

St Joseph – a Father's Heart (video)

St Joseph, the foster-father of Jesus, is a not a well known saint, Little has been written about him because there are not too many testimonies about him. However, devotion to him has seen a steady increase in recent times, a sign of the powerful intercession that this hard-working and silent saint has with God.

Already from ancient times several Church Fathers showed a tender devotion to St Joseph, the foster-father of Jesus. In Italian he is called the *padre putativo di Gesù*. The Latin word “puto” means “I believe”, i.e. he was the one “believed to be” his father (cf. Lk 3:23). Devotion to him is also found among other saints of the Church. The most famous expression is found in St Teresa of Jesus (of Ávila) when she says: “Until now I do not remember ever having asked him for a favour that he did not grant me. It fills me with awe to think of the extraordinary graces bestowed on me by God and the dangers from which he has delivered me, both material and spiritual, through the intercession of this blessed saint. While it seems to other saints that the Lord has granted us succour in a single need, I have experienced that the glorious Saint Joseph comes to our aid in all of them. Therefore, the Lord wants us to understand that in the same way that he was subject to him on earth – where Saint Joseph, who was his father, having custody of him, could give him orders – also in heaven he does what he asks of him. Other people, to whom I used to tell them to entrust themselves to him, have found this to be true, and there are now many who have become devoted to him, because they have experienced this truth.” (Book of Life).

The spread of devotion to him saw steady

progression. In 1726, his name was included in the Litany of the Saints. In 1833, the little office of St Joseph to be prayed on Wednesdays was approved. In 1844, the Saint's name was included among the invocations in the prayers to be recited after Mass. In 1847 Pope Pius IX extended the feast of the Patronage of St Joseph to the whole Church, a celebration that was to be replaced in 1956 with that of St Joseph the Worker, assigned to 1 May. However, the one that would give him greater prominence would be the declaration of St Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church, which took place on 8 December 1870 by Blessed Pope Pius IX with the decree *Quemadmodum Deus*. Thus began this decree:

“As almighty God appointed Joseph, son of the patriarch Jacob, over all the land of Egypt to save grain for the people, so when the fullness of time had come and He was about to send to earth His only-begotten Son, the Savior of the world, He chose another Joseph, of whom the first had been the type, and He made him the lord and chief of His household and possessions, the guardian of His choicest treasures.

Indeed, he had as his spouse the Immaculate Virgin Mary, of whom was born by the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ our Lord, who deigned to be reputed in the sight of men as the son of Joseph, and was subject to him.

Him whom countless kings and prophets had desired to see, Joseph not only saw but conversed with, and embraced in paternal affection, and kissed. He most diligently reared Him whom the faithful were to receive as the bread that came down from heaven whereby they might obtain eternal life.

Because of this sublime dignity which God conferred on his most faithful servant, the Church has always most highly honored and praised blessed Joseph next to his spouse, the Virgin Mother of God, and has besought his intercession in times of trouble.”

On 15 August 1889, Pope Leo XIII wrote the Encyclical [*Quamquam Pluries*](#), in which he recommended devotion to Saint Joseph. With this Encyclical, the now classic prayer

“To you, O Blessed Joseph” was also spread.

In 1909, the Holy See approved a litany in honour of Saint Joseph proposed to the whole Church, sanctioned by Pope Saint Pius X and published in the [*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*](#).

On 9 April 1919, Pope Benedict XV inserted a Preface proper to St Joseph into the Missal. Later, Pope John XXIII wanted to include the name of St Joseph in the Roman Canon. And on 1 May 2013, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments established the inclusion of the name of St Joseph in all the Eucharistic Prayers (II, III, IV) of the Roman Missal, through a [decree](#) approved by Pope Francis.

On 25 July 1920, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the proclamation of St Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church, Pope Benedict XV issued a *motu proprio*, *Bonum Sane*, in which he confirmed the devotion to St Joseph.

Popes Pius IX and Pius XI dedicated the month of March to St Joseph.

On 7 March 1958, Pope Pius XII had a prayer to St Joseph published in the [*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*](#) and enriched it with a partial indulgence. We present it below.

“O glorious Patriarch, Saint Joseph, humble and just artisan of Nazareth, thou hast given to all Christians and particularly to us an example of a perfect life through diligent labor and admirable union with Jesus and Mary.

Assist us in our daily work in order that we, Catholic artisans, may also see in it an effective means of glorifying God, of sanctifying ourselves, and of being a useful member in the society in which we live. These should be the highest ideals for all our actions.

O dearest Protector, obtain for us from the Lord humility and simplicity of heart, love for our work and kindness towards our fellow-laborers; conformity to God’s will in the

unavoidable trials of this life together with joy in bearing them; recognition of our specific social mission and a sense of responsibility; the spirit and discipline and prayer; docility and respectfulness towards superiors; the spirit of brotherhood towards our equals; charity and indulgence with our dependents.

Accompany us in times of prosperity when the opportunity is given for an honest enjoyment of the fruits of our labors; sustain us in our hours of sadness, when Heaven seems to be shut in our regard, and even the very tools with which our hands toil appear to rebel against us.

Grant that, in imitation of thee, we may keep our eyes fixed on our Mother, Mary, thy dearest Spouse, who as she spun silently in a corner of thy shop would let the sweetest smile course over her lips. Besides, may we never take our eyes off Jesus, Who was busily occupied with thee at the carpenters bench, in order that we in like manner may lead on earth a peaceful and a holy life, a prelude to the life of eternal happiness that awaits us in Heaven for ever and ever. Amen. “

On 19 March 1961, the Supreme Pontiff John XXIII asked for St Joseph's protection for the Second Vatican Council in the Apostolic Charter "The Voices".

On 15 August 1989, St John Paul II published the Apostolic Exhortation [*Redemptoris Custos*](#), on the occasion of the centenary of the proclamation of St Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church.

On the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception on 8 December 2021, the Holy Father Francis sent an Apostolic Letter, [*Patris Corde*](#), on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of St Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church and dedicated the year 2022 as the 'Year of St Joseph'.

On 1 May 2021, in a [letter](#) addressed to the Presidents of the Bishops' Conferences, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments requested

the inclusion of new invocations in the [Litany in honour of St Joseph](#).

All these official interventions by the Church are in addition to many other devotions that have taken root among the Christian people, such as the practice of the Seven Sorrows and Joys of St Joseph, the Litany of St Joseph, the Girdle or Cord of St Joseph, the Chaplet of St Joseph, the Scapular of St Joseph, the Sacred Mantle in honour of St Joseph, the Nine Wednesdays, the Perpetual Novena, the Perpetual Crown, the Perpetual Court.

But not a word is preserved about St Joseph in the Gospels. Instead, we are reminded of his actions, his fidelity to God, from which the practice of the Seven Sorrows and Joys also derives: the acceptance of Mary as Mother of the Messiah (Mt. 1:18-25), the birth of Jesus (Lk. 2,4-7), the circumcision (Lk. 2,21), the presentation in the Temple (Lk. 2,22-33), the flight into Egypt (Mt. 2,13-15), the return to Galilee (Mt. 2,19-23) and the finding of Jesus in the Temple (Lk. 2,39-51).

This silence and this action of St Joseph remind us that witness is borne first and foremost by works of faith, before words. And it reminds us that the Tradition of the Church is not only formed by words delivered in writing, but is first and foremost a living communication that comes from the Holy Spirit, who may or may not make use of written texts.

The intercession of St Joseph continues even today, most often in silence, as was also his life. A documentary film, called 'Father's Heart', launched in the year 2022 dedicated to him, comes to highlight this mediation with God. The director Andrés Garrigó, who searched various countries for traces of this saint's devotion, discovered that "... Joseph of Nazareth, the giant of silence, is more active than ever, attracting thousands of people every day and acting in their lives in an extraordinary way".

It is a film that presents historical and theological aspects,

but above all the intercession of Saint Joseph in people's lives, even in those who are initially distrustful: conversions, failed marriages, assistance to the dying, etc. It turns out that Saint Joseph is not just a man who lived more than 2000 years ago or a figure from the crib, but a saint who acts in the lives of the people who invoke him, a saint who is worshipped all over the world.

The film is primarily aimed at a believing audience, but is suitable for all age groups, without restrictions.

Here is also the film's fact sheet.

Title: Father's Heart

Original title: Corazón de padre

Year of release: 2022

Cinema release: 18.03.2022

Running time: 91 min

Genre: Documentary

Suitable audience: Everyone

Country: Spain

Director: Andrés Garrigó

Main actors: Paco Pérez-Reus, María Gil

Screenplay: Josepmaria Anglés, Andrés Garrigó

Photography: Ismael Durán

Production company: Andrés Garrigó

Cinema distribution: [Goya Producciones](#)

Official website: <https://www.saintjosephthemovie.com/>

Rating: 7/10 (tens21)

Trailer:

Wonders of the Mother of God invoked under the title of Mary Help of Christians (5/13)

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

Chapter 7. Mary favours those who work for the faith; while God punishes those who outrage the Blessed Virgin.

There was a time when the emperors of Constantinople carried out a violent persecution against Catholics for venerating sacred images. Among them was Leo Isauricus. In order to abolish the cult , he killed and imprisoned anyone who was denounced as having given veneration to images or relics of saints and especially of the Blessed Virgin. In order to deceive the simple people, he summoned some bishops and abbots and by dint of money and promises induced them to establish that the images of the crucified Jesus, neither of the Virgin nor of the Saints should be venerated.

But the learned and famous St John Damascene lived in those times. To fight the heretics and also to provide an antidote for Catholics, John wrote three books in which he defended the cult of holy images. The Iconoclasts (as those heretics were called because they despised holy images) were greatly offended by these writings, so they accused him of treason to the prince. They said that he had sent letters signed in his own hand to break the alliance he had with foreign princes, and that he disturbed public peace with his writings. The credulous emperor began to suspect the saint, and although he was innocent, he condemned him to have his right hand cut off.

But this treachery had a much happier outcome than

he had expected, for Our Blessed Lady wanted to reward her servant for his zeal for her.

As evening came, St John prostrated himself before the image of the Mother of God, and prayed most of the night , saying: O Blessed Virgin, because of my zeal for you and the holy images, my right hand was cut off, come therefore to my aid and let me continue to write your praises and those of your son Jesus. So saying, he fell asleep.

In a dream he saw the image of the mother of God looking at him happily and saying: Behold, your hand is healed. Therefore arise and write down my glories. When he woke up, he actually found his healed hand attached to his arm.

When the news of such a great miracle had spread, everyone praised and glorified the Blessed Virgin, who rewards so greatly. Virgin who so richly rewards her devotees who suffer for the faith. But some of Christ's enemies wanted to claim that the hand had not been cut off from him, but from one of his servants, and they said, "Don't you see that John is in his house singing and carousing as if he were celebrating a wedding feast?" So John was arrested again and taken to the prince. But here a new miracle. Showing his right hand, a shining line could be seen in it, which proved the amputation to be true.

Amazed at this miracle, the prince asked him which doctor had restored him to health, and what medicine he had used. He then loudly narrated the miracle. "It is my God" he said, "the almighty physician who restored my health. The prince then showed repentance for the evil he had done, and wanted to raise him to great dignities. But Damascene, averse to human greatness, loved private life better, and as long as he lived, he employed his genius in writing and publishing about the power of the august Mother of the Saviour (see John Patriarch of Jer. Baronius in the year 727).

If God often grants extraordinary graces to those who promote the glories of his august Mother, he not infrequently punishes terribly even in the present life those

who despise her or her images.

Constantine Copronymus, son of Leo Isauricus ascended his father's throne at the time of the supreme pontiff St Zacharias (741-75). Following the impieties of his father, he forbade the invocation of saints, the honouring of relics, and the imploring of their intercession. He desecrated churches, destroyed monasteries, persecuted and imprisoned monks, and invoked with nocturnal sacrifices the help of the demons themselves. But his hatred was especially directed against the Holy Virgin. To confirm what he said, he used to take in his hand a bag full of gold coins, and showed it to those around him, saying: How much is this bag worth? Very much, they said. Throwing out the gold, he again asked what the purse was worth. When they answered that it was not worth anything, so quickly she took back the impious one, so it is of the Mother of God; for that time, that she had Christ in her, she was greatly to be honoured, but from the point that she gave him up nothing differs from other women.

These enormous blasphemies certainly deserved an exemplary punishment that God did not delay in sending to the impious blasphemer.

Constantine Copronymus was punished with shameful infirmities, with ulcers that turned into burning pustules, which made him send up high cries, while a burning fever devoured him. Thus panting and screaming as if he were burning alive, he sent out his last breath.

The son followed his father's footsteps. He took great delight in gems and diamonds, and seeing the many beautiful crowns that the Emperor Maurice had dedicated to the Mother of God to adorn the church of St Sophia in Constantinople, he had them taken and placed on his head and carried it to his own palace. But on the instant his forehead was covered with pestiferous carbuncles, which on that very day drew to death the one who dared to thrust his sacrilegious hand against the ornament of Mary's virginal head (see Theophanes and Nicephorus contemporaries. Baronius an. 767).

Chapter 8. Mary protector of the armies fighting for the faith.

Let us now briefly mention some facts concerning the special protection that the holy Virgin has constantly given to armies fighting for the faith.

Emperor Justinian recovered Italy, which had been oppressed by the Goths for sixty years. Narses, his General, was warned by Mary when he was to take the field and never took up arms without her consent. (Procopius, Evagrius, Nicephorus, and Paul the Deacon. Baronius to the year 553).

Emperor Heraclius won a glorious victory against the Persians and seized their rich spoils, reporting the prosperous outcome of his arms to the Mother of God to whom he had commended himself. (Greek Inst. art. 626).

The same Emperor triumphed again over the Persians the following year. A frightful hail in the enemies' camp routed them and put them to flight. (Greek Ist.).

The city of Constantinople was once again liberated from the Persians in a most prodigious manner. While the siege lasted, the Barbarians saw a noble matron escorted by a retinue of Eunuchs coming out of the city gate at dawn. Believing her to be the emperor's wife on her way to her husband to plead for peace, they let her pass. When they saw her going to the emperor, they followed her as far as a place called the Old Stone, where she disappeared from their sight. Then a tumult arose among them, they fought each other, and so terrible was the slaughter that their general was forced to raise the siege. It is believed that that matron was the Blessed Virgin. (Baronius).

The image of Mary carried in procession around the walls of Constantinople freed this city from the Moors who had held it besieged for three years. Already the enemy leader, despairing of victory, begged to be allowed to enter and see the city, promising not to dare any violence. While his soldiers entered without difficulty, when his horse arrived at the gate known as the Bosphorus, there was no way to make it

go forward. Then the barbarian looked up and saw on the gate the image of the Virgin that he had blasphemed just before. He then turned back and took the path towards the Aegean Sea where he was shipwrecked. (Baronius year 718).

In the same year, the Saracens took up arms against Pelagius, Prince of the Asturians. This pious general resorted to Mary and the darts and thunderbolts thrown at him backfired on the enemies of the faith. Twenty thousand Saracens were wiped out, and sixty thousand perished submerged in the waters. Pelagius together with his few had taken refuge in a cave. Grateful to Mary for the victory he had won, he built a temple to the Blessed Virgin in the cave. (Baronius).

Andrew, General of the Emperor Basil of Constantinople, defeated the Saracens in the year 867. The enemy had insulted Mary in this conflict by writing to Andrew: I will now see if the son of Mary and his mother can save you from my arms. The pious General took the insolent writing, hung it on the image of Mary saying: See, O Mother of God: see, O Jesus, what insolence this arrogant barbarian says against your people. Having done this, he rises up on his bow and commences a bloody massacre of all his enemies. (Curopalate ann. 867).

In the year 1185, the Supreme Pontiff Urban II put the Crusaders' arms under the auspices of Mary, and Goffredo Buglione at the head of the Catholic army freed the holy places from the dominion of the infidels.

Alfonso VIII, King of Castile, achieved a glorious victory over the Moors by carrying the image of Mary on his banners onto the battlefield. Two hundred thousand Moors remained on the field. To perpetuate the memory of this event, Spain celebrated the feast of the Holy Cross every year on 16 July. The banner on which was impressed the image of Mary, who had triumphed over the enemies, is still preserved in the church of Toledo. (Ant. de Balimghera).

Alfonso IX, King of Spain, also defeated two hundred thousand Saracens with Mary's help. (Idem die XXI junii).

James I King of Aragon wrested three very noble kingdoms from the Moors and defeated ten thousand of theirs. In gratitude for this victory, he erected several churches to Mary. (Idem die XXI julii).

The Carnotesi besieged in their city by a band of corsairs displayed a part of Mary's robe that Charles Calvo had brought from Constantinople on a pole as a banner. The barbarians, having thrown their spears at this relic, were suddenly blinded, and could no longer escape. The devout Carnotese took up arms and slaughtered them.

Charles VII, King of France, who was cornered by the English, had recourse to Mary, and not only was he able to defeat them in several battles, but he also freed a city from siege and brought many others under his rule. (The same on 22nd July).

Philip the Fair, King of France surprised by his enemies and abandoned by his own resorted to Mary and found himself surrounded by a prodigious host of warriors ready to fight in his defence. In a short time thirty-six thousand enemies are defeated, the others surrender as prisoners or flee. Grateful for such a triumph to Mary, he built a church to her and there hung all the weapons he had used in the conflict. (Idem XVII aug.).

Philip Valesius, King of France, defeated twenty thousand enemies with a handful of men. Returning triumphant that same day to Paris, he went straight to the cathedral dedicated to the Virgin Mary. There he offered his horse and his royal arms to his generous Helper. (Idem XXIII aug.).

John Zemisca, Emperor of the Greeks, defeated the Bulgarians, Russians, Scythians and other barbarians, who together numbered three hundred and thirty thousand and threatened the empire of Constantinople. The Blessed Virgin sent the martyr St Theodore, who appeared on a white horse and broke the enemy ranks; whereupon Zemisca built a church in honour of St Theodore and had the image of Mary carried in triumph. (Curopalate).

John Comnenus, aided by the protection of Mary,

defeated a horde of Scythians and in memory of the event ordered a public feast at which the image of the Mother of God was carried triumphantly on a chariot quilted with silver and precious gems. Four very white horses led by the Emperor's princes and relatives pulled the chariot; the Emperor walked on foot carrying the cross. (Niceta in his *Annals*).

The citizens of Ipri, besieged by the English and reduced to extremes, resorted with tears to the help of the Mother of God, and Mary appeared visibly to console them and put the enemies to flight. The event took place in 1383 and the people of Cyprus celebrate the memory of their liberation every year with a religious festival on the first Sunday in August. (Maffeo lib. 18, *Cronaca Univers.*).

Simon Count of Monforte with eight hundred horsemen and one thousand pawns defeated one hundred thousand Albigensians near Toulouse. (Bzovio Annals year 1213).

Vladislaus, King of Poland, placed his arms under the protection of the Virgin Mary, defeated fifty thousand Teutons and took their remains as a trophy to the tomb of the martyr St. Stanislaus. Martin Cromerus in his history of Poland says that this holy martyr was seen, as long as the battle lasted, dressed in pontifical robes in the act of encouraging the Poles and threatening his enemies. It is believed that this holy bishop was sent by the Virgin to help the Poles, who had recommended themselves to Mary before the battle.

In the year 1546, the Portuguese besieged by Mamudio, King of the Indies, invoked Mary's help. The enemy counted over sixty thousand men perished in the war. The siege had been going on for seven months and was already on the verge of surrender, when a sudden consternation invaded the enemies. A noble matron, surrounded by celestial splendour, appeared above a small church in the city and shone such a light on the Indians that they could no longer distinguish one from the other and fled in haste. (Maffeo lib. 3 Hist. of the Indies).

In the year 1480, while the Turks were fighting

against the city of Rhodes, they had already succeeded in planting their banners on the walls, when the blessed Virgin appeared armed with a shield and lance, with St John the Baptist and a host of armed heavenly warriors out front. Then the enemies broke free and slaughtered each other. (James Bosso *St. of the Knights of Rhodes*).

Maximilian, Duke of Bavaria, reduced a horde of heretical Austrian and Bohemian rebels to duty. On the banner of his army, he had the effigy of the Virgin Mary inscribed with the words: *Da mihi virtutem contro hostes tuos*. Give me strength against your enemies. (Jeremias Danelius. *Trimegisti cristiani* lib. 2 cap. 4, § 4).

Arthur, King of England, by wearing the image of Mary on his shield made himself invulnerable in battle; and Prince Eugene with our Duke Victor Amadeus, who wore it on their shield and chest, with a handful of valiant men defeated the 80,000-strong French army under Turin. The majestic Basilica of Superga was erected by the aforementioned Duke, then King Victor Amadeus as a sign of gratitude for this victory.

[\(continued\)](#)

Letter from Rector Major Cardinal Ángel Fernández Arttime

For the attention of my Salesian confreres, for the attention of our dear Salesian Family

My dear Salesian confreres, my dear brothers and sisters in the Salesian Family throughout the world: please accept my

warm and affectionate greetings, especially at this time.

The reasons for my writing to you today, right on the eve of my Episcopal Ordination, at the nomination of the Holy Father Pope Francis, is to officially and definitively pass on to you my personal situation with regard to our Congregation and the Salesian Family.

Some time ago, Pope Francis expressed to me his wish that my Episcopal Ordination would take place during this Easter season together with our Salesian confrere Archbishop-elect Giordano Piccinotti, and that I could continue my service until the appropriate date. So, trusting always in the Lord, who is the only guarantor of our lives, the following is definitive:

1. The Holy Father has prepared a document for me with the 'deroga' (an Italian term meaning "an exception to what is legislated", in which he authorises me to continue for a further period as Rector Major, after having received episcopal consecration). This document containing the Holy Father's authorisation has already reached us and is in the archives of the Congregation.

2. In agreement with Pope Francis, I will conclude my service as Rector major towards the evening of 16 August this year, 2024, following the celebration of the 209th anniversary of the birth of our father at Colle Don Bosco. On the same day we will celebrate the closing of the Youth Synod' with the young people, a Synod in which 370 young people from all over the world will have participated on the occasion of the bicentenary of the dream at 9 years of age, an event for Don Bosco that was a dream-vision and a programme for life that has come down to us.

On that afternoon, in a simple act, I will sign my letter of renunciation in accordance with Article 128 of our Constitutions, and I will hand over this document to the Vicar of the Rector Major Father Stefano Martoglio who, according to Article 143, will assume the government of our Congregation

'ad interim' until the election of the Rector Major at GC29 to be held in Valdocco (Turin) from 16 February 2025.

3. Certainly from now on, but particularly from that date onwards, I will be attending to the service that the Holy Father will indicate to me.

I wish to thank the Lord, together with all of you, my dear brothers and sisters, for how blessed we have been over these last ten years, both as a Salesian Congregation and as the Family of Don Bosco. The Lord has assisted us in his Spirit and our Mother the Help of Christians has never let go of our hand. And we are certain that this will continue to be the case in the future because "She has done everything".

My final word at this moment is addressed to Don Bosco who will undoubtedly continue to look after his Congregation and his precious Family.

With true affection and united in the Lord,

Cardinal Ángel FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME, sdb

Rector Major

Society of St Francis de Sales

Rome, 19 April 2024

Prot. 24/0160

Don Bosco, politics and the social question

Did Don Bosco do politics? Yes, but not in the immediate sense of the word. He himself said that his politics were of the Our Father: souls to be saved, poor young people to be nurtured and educated.

Don Bosco and politics

Don Bosco lived intensely and with a conscious awareness of the problems, unprecedented for him also, of the great cultural and social changes of his century, particularly in their political implications, and he made a considered choice, one that he wanted to make part of his spirit and characterise his mission.

He consciously wanted “not to do party politics”, and left it as a spiritual legacy to his Congregation not to do so, not because he was “apolitical”, i.e. alienated from the great human problems of his era and the society in which he lived, but because he wanted to dedicate himself to the reform of society without entering into political movements. He was therefore not “disengaged”; on the contrary, he wanted his Salesians to be truly “committed”. But it is necessary to clarify the meaning of this political commitment.

The term “politics” can be used in two senses: in the first it indicates values and ends which define the “common good” in an overall perspective of society; in the second it indicates means and methods to be followed to achieve the “common good”. The first meaning considers politics in the broadest sense of the word. At this level, everyone has a political responsibility. The second meaning considers politics as a series of initiatives that, through political parties etc., aim to direct the exercise of power in favour of the people. At this second level politics is connected with intervention by the government of the country, something which goes beyond the commitment desired by Don Bosco.

He recognised in himself and in his Salesians a political responsibility that relates to the first meaning, insofar as it is intended to be a religious, educational commitment aimed at creating a culture that informs politics in a Christian way. In this second sense Don Bosco did politics, even if he presented it in other terms such as the “moral and civil education of youth”.

Don Bosco and the social question

Don Bosco presented the social evolution of his time. " First of all, he was one of the few who had understood immediately- and he said so a thousand times- that the revolutionary movement was not just a passing storm. Not all its promises to the people were unjust; many of them filled real needs. The workers demanded equality of rights without class distinction, more justice, and improvement of living conditions. Secondly, Don Bosco saw how wealth was becoming the monopoly of ruthless capitalists. Employers imposed unjust labor contracts on individual, defenseless workers, and crudely violated provisions

for the Sunday rest. These abuses were bound to produce disastrous results; workers lived in misery, lost their faith, and fell prey to subversive principles. Hence Don Bosco deemed it necessary for the clergy to draw closer to the working class to guide it." (BM IV, 55-56).

Turning to the poor youth with the intention of working for moral salvation and thus cooperating in the Christian construction of the new society was precisely the natural and primary effect and consequence of the intuition he had of this society and its future.

But one should not look for technical formulas in Don Bosco's words. Don Bosco spoke only of the abuse of wealth. He spoke about it with such insistence, with such force of expression and extraordinary originality of concept, as to reveal not only the acuity of his diagnosis of the evils of the century, but also the intrepid approach of the doctor who wants to cure them. He indicated the remedy in the Christian use of wealth, in awareness of its social function. Wealth is much abused, he repeated incessantly. The rich must be reminded of their duty before catastrophe occurs.

Justice and charity

Mentioning the work done in Turin by Can. Cottolengo and Don Bosco in Turin, a professor at the Institute of Political Science at the University of Turin admits the good done by these two saints, but then expresses the opinion that "this

aspect of the Piedmontese charitable movement, despite the remarkable results achieved, has been historically negative" because more than any other it would have contributed to halting the progress implicit in the action of the popular masses who claimed their rights.

It is his opinion that "the activities of these two Piedmontese saints were vitiated by the basic concept that moved both of them, whereby everything was abandoned into the merciful hands of divine providence" (ibid.). They would have remained estranged from the real movements of the masses and their rights, bound as they were to the image of a society made up, by force of circumstance, of nobility and people, of rich and proletariat, where the wealthy had to be merciful and the poor humble and patient. In short, St J. B. Cottolengo and St J. Bosco would not have realised the problem of the changing classes.

I cannot stop here to consider Cottolengo's case. I will only point out that his intervention responded to a burning experience that immediately led him to do something, as the Good Samaritan of the Gospel had done (Lk 10:29-37). Woe if the Good Samaritan had waited for the change in society to intervene. The man on the Jericho road would have died! "The charity of Christ impels us" (2 Cor 5:14) was to be the action programme of St Joseph Benedict Cottolengo. Everyone has a mission in life. Action on the effects of evil does not negate the recognition of the need to go to the causes. But it is still the most urgent thing to do. And then Cottolengo was thinking not only about this, but about much more.

Don Bosco's intervention in the social question was guided by a fundamental option: for the poor, for the facts, and for dialogue with those who, even if on the other side, could be induced to do something.

Don Bosco's contribution

As an educator priest, Don Bosco made a choice for poor and abandoned youth, and went beyond the purely charitable ideal, preparing youth to be able to honestly assert their rights.

His first activities were mainly for the benefit of poor shop assistants and workshop labourers. His interventions, which today could be described as trade unionist in nature, led him into direct relations with the bosses of these young people to conclude "work lease contracts" with them.

Then, realising that this help did not solve the problems except in limited cases, he began to set up arts and trades workshops, small businesses where the finished products under the guidance of a head of trade would benefit the students themselves. It was a matter of organising apprenticeships at home, so that young apprentices could earn their bread without being exploited by their masters. Finally he moved on to the idea of a head of trade who was himself not the master of the workshop or a wage earner in the school, but a lay religious, a master of a trade who could give the young apprentice, selflessly, full-time and by vocation, a complete professional and Christian education.

The vocational schools he dreamt of, and which were later implemented by his Successors, were an important contribution to the solution of the worker question. He was neither the first nor the only one in that endeavour; he did, however, put his own spin on it, especially by harmonising his institution with the nature of the times and imparting his own educational method to it.

It is therefore not surprising that great Catholic sociologists of the last century paid attention to Don Bosco. Bishop Charles Emil Freppel (1827-1891), bishop of Angers, a man of great culture and Member of the French Chamber, said on 2 February 1884, in a speech in Parliament on the worker question: "Vincent de Paul alone has done more for the solution of the worker questions of his time than all the writers of the century of Louis XIV. And at this moment in Italy, a religious, Don Bosco, whom you saw in Paris, succeeds better in preparing the solution to the worker question than all the speakers in the Italian Parliament. This is the indisputable truth" (cf. Journal officiel de la République française... Chambre. Débats parlementaires, 3 février 1884, p.

280).

A testimony that needs no further commentary...

Patagonia, in the letters of the first missionaries

Arrival in Patagones and start of the work

The first Salesians finally established their mission in Patagonia on 20 January 1880. Accompanied by Monsignor Antonio Espinosa, vicar of Archbishop Federico Aneyros, Fr Giuseppe Fagnano, Fr Emilio Rizzo, Fr Luigi Chiaria, catechist Bro. Luciani and another “young pupil of theirs”, who has remained unknown, arrived in Carmen de Patagones; with them were also four Daughters of Mary Help of Christians: Giovanna Borgo, Angela Vallese, Angiolina Cassolo and Laura Rodriguez.

The missionaries committed themselves to the catechesis and formation of the inhabitants of Patagones and Viedma by opening a college dedicated to St Joseph, while the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians founded an institute dedicated to Santa Maria de Las Indias. Expeditions were then launched to the colonies along the Rio Negro, with the aim of guaranteeing spiritual and catechetical support to the emigrants living in those regions and, at the same time, to systematically start catechesis for the conversion of the native communities of Patagonia.

The presence of the Salesians in Argentina was favoured and followed with interest by the Argentine government, which was obviously not driven in this choice by a fervent desire to see the indigenous communities converted to Christianity, but by the need to calm public opinion outraged

by the indiscriminate killings and the sale of prisoners: the military campaigns of 1879 to expand the borders had clashed with the resistance of the communities living in the territories of the Pampas and Patagonia.

Habits and customs of the indigenous communities of Patagonia

Getting to know the customs, culture and beliefs of the communities they intended to convert was an important task for the first missionaries: Fr Giacomo Costamagna, during his exploratory mission to Patagones in 1879, noted that, once he had crossed the Rio Colorado, he had come across a tree "laden with drapes, or better put, rags, which the Indians had hung as votive offerings." The missionary explained that the tree was not considered a deity, but simply the abode "of the gods or good spirits" and that the rags were supposed to be a kind of offering to appease them and make them benevolent. Costamagna later discovered that communities worshipped a "supreme God" called Gùnechen.

Knowledge increased over the years. With time, the missionaries realised that the communities in Patagonia believed in a "Supreme Being" who administered and ruled the universe and that their concept of a benevolent deity, however – when compared to the Christian one – appeared confused, as it was often not possible to "distinguish the principle of good, which is God, from the evil genius, which is the devil". The members of the community only feared "the influences of the evil mind", so that in the end the Indians only implored the evil deity to refrain from all evil.

The missionaries sadly noted that the indigenous communities "know nothing to ask the Lord about spiritual things" and also described how the illness and death of a community member was dealt with. According to the common belief, the demon, called Gualicho, took possession of the sick and, in the case of the death of the sick person, the demon "had won": "and so they weep, pray and sing lamentations accompanied by a thousand exorcisms, with which they pretend to obtain that the evil genius leave the deceased in peace."

Once the corpse was buried, the period of mourning began, which usually lasted six days in which the Indians "threw themselves with their faces to the ground" and sang "a kind of lamentation"; living where the deceased had resided and coming into contact with any of his personal effects was strongly discouraged, because Gualicho had lived there.

There were no shared cemeteries and above the graves it was possible to see "either two or three skeletons of horses'", which were sacrificed to the deceased to be of help and support to him in the afterlife. The horses were thus killed above the grave, leaving the corpses there so that the dead could enjoy their flesh, while the saddle, various supplies and jewellery were buried with the corpse.

In ordinary life, only the richest had square, mud-brick dwellings, with nothing "but the door to enter them, and an opening in the middle of the roof for light and for the smoke to go out", while the communities along the Rio Negro were established by rivers or lagoons and the dwellings were mostly simple tents: "horse or guanaco leather suspended above with a few sticks fixed in the ground". For those who had surrendered, the Argentine government had ordered them to build themselves "a more or less large room usually made of wolfsbane, plants with which the field abounds in damp places". The most fortunate had built houses with willow poles and mortar.

In 1883, the missionaries noted: "Nowadays, and especially in the bad season, it is rare to see an Indian not dressed from head to toe, even among those who have not yet surrendered. The men dress more or less like ours, minus the cleanliness, which they do not have, and the trousers they wear ordinarily like the Garci, in the manner, as they say, of Ciripà. The poorest, if they have nothing else, wrap themselves in a kind of mantle of the most ordinary cloth. The women wear the manta, and it is a surcoat, which covers the whole body." The women remained faithful to the traditional costumes for longer: "the women have the ambition to wear large silver earrings, several rings on their fingers, and a

kind of bracelet on their wrists, made of silver filigree with several loops around the arm. Some of them and the more affluent also wear several turns of filigree over their chests. They are by nature very shy, and when any unknown stranger approaches their home, they hastily hide."

Marriages followed tradition: the groom would give his future wife's parents "various precious objects in gold and silver, such as rings, bracelets, stirrups, brakes and the like", or he could simply pay "a sum of money agreed between them": fathers would only give their daughters in marriage for money, and what is more, the groom was obliged to stay at the bride's home and provide for the maintenance of the entire family.

Polygamy was widespread among the chiefs or caciques and consequently, as Fr Costamagna stated in a letter published in January 1880, it was difficult to convince them to renounce it in order to become Christians.

Evangelising the native communities: "you will have to win these friends of yours not by blows but with gentleness and love".

A fundamental role in the work of catechesis and evangelisation in Patagonia was played by Fr Domenico Milanesio, also for his work as mediator between the communities and the Argentine government.

The missionary joined the confreres on 8 November 1880 after being appointed vicar of the parish of Our Lady of Mercede in Viedma, and in a letter to Fr Michele Rua dated 28 March 1881 he recounted his first mission among "the Indians in the area", underlining the considerable difficulties encountered in the attempt to instruct and catechise: the native communities lived far from each other and Fr Domenico had to go in person to their *toldos*, or homes. Sometimes he managed to gather several families together and then catechesis was held outside where, sitting on the lawns, the Patagonians listened to the catechism lesson.

Fr Domenico recounted that even a simple prayer

such as "My Jesus, mercy", which he considered simple and easy to memorise, actually took a long time to understand: although it was repeated between fifty and a hundred times, it was often forgotten within a couple of days. However, the desire to see the native communities converted and sincerely Christian was more than sufficient motivation to continue the mission: "But our Religion commands us to love them as our brothers, as children of the Heavenly Father, as souls redeemed by the Blood of Jesus Christ; and therefore with patient, loving charity that hopes everything, we say, we repeat things one day, two, ten, twenty until it is enough, and finally we succeed in making them learn the necessary things. If you could only see how happy they are afterwards; it is a real consolation for them and for us, which rewards us for everything."

It was not easy to get these communities to accept the truths of the Catholic faith: Fr Domenico, in a report published in the Bulletin in November 1883, recounted that during a mission to the community of the cacique (chief) Willamay, near Norquin, he seriously risked his life when the assembly to which he was preaching began to discuss the teachings he had received up to that point. Willamay himself, describing Milanesio as "a dream teller in the manner of old women", withdrew to his *toldo*, while there were those who sided with the missionary and those who were of the same opinion as the cacique. Faced with this situation, Milanesio preferred to remain aloof and as he himself noted, "I then stood silently waiting for the outcome of that agitation of minds, which was a harbinger of more sinister things. At a certain point, I truly believed that the time had come for me to at least take a beating from those barbarians, and perhaps even leave my own skin among them." Fortunately, the party that supported the missionary prevailed in the end, so the Salesian was able to conclude his catechesis to the thanks of the community.

Catechising these populations was not an easy task and the Salesians were hindered by the Argentine military,

whose attitudes and habits offered negative examples of Christian living.

Fr Fagnano recorded: "The conversion of the Indians is not so easy to obtain when they are obliged to live with certain soldiers who do not give them a good example of morality; and it is not possible to enter their *toldos* for the moment without risk to one's life, because these savages use all means to take revenge against the Christians who, according to them, have come to take possession of their fields and their livestock." The same Salesian also wrote of two communities who, having settled a short distance from an Argentine camp where "liquor shops" had been opened, indulged "in the vice of drunkenness". Fr Fagnano reproached the military who, "for cowardly gain", laid the groundwork to make the Indians even more likely to indulge in "bestial disorder".

Fr Fagnano and Fr Milanesio continued, however, to approach, catechise and form these communities, to "instruct them in the truths of the Gospel, educate them by word, but more by good example", despite the risks, so that, as Don Bosco wished, they could become "good Christians and upright citizens."

Giacomo Bosco

What are the requirements for entering the Salesian Society

In various parts of the world the time is approaching when some young people, attracted by God's grace, are preparing to say their "Fiat" in the following of Christ, according to the charism that God has instituted through St John Bosco. What would be the dispositions with which they should approach

joining the Salesian Society of St John Bosco? The saint himself tells us in a letter addressed to his sons (MB VIII, 828-830).

On Pentecost Sunday [1867] Don Bosco addressed a letter to all Salesians concerning the goal a candidate should have in mind when seeking admission to the Salesian Society. He also stated that the Society's definitive approval might not be long in coming. However, pertinent documents on hand give no such assurance. Since Don Bosco's personally written letter is dated "May 24, Feast of Mary, Help of Christians," we feel that it may have been this feast which inspired him to write and perhaps gave him a more vivid vision of the future. Be that as it may, he had several copies of his letter made, and then he himself changed the date and addressed each respectively: To Father Bonetti and to My Dear Sons of St. Francis de Sales at Mirabello; To Father Lemoyne and to My Dear Sons of St. Francis de Sales at Lanzo. He also signed them himself and added the postscript: "Let the director read and explain as he judges necessary."

Here is the copy addressed to the Salesians at the Oratory:

"To Father Rua and to My Beloved Sons of St Francis de Sales in Turin.

Before long our Society may be definitively approved. I therefore feel the need frequently to communicate with you, my dear sons. Being unable at times to do so personally, I will try to reach you by letter.

First I shall treat of the general purpose of our Society, leaving the explanation of our rules to some other occasion.

The primary aim of our Society is the sanctification of its members. On entering it, therefore, everyone must discard any other intention and concern. It would be wrong to enter in order to enjoy a tranquil life, complete one's education, or free oneself of parental or other authority. This would hardly

be a response to Christ's call. Such a person would be seeking temporal advantages, not his spiritual good. Our Savior praised the Apostles and promised them an eternal kingdom not because they had abandoned the world, but because they had abandoned it in order to follow Him through thick and thin; this they indeed did, wearing themselves out with work, penance, and suffering, and finally undergoing martyrdom.

It would also be wrong for anyone to enter or remain in this Society with the notion that he is necessary. **From the Superior General down to the last member, let everyone keep well in mind that nobody is necessary to the Society.** God alone is its head, its absolute, necessary master. Its members must therefore turn to Him as to their head, true master and rewarder. Those who join this Society should work, obey, and abandon all worldly possessions exclusively for God's sake so that, at the end of their lives, they can tell their Savior, *"Behold, we have left all and followed You. What then shall we have?"* [Matt. 19:27]

By saying that **one should enter the Society only to serve God more perfectly and do good to himself**, we mean his true good, his spiritual eternal good. Anyone who seeks an easy, comfortable life in our Society is not rightly motivated. Our basic motive must stem from Our Lord's words that whoever wishes to be His disciple must sell his possessions, give to the poor, and then follow Him. But where can we follow Him, since He had nowhere to lay His weary head? He explains that we must follow Him in prayer, in penance, especially in self-denial, in accepting our daily crosses ... *"Let him deny his very self, take up his cross each day, and follow Me."* [Luke 9, 23] Till when? Till death and, if necessary, even till death on the cross.

This is what one does in our Society when he wears himself out in the sacred ministry, in teaching or in other priestly work till death, till even a violent death through imprisonment, exile, sword, fire, or water. Then, after having suffered and

died with Jesus Christ on earth, he will join Him in the happiness of heaven.

This is how I understand Saint Paul's words to all Christians:
"Whoever wishes to rejoice with Christ must also suffer with Christ."

After entering the Society with these good dispositions, a member must be undemanding and willing to accept any task-even the most menial- readily and cheerfully because what matters before God is not the task itself but the intention with which it is done. All jobs are equally noble because they are all equally meritorious in God's sight.

My dear sons, trust your superiors. They shall have to give God a strict account of your actions. Hence they study your abilities and inclinations and use them in a manner compatible with your strength, but always in accordance with what seems best for God's greater glory and the good of souls.

If applicants enter our Society with these intentions, our houses will certainly be an earthly paradise. Peace and concord will reign, charity will guide superiors, and obedience and respect will anticipate their decisions, their undertakings, and even their wishes. Thus we shall have a family of brothers around a father, all united to promote God's glory on earth so as to be with Him some day and praise Him in the immense glory of the blessed in heaven.

May God abundantly bless you and your efforts. May He sanctify your activities and help you persevere in doing good.

Turin, 9 June 1867, Pentecost Day.
Affectionately yours in Jesus Christ,
Father John Bosco

Servant of God Akash Bashir

On 25 February, we celebrated the feast of our Salesian protomartyrs, Bishop Aloysius Versiglia and Father Callistus Caravario. Martyrdom, since the time of the first Christian community, has always been a clear sign of our faith, similar to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for our salvation. Currently, in our Salesian Congregation, we are dealing with the cause of martyrdom of Akash Bashir, a young Salesian former pupil from Pakistan, who gave his life for the salvation of his parish community at the age of 20. The diocesan investigation phase for the beatification process ended on 15 March, the anniversary of his martyrdom.

Pakistan is one of the most extremist Muslim countries in the world. The Islamic Republic of Pakistan emerged after World War II, with independence from India in 1947. However, Christians were already present in this region thanks to Dominican and Franciscan missionaries. Currently, Christians in Pakistan make up about 1.6% of the total population (Catholics and Anglicans), or about 4 million people. Religious minorities face daily discrimination, marginalisation, lack of equal opportunities in employment and education, and religious discrimination and sometimes persecution persist, making religious freedom a critical issue.

Despite the challenges, Christian communities in Pakistan demonstrate resilience and hope. Churches and Christian organisations play a key role in providing support and promoting interreligious unity, and the Salesians have contributed significantly with their presence.

Akash Bashir's life began in a small village near Afghanistan, in a family of five children, he being the third. Akash, born during the summer on 22 June 1994, faced extreme

weather and survived with difficulty. Despite the difficulties of the adverse climate, family poverty and poor nutrition, these challenges helped shape his character.

Akash's dream of serving in the army was thwarted by educational and financial insecurity. The Bashir family decided to migrate eastwards, to the Punjab, to the city of Lahore, close to the border with India, specifically to the Christian district of Youhanabad, where the Salesians run a boarding school, a primary school and a technical school. In September 2010, Akash Bashir entered the Salesian Don Bosco Technical and Youth Centre.

In a difficult political-religious context, Akash volunteered as a security guard in Youhanabad Parish in December 2014. His role as a security guard at St John's Parish consisted of guarding the entrance to the courtyard and controlling the worshippers at the entrance gate, as the churches are protected by a wall with only one entrance door. On 15 March 2015, during the celebration of Mass, Akash was on duty.

That day was the Fourth Sunday of Lent ("Laetare" Sunday) celebrated by 1200-1500 faithful attending the Mass, presided over by Father Francis Gulzar, the parish priest. At 11.09 a.m., a first terrorist attack hit the Anglican community less than 500 metres from the Catholic church. A minute later, at 11.10 a.m., a second detonation took place right at the entrance to the courtyard of the Catholic Parish, where Akash Bashir, as a volunteer security guard, was on duty.

His Eminence, Cardinal Ángel Fernández, the Rector Major of the Salesians, in the introduction to his biography describes Akash's martyrdom in these words:

"On 15 March 2015, while Holy Mass was being celebrated in St John's parish, the group of security guards made up of young volunteers, of which Akash Bashir was a member, faithfully guarded the entrance. Something unusual happened that day. Akash noticed that a person with explosives under his clothes was trying to enter the church. He

restrained him, spoke to him and tried to stop him from continuing, but realising that he could not hold him back he hugged him tightly saying, "I will die, but I will not let you enter the church." So the young man and the suicide bomber died together. Our young man offered his life saving thundreds of people, boys, girls, mothers, teenagers and grown men who were praying inside the church at that moment. Akash was 20 years old."

After the explosion, four people lay dying on the ground: the man with the explosives, a vegetable vendor, a six-year-old girl and Akash Bashir. His sacrifice prevented the death toll from being much higher. The Gospel proclaimed that day recalled Jesus' words to Nicodemus: "For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God" (John 3: 20-21). Akash sealed these words with his blood as a young Christian.

On 18 March, the Archbishop of Lahore presided over an ecumenical funeral celebration for Akash and the Anglican Christians, attended by 7,000-10,000 faithful. Afterwards, the body was transferred to the Youhanabad cemetery, where it was buried in a tomb built by Akash's father.

The life of Akash Bashir is a powerful testimony to the early Christian communities surrounded by philosophies, adverse cultures and persecution. The communities of the Acts of the Apostles were also minorities, but with strong faith and unlimited courage, similar to the Christians in Pakistan.

The shining example of Salesian Past Pupil Akash Bashir continues to inspire the world. He lived the words of Jesus: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13).

On 15 March 2022, the diocesan enquiry officially began, marking a significant step towards the possible beatification of the first Pakistani citizen. The conclusion of the diocesan enquiry on 15 March 2024 marks a fundamental

milestone on the path to beatification and canonisation.

I finish by recalling again the words of His Eminence, Card. Ángel Fernández on Akash Bashir:

"To be a saint today is possible! And it is undoubtedly the most obvious charismatic sign of the Salesian educational system. In a special way, Akash is the flag, the sign, the voice of so many Christians who are attacked, persecuted, humiliated and martyred in non-Catholic countries. Akash is the voice of so many courageous young people who manage to give their lives for the faith despite the difficulties of life, poverty, religious extremism, indifference, social inequality and discrimination. The life and martyrdom of this young Pakistani, only 20 years old, makes us recognise the power of God's Holy Spirit, alive, present in the least expected places, in the humble, in the persecuted, in the young, in God's little ones. His Cause for Beatification is for us a sign of hope and an example of youthful holiness unto martyrdom."

*Fr Gabriel de Jesús CRUZ TREJO, sdb
vice-postulator of the cause of Akash Bashir*

Prayers and invocations attracting indulgences

We sometimes here the question, what is the most powerful prayer?

The wording is certainly wrong, because it leads us to think of a magical formula which has power over God, forcing him to respond positively to our request.

The more correct question would be: what is the prayer most pleasing to God?

Surely it is the one made with our whole heart, not just with our lips.

But just as so often we do not know how to pray, just as Jesus taught the apostles the "Our Father", the Church also suggests prayers. And they are not chosen at random but have their origin in salvation history, whether biblical or in the lives of the saints. And because of their high doctrinal value, some have been enriched with indulgences.

But what is an indulgence?

We read this explanation in the *Enchiridion indulgentiarum* (Handbook of Indulgences):

"An indulgence is the remission before God of the temporal penalty for sins, already remitted with regard to the sin, which the faithful, duly disposed and under certain conditions, acquire through the intervention of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, authoritatively dispenses and applies the treasure of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints."

More explicitly: it is not enough to have obtained forgiveness of sin in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, since reparation must be made for the damage done (because there is damage, even if it is not immediately visible), a reparation that is not always achieved through the penance imposed by the confessor.

This also occurs in human relationships. For example, if a journalist has written falsities regarding someone, it is not enough to acknowledge the mistake, he must make reparation, i.e. retract his error. Or if someone has physically destroyed something it is not enough to acknowledge the fault, he must repair the damage. Or if a thief has acknowledged his crime and received his sentence, it is not enough for him to repair the damage, that is, to return the stolen property. It is an act of justice which we understand very well when we are the victims.

Prayers that attract an indulgence, if they are done with

faith, obtain the remission due to sins partially or even fully (they free us in part or in full from temporal punishment). St John Bosco held them in high esteem, and did not miss an opportunity to propose not only prayers but also works that gained an indulgence.

Below we offer a list of prayers that attract an indulgence, presenting their use, origin, where they are found in the *Enchiridion indulgentiarum* (Manual of Indulgences) and the source of the text. May the Lord grant that these prayers help us progress in our spiritual life.

Access the list of prayers and invocations by clicking [HERE](#).

The childhood of a future saint: Saint Francis de Sales

Francis was born on 21 August 1567 at the Château de Sales, in Thorens, near Annecy in Savoy, in a landscape of mountains and country valleys.

Francis' father was a loyal, chivalrous, generous and at the same time emotional and impulsive man. By virtue of his wisdom and sense of fairness, he was often chosen as an arbitrator in disputes and trials. He was also very welcoming towards the poor in the neighbourhood, to the point that he would give his soup to a poor man rather than send him begging. Of his mother Frances, St Joan de Chantal drew this admirable portrait:

She was one of the most remarkable ladies of her time. She was gifted with a noble and generous soul, but pure, innocent and simple, like a true mother and nurturer of the poor. She was modest, humble and good-natured with everyone, very quiet in

her home; she governed her family wisely, concerned to make them live in the fear of God.

At the birth of Francis, her eldest son, she was only fifteen years old, while her husband was over forty. This age difference was not uncommon at the time, especially among nobles, as marriage was considered first and foremost as an alliance between two families in order to have children and enlarge their lands and titles. Sentiment counted for little in those days, which did not prevent this apparently ill-combined union from turning out to be solid and happy.

Motherhood announced itself as particularly difficult. The mother-to-be prayed before the Holy Shroud, then kept in Chambéry, the capital of Savoy. Francis came into the world two months before his natural due date and, fearing for his survival, was quickly baptised.

On Francis, the eldest son, were pinned all the hopes of his father, who envisaged a prestigious career for him in the service of his country. This project would be a source of difficulty throughout his youth, marked by a tension between obedience to his father and his own particular vocation.

The first six years (1567-1573)

When little Francis was born, his young mother was unable to breastfeed him, so she turned to a peasant girl from the village. Three months later, his godmother, his maternal grandmother took care of him for some time.

"My mother and I", he would one day write, "are one". Indeed, the child "is not yet able to use his will, nor can he love anything but the breast and face of his dear mother." It is a model of abandonment to God's will:

He does not think at all of wanting to be on one side or the other and desires nothing more than to be in the arms of his mother, with whom he thinks he forms one; nor does he care at all to conform his own will to that of his mother, because he does not perceive it, nor does he care to have it, and he lets

his mother move, do and decide what she thinks is good for him.

Francis de Sales also stated that children do not laugh before the fortieth day. Only after forty days do they laugh, that is, they are comforted, because, as Virgil says, "only then do they begin to know their mother."

Little Francis was not weaned until November 1569, when he was two years and three months old. At that age, he had already begun to walk and talk. Learning to walk happens progressively and it often happens that children fall to the ground, which is not at all serious, because "while they feel their mother holding them by the sleeves, they walk briskly and wander here and there, without being surprised by the tumbles that their insecure legs make them take." Sometimes it is the father who observes his child, still weak and uncertain as he takes his first steps, and says to him: "take your time, my child"; if he then falls, he encourages him by saying, "he has taken a leap, he is wise, don't cry"; then he approaches him and gives him his hand.

On the other hand, learning to walk as well as to speak happens by imitation. It is 'by dint of hearing the mother and babbling with her' that the child learns to speak the same language.

Childhood adventures and games

Childhood is the time of discovery and exploration. The little Savoyard observed the nature around him and was enraptured by it. In Sales, on the mountain slope to the east, everything is grandiose, imposing, austere; but along the valley, on the contrary, everything is verdant, fertile and pleasant. At the castle of Brens, in the Chablais, where he probably made several stays between the ages of three and five, little Francis could admire the splendour of Lake Geneva. At Annecy, the lake surrounded by hills and mountains never left him indifferent, as the numerous literary images of navigation show. It is easy to see that Francis de Sales was

not a man born in the city.

The world of animals, at that time still very much found in castles, towns and even cities, is an enchantment and a source of instruction for the child. Few authors have spoken of it as abundantly as he did. Much of his (often legendary) information he drew from his readings; however, personal observation must have counted for quite a bit, for instance when he writes that "dawn makes the cock crow; the morning star gladdens the sick, invites the birds to sing."

Little Francis considered at length and admired the work of the bees, observed and listened attentively to the swallows, the doves, the hen and the frogs. How many times did he have to witness the feeding of pigeons in the castle courtyard!

Above all, the child needs to manifest his desire to grow up through play, which is also the school of living together and a way of taking possession of his surroundings. Did Francis rock on wooden horses? In any case, he recounts in one of his sermons that "children swing on wooden horses, call them horses, neigh for them, run, jump, amuse themselves with this childish amusement." And here is a personal recollection from his childhood: "When we were children, with what care we assembled pieces of tiles, of wood, of mud to build little houses and tiny buildings! And if someone destroyed them we felt lost and cried."

But discovering the world around us does not always happen without risk and learning to walk holds surprises. Fear is sometimes a good counsellor, especially when there is a real risk. If children see a barking dog, "they immediately start screaming and do not stop until they are close to their mother. In her arms they feel safe and as long as they shake her hand they think no one can hurt them." Sometimes, however, the danger is imaginary. Little Francis was afraid of the dark, and here is how he was cured of his fear of the dark: "Little by little, I endeavoured to go alone, with my heart armed only with trust in God, to places where my imagination frightened me; in the end, I became so

refreshed that I considered the darkness and solitude of the night delightful, because of this presence of God, which in such solitude becomes even more desirable.”

Family upbringing

The first education fell to the mother. An exceptional intimacy was established between the young mother and her first-born son. It was said that she was inclined to cuddle her son, who, moreover, looked a lot like her. She preferred to see him dressed as a pageboy rather than in a play costume. His mother took care of his religious upbringing, and, anxious to teach him her “little creed”, took him with her to the parish church in Thorens.

For her part, the child experienced all the affection of which he was the object, and the child’s first word would be this: “My God and my mother, they love me so much.” “The love of mothers towards their children is always more tender than that of fathers”, Francis de Sales would write, because in his view, “it costs them more.” According to a witness, it was he who sometimes consoled his mother in her moments of melancholy by telling her, “Let us turn to the good Lord, my good mother, and he will help us.”

From his father he began to learn a “just and reasonable spirit.” He made him understand the reason for what was asked of him, teaching him to be responsible for his acts, to never lie, to avoid games of chance, but not those of dexterity and intelligence. He was certainly very pleased with the answer his son gave him when he suddenly asked him what he was thinking about: “My father, I think of God and of being a good man.”

To strengthen his character, his father imposed on him a manly lifestyle, the avoidance of bodily comforts, but also open-air games with his cousins Amé, Louis and Gaspard. Above all, Francis spent his childhood and youth with them, at play and at boarding school. He learned to ride horses and handle hunting weapons. He was also given boys from the village as companions, but carefully chosen.

A usually wise and quiet boy, Francis nevertheless manifested surprising fits of rage in certain circumstances. On the occasion of a Protestant's visit to the family castle, he gave vent to his animosity against the chickens, whom he started clubbing, shouting at the top of his voice: "Up! Up! At the heretics!" It would take time and effort to convert to 'Salesian gentleness'.

Entering school

At the age of six or seven, the child reaches the use of reason. For the Church, he or she now has the ability to discern good and evil, and, for humanists, can begin to attend primary school. This is the age at which children in noble families usually pass from the hands of women to those of men, from mother to father, from governess to guardian or tutor. The age of reason also marked, for a small minority of children, entry into a school or boarding school. Now Francis showed remarkable dispositions to study, indeed such impatience that he begged to be sent to school without delay.

In October 1573, Francis was sent to the boarding school in La Roche, in the company of his cousins Amé, Louis et Gaspard. At the tender age of six, Francis was then separated from his family. He stayed there for two years to do his "little grammar school". The children housed in the town, placed under the supervision of a particular pedagogue, mingled during the day in the mass of three hundred pupils attending the boarding school. A servant of the family took special care of Francis, who was the youngest.

According to what we know of the schools of the time, the children began to read and write, using syllabaries and the first elements of grammar, to recite prayers and selected texts by heart, to learn the rudiments of Latin grammar, the declensions and conjugations of verbs. The commitment to memory, still very much dependent on the didactic method in use, was concentrated above all on religious texts, but emphasis was already placed on the quality of diction, a characteristic trait of humanist

education. In terms of moral education, which then occupied an important place in the humanist education of students, it borrowed its models more from pagan antiquity than from Christian authors.

From the very beginning of his studies at the college at La Roche, Francis behaved as an excellent pupil. But this first contact with the scholastic world may have left him with some less pleasant memories, as he himself told a friend. Had it never happened to him to unintentionally miss school and be "in the situation in which good pupils sometimes find themselves who, having arrived late, have cut certain lessons short"?

They would certainly like to return to the compulsory timetable and win back the benevolence of their professors; but oscillating between fear and hope, they cannot decide at what time to appear before the irritated professor; should they avoid his current anger by sacrificing the hoped-for forgiveness, or obtain his forgiveness by exposing themselves to the risk of being punished? In such hesitation, the child's spirit must struggle to discern what is most advantageous to him.

Two years later, still with his cousins, there he was at the boarding school [college] in Annecy, where Francis would study for three years. With his cousins, he stayed in the city with a lady, whom he called his aunt. After the two years of grammar school at La Roche, he entered the third year of classical studies and made rapid progress. Among the exercises used at the college were declamations. The boy excelled in them, "because he had a noble bearing, a fine physique, an attractive face and an excellent voice."

It seems that discipline was traditional and severe, and we know that a regent behaved like a real chastiser. But Francis' conduct left nothing to be desired; one day he himself would ask to be chastised in place of his cousin Gaspard who cried in fear.

The most important religious event for a child was First Communion, the sacrament by which “we are united and joined to divine goodness and receive the true life of our souls.” As he would later say about communion, he had prepared “his little heart to be the dwelling place of Him” who wanted to “possess” it whole. On the same day he received the sacrament of confirmation, the sacrament by which we are united with God “like the soldier with his captain.” On that occasion, his parents gave him Fr Jean Déage as his tutor, a gruff, even choleric man, but totally devoted to his pupil, whom he would accompany throughout his education.

On the threshold of adolescence

The years of Francis’ childhood and boyhood in Savoy would leave an indelible mark on him, but they would also arouse in his soul the first seeds of a particular vocation. Committed to giving others a good example with discretion, he intervened with his companions with appropriate initiatives. Still very young, he liked to gather them together to teach them the catechism lesson he was learning. After the games, he would sometimes take them to the church in Thorens, where they had become children of God. On holiday days, he would take them with him for walks in the woods and by the river to sing and pray.

But his intellectual training was only just beginning. At the end of three years at the boarding school in Annecy, he knew everything that Savoy could teach him. His father decided to send him to Paris, the capital of knowledge, to make him a “scholar”. But to which college should he send such a gifted son? His choice was first the college at Navarre attended by the nobility. But Francis cleverly intervened with the help of his mother. At his son’s insistence, his father finally agreed to send him to the Jesuit Fathers’ college in Clermont.

Significantly, before leaving, Francis asked to receive the tonsure, a practice still permitted at the time for boys destined for an ecclesiastical career, which,

however, must not have pleased his father, who did not wish an ecclesiastical vocation for his eldest son.

Having reached the threshold of adolescence, the boy began a new stage in his life. "Childhood is beautiful" he would one day write, "but to always want to be a child is to make a wrong choice, because a child of a hundred is despised. To begin to learn is very praiseworthy, but he who begins with the intention of never perfecting himself would be acting against reason." After receiving in Savoy the seeds of these "manifold gifts of nature and grace", Francis would find in Paris great opportunities to cultivate and develop them.

Episcopal ordination of Cardinal Ángel Fernández Artime

The Holy See announced in a press release issued by the Press Office on 5 March 2024 that Pope Francis has decided on the episcopal ordination of Cardinal Ángel Fernández Artime, sdb, Rector Major of the Salesian Society of Saint John Bosco, assigning him the titular See of Ursona, with archiepiscopal dignity. It is an ancient episcopal see in Spain (4th century), which was located in the city of Ossuna, suffragan of the archdiocese of Seville, and since 1969 has been counted among the titular episcopal sees of the Catholic Church.

The episcopal ordination takes place in accordance with Pope John XXIII's Apostolic Motu Proprio, *Cum Gravissima*, on the episcopal dignity to be conferred on all cardinals (15 April 1962), and is scheduled for 20 April next.

He is the first Rector Major to be appointed cardinal and also

the first Rector Major to be appointed archbishop of the Catholic Church.

Following this elevation to the cardinalate, various events have taken place and others will follow:

- 9 July 2023, at the end of the Angelus, Pope Francis announced his creation as a cardinal;
- 30 September 2023, he was created a cardinal, receiving the cardinal's biretta and ring in the Ordinary Public Consistory;
- 4 October 2023, he took office in the Roman Curia, being appointed a member of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (DIVCSVA);
- 17 December 2023, he took possession of the diaconate of Mary Help of Christians in Via Tuscolana;
- 20 April 2024, he is scheduled for episcopal ordination; it will be done through the laying on of hands and the prayer of ordination by Card. Emil Paul TSCHERRIG, Apostolic Nuncio Emeritus in Italy and in the Republic of San Marino, who will be joined by His Eminence Cardinal Cristóbal LÓPEZ ROMANO, Cristóbal LÓPEZ ROMERO, sdb, Archbishop of Rabat (Morocco) and Bishop Lucas VAN LOOY, sdb, Bishop Emeritus of Ghent (Belgium). The celebration will take place in the Papal Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome and will begin at 3.30 p.m;
- 16 August 2024, end of mandate as Rector Major and beginning of his service at the Holy See, according to the mission that will be entrusted to him.

His successor at the head of the Salesian Congregation will be elected at the 29th General Chapter of the Congregation (which will take place from 16 February to 12 April 2025), which has already been convoked, according to the Salesian Constitutions.

We wish our Rector Major, Cardinal Ángel, every success in his service to the Universal Church.