian house in Dili was closed in 1929.

He was therefore sent to the Shiu-chow Mission where he met his primary school teacher, Fr Charles Braga, and Bishop Versiglia, who ordained him a priest on 18 May 1929. That day, he wrote to his mother: "Mother, I am writing to you with a

heart full of joy. This morning I was ordained, I am a priest for ever. By now your Callistus is no longer yours: he must be completely the Lord's. Will the time of my priesthood be long or short? I do not know. The important thing is that by presenting myself to the Lord I can say that I have made the grace He has given me bear fruit."

Caravario was extremely thin and weak due to malaria contracted in Timor, and Versiglia entrusted him with the Lin-chow Mission, thinking that the good climate of that area would benefit his physical health.

Like Versiglia, Caravario faced the hardships of apostolic journeys with a spirit of sacrifice and adaptation. "In this land there are many souls to be saved and workers are few; therefore, we must, with the Lord's help, save them even at the cost of any sacrifice."

Thanks to his qualities of purity, piety, gentleness and sacrifice, he was considered by his confreres to be the perfect model of a missionary priest.

Louis and Callistus: together in the ultimate sacrifice

On 24 February 1930 Bishop Versiglia left for a pastoral visit to the Lin-chow residence together with Fr Callistus Caravario, two teachers and three young girls who had studied at the Shiu-chow boarding school. On 25 February, on their way up the Lin-chow river, their boat was stopped by a dozen Bolshevik pirates who demand five hundred dollars as a pass (which the missionaries obviously did not have with them) and attempted to kidnap the girls, but Versiglia and Caravario firmly oppose this in order to protect the purity of the girls. Bishop Versiglia was determined to do his duty to the point of giving his life: "If it is necessary to die to save those entrusted to my care, I am ready." The pirates pounced on them, insulting the Catholic religion, and beat them brutally. Then they led them into a thicket, shot them and mistreated their bodies.

The girls, freed a few days later by the regular army, would testify to the serenity with which the two missionaries went

to their deaths.

Louis and Callistus sacrificed themselves to defend the faith and purity of the three young girls.

Those who knew them testify that their strength of will and attachment to God permeated their entire lives in a heroic manner, and that their zeal for the salvation of souls was special.

The holiness of these beautiful souls was their daily conquest and their martyrdom was their crowning achievement.

Dr Giovanna Bruni

Being lovable like Don Bosco (2/2)

[\(continuation from previous article\)](#)

5) Being authentic

In the digital age, authentic people are very important. They do not show off, they do not try to fit a mould, they are comfortable with who they are and are not afraid to show it. They express their thoughts and feelings with total honesty, without worrying about what others might think, creating an environment of honesty and acceptance.

In his *Memoirs*, this rather satisfying statement is recorded: “all of them [my companions] – including those older and bigger than I – respected my mettle and my strength.”

“It is useless”, Fr Cafasso was to say in his turn, “he wants to do it his own way; yet he must be allowed to do it; even when a project would be inadvisable, Don Bosco succeeds”; resentful at not having won him over to her cause, the Marchioness Barolo accused him of being “stubborn, obstinate,

proud.”

They are good bricks. He knows how to use them well to build a masterpiece.

Simplicity

Many people need to pretend to be different, to appear stronger than they are. To want to be what they are not.

Flowers simply bloom. Silent lightness is what they are. The simple person is like the birds in the sky. Sometimes singing more often silent, always alive. Don Bosco lived as he breathed. He was always himself. Never duplicitous, never pretentious, never complex. Intelligence is not about ruffling, complication, snobbery. Reality is complex without a doubt. We could not easily describe a tree, a flower, a star, a stone... This does not prevent them from simply being what they are. The rose is without a 'why', it blooms because it blooms, it does not care for itself, it does not wish to be seen...

The *Biographical Memoirs* recount that in 1877, in Ancona, “Don Bosco went to celebrate Mass around ten o'clock in the Gesù church, run by the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. He was served Mass by a young man, who never forgot that meeting for the rest of his life. He saw a short little priest enter the sacristy, modest in face and attitude, indeed unknown.” But “in that dark face” he saw something of an attractive goodness, which immediately aroused in him a mixture of curiosity and reverence. As he celebrated, he noticed that there was something special about him, something inviting him to recollection and fervour. At the end of mass, after thanksgiving, the priest placed his hand on his head, gave him ten cents, wanted to know who he was and what he did, and said a few kind words to him. Forty-eight years later, that young man, whose name was Eugenio Marconi and who was a pupil at the Good Shepherd Institute, was later to write: ‘Oh the gentleness of that voice! The warmth, the affection contained in those words! I was confused and moved.’ He discovered shortly afterwards that the “short little priest” was Don

Bosco and he remained a devoted friend to him all his life. The opposite of simple is not complicated, but false. Simplicity is nakedness, being stripped of self, poverty. With no wealth other than everything. Without other treasure than nothing. Simplicity is freedom, lightness, transparency. Simple as air, free as air. Like a window open to the great breath of the world, to the infinite and silent presence of everything.

Where the Spirit of the Gospel blows: "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Mt 6:26).

The *Biographical Memoirs* quietly state: "It was evident that he threw himself into the arms of divine Providence, like a child into those of its mother" (MB III, 36).

Everything is simple for God. Everything is divine for the simple. Even work. Even effort.

6) Being resilient

Life is full of surprises. Things don't always go smoothly and sometimes we face challenges that test our strength and determination. In these moments, resilience is a powerful quality. It is about having the mental and emotional strength to bounce back in the face of adversity, to keep going even when things get tough. And it is something that people admire. Having someone next to you who embodies courage can be an incredible source of inspiration. I think the best title for a life of Don Bosco is *Giovannino Semprinpiedi [Young John , always on his feet]*

Bishop Cagliero recalls, "I don't remember seeing him for a single moment, in the 35 years I was at his side, discouraged, annoyed or restless because of the debts he was often burdened with. He often said, 'Providence is great, and as it thinks of the birds of the air, so it will think of my boys.'

"Look, I am a poor priest, but if I had even a piece of bread left over, I would share it with you." It was the phrase most often repeated by Don Bosco.

True friends are like the stars... you don't always see them, but you know they are always there.

7) Be humble

Humble people do not need constant praise or recognition to feel good about themselves and do not feel the need to prove their worth to others. Furthermore, they have an open mind and are always willing to learn from others, regardless of their status or position.

Don Bosco was never ashamed to ask for alms. Humble and strong, as his teacher had asked him to be. He held his head high with everyone.

8) Spreading tenderness

Michael Rua grew fond of Don Bosco, the priest beside whom one felt cheerful and as if full of warmth. Michelino lived at the Royal Arms Factory where his father had been employed. Four of his brothers had died very young, and he was very frail. That is why his mother often did not let him go to the oratory. But he still met Don Bosco at the De La Salle school where he attended third grade. He recounted:

"When Don Bosco came to say Mass and preach to us, as soon as he entered the chapel it seemed as if an electric current was passing through all those numerous children. We would jump up, get out of our seats, huddle around him. It took a long time for him to reach the sacristy. The good Brothers could not prevent that apparent disorder. When other priests came, nothing like that happened."

Don Bosco was as attractive as a magnet. There is a comical and tender episode, recounted in Don Bosco's *Biographical Memoirs*:

"One evening Don Bosco walking along the pavement in Via Doragrossa, now called Via Garibaldi, and passed in front of the glazed door of a magnificent clothier's shop whose window was the whole width of the door. A good young man from the Oratory, who served as an errand boy there, saw Don Bosco, and in the first impulse of his heart, without thinking the door

was closed, ran to go and reverence him; but he smashed his head into the glass and smashed it to pieces. At the crashing of the glass, Don Bosco stopped and opened the door; the mortified boy came up to him; the owner came out of the shop, raised his voice and shouted at him; the clients were huddled together. "What did you do?" Don Bosco asked the young man; and he naively replied: "I saw you passing by and, out of a great desire to reverence you, I no longer paid attention to the fact that you had to open the door and I broke it" (Biographical Memoirs MB III, 169-170).

It was an explosive sense of friendship that the boys felt for Don Bosco. Along the lines of St Francis de Sales, who wrote about spiritual friendship, Don Bosco felt that friendship founded on mutual benevolence and trust seemed essential to his preventive system.

Friendship for Don Bosco was that "extra touch" that transformed an educational method similar to others into a unique and original masterpiece.

Fr Rua, Bishop Cagliero and others called him papa...

At the end of the day, kindness is what matters most. It is the way you treat others, the compassion you show and the love you spread that really defines who you are as a person. Kindness can be as simple as a smile, a word of encouragement or an outstretched hand. The idea is to make others feel valued and loved. Don Bosco's boys would testify with an almost monotonous insistence: "He loved me" One of them, St Louis Orione, would write: "I would walk on hot coals to see him once more, and say thank you."

One boy could not understand how Don Bosco, whom he had met by chance weeks before in the courtyard, still remembered his name. He took courage and asked him. "Don Bosco, how did you remember my name?"

"I never forget my children!" he replied.

To a boy who was leaving the Oratory of his own free will, Don Bosco, meeting him, asked:

"What do you have in your hand?"

"Five lira that my mum gave me to buy a train ticket."

"Your mum paid your ticket for the journey from the Oratory to your house, and that's fine. Now take these other five lira. They are for your return ticket. Any time you need it, come and see me!"

Attention is a form of kindness, just as inattention is the greatest rudeness one can do. Sometimes it is implicit violence, especially when it comes to children: neglect is rightly considered abuse when it reaches an unbearable threshold, but in small doses it is part of the ordinary ignominies that many children are forced to endure. Inattention is frostbite: and it is difficult to grow up in frostbite, where the only consolation is perhaps a television full of violent or consumerist dreams. Attention is warmth and affection, which allows the best potential to develop and flourish.

"I also need people to know the importance of the Salesian Cooperators. So far it seems a small thing; but I hope that by this means a good part of the Italian population will become Salesian and open the way for many things. The Work of the Salesian Cooperators...will spread throughout all countries, will spread throughout Christendom, a time will come when the name Cooperator will mean true Christian...already I can see not only families, but whole towns and villages becoming Salesian Cooperators."

Since Don Bosco's predictions have come true, get ready to see some good things this century!

9) This is how Don Bosco preached about God

Those who write about him are blatantly wrong when they try to turn him into a pedagogue or even a brilliant social innovator. Certainly Don Bosco was concerned with charitable works like many others, and again with social justice. His exceptional strength lies, however, in the fact that in everything he did he relied solely and completely on God.

"It is truly admirable" exclaimed one of those present, "the way things proceed. Don Bosco starts, and never gives up."

“That is why”, Don Bosco resumed, “we never give back, because we always go ahead on the safe side. Before undertaking something we make sure that it is God’s will that things be done. We begin our works with the certainty that it is God who wills them. Having this certainty, we go forward. It may seem that a thousand difficulties are encountered along the way; it does not matter; God wills it, and we remain intrepid in the face of any obstacle. I trust in Divine Providence without limit; but Providence also wants to be helped by our immense efforts.”

His efforts always have the colour of infinity.

Even Nietzsche states that the perception of people’s inner life is instinctive. Young people then have a natural aptitude for observing what lies behind a person’s exterior. They have special antennae to pick up signals that cannot be observed by ordinary means. They are able to perceive what is hidden to others.

Our spiritual antenna makes us sensitive to the moral beauty in people, instinctively makes us notice the moral and spiritual dimension of their lives.

In 1864 Don Bosco arrived in Mornese with his boys, on their autumn walks. It was already night time. People came to meet him preceded by the parish priest Fr Valle and Fr Pestarino. The band played, many knelt as Don Bosco passed by asking him to bless them. The young people and the people entered the church, then Benediction, then everyone went to dinner.

Afterwards, encouraged by applause, the Don Bosco boys gave a short concert of marches and happy music. In the front row was 27-year-old Mary Mazzarello. At the end, Don Bosco said a few words: “We are all tired, and my boys want to have a good night’s sleep. Tomorrow, however, we will speak at greater length”.

Don Bosco stayed five days at Mornese. Every evening Mary Mazzarello was able to listen to the “good night” he gave his youngsters. She climbed over the benches to get closer to the man. Someone reproached her for this as an improper gesture. She replied: “Don Bosco is a saint, I feel it.”

It is much more than just a feeling. How many women's lives would he change? All it takes is a movement, a simple movement of the kind that children make when they rush forward with all their strength, without fear of falling or dying, oblivious to the weight of the world.

It is again the case of a mirror: no one turned his face towards women more than Jesus Christ, as one turns one's gaze towards the foliage of trees, as one bends over the water flowing down river to draw strength and the will to continue on one's way. Women in the Bible are numerous. They are there at the beginning and they are there at the end. They give birth to God, watch him grow, play and die, then resurrect him with the simple gestures of foolish love.

There are still those who fret about demonstrations of God's existence. The most perfect demonstration of God is not difficult.

The child asked his mother: "In your opinion, does God exist?"

"Yes."

"How come?"

The woman drew her son to her.

She hugged him tightly and said, "God is like this."

"I have understood."

Fr Paul Albera said: "Don Bosco educated by loving, attracting, conquering and transforming. [...] He enveloped us all and entirely almost in an atmosphere of contentment and happiness, from which sorrow, sadness, melancholy were banished... Everything about him had a powerful attraction for us: his penetrating gaze, at times more effective than a sermon; the simple movement of his head; the smile that bloomed perpetually on his lips, always new and varied, and yet always calm; the flexion of his mouth, as when one wants to speak without pronouncing the words; the very words cadenced in one way rather than another; the bearing of his person and his slender, easy gait: all these things acted on our youthful hearts like a magnet from which it was impossible to escape; and even if we could have, we would not have done

so for all the gold in the world, so happy was we with this unique ascendancy he had over us, which in him was the most natural thing, without study or effort.”

Always present and alive. God as company, air that one breathes. God as water for fish. God as the warm nest of a loving heart. God as the scent of life. God is what children know, not adults.

Now let's go change the world (Willy Wonka)

The prophecies of Don Bosco and the kings of Italy

“The family of those who steal from God does not reach the fourth generation.”

The pretender to the throne of Italy, [Victor Emmanuel of Savoy](#) (b. 12.02.1937 – † 03.02.2024), the fifth descendant of the first King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel II of Savoy, died a few days ago. He was granted burial in the crypt of the Basilica at Superga, Turin, where dozens of other mortal remains of the House of Savoy are located. This event reminds us of other dreams of Don Bosco that came true.

In November 1854, a law was being prepared on the confiscation of ecclesiastical property and the suppression of convents and monasteries. To be valid, it had to be sanctioned by the King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel II of Savoy. At the end of that month of November, Don Bosco had two dreams that came true as prophecies concerning the king and his family. Let us recall the facts with Fr Lemoyne.

Don Bosco was anxious to scatter an ominous cloud that loomed darker and darker over the royal house. Toward the end of November 1854, he had a dream in which he seemed to be standing by the pump near the wall of the Pinardi house-where now the main portico, then only half built, is located. He was sur-

rounded by priests and clerics. Suddenly a red-coated court valet appeared, rushed to Don Bosco, and said aloud,

“News! News!”

“What news?” Don Bosco asked.

“Make this announcement: **A state funeral at court!**”

Don Bosco was shocked by the sudden apparition and cry. The valet repeated: “A state funeral at court!” Don Bosco wanted more information, but the valet vanished. Don Bosco awoke in distress. Grasping the significance of his dream, he instantly drafted a letter for the king, revealing this dream. [...]

...What really whetted their curiosity was that Don Bosco had written to the king. They knew well enough how he felt about the usurpation of ecclesiastical property. Don Bosco did not keep them in suspense but clearly told them what he had written in order to persuade the king to oppose that infamous law. He then

narrated his dream and concluded: “It deeply upset me and left me exhausted.” One could see that he was worried. Now and then he would say: “Who knows? . . . Who knows? . . . Let us pray!” Dumbfounded, the clerics kept asking each other whether anyone had heard of any important person at the court being ill. Nobody had. In the meantime, Don Bosco sent for the cleric Angelo Savio and showed him the draft of the letter to the king. “Copy it,” he said, “and send it to the king.” Savio did as he was requested. Don Bosco later learned from confidential sources within the royal palace that the king had read the letter.

Five days later, Don Bosco had another dream. He seemed to be writing at his desk when he heard a horse’s

hoofbeats in the playground. Suddenly the door flew open and again the red-coated valet appeared. He strode into the middle of the room and exclaimed: "Make this announcement: Not one state funeral at court, but state funerals at court!" He repeated these words twice before withdrawing. Anxious to know more, Don Bosco rushed out to the balcony. The valet was already in the playground, mounting his horse. Don Bosco called out to him, but the valet, once again shouting "**State funerals at court!**" vanished into the night.

At dawn, Don Bosco personally wrote to the king. He informed him of his

second dream and begged him to oppose that bill at all costs and save himself from the threatened punishments.

After supper that evening Don Bosco said to the young clerics around him: "I have something to tell you that is even more surprising than what I told you the other day." Then he narrated his second dream. More mystified than ever, they kept wondering what it might portend. We can well imagine how anxiously they waited to see how these predictions would be fulfilled.

On the side, however, Don Bosco unequivocally revealed to the cleric John Cagliero and to a few others that these predictions were genuine threats of

punishments which God would inflict on those who were conspiring to cause still greater harm to the Church. He was indeed profoundly grieved and kept remarking: "This law will wreak havoc upon the royal house." These things he said to his boys so that they would pray for their sovereign and mercifully obtain from God that the religious would not be dispersed and so many vocations lost.

Meanwhile the king had handed the letters to Marquis Fassati. After reading them, he returned to Don Bosco to remonstrate. "Do you think this was the proper thing to do? You deeply hurt the king and made him furious."

Don Bosco replied: "What if those predictions come true? I regret having upset the king, but after all, his own good and that of the Church are at stake."

Don Bosco's warnings went unheeded. On November 28, 1854, Urbano Rattazzi, Minister of Justice, submitted a bill for the suppression of religious orders to the Chamber of Deputies. He had the support of Count Camillo Cavour, Minister of Finance, who was determined to push it through at all costs. In their philosophy it was an incontestable principle that there existed no society superior to or independent of civil society; the State was all; therefore, no moral persons-not even the Catholic Church-could claim juridical existence without the consent and recognizance of the State. Now-the two gentlemen argued-the State did not recognize the universal Church as having dominion over the properties of each religious congregation. These congregations could claim juridical existence only insofar as they were recognized by the State.

The State could therefore modify or even cancel their juridical existence. In such a case, the properties, without heirs, would fall under the sole, absolute ownership of the State. This was a crass assumption, because should a religious congregation cease to exist for any reason, its heir would be the Church of which it was a member, the Church established by Jesus Christ and represented by the Pope. (BM V, 115-117).

That these were warnings from Heaven is also confirmed by a letter written four years earlier, on 9 April 1850, that the King's mother, Queen Mother Maria Teresa, widow of Charles Albert, had addressed to her son, King Victor Emmanuel II of Savoy.

God will reward you, He will bless you, otherwise who knows what punishment, what dire penalties from God you will call down upon yourself, your family and the country, if you should approve the law. Just think about the grief you would feel if the Lord were to allow your beloved Adele, whom you so rightly love, or your Chichina (Clotilde) or your Betta (Umberto) to fall sick, or to be taken from you. If only you could look into my heart and see how grieved I am,

how anxious and fearful that if you immediately ratify this law, many misfortunes would be visiting on us, if you do this without the consent of the Holy Father. Perhaps your heart, which is sincerely honest and sensitive and has always been deeply attached to your poor mamma, would allow itself to be softened. (Antonio Monti, Nuova Antologia, 1 January 1936, p. 65; BM XVII, 855).

But the king took no notice of these warnings and the consequences were not long in coming. The negotiations for approval continued and the prophecies were also fulfilled:

- on 12 January 1855 Maria Theresa, Queen Mother, died at the age of 53;

- on 20 January 1855 Queen Maria Adelaide died, aged 33;

- on 11 February 1855 Prince Ferdinand, the King's brother, died at the age of 32;

- on 17 May 1855 the King's son, Prince Victor Emmanuel Leopold Mary Eugene died, aged just 4 months.

Don Bosco continued to issue warnings, publishing the charter of the foundation of Altacomba (Hautecombe) with an exposition of all the maledictions inflicted on those who dared to destroy or usurp the possessions of the Abbey of Altacomba, inserted in the document by the ancient Dukes of Savoy to protect the place where dozens of the illustrious ancestors of the House of Savoy are interred.

And he also continued by publishing in April 1855, in the *Letture Cattoliche* (Catholic Readings) a pamphlet written by Baron Nilinse entitled: *Stealing Church Property and Its Consequences; with a brief appendix on the events in Piedmont*. On the frontispiece was written: The frontispiece featured a quotation of St. Ambrose: *"What! A private citizen's home is inviolable, and yet you dare lay hands on the house of the Lord?"* The incidents related in this booklet, many of which had their source in the testimony of Protestant

authors, detailed the frightful punishments that had befallen those rulers or private citizens who had confiscated, sold, or purchased what had once been consecrated to God: ***“The family of him who steals from God shall not attain the fourth generation!”*** (BM V, 149).

On 29 May Victor Emmanuel II signed the Rattazzi law, which confiscated ecclesiastical property and suppressed the religious corporations, without taking into account what Don Bosco had predicted and the mourning that had struck his family since January... not knowing that he was also signing the destiny of the royal family.

In fact, here too the prophecy came true, as we see.

- King [Victor Emmanuel II of Savoy](#) (born 14.03.1820 – † 09.01.1878), reigned from 17.03.1861 – to 09.01.1878, died at the age of 58;

- King [Umberto I](#) (b. 14.03.1844 – † 29.07.1900), son of King Victor Emmanuel II of Savoy, reigned from 10.01.1878 – to 29.07.1900, was killed in Monza at the age of 56

- King [Victor Emmanuel III](#) (b. 11.11.1869 – † 28.12.1947), grandson of King Victor Emmanuel II of Savoy, reigned from 30.07.1900 – to 09.05.1946, was forced to abdicate on 9 May 1946 and died a year later

- King [Umberto II](#) (b. 15.09.1904 – † 18.03.1983) the last King of Italy, reigning from 10.05.1946 to 18.06.1946, great-grandson of Victor Emmanuel II (the fourth generation), was forced to abdicate after only 35 days of his reign, following the Institutional Referendum of 2 June of the same year. He died on 18 March 1983 in Geneva, and was buried in Altacomba Abbey...

Some interpret these events as mere coincidences, because they cannot deny the facts, but those who know God's action know that in his mercy he always warns in one way or another of the serious consequences that certain decisions of

great importance, affecting the destiny of the world and the Church, may have.

Let us just recall the end of the life of the wisest man on earth, King Solomon.

For when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David. For Solomon followed Astarte the goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not completely follow the Lord, as his father David had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who offered incense and sacrificed to their gods. Then the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, **who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this matter, that he should not follow other gods; but he did not observe what the Lord commanded.** Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, 'Since this has been your mind and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and give it to your servant. (1 Kings 11:4-11).

Just read history carefully, both sacred and profane...

Alberto Marvelli, the

Christian that even the Communists liked

Alberto Marvelli (1918-1946), a young man formed in the Salesian oratory in Rimini, lived his short life in the daily commitment of service to others, with all the intensity that his strengths allowed. His normal but intensely Christian life led him to sanctity, being beatified in 2004 by Pope Saint John Paul II.

Alberto Marvelli, “engineer of charity”, has the charm of an extraordinarily normal holiness. Alberto’ father was a bank manager father and his family was very Christian. He was born in Ferrara in 1918, but at the age of 13 he and his family settled permanently in Rimini, following his father on his business trips. As a boy his health was health and he had impetuous temperament, but he was also so serious that at times he made one think of a grown man. He went through junior high school amidst study sessions and sensational sports competitions. At the age of 15, he enrolled in the classical high school. But in those very months, the family was hit hard by the death of his father. He was already an aspiring delegate and leader in the oratory at Mary Help of Christians parish. He taught catechism, led meetings, organised the youth mass. At only 18, he became President of Catholic Action.

Starting high school, Albert began his Diary and wrote, “God is great, infinitely great, infinitely good.”. But he would record there his growth into manhood and as a Christian throughout his life. There we read of a strict and strong “small regime” that he gave himself. In particular: prayer and meditation in the morning and in the evening, the Eucharist, daily if possible, and struggle against his main faults: laziness, gluttony, impatience, curiosity... A programme that Albert would implement for the whole of his life.

Student commute

Among the 60 candidates for the classical school leaving certificate, Alberto came second. On 1 December 1936 (at the age of 18) he began his first year of engineering at the University of Bologna. Thus began the life of a student commuting between Rimini and Bologna. Study and apostolate in both cities. His aunt's housekeeper with whom he stayed in Bologna would testify simply, "I used to see him day and night working hard with his uni studies and the apostolate. Sometimes I would find him asleep on his books and with the rosary in his hand. In the morning I would see him in church at 6 a.m. for Mass and Communion. If commitments did not allow him to take communion earlier, he would fast until noon. He imposed a formidable penance on his appetite."

While Alberto was finishing university, the Second World War broke out over Europe. Italy was also caught up in it. As an engineering graduate, from August to November 1940 Alberto was in Milan, employed at the Bagnagatti foundry, under the first bombings. The industrialist would testify: "He spent a few months with me. He immediately became familiar with all the employees and particularly with the youngest and humblest. He took an interest in the family needs of the workers and pointed out to me the particular needs of each one, soliciting the help he considered appropriate. He visited the sick, encouraged apprentices to attend evening classes. He instilled in everyone an immediate and keen sense of sympathy and warmth."

30 June 1941. As Italy entered its second year of war, Alberto graduated in industrial engineering with top marks. Soon after, he too put on the grey-green uniform and left to be a soldier.

Military service and the war

In January 1943, the Russians unleashed their offensive on the entire Western Front. The Armir (Italian army in Russia), occupying the front on the Don, was forced into a legendary retreat across the endless frozen fields, while the Russians and the frost were the killers. Raffaello Marvelli had just

arrived there and was killed in combat. For Maria, his mother it was a very tough time. Alberto wrote bare, bleeding words in his diary: "War is a punishment for our wickedness, it punishes our lack of love for God and other human beings. The spirit of charity is lacking in the world, and so we hate each other as enemies instead of loving each other as brothers."

He was destined for barracks in Treviso. And it is here that Marvelli's "miracle" took place. Fr Zanotto, parish priest of S. Maria di Piave, wrote, "When engineer Marvelli arrived in Treviso, in the barracks with two thousand soldiers, everyone was blaspheming and the underworld reigned. After some time, nobody blasphemed any more, I mean nobody, not even the superiors. The colonel, as a blasphemer, acted to repress blasphemy among the soldiers." In September, Italy surrendered and Alberto returned home. But the war was not over. German soldiers had occupied Italy, and the allies intensified their bombing of our cities.

Among the refugees in San Marino

On 1 November, Rimini was hit by the first aerial bombardment. It suffered three hundred and was reduced to a carpet of rubble. They had to flee far away, to the free Republic of San Marino. In a few weeks, this postage-stamp-sized piece of free land went from 14 thousand to 120 thousand inhabitants.

Alberto arrived there holding the halter of a donkey. On the buggy was his mother. Giorgio and Gertrude pushed bicycles laden with food to survive on. They were accepted into one of the dormitories at the Belluzzi college. Other families were in the warehouses of the Republic, many more piled up in the railway tunnels.

It is very easy, at times like these, to close in on oneself, to think about the survival of one's loved ones and that's all. Instead, Alberto was at the centre of care, available to everyone. A witness writes: "In the evening he prayed the rosary loudly in the dormitories at the Belluzzi college, then went got some sleep as best he could at the conventuals; and in the morning, in the church filled with evacuees, he served

mass and received communion. Then off again to all the streets and to all the needy. He would take note of the needs, and when he could not go there himself, he would entrust the work to others. He would go into the tunnels from where people did not dare come out." Domenico Mondrone adds: "Every day he would cycle kilometres, collecting food. Sometimes he came home with his haversack punctured by shrapnel bursting from all sides. But with friends who emulated his courage, he did not stop."

They wanted him to be Mayor

21 November 1944. The Allies enter Rimini. All around are villages and woods burning, traffic jams of wagons, trucks, cars. Deaths and desolation. Alberto returned there with his family. He found his house (hit, but still habitable) occupied by British officers. The Marvellis settled into the basement as best they could. In that terrible winter (the last one during the war) Alberto became everybody's servant. The Liberation Committee entrusted him with the housing office, the municipality entrusted him with civil engineering for the reconstruction, the bishop handed him over to the diocese's Catholic graduates. The poor permanently besieged the two small rooms in his office, followed him home when he went to have a bite to eat with his mother. Alberto never turned a single person away. He said, "Let the poor straight in, the others can have the courtesy to wait." After peace, the misery of the people continued. Many had lost everything in the war, 1946 was taken up daily by endless needs, all urgent. Alberto went to Mass, then was on on hand. At the end of that year there were the first local elections. Strong competition between the Communists and Christian Democrats. One Communist, who saw not a Christian Democrat but a Christian in Marvelli every day, said: "Even if my party loses... as long as engineer Marvelli is Mayor." He would not become one. On the evening of 5 October, he dined quickly with his mother, then went out on his bicycle to hold a rally in San Giuliano a Mare. 200 metres from his home, an allied truck running at breakneck speed hit

him, throwing him into the garden of a villa and then disappeared into the night. He was picked up by the trolleybus. Two hours later he died. He was 28 years old. When his coffin passed through the streets, the poor wept and blew kisses. A poster proclaimed in large letters: "The communists of Bellariva bow reverently to greet their son, their brother, who spread so much good on this earth."

don Mario PERTILE, sdb

"I want to be useful to my people". Lessons of life in missionary Africa

In 1995, 28 years ago, I left my beloved Argentina for missionary Africa with the same ideal as Zeffirino Namuncurà: to become a Salesian and a priest "useful to my people" in my beloved Africa.

And here I am, sitting under a noble, 100-year-old African tree, with a temperature of 36 degrees and 70% humidity, reflecting on my missionary life. From here I contemplate the beautiful rainforest painted in a thousand shades of infinite green, overflowing with life, full of mysteries and a thousand questions waiting to be answered. A true multicoloured mural like my missionary life: drawn in a thousand colours, painted in different shades and tones, blessed by challenges and rewards, by projects and dreams, by brushstrokes of light to shade the darker and more difficult tones of the mission.

First steps

My first steps in Africa were steps of discovery and reverence. I said to myself, "Africa is rich!" and, like a

teenager, I fell in love with it at first sight.... I fell in love with the diversity of its landscapes and exuberant geography, its fauna and flora, its seas and jungles, its immense savannahs and deserts. It is rich in natural resources: gold, diamonds, oil, uranium, timber, agriculture and fisheries. I realised immediately that Africa is not poor, but it is very badly managed. I fell in love with its cultures, languages, colours, smells and tastes. I was captivated by their rhythms, their music, the vibration of their eardrums, the sound of their musical instruments, their songs and dances full of life. And above all, I fell in love with its people and its young people, because this is certainly its greatest wealth: its children, its young people who represent the present and the future of the continent of hope.

Missionary temptation

When you are young, inexperienced, and you arrive in mission land with a thousand expectations and a heart full of dreams, the first temptation is to think that you are coming to “save”, that you are an “envoy”, called to “change the world”, to “transform”, to “teach”, to “evangelise”, to “heal”. It is there that your promised land teaches you the value of humility. And your people teach you that, to be a missionary, you must make yourself as small as a child, you must be born again: you must learn to speak new languages, to understand new and different customs, to change lifestyles, ways of thinking and feeling. In the mission you learn to keep quiet, to receive corrections, to accept humiliation and to suffer culture shocks. The true missionary unlearns in order to learn anew, until arriving at the most beautiful discovery: it is your people who “educate” you, “evangelise” you, “transform” you, “heal” you. They become your “Kairos”, your “time of God”, they are the “theological place” where God manifests himself to you and finally “saves” you.

African lessons

From the southern hemisphere, Africa has much to teach the Christian and “developed” West and the North. Here are some lessons I learnt in Africa.

The first lesson is “Ubuntu”: “I am, because we are”.

Africans love family, community, working and celebrating together. They are deeply generous and caring, always ready to lend a hand to anyone in need. They know that the individualist dies in isolation. African wisdom confirms this: “If you walk alone, you go faster, but if you walk in a group, you go further.” “It takes three stones to keep the pot on the fire.” “The tree that is alone withers; the tree that is in the forest lives.”. “It takes a whole village to raise a child.” And in the same vein: “It takes a whole village to kill a rabid dog.” “If two elephants fight, it is the grass that loses.” Fraternal life and community keep the family, clan and tribe alive.

The second is respect for life and elders

A son or daughter is always a blessing from heaven, a joy for the whole family, and hands to work the land and harvest. Life is a gift from God. That is why it is said “where there is life, there is hope” and “protecting the seed protects the harvest.” And because life expectancy is low, the elderly are valued, loved and “cared for”. There are no nursing homes or old people’s homes here. Grandparents are the heritage of the village. Children sit around the elders to listen to ancestral stories and the wisdom of the ancestors. That is why we say here that “when an elder dies, it is like burning down a library” and “if you forget your elders, you forget your shadow.”

The third is about suffering and resilience

African wisdom says that “pain is a silent host” and states that “through suffering one acquires wisdom.” That is why it is said that “patience is the medicine for all pain.” They turn obstacles into opportunities. They are not afraid of sacrifice or death. For them, losing a crop, a material good, a loved

one, is an opportunity to start again, to create something new. They know that nothing is achieved without effort and sacrifice; that the only way to succeed is to enter through the narrow door and they bless God who gives and takes away at the same time.

A fourth lesson concerns spirituality and prayer

Africans are 'spiritual' by nature. They are willing to give their lives for what they believe in. God is omnipresent in their lives, in their history, in their speeches, in their celebrations. Every activity begins with a prayer and ends with a prayer. That is why their proverbs say: "When you pray, move your feet" "don't look to God only when you are in trouble" and "where there is prayer, there is hope." If one does not pray, life becomes bland and sterile. They pray as if "everything depends on God, knowing that in the end everything depends on them", as a great African saint would say.

In my missionary life, I am mission

In three decades, we have built schools and vocational training centres, built churches and shrines, chapels and community centres, done emergency interventions during the civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia, opened homes for child soldiers, helped Ebola orphans, provided care for street children or girls in prostitution. But these activities are not identified with mission. The fruits of missionary activity are measured in terms of life transformation. And in this sense I confess that I have seen miracles: I have seen child soldiers rebuild their lives, I have seen street children become lawyers at university, I have seen them smile again and go back to school, I have seen girls in prostitution return to their families, learn a trade and start again.

As Pope Francis says, "we don't have a mission, or do mission" We are mission. I am the mission. My mission is to be the "sacrament of God's love" for the most vulnerable. That is, that they, through my hands, my eyes, my ears, my legs, my heart, can experience that God loves them madly, that he gives

them life, through my life given to them. This is what being a Salesian missionary means to me. That is why I am mission when I kneel before the Eucharist asking for their salvation; I am mission when I am in the courtyard or at home accompanying the children, I am mission when I travel to the most distant and dangerous areas, I am mission when I celebrate the Eucharist, hear confessions or baptise. I am on mission when I sit down to read or study thinking about them. I am on mission when I put together a strategic plan with my brothers and sisters or write a project to improve the quality of life of my people. I am on mission when I build a school or a chapel. I am on mission when I share my life with you who are reading this.

We are all missionaries by vocation

Dear friends, through baptism we are all called to be missionaries, to be mission. We do not have to go to Africa to be missionaries. The missionary call is an inner call to leave everything, to give everything where God has planted us. Not to give things, but to “give myself”, to “share” my time, my talents, my faith, my professionalism, my love, my service with the most vulnerable. If you hear this call, do not put it off. The charity of Christ and the urgency of the Kingdom are calling you.

Fr Jorge Mario CRISAFULLI, sdb, Provincial Africa Niger Niger

Being lovable like Don Bosco (1/2)

Being lovable is a human quality that is cultivated, accepting the effort that it so often entails. For Don Bosco it was not an end in itself, but a way to lead souls to God.

An address given at the 42nd Salesian Spirituality Days in Valdocco, Turin.

All good things in this world began with a dream (Willy Wonka).

Don't give up yours (Willy Wonka's mother).

A sculptor was busily working with his hammer and chisel on a large block of marble. A little boy, who was walking around licking ice cream, stopped in front of the wide-open workshop door.

The little boy stared in fascination at the shower of white dust, of small and large stone chips falling left and right.

He had no idea what was happening; the man who was pounding the large stone like a madman seemed a little strange to him.

A few weeks later, the little boy walked past the studio and to his surprise saw a large and mighty lion in the place where the marble block used to be.

All excited, the boy ran to the sculptor and said to him: "Sir, tell me, how you knew there was a lion in the stone?"

Don Bosco's dream is God's chisel.

Our Lady's simple and unique advice in the dream at nine years of age, "Make yourself humble, strong and energetic" became the scaffolding for a unique and fascinating personality. And above all a "style" that we can define as "Salesian".

Everyone loved Don Bosco. Why? He was attractive, a born leader, a real human magnet. Throughout his life he would always be a "conqueror" of affectionate friends.

John Giacomelli, who remained his friend for life, recalls, "I entered the seminary a month after the others. I knew almost no one, and in the early days I seemed to be lost in my loneliness. It was the cleric Bosco who came up to me the first time he saw me alone, after lunch, and kept me company all the time at recreation, telling me various nice things to distract me from any thoughts I might have of home or relatives left behind. Discussing with him, I learned that he

had been quite ill during the holidays. He was then very kind to me. Among other things, I remember that since I had a much over-sized cap, which several of my companions made fun of me for, and which displeased me and Bosco, who often came with me, fixed it for me himself, since he had the necessary material with him and was very good at sewing. From then on I began to admire the goodness of his heart. His company was edifying.

Can we borrow some of his qualities to become "lovable" too?

1) Being a positive force

Someone who constantly maintains a positive attitude helps us see the bright side and pushes us forward.

"When Don Bosco first visited the miserable shed which was to be used for his oratory, he had to be careful not to bump his head, because on one side it was only a metre high; for a floor it had the bare ground, and when it rained the water penetrated from all sides. Don Bosco felt big rats running between his feet, and bats fluttering overhead." But for Don Bosco it was the most beautiful place in the world. And he set off at a run: "I ran right back to my boys. I gathered them around me and began to shout in a loud voice, 'Great news, my sons, we've got a place for our Oratory, a more reliable one than we've had till now. We'll have a church, a sacristy, classrooms and a place to play. Sunday, next Sunday, we'll go to our new Oratory which is over there in Pinardi's house. And I pointed the place out to them.'"

Joy

Joy, a positive and happy state of mind, was the norm in Don Bosco's life.

More true than ever for him is the expression "My vocation is something else. My vocation is to be happy when others are happy."

Where love is concerned there is no adult, just children, this childlike spirit that is abandonment, carefreeness, inner freedom.

“ Don Bosco [thus] covered the whole playground, and he was always considered a good player to have, although it entailed a great deal of exertion and sacrifice on his part. ‘It was heartwarming just to see him in our midst’, said one of the pupils, now already at an advanced age. ‘Some of us had no coats or they were in bad shape; others had trousers that were more rags than anything else; others, too, had no hat or their shoes were so worn that the toes stuck out. We were a disheveled and, occasionally, quite grubby, ill-mannered, importunate and capricious lot, but he was happy to be with the poorest of us. With the smaller boys he was as gentle as a mother. If two of them started calling each other names and broke into a

fight, Don Bosco would quickly run up to them and tell them to behave. But the two boys, blind with anger, would pay him no attention. He would then raise his hand as if to strike them, but would suddenly check himself and just separate them. Soon peace would be restored as if by magic.

He often divided the boys into two teams for a game, leading one himself. Both sides played so hard that players and spectators got very excited. One team wanted the honor of beating Don Bosco and his team, while the other was sure of undisputed victory.

Often he would mark a finish line and challenge all the boys to a race with, of course, a prize for the victor. After they were all lined up, Don Bosco would hitch his cassock to his knees. “Ready?” he would cry. “Get set! Go!” And the race was on, as a swarm of boys raised a cloud of dust and trailed Don Bosco. He always won. The last of these contests took place in 1868, when Don Bosco, in spite of his swollen legs, still ran so swiftly that he left eight hundred boys behind him, including some top racers. We were there ourselves and could hardly believe our own eyes. (BM III (English edition), 85).

2) Sincerely caring for others

One of the characteristics of “attractive” people is genuine and sincere care and concern for others. It is not just a

matter of asking someone how their day went and listening to their answer. It is about really listening, empathising and showing genuine interest in the lives of others. Don Bosco wept with a broken heart at the death of Fr Calosso, of Luigi Comollo, at the sight of the first boys behind prison bars.

An anticlerical young man

We make mention of this young man because he can represent a hundred and one others of his kind. In the autumn of 1860 Don Bosco went into the coffee shop known as the Consolata, because it was near the famous Shrine of that name, and took a seat in a secluded room to quietly read the correspondence he used to bring with him. A casual and courteous waiter served the patrons there. His name was Giovanni Paolo Cotella, a native of Cavour (Turin), aged 13. He had run away from home in the summer of that year, because he was intolerant of his parents' reproaches and severity. We leave the description of his meeting with Don Bosco, as he narrated it to Fr Francesco Cerruti.

"One evening", he recounted, the boss said "Bring a cup of coffee to a priest who is in the room over there." "Me bring coffee to a priest?" I said as if startled. Priests were then as unpopular as they are now, even more so than now. I had heard and read all kinds of things and had therefore formed a very bad opinion of priests.

I went over ready to mock him: "What do you want from me, priest?" I asked Don Bosco rudely. And he looked at me steadily, "I would like a cup of coffee from you, my good young man" he replied with great kindness, "but on one condition." "What's that?" "That you bring it to me yourself." Those words and that look won me over and I said to myself "This is not a priest like the others."

I brought him his coffee; some mysterious force kept me close to him, and he began to question me, still in the most loving way, about where I was born, my age, my work and above all why I had run away from home. Then he said "Do you want to come with me?" "Where?" "To Don Bosco's Oratory. This place and

this kind of work are not for you." "And when I am there?" "If you like, you can study." "But will you look after me properly?" "Oh, just think about it! You can play have fun, be happy there." "Well, well" I replied, "I'll come. But when? Immediately? Tomorrow?" "This evening" Don Bosco said.

I handed in my resignation to my boss who would have liked me to stay a few more days, and I took my few rags and went to the Oratory that same evening. On the morrow Don Bosco wrote to my parents to reassure them about me, and inviting them to come to him for a necessary understanding regarding help with food and related expenses. In fact my mother came and, after listening to what she said about the family's circumstances, Don Bosco concluded by saying "Well, let's do this; you pay 12 lire a month, Don Bosco will find the rest."

I admired not only the exquisite charity, Don Bosco showed in this but his prudence. My family was not rich, but they enjoyed sufficient wealth. If, therefore, he had accepted me completely free of charge, it would not have been a good decision, for this would have been detrimental to others more needy than me."

For two years his parents had kept their agreement with Don Bosco regarding the boarding fee, but at the beginning of the third year they stopped paying and no longer wanted to hear of it. The youngster, though extremely lively, was open, frank, good-hearted, of exemplary conduct, and benefited much from his studies. Now in this school year (1862-1863), as he was about to enter fourth class, and afraid of having to cut short his studies, he opened up to Don Bosco, who replied: "And what does it matter if your parents no longer want to pay? Aren't I here? Rest assured that Don Bosco will not abandon you." And indeed, as long as he stayed at the Oratory, Don Bosco provided him with everything he needed.

When he had finished his fourth year of secondary school and had passed his exams successfully, he began work; and the first money he was able to put together with his work, he sent to Don Bosco at some cost to himself and in small instalments to make up the balance of the small fee that his parents had

neglected to pay in his last year at the Oratory. He lived as a good Christian, he zealously disseminated the *Catholic Readings*, was among the first to join the past pupils union and always kept in affectionate communication with his former superiors.

3) Being a good listener

In a world where everyone seems to be talking all the time, a good listener stands out. Listening to what someone says is one thing, but really listening – absorbing and understanding – is something else. Being a good listener is not just about remaining silent while the other person speaks. It is about participating in the conversation, asking probing questions and showing genuine interest.

Contact as an exchange of energy

He had one of the rarest qualities: the “grace of existence”. A life overflowing, like good wine from the vat. For which thousands of people said “Thank you for being there!” and “I am someone else when I am with you!”

“He listened to the boys with the greatest attention as if the things they were saying were all very important. Sometimes he would get up, or walk with them around the room. When the conversation was over, he would accompany them to the threshold, open the door himself, and bid them farewell by saying: “We will always be friends, right?” (Memorie Biografiche VI, 439).

4) The beauty of the good man

This is why Don Bosco is attractive. Cardinal John Cagliero reported the following fact noted personally when accompanying Don Bosco. After a conference held in Nice, Don Bosco had just finished a sermon and was leaving the sanctuary to walk to the door, his passage blocked by people crowding about him. A dangerous-looking man stood stock-still, staring at him as though deliberating a violent move. Somewhat concerned, Father Cagliero kept an eye on him as Don Bosco slowly drew nearer to him. Finally they stood face to face. On seeing him,

Don Bosco asked, "What do you want?"

"I? Nothing!"

"You look as though you have something to tell me."

"No, not at all!"

"Would you perhaps like to make your confession?"

"I? How silly!"

"Why are you here then?"

"Because . . . well, because I cannot walk away "

"I understand. Friends, leave us alone for a while" Don Bosco said to those about him. When they pulled back, Don Bosco whispered briefly into the man's ear. He fell to his knees and made his confession then and there in the middle of the church." (cf. BM XIV, 22).

Pope Pius XI, the Pontiff who canonised Don Bosco and who had been Don Bosco's guest at the Pinardi House in the autumn of 1883, remembers, "Here he was answering everyone: and he had the right word for everything, so right that it was amazing: at first surprising then so amazing."

Two things make us understand eternity: love and wonder. Don Bosco summed them up in his person. Outward beauty is the visible component of inner beauty. And it manifests itself through the light that shines from the eyes of each individual. It does not matter if they are badly dressed or does not conform to our canons of elegance, or if they do not try to impose themselves on the attention of the people around them. The eyes are the mirror of the soul and, to some extent, reveal what seems hidden.

But, in addition to their ability to shine, they possess another quality: they act as a mirror both for the gifts held within the soul and for the men and women who are the object of their gaze.

Indeed, they reflect who is looking at them. Like any mirror, the eyes return the innermost reflection of the face before them.

An elderly priest, a former pupil at Valdocco, wrote in 1889,

“Don Bosco’s most striking trait was his glance – kindly, yet penetrating the heart’s inmost recesses; a glance which charmed, frightened, or crushed, as the case might be. In my life I never saw the like of it. Generally his portraits, even his photographs, do not bring this out; they simply make him a good-natured man. (BM VI, 2).

Another former pupil, from the 1870s, Pons Pietro, reveals in his recollections: “Don Bosco had two eyes that pierced and penetrated the mind... He used to walk around talking and looking at everyone with two eyes that turned every which way, electrifying hearts with joy” (MB XVII, 863).

You know you are a good person when people always come to you for advice and encouragement. Don Bosco’s door was always open for young and old. The beauty of the good man is a difficult quality to define, but when it is there, you notice it: like perfume. We all know what the scent of roses is, but no one can stand up and explain it.

Sometimes this phenomenon happened, that a young man heard Don Bosco’s word and could not tear himself away from his side, absorbed almost in a luminous idea... Others kept vigil at his door at night, tapping lightly every so often, until it was opened for them, because they did not want to go to sleep with sin in their souls.

[\(continued\)](#)

Message at the end of the 42nd Salesian Spirituality

Days

To my dearest Family

My dearest sons and daughters,

The dream that makes you dream. This is the entire legacy I leave you: a dream. That dream that guided my life. Now it is your dream. I am giving you the most precious things that I have. It came from above, and like everything that is born of God it cannot die. It was my vocation and my mission.

If you are here today, it is because you were **chosen for a mission**. This is your vocation: you are called to continue what I began. To bring to fulfilment, today, all God's dreams that are also mine. And to fulfil them together, **as a family**.

So I ask you to **get on the move and go**. Get on the move, once again. Get on the move, relentlessly, without ceasing.

Like Abraham, like Joseph and Mary, like Levi, Simon, Andrew, and all the others. Like I did.

Go, God says. I'll tell you where to go. Do not tire of it. Never stop.

I have often told you: we will rest in Heaven. Let this be your direction. Go to Heaven and take as many boys, girls and young people with you as possible.

Believe in the highest and most beautiful truths. Trust in God the Creator, in the Holy Spirit who moves everything towards good, in the embrace of Christ present in every person and who awaits everyone at the end of their life; believe, He awaits you, in the family.

Trust the Teacher, let her take your hand. She will never abandon you.

A mother always keeps the fire burning and the door open.

Wherever you are, **build!** On your feet, always. If you are lying down, get up! The world needs you!

Our flock is threatened, wolves are lurking: their fangs are called physical violence, affective-sexual violence, economic violence, cyber-violence and terrible social exclusion.

Love people. Love each one individually. Respect everyone's path, be it a straight line or curved, because every person is sacred.

Cry with those who cry, but work so that there are no more tears in this world. "Do not weep" Jesus told the widow of Nain. Give back living children to the mothers of this world.

Your way of loving is a transformative power that leads to happiness. Have pure love, sow joy and be a blessing wherever you go. Don't waste your life. Infect the world with your joy.

Save yourself from indifference. Enjoy the miracle of light, living water and shared bread. Remember that faith makes people human. Always. Watch, learn, and be patient, and let God dictate the timing of Providence.

Leave no room for bitter, dark thoughts. This world is the first miracle that God has done, and God has placed in your hands the grace of new miracles. Always expect a miracle in everyday life.

Synchronize the beating of your heart with the tears of so many impoverished young people. And the anger of those who have only encountered injustice and abuse. Keep the doors open at all times. Be responsible for this world and the life of every young person. Consider that every injustice against a poor person is an open wound in the heart of God.

Make peace among human beings, and do not listen to the voice of those who spread hatred and divisions. May there be peace and forgiveness in your homes and houses. Together you form a real family, a solid city, an inclusive space. An Oratory. Be an Oratory.

May every young man and young woman you meet grow in wisdom,

in age, in grace before God and before others and become the protagonist of a new humanity.

Every day **ask God for the gift of courage**. Always remember that Jesus overcame fear for us. You will conquer the world with Mary's weapon – tenderness. As Pope Francis recommended: Jesus has given us a light that shines in the darkness: defend it, protect it. That special light is the greatest wealth entrusted to your life.

And above all, dream! **Don't be afraid to dream**. Dream! You dream of a world that is not yet seen, but that will certainly come.

Organize hope. Take care of creation. Hope leads us to believe in the existence of a creation that extends until its definitive fulfilment, when God will be all in all.

Our dream is like life: it's all we have.

Don't let it die.

So **let's go**, let's change the world. Together.

Don Bosco