

Don Bosco and the titles of Our Lady

Don Bosco's devotion to Mary stems from a filial and vibrant relationship with Mary's maternal presence, which he experienced throughout every stage of his life. From the votive pillars erected during his childhood in Becchi, to the revered images in Chieri and Turin, and the pilgrimages he made with his boys to the sanctuaries of Piedmont and Liguria, each stop reveals a different title for the Virgin—Consolata, Addolorata, Immacolata, Madonna delle Grazie, and many others—that speaks to the faithful of protection, comfort, and hope. However, the title that would forever define his veneration was “Mary Help of Christians”: according to Salesian tradition, it was the Madonna herself who indicated it to him. On December 8, 1862, Don Bosco confided to the cleric Giovanni Cagliero: “Up until now,” he added, “we have celebrated the feast of the Immaculate Conception with solemnity and pomp, and on this day our first works of the festive oratories began. But the Madonna wants us to honor her under the title of Mary Help of Christians: the times are so sad that we truly need the Most Holy Virgin to help us preserve and defend the Christian faith.” (MB VII, 334)

Marian titles

To write an article today on the “Marian titles” under which Don Bosco venerated the Blessed Virgin during his life may seem out of place. Someone, in fact, might say: Isn't there just one Our Lady? What is the point of so many titles if not to create confusion? And then, after all, isn't Don Bosco's title for her Mary Help of Christians?

Leaving deeper reflections that justify these titles from a historical, theological and devotional point of view to the experts, we will content ourselves with a passage from *Lumen*

Gentium, the document on the Church of the Second Vatican Council, which reassures us, reminding us that Mary is our mother and that "her constant intercession continued to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and cultics, until they are led into the happiness of their true home. Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked by the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and Mediatrix." (*Lumen Gentium* 62).

These four titles admitted by the Council, well considered, encompass in synthesis a whole series of titles and invocations by which the Christian people have called Mary, titles that made Alessandro Manzoni exclaim

"O Virgin, O Lady, O All-holy One, what beautiful names every language holds up to thee: more than one proud people boast to be in thy gentle guardianship" (from *The Name of Mary*).

The Church's liturgy itself seems to understand and justify the praises raised to Mary by the Christian people, when it asks. "How shall we sing your praises, Holy Virgin Mary?"

So, let us leave doubts aside and go and see what Marian titles were dear to Don Bosco, even before he spread that of Mary Help of Christians throughout the world.

In his youth

The little niches scattered along city streets in many parts of Italy, the country chapels and pedestals found at road crossroads or at the entrance to private roads in our lands, are a heritage of popular faith that even today time has not erased.

It would be an arduous task to calculate exactly how many can be found on the roads of Piedmont. In the 'Becchi- Morialdo' area alone there are about twenty, and no less than fifteen in the Capriglio area.

They are mostly votive pedestals inherited from the old ones and restored several times. There are also more recent ones that document a piety that has not disappeared.

The oldest pedestal in the Becchi region appears to date back

to 1700. It was erected at the bottom of the 'plain' towards the *Mainito*, where the families living in the ancient *Scaiota*' later a Salesian farmstead, now undergoing renovation, used to meet.

This is the Consolata pedestal with a small statue of Our Lady of Consolation, always honoured with country flowers brought by devotees.

John Bosco must have passed by that pedestal many times, taking off his hat, perhaps bending the knee and murmuring a Hail Mary as his mother had taught him.

In 1958, the Salesians renovated the old pedestal and, with a solemn religious service, returned it to renewed worship by the community and the population.

That little statue of the Consolata may be the first effigy of Mary that Don Bosco worshipped outdoors in his lifetime.

In the old house

Without mentioning the churches in Morialdo and Capriglio, we do not know exactly which religious images hung on the walls in the Biglione farmstead or at the Casetta. We do know that later in Joseph's house, when Don Bosco went to stay there, he could see two old pictures on the walls of his bedroom, one of the Holy Family and the other of Our Lady of the Angels. So assured Sister Eulalia Bosco. Where did Joseph get them? Did John see them as a boy? The one of the Holy Family is still on display today in the middle room on the first floor of Joseph's house. It depicts St Joseph seated at his work table, with the Child in his arms, while Our Lady, standing on the other side, watches.

We also know that at the Cascina Moglia, near Moncucco, as a boy John used to say prayers and the rosary together with the owners' family in front of a small painting of Our Lady of Sorrows which is still kept at the Becchi on the first floor of Joseph's house in Don Bosco's room above the head of the bed. It is very blackened with a black frame outlined in gold on the inside.

At Castelnuovo John then had frequent occasions to go up to

the Church of Madonna del Castello (Our Lady of the Castle) to pray to the Blessed Virgin. On the Feast of the Assumption, the villagers carried the statue of the Madonna in procession. Not everyone knows that that statue, as well as the painting on the icon on the high altar, depict Our Lady of the Cincture, a devotion of the Augustinians.

In Chieri, John Bosco student and seminarian cleric prayed many times at the altar of Our Lady of Graces in the Cathedral of Santa Maria della Scala, at the altar of the Holy Rosary in the Church of San Domenico, and before the Immaculate Conception in the Seminary chapel.

So in his youth Don Bosco had the opportunity to venerate Mary Most Holy under the titles of the Consolata, Our Lady of Sorrows, Our Lady of Grace, Our Lady of the Rosary and the Immaculate.

In Turin

In Turin John Bosco had already gone to the Church of Our Lady of the Angels for the examination for admission to the Franciscan Order in 1834. He returned there several times to do the Spiritual Exercises, in preparation for Holy Orders, in the Church of the Visitation, and received Holy Orders in the Church of the Immaculate Conception at the Archiepiscopal Curia.

When he arrived at the Convitto he certainly often prayed before the image of the Annunciation in the first chapel on the right in the Church of St Francis of Assisi. On his way to the Duomo and entering, as is still the custom today, through the right-hand portal, how many times will he have paused for a moment in front of the ancient statue of the Madonna delle Grazie, known by the old Torinese as *La Madòna Granda*.

If we then think of the pilgrimages or walks that Don Bosco used to make with his rascals from Valdocco to Turin's Marian shrines in the days of the itinerant Oratory, then we can recall first of all the Sanctuary of the Consolata, the religious heart of Turin, full of memories of the first Oratory. Don Bosco took his youngsters many times to

the *Consolà*. And it was to the *Consolà* that he resorted in tears at the death of his mother.

But we cannot forget the city outings to Madonna del Pilone, Madonna di Campagna, to Monte dei Cappuccini, to the Church of the Nativity at Pozzo Strada, to the Church of the Graces at Crocetta.

The most spectacular pilgrimage of those early Oratory years was to Our Lady of Superga. That monumental Church dedicated to the Nativity of Mary reminded Don Bosco's youngsters that the Mother of God is 'like a dawn rising', a prelude to the coming of Christ.

So Don Bosco made his boys experience the mysteries of Mary's life through her most beautiful titles.

On the autumn walks

In 1850 Don Bosco began walks beyond Turin first to the Becchi and the surrounding area, then to the hills of Monferrato as far as Casale, of Alessandria as far as Tortona and in Liguria as far as Genoa.

In the early years his main, if not exclusive, destination was the Becchi and surroundings, where he celebrated the feast of the Rosary with solemnity in the little chapel erected on the ground floor of his brother Joseph's house in 1848.

The years 1857-64 were the golden years of the autumn walks, and the boys took part in them in ever larger groups, entering the villages with the brass band at their head, festively welcomed by the people and the local parish priests. They rested in barns, ate frugal peasant meals, held devout services in churches and in the evenings gave performances on an improvised stage.

In 1857 a pilgrimage destination was *Santa Maria di Vezzolano*, a sanctuary and abbey so dear to Don Bosco, located below the village of Albugnano, 5 km from Castelnuovo.

In 1861 it was the turn of the *sanctuary at Crea*, famous throughout Monferrato. On that same trip Don Bosco again took the boys to *Madonna del Pozzo* (Our Lady of the Well) at San Salvatore.

On 14 August 1862 from Vignale, where the youngsters were staying, Don Bosco led the happy group on a pilgrimage to the shrine of *Madonna delle Grazie* at Casorzo. A few days later, on 18th October, before leaving Alexandria, they went again to the cathedral to pray to *Madonna della Salve*, venerated with such piety by the Alexandrians, for a happy conclusion to their walk.

Also on the last walk of 1864 in Genoa, on the way back, between Serravalle and Mornese, a group led by Fr Cagliero went on a devout pilgrimage to the shrine of *Nostra Signora della Guardia*, in Gavi.

These pilgrimage-trips traced the vestiges of a popular religiosity characteristic of our people; they were the expression of a Marian devotion, which John Bosco had learnt from his mother.

And then again...

In the 1860s the title of Mary Help of Christians began to dominate Don Bosco's mind and heart, with the construction of the church he had dreamt of since 1844 and which then became the spiritual centre of Valdocco, the mother-church of the Salesian Family, the radiating point of devotion to Our Lady, invoked under this title.

But Don Bosco's Marian pilgrimages did not cease because of this. It is enough to follow him on his long journeys through Italy and France and see how often he took the opportunity for a fleeting visit to the shrine of the local Virgin.

From *Madonna di Oropa* in Piedmont to *Our Lady of the Miracle* in Rome, from Our Lady of the Boschetto in Camogli to Our Lady of Gennazzano, from *Madonna del Fuoco* in Forlì to *Madonna dell'Olmo* (Elm) in Cuneo, from *Our Lady of Good Hope* in Bigione to *Our Lady of Victories* in Paris.

Our Lady of Victories, placed in a golden niche, is standing, holding her Divine Son with both hands. Jesus has his feet resting on the starry ball representing the world.

Don Bosco before this Queen of Victories in Paris gave a

“sermon de charité” in 1883, that is, one of those conferences to obtain help for his works of charity for poor and abandoned youth. It was his first conference in the French capital, in the shrine that is to Parisians what the shrine of the Consolata is to the people of Turin.

That was the culmination of Don Bosco’s Marian wanderings, which began at the foot of the Consolata pillar under the Becchi’s “Scaiota”.

Educating the Faculties of Our Spirit with Saint Francis de Sales

St. Francis de Sales presents the spirit as the highest part of the soul, governed by intellect, memory, and will. At the heart of his pedagogy is the authority of reason, a “divine torch” that truly makes a person human and must guide, illuminate, and discipline passions, imagination, and the senses. To educate the spirit therefore means cultivating the intellect through study, meditation, and contemplation, exercising memory as a repository of received graces, and strengthening the will so that it consistently chooses good. From this harmony flow the cardinal virtues – prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance – which shape free, balanced individuals capable of genuine charity.

Francis de Sales considers the spirit as the higher part of the soul. Its faculties are the intellect, memory, and will. Imagination could be part of it to the extent that reason and will intervene in its functioning. The will, for its part, is the master faculty to which particular

treatment should be reserved. The spirit makes humans, according to the classic definition, a "rational animal." "We are human only through reason," writes Francis de Sales. After "bodily graces," there are "gifts of the spirit," which should be the object of our reflections and our gratitude. Among these, the author of the *Philothea* distinguishes the gifts received from nature and those acquired through education:

Consider the gifts of the spirit; how many people in the world are foolish, furiously mad, mentally deficient. Why are you not among them? God has favoured you. How many have been educated rudely and in the most extreme ignorance; but you, divine Providence has had you raised in a civil and honourable way.

Reason, "Divine Torch"

In an Exercise of Sleep or Spiritual Rest, composed in Padua when he was twenty-three years old, Francis proposed to meditate on an astonishing topic:

I will stop to admire the beauty of the reason that God has given to man, so that, illuminated and instructed by its marvellous splendour, he may hate vice and love virtue. Oh! Let us follow the shining light of this divine torch, because it is given to us for use to see where we must put our feet! Ah! If we let ourselves be guided by its dictates, we will rarely stumble; it will be difficult to hurt ourselves.

"Natural reason is a good tree that God has planted in us; the fruits that come from it can only be good," affirms the author of the *Treatise on the Love of God*. It is true that it is "gravely wounded and almost dead because of sin," but its exercise is not fundamentally impeded.

In the inner kingdom of man, "reason must be the queen, to whom all the faculties of our spirit, all our senses, and the body itself must remain absolutely subject." It is reason that distinguishes man from animal, so we must be

careful not to imitate “the apes and monkeys that are always sullen, sad, and lamenting when the moon is missing; then, on the contrary, at the new moon, they jump, dance, and make all possible grimaces.” It is necessary to make “the authority of reason” reign, Francis de Sales reiterates.

Between the upper part of the spirit, which must reign, and the lower part of our being, sometimes designated by Francis de Sales with the biblical term “flesh,” the struggle sometimes becomes bitter. Each front has its allies. The spirit, “fortress of the soul,” is accompanied “by three soldiers: the intellect, memory, and will.” Therefore, beware of the “flesh” that plots and seeks allies on the spot:

The flesh now uses the intellect, now the will, now the imagination, which, associating against reason, leave it free field, creating division and doing a bad service to reason. [...] The flesh allures the will sometimes with pleasures, sometimes with riches; now it urges the imagination to make claims; now it arouses in the intellect a great curiosity, all under the pretext of good.

In this struggle, even when all the passions of the soul seem upset, nothing is lost as long as the spirit resists: “If these soldiers were faithful, the spirit would have no fear and would not give any weight to its enemies: like soldiers who, having sufficient ammunition, resist in the bastion of an impregnable fortress, despite the fact that the enemies are in the suburbs or have even already taken the city. It happened to the citadel of Nizza, before which the force of three great princes did not prevail against the resistance of the defenders.” The cause of all these inner lacerations is self-love. In fact, “our reasonings are ordinarily full of motivations, opinions, and considerations suggested by self-love, and this causes great conflicts in the soul.”

In the educative field, it is important to make

the superiority of the spirit felt. "Here lies the principle of a human education," says Father Lejeune, "to show the child, as soon as his reason awakens, what is beautiful and good, and to turn him away from what is bad; in this way, to create in his heart the habit of controlling his instinctive reflexes, instead of following them slavishly. It is thus, in fact, that this process of sensualisation is formed which makes him a slave to his spontaneous desires. At the moment of decisive choices, this habit of always yielding, without controlling oneself, to instinctive impulses can prove catastrophic."

The Intellect, "Eye of the Soul"

The intellect, a typically human and rational faculty, which allows us to know and understand, is often compared to sight. For example, we say: "I see," to mean: "I understand." For Francis de Sales, the intellect is "the eye of the soul"; hence his expression "the eye of your intellect." The incredible activity of which it is capable makes it similar to "a worker, who, with hundreds of thousands of eyes and hands, like another Argus, performs more works than all the workers in the world, because there is nothing in the world that he is not able to represent."

How does the human intellect work? Francis de Sales has precisely analysed the four operations of which it is capable: simple thought, study, meditation, and contemplation. Simple thought is exercised on a great diversity of things, without any purpose, "as flies do that land on flowers without wanting to extract any juice, but only because they meet them." When the intellect passes from one thought to another, the thoughts that thus cram it are ordinarily "useless and harmful." Study, on the contrary, aims to consider things "to know them, to understand them, and to speak well of them," with the aim of "filling the memory," as beetles do that "land on roses for no other purpose than to satiate themselves and fill their bellies."

Francis de Sales could have stopped here, but he

knew and recommended two other higher forms. While study aims to increase knowledge, meditation aims to “move the affections and, in particular, love”: “Let us fix our intellect on the mystery from which we hope to draw good affections,” like the dove that “coos holding its breath and, by the grumbling that it produces in its throat without letting the breath out, produces its typical song.”

The supreme activity of the intellect is contemplation, which consists in rejoicing in the good known through meditation and loved through such knowledge; this time we resemble the little birds that frolic in the cage only to “please the master.” With contemplation, the human spirit reaches its peak; the author of the *Treatise on the Love of God* affirms that reason “finally vivifies the intellect with contemplation.”

Let us return to study, the intellectual activity that interests us more closely. “There is an old axiom of philosophers, according to which every man desires to know.” Taking up this affirmation of Aristotle on his part, as well as the example of Plato, Francis de Sales intends to demonstrate that this constitutes a great privilege. What man wants to know is the truth. The truth is more beautiful than that “famous Helen, for whose beauty so many Greeks and Trojans died.” The spirit is made for the search for truth: “Truth is the object of our intellect, which, consequently, discovering and knowing the truth of things, feels fully satisfied and content.” When the spirit finds something new, it experiences an intense joy, and when one begins to find something beautiful, one is driven to continue the search, “like those who have found a gold mine and push themselves further and further to find even more of this precious metal.” The amazement that the discovery produces is a powerful stimulus; “admiration, in fact, has given rise to philosophy and the careful search for natural things.” Since God is the supreme truth, the knowledge of God is the supreme science that fills our spirit. It is he who “has given us the intellect to know him”; outside of him there are only “vain

thoughts and useless reflections!"

Cultivating One's Intelligence

What characterizes man is the great desire to know. It was this desire that "induced the great Plato to leave Athens and run so far," and "induced these ancient philosophers to renounce their bodily comforts." Some even go so far as to fast diligently "in order to study better." Study, in fact, produces an intellectual pleasure, superior to sensual pleasures and difficult to stop: "Intellectual love, finding unexpected contentment in union with its object, perfects its knowledge, continuing thus to unite with it, and uniting ever more, does not cease to continue to do so."

It is a matter of "illuminating the intellect well," striving to "purge" it from the darkness of "ignorance." He denounces "the dullness and indolence of spirit, which does not want to know what is necessary" and insists on the value of study and learning: "Study ever more, with diligence and humility," he wrote to a student. But it is not enough to "purge" the intellect of ignorance; it is also necessary to "embellish and adorn" it, to "wallpaper it with considerations." To know a thing perfectly, it is necessary to learn well, to dedicate time to "subjecting" the intellect, that is, to fixing it on one thing before moving on to another.

The young Francis de Sales applied his intelligence not only to studies and intellectual knowledge, but also to certain subjects essential to man's life on earth, and, in particular, to "consideration of the vanity of greatness, riches, honours, comforts, and voluptuous pleasures of this world"; to "consideration of the wickedness, abjection, and deplorable misery present in vice and sin," and to "knowledge of the excellence of virtue."

The human spirit is often distracted, forgets, and is content with vague or vain knowledge. Through meditation, not only on eternal truths, but also on the phenomena and events of the world, it is able to reach a more realistic and

profound vision of reality. For this reason, in the *Meditations* proposed by the author to *Philothea*, there is dedicated a first part entitled *Considerations*.

To consider means to apply the mind to a precise object, to examine its different aspects carefully. Francis de Sales invites *Philothea* to “think,” to “see,” to examine the different “points,” some of which deserve to be considered “separately.” He urges her to see things in general and then to descend to particular cases. He wants her to examine the principles, causes, and consequences of a given truth, of a given situation, as well as the circumstances that accompany it. It is also necessary to know how to “weigh” certain words or sentences, the importance of which risks escaping us, to consider them one by one, to compare them with each other.

As in everything, so in the desire to know there can be excesses and distortions. Beware of the vanity of false wise men: some, in fact, “for the little science they have, want to be honoured and respected by all, as if everyone should go to their school and have them as teachers: therefore, they are called pedants.” Now, “science dishonours us when it swells us up and degenerates into pedantry.” What ridiculousness to want to instruct Minerva, *Minervam docere*, the goddess of wisdom! “The plague of science is presumption, which swells spirits and makes them hydroponic, as are ordinarily the wise men of the world.”

When it comes to problems that surpass us and fall within the realm of the mysteries of faith, it is necessary to “purify them from all curiosity;” we must “keep them well closed and covered in the face of such vain and foolish questions and curiosities.” It is “intellectual purity,” the “second modesty” or “inner modesty.” Finally, one must know that the intellect can be mistaken and that there is the “sin of the intellect,” such as that which Francis de Sales reproaches to the lady of Chantal, who had made a mistake by placing an exaggerated esteem in her director.

Memory and its “warehouses”

Like the intellect, so memory is a faculty of the spirit that arouses admiration. Francis de Sales compares it to a warehouse "that is worth more than those of Antwerp or Venice." Is it not said "to store" in memory? Memory is a soldier whose fidelity is very useful to us. It is a gift from God, declares the author of the *Introduction to the Devout Life*: God has given it to you "so that you may remember him," he says to *Philothea*, inviting her to flee "detestable and frivolous memories."

This faculty of the human spirit needs to be trained. When he was a student in Padua, the young Francis exercised his memory not only in his studies, but also in his spiritual life, in which the memory of benefits received is a fundamental element:

First of all, I will dedicate myself to refreshing my memory with all the good motions, desires, affections, purposes, projects, feelings, and sweetnesses that the divine Majesty has inspired and made me experience in the past, considering its holy mysteries, the beauty of virtue, the nobility of its service, and an infinity of benefits that it has freely bestowed upon me; I will also put order in my memories about the obligations I have towards her for the fact that, by her holy grace, she has sometimes weakened my senses by sending me certain illnesses and infirmities, from which I have drawn great profit.

In difficulties and fears, it is indispensable to use it "to remember the promises" and to "remain firm trusting that everything will perish rather than the promises will fail." However, the memory of the past is not always good, because it can engender sadness, as happened to a disciple of St. Bernard, who was assailed by a bad temptation when he began "to remember the friends of the world, the relatives, the goods he had left." In certain exceptional circumstances of the spiritual life "it is necessary to purify it from the memory of perishable things and from worldly affairs and to

forget for a certain time material and temporal things, although good and useful." In the moral field, to exercise virtue, the person who has felt offended will take a radical measure: "I remember too much the taunts and injuries, from now on I will lose the memory."

"We must have a just and reasonable spirit"

The capacities of the human spirit, in particular of the intellect and memory, are not destined only for glorious intellectual enterprises, but also and above all for the conduct of life. To seek to know man, to understand life, and to define the norms concerning behaviours conforming to reason, these should be the fundamental tasks of the human spirit and its education. The central part of *Philothea*, which deals with the "exercise of virtues," contains, towards the end, a chapter that summarizes in a certain way the teaching of Francis de Sales on virtues: "We must have a just and reasonable spirit."

With finesse and a pinch of humour, the author denounces numerous bizarre, foolish, or simply unjust behaviours: "We accuse our neighbour for little, and we excuse ourselves for much more"; "we want to sell at a high price and buy cheaply"; "what we do for others always seems a lot to us, and what others do for us is nothing"; "we have a sweet, gracious, and courteous heart towards ourselves, and a hard, severe, and rigorous heart towards our neighbour"; "we have two weights: one to weigh our comforts with the greatest possible advantage for us, the other to weigh those of our neighbour with the greatest disadvantage that can be." To judge well, he advises *Philothea*, it is always necessary to put oneself in the shoes of one's neighbour: "Make yourself a seller in buying and a buyer in selling." Nothing is lost by living as "generous, noble, courteous people, with a regal, constant, and reasonable heart."

Reason is at the base of the edifice of education. Certain parents do not have a right mental attitude; in fact, "there are virtuous children whom fathers and mothers can

hardly bear because they have this or that defect in the body; there are instead vicious ones continuously pampered, because they have this or that beautiful physical gift." There are educators and leaders who indulge in preferences. "Keep the balance straight between your daughters," he recommended to a superior of the Visitation nuns, so that "natural gifts do not make you distribute affections and Favors unjustly." And he added: "Beauty, good grace, and gentle speech often confer a great force of attraction on people who live according to their natural inclinations; charity has as its object true virtue and the beauty of the heart, and extends to all without particularisms."

But it is above all youth that runs the greatest risks, because if "self-love usually distances us from reason," this perhaps happens even more in young people tempted by vanity and ambition. The reason of a young person risks being lost above all when he lets himself "be taken by infatuations." Therefore, attention, writes the bishop to a young man, "not to allow your affections to prevent judgment and reason in the choice of subjects to love; since, once it has started running, affection drags judgment, as it would drag a slave, to very deplorable choices, of which he might repent very soon." He also explained to the Visitation nuns that "our thoughts are usually full of reasons, opinions, and considerations suggested by self-love, which causes great conflicts in the soul."

Reason, source of the four cardinal virtues

Reason resembles the river of paradise, "which God makes flow to irrigate the whole man in all his faculties and activities." It is divided into four branches corresponding to the four virtues that philosophical tradition calls cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.

Prudence "inclines our intellect to truly discern the evil to be avoided and the good to be done." It consists in "discerning which are the most appropriate means to reach the good and virtue." Beware of passions that risk deforming

our judgment and causing the ruin of prudence! Prudence does not oppose simplicity: we will be, jointly, “prudent as serpents so as not to be deceived; simple as doves so as not to deceive anyone.”

Justice consists in “rendering to God, to our neighbour, and to ourselves what is due.” Francis de Sales begins with justice towards God, connected with the virtue of religion, “by which we render to God the respect, honour, homage, and submission due to him as our sovereign Lord and first principle.” Justice towards parents entails the duty of piety, which “extends to all the offices that can legitimately be rendered to them, whether in honour or in service.”

The virtue of fortitude helps to “overcome the difficulties that are encountered in doing good and in rejecting evil.” It is very necessary, because the sensitive appetite is “truly a rebellious, seditious, turbulent subject.” When reason dominates the passions, anger gives way to gentleness, a great ally of reason. Fortitude is often accompanied by magnanimity, “a virtue that pushes and inclines us to perform actions of great importance.”

Finally, temperance is indispensable “to repress the disordered inclinations of sensuality,” to “govern the appetite of greed,” and to “curb the passions connected.” In effect, if the soul becomes too passionate about a pleasure and a sensible joy, it degrades itself, rendering itself incapable of higher joys.

In conclusion, the four cardinal virtues are like the manifestations of this natural light that reason provides us. By practicing these virtues, reason exercises “its superiority and the authority it has to regulate sensual appetites.”

With Nino Baglieri, Pilgrim of Hope, on the Journey of the Jubilee

The path of the 2025 Jubilee, dedicated to Hope, finds a shining witness in the story of the Servant of God Nino Baglieri. From the dramatic fall that left him tetraplegic at seventeen to his inner rebirth in 1978, Baglieri moved from the shadow of despair to the light of active faith, transforming his bed of suffering into a throne of joy. His story intertwines the five Jubilee signs – pilgrimage, door, profession of faith, charity, and reconciliation – showing that Christian hope is not escapism but a strength that opens the future and supports every journey.

1. Hoping as Waiting

Hope, according to the online Treccani dictionary, is a feeling of “trustful expectation in the present or future fulfillment of what is desired.” The etymology of the noun “hope” comes from the Latin *spes*, which in turn derives from the Sanskrit root *spa-* meaning to stretch toward a goal. In Spanish, “to hope” and “to wait” are both translated with the verb *esperar*, which combines both meanings in one word: as if one could only wait for what one hopes for. This state of mind allows us to face life and its challenges with courage and a heart always burning with light. Hope is expressed – positively or negatively – in some popular proverbs: “Hope is the last to die,” “While there is life, there is hope,” “He who lives by hope dies in despair.”

Almost gathering this “shared feeling” about hope, but aware of the need to help rediscover hope in its fullest and truest dimension, Pope Francis dedicated the Ordinary Jubilee of 2025 to Hope (*Spes non confundit* [Hope does not disappoint] is the bull of convocation) and already in 2014 said: “The resurrection of Jesus is not the happy ending of a

beautiful fairy tale; it is not the happy end of a movie; it is the intervention of God the Father where human hope breaks down. At the moment when everything seems lost, in the moment of pain, when many people feel the need to get down from the cross, that is the moment closest to the resurrection. The night becomes darkest just before the morning begins, before the light begins. In the darkest moment God intervenes and raises up” (cf. Audience of 16 April 2014).

In this context, the story of the **Servant of God Nino Baglieri** (Modica, May 1, 1951 – March 2, 2007) fits perfectly. As a seventeen-year-old bricklayer, he fell from a seventeen-meter-high scaffold due to the sudden collapse of a plank, crashing to the ground and becoming tetraplegic: from that fall on May 6, 1968, he could only move his head and neck, depending on others for life in everything, even the simplest and humblest things. Nino could not even shake a friend’s hand or caress his mother... and saw his dreams vanish. What hope for life did this young man have now? What feelings could he face? What future awaited him? Nino’s first response was despair, total darkness before a search for meaning that found no answer. First a long wandering through hospitals in different Italian regions, then the pity of friends and acquaintances led Nino to rebel and lock himself away in ten long years of loneliness and anger, while the tunnel of life grew ever deeper.

In Greek mythology, Zeus entrusts Pandora with a jar containing all the evils of the world; when opened, men lose immortality and begin a life of suffering. To save them, Pandora reopens the jar and releases *elpis*, hope, which remained at the bottom. It was the only antidote to life’s troubles. Looking instead to the Giver of all good, we know that “hope does not disappoint” (Rom 5:5). Pope Francis writes in *Spes non confundit*: “In the sign of this hope, the apostle Paul encourages the Christian community in Rome [...] Everyone hopes. In the heart of every person is enclosed hope as desire and expectation of good, even without knowing what tomorrow

will bring. The unpredictability of the future, however, gives rise to sometimes opposing feelings: from trust to fear, from serenity to discouragement, from certainty to doubt. We often meet discouraged people who look to the future with skepticism and pessimism, as if nothing could offer them happiness. May the Jubilee be an opportunity for all to revive hope" (ibid., 1).

2. From Witness of "Despair" to "Ambassador" of Hope

Let us return to the story of our Servant of God, Nino Baglieri.

Ten long years had to pass before Nino emerged from the tunnel of despair, the thick darkness cleared, and Light entered. It was the afternoon of March 24, Good Friday 1978, when Father Aldo Modica, with a group of young people, went to Nino's home, urged by his mother Peppina and some people involved in the Renewal in the Spirit movement, then in its early days in the nearby Salesian parish. Nino writes, "While they invoked the Holy Spirit, I felt a very strange sensation, a great warmth invaded my body, a strong tingling in all my limbs, as if a new strength entered me and something old left. At that moment I said my 'yes' to the Lord, accepted my cross, and was reborn to a new life, becoming a new man. Ten years of despair erased in a few moments, because an unknown joy entered my heart. I desired the healing of my body, but the Lord granted me an even greater grace: spiritual healing."

A new path began for Nino: from "witness of despair" he became a "pilgrim of hope." No longer isolated in his little room but an "ambassador" of this hope, he shared his experience through a broadcast on a local radio station and – an even greater grace – God gave him the joy of being able to write with his mouth. Nino confides: "In March 1979 the Lord performed a great miracle for me: I learned to write with my mouth. I started like this; I was with my friends doing homework, I asked for a pencil and a notebook, I began making marks and drawing something, but then I discovered I

could write, and so I began to write.” He then began to write his memoirs and correspond with people of all kinds around the world, thousands of letters still preserved today. The regained hope made him creative; now Nino rediscovered the joy of relationships and wanted to become – as much as he could – independent. With a stick he used with his mouth and an elastic band attached to the phone, he dialed numbers to communicate with many sick people, offering them words of comfort. He discovered a new way to face his suffering, which brought him out of isolation and set him on the path to becoming a witness to the Gospel of joy and hope. “Now there is so much joy in my heart, there is no more pain in me, in my heart there is Your love. Thank you, my Lord Jesus, from my bed of pain I want to praise you and with all my heart thank you because you called me to know life, to know true life.”

Nino changed perspective, made a 360° turn – the Lord gave him **conversion** – and placed his trust in that merciful God who, through “misfortune,” called him to work in His vineyard, to be a sign and instrument of salvation and hope. Thus, many who came to console him left comforted, with tears in their eyes. They did not find on that little bed a sad and gloomy man, but a smiling face that radiated – despite many sufferings, including bedsores and respiratory problems – the joy of living; the smile was constant on his face, and Nino felt “useful from the bed of the cross.” Nino Baglieri is the opposite of many people today, constantly searching for the meaning of life, aiming for easy success and the happiness of fleeting and worthless things, living online, consuming life with a click, wanting everything immediately but with sad, dull eyes. Nino apparently had nothing, yet he had peace and joy in his heart. He did not live isolated but supported by God’s love expressed through the embrace and presence of his entire family and more and more people who knew him and connected with him.

3. Rekindling Hope

Building hope means that every time I am not satisfied with my life and I commit to changing it. Every time I do not let negative experiences harden me or make me distrustful. Every time I fall and try to get up, not allowing fears to have the last word. Every time, in a world marked by conflicts, I choose trust and always try again, with everyone. Every time I do not flee from God's dream that tells me, "I want you to be happy," "I want you to have a full life... full even of holiness." The pinnacle of the virtue of hope is indeed a gaze toward Heaven to live well on earth or, as Don Bosco would say, **walking with feet on the ground and heart in Heaven.**

In this furrow of hope, the Jubilee finds fulfillment, which, with its signs, asks us to set out, to cross some frontiers.

First sign, the pilgrimage: when moving from one place to another, one is open to the new, to change. Jesus' whole life was "a setting out," a journey of evangelization fulfilled in the gift of life and beyond, with the Resurrection and Ascension.

Second sign, the door: in John 10:9 Jesus says, "I am the door; if anyone enters through me, he will be saved; he will come in and go out and find pasture." Passing through the door means being welcomed, being community. The Gospel also speaks of the "narrow door": the Jubilee becomes a path of conversion.

Third sign, the profession of faith: expressing belonging to Christ and the Church and declaring it publicly.

Fourth sign, charity: charity is the password to heaven; in 1 Peter 4:8 the apostle Peter admonishes, "Keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins."

Fifth sign, therefore, reconciliation and Jubilee indulgence: it is a "favorable time" (cf. 2 Cor 6:2) to experience God's great mercy and walk paths of rapprochement and forgiveness toward others; to live the prayer of the Our Father where we ask, "forgive us our debts as we forgive our

debtors." It is becoming new creatures.

Even in Nino's life, there are episodes that connect him – along the "thread" of hope – to these Jubilee dimensions. For example, his repentance for some childhood mischiefs, like when three of them (he recounts), "stole the offerings from the sacristy during Masses, we used them to play foosball. When you meet bad companions, they lead you astray. Then one took the Oratory keys and hid them in my schoolbag in the study; they found the keys, called the parents, gave us two slaps, and kicked us out of school. Shame!" But above all, in Nino's life there is charity, helping the poor person in physical and moral trial, reaching out to those with psychological struggles, and writing to brothers in prison to testify to them God's goodness and love. Nino, who before the fall had been a bricklayer, writes, "[I] liked to build with my hands something that would last over time: even now I feel like a bricklayer working in God's Kingdom, to leave something that lasts, to see the Wonderful Works of God that He accomplishes in our Life." He confides, "My body seems dead, but my heart keeps beating in my chest. My legs do not move, yet I walk the paths of the world."

4. Pilgrim Toward Heaven

Nino, a consecrated Salesian cooperator of the great Salesian Family, ended his earthly "pilgrimage" on Friday, March 2, 2007, at 8:00 a.m., at only 55 years old, having spent 39 years tetraplegic between bed and wheelchair, after asking forgiveness from his family for the hardships his condition caused. He left this world dressed in tracksuit and sneakers, as he expressly requested, to run in the green flowering meadows and leap like a deer along the streams. We read in his spiritual Testament, "I will never stop thanking you, O Lord, for having called me to You through the Cross on May 6, 1968. A heavy cross for my young strength..." On March 2, life – a continuous gift that begins with parents and is slowly nurtured with wonder and beauty – placed the most

important piece for Nino Baglieri: the embrace with his Lord and God, accompanied by the Madonna.

At the news of his passing, a unanimous chorus rose from many quarters: “a saint has died,” a man who made his bed of the cross the banner of a full life, a gift for all. Thus, a great witness of hope.

Five years after his death, as provided by the *Normae Servandae in Inquisitionibus ab Episcopis faciendis in Causis Sanctorum* of 1983, the bishop of the Diocese of Noto, at the request of the Postulator General of the Salesian Congregation, after consulting the Sicilian Episcopal Conference and obtaining the Nihil obstat from the Holy See, opened the Diocesan Inquiry for the Cause of Beatification and Canonization of the Servant of God Nino Baglieri.

The diocesan process, lasting 12 years, followed two main lines: the work of the Historical Commission, which researched, collected, studied, and presented many sources, especially writings “by” and “about” the Servant of God; and the Ecclesiastical Tribunal, responsible for the Inquiry, which also heard witnesses under oath.

This process concluded on May 5, 2024, in the presence of Monsignor Salvatore Rumeo, current bishop of the Diocese of Noto. A few days later, the procedural acts were delivered to the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, which opened them on June 21, 2024. At the beginning of 2025, the same Dicastery declared their “Legal Validity,” allowing the Roman phase of the Cause to enter full swing.

Now the contribution to the Cause continues also by spreading knowledge of Nino’s figure, who at the end of his earthly journey recommended: “Do not leave me doing nothing. I will continue my mission from heaven. I will write to you from Paradise.”

The journey of hope in his company thus becomes a longing for Heaven, when “we will meet face to face with the infinite beauty of God (cf. 1 Cor 13:12) and will be able to read with joyful admiration the mystery of the universe, which will share with us endless fullness [...]. Meanwhile, we unite

to take care of this home entrusted to us, knowing that whatever good is in it will be taken up in the feast of heaven. Together with all creatures, we walk on this earth seeking God [...] We walk singing!" (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 243-244).

Roberto Chiaramonte

Fr. Peter Ricaldone is Reborn in Mirabello Monferrato

Fr. Peter Ricaldone (Mirabello Monferrato, 27 April 1870 – Rome, 25 November 1951) was the fourth successor of Don Bosco as leader of the Salesians, a man of vast culture, deep spirituality, and great love for young people. Born and raised amidst the Monferrato hills, he always carried the spirit of that land with him, translating it into a pastoral and educational commitment that would make him a figure of international standing. Today, the people of Mirabello Monferrato wish to bring him back to their lands.

The Don Pietro Ricaldone Committee: Revival of a Legacy (2019)

In 2019, a group of past pupils, historians, and enthusiasts of local traditions formed the **Don Pietro Ricaldone Committee** in Mirabello Monferrato. The objective – simple yet ambitious – has been from the outset, to restore Don Pietro's figure to the heart of the town and its young people, so that his story and spiritual legacy will not be lost.

To prepare for the 150th anniversary of his birth (1870–2020), the Committee searched the Mirabello Municipal Historical Archive and the Salesian Historical Archive, uncovering letters, notes, and old volumes. From this work, an

illustrated biography was created, designed for readers of all ages, in which Ricaldone's personality emerges clearly and engagingly. Collaboration with Fr. Egidio Deiana, a scholar of Salesian history, was fundamental during this phase.

In 2020, a series of events was planned – photographic exhibits, concerts, theatre and circus performances – all centred on remembering Fr. Peter. Although the pandemic forced the rescheduling of many of the celebrations, in July of that year a commemorative event took place, featuring a photographic exhibit on the stages of Ricaldone's life, children's entertainment with creative workshops, and a solemn celebration attended by several Salesian Superiors.

That gathering marked the beginning of a new period of focus on the Mirabello area.

Beyond the 150th: The Concert for the 70th Anniversary of His Death

The enthusiasm for reviving the figure of Don Pietro Ricaldone led the Committee to extend its activities beyond the 150th anniversary.

Ahead of the 70th anniversary of his death (25 November 1951), the Committee organised a concert titled "Hasten the radiant dawn of the longed-for day", a phrase taken from Fr. Peter's 1942 circular on Gregorian Chant.

At the height of the Second World War, Fr. Peter – then Rector Major – wrote a famous circular on Gregorian Chant in which he stressed the importance of music as a special way to lead human hearts back to charity, gentleness, and above all, to God: *'It may surprise some that, amidst such a clamour of arms, I invite you to engage with music. Yet I believe, even setting aside mythological allusions, that this theme fully meets the needs of the present hour. Everything that can exert an educative influence and lead people back to feelings of charity and gentleness, and above all to God, must be practised by us, diligently and without delay, to hasten the*

radiant dawn of the longed-for day.'

Salesian Walks and Roots: The “Don Bosco Walk”

Although established as a tribute to Fr. Ricaldone, the Committee has also ended up promoting the figure of Don Bosco and the entire Salesian tradition, of which Fr. Peter was both an heir and a protagonist.

Since 2021, every second Sunday of October, the Committee has promoted the “Don Bosco Walk”, re-enacting the pilgrimage Don Bosco undertook with the boys from Mirabello to Lu Monferrato between 12th–17th October 1861. During those five days, the details of the first Salesian school outside Turin were planned, entrusted to Blessed Michael Rua, with Fr. Albera among the teachers. Although the initiative does not directly involve Fr. Peter, it highlights his roots and connection to the local Salesian tradition that he himself carried forward.

Hospitality and Cultural Exchanges

The Committee facilitated the welcoming of groups of young people, vocational schools, and Salesian clerics from around the world. Some families offer free hospitality, renewing the fraternity characteristic of Don Bosco and Fr. Peter. In 2023, a large group from the Crocetta visited Mirabello, while every summer, international groups arrive, accompanied by Fr. Egidio Deiana. Each visit is a dialogue between historical memory and the joy of youth.

On 30 March 2025, nearly one hundred Salesian chapter members stopped in Mirabello, visiting the places where Don Bosco opened his first school outside Turin and where Fr. Peter spent his formative years. The Committee, together with the Parish and the *Pro Loco* (local community association), organised the reception and created an informative video about local Salesian history, which was appreciated by all participants.

The initiatives continue, and today the Committee, led by its president, is collaborating on the creation of *Don Bosco's*

Monferrato Walk, a spiritual route of approximately 200 km following the autumn paths walked by the Saint. The aim is to obtain official regional recognition, but also to offer pilgrims an experience of formation and evangelisation. Indeed, Don Bosco's youth walks were experiences of formation and evangelisation: the same spirit that Fr. Peter Ricaldone would later defend and promote throughout his time as Rector Major.

The Committee's Mission: Keeping Fr. Peter's Memory Alive

Behind every initiative lies the desire to highlight the educative, pastoral, and cultural work of Fr. Peter Ricaldone. The Committee's founders cherish personal childhood memories and wish to pass on to new generations the values of faith, culture, and solidarity that inspired the priest from Mirabello. In an era when many points of reference are faltering, rediscovering Fr. Peter's path means offering a life model capable of illuminating the present, 'Where Saints pass, God walks with them, and nothing is ever the same again' (Saint John Paul II).

The Fr. Peter Ricaldone Committee acts as a custodian of this legacy, trusting that the memory of a great son of Mirabello will continue to light the way for generations to come, charting a steady path built on faith, culture, and solidarity.

Novena to Mary Help of Christians 2025

This 2025 Novena to Mary Help of Christians invites us to rediscover ourselves as children under Mary's maternal gaze.

Each day, through the great apparitions – from Lourdes to Fatima, from Guadalupe to Banneaux – we contemplate an aspect of her love: humility, hope, obedience, wonder, trust, consolation, justice, gentleness, dream. The meditations by the Rector Major and the prayers of the “children” accompany us on a nine-day journey that opens the heart to the simple faith of the little ones, nourishes prayer, and encourages us to build, with Mary, a healed world full of light, for ourselves and for all those who seek hope and peace.

Day 1 – Our Lady of Lourdes

Being Children – Humility and faith

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there.

As for us, are we able to see her?

Little Bernadette Soubirous

11 February 1858. I had just turned 14. It was a morning like any other, a winter's day. We were hungry, as always. There was this cave, with a black mouth; in the silence I felt a rush of air. The bush moved, shaken by some force. And then I saw a young woman, in white, no taller than me who greeted me with a slight bow of her head; at the same time she moved her outstretched arms away from her body a little, opening her hands, like the statues of Our Lady; I was afraid. Then it occurred to me to pray: I took the rosary beads that I always carry with me and began to say the rosary.

Mary showed herself to her daughter Bernadette Soubirous. She who could neither read nor write; she who spoke in dialect and did not go to catechism class. A poor girl, pushed around by everyone in the village, yet ready to trust and rely on others, like someone who has nothing. Nothing to lose. Mary entrusted her secrets to her and did so because she trusted her. She treated her with loving kindness, spoke to her kindly, and said ‘please’ to her. And Bernadette let herself

go and believed her, just like a child does with its mother. She believed in her promise that Our Lady **would make her happy not in this world, but in the next.** She remembered this promise for the rest of her life. A promise that would allow her to face all her difficulties with her head held high, with strength and determination, doing what Our Lady asked her to do: pray, always pray for all of us sinners. She also made a promise: she would look after Mary's secrets and give voice to her request for a Shrine in the place where Mary appeared. And as she lay dying, Bernadette smiled, thinking back to Mary's face, her loving gaze, her silences, her few but intense words, and above all, that promise. And she still felt like a daughter, the daughter of a Mother who keeps her promises.

Mary, the Mother who promises.

You, who promised to become the mother of humanity, stayed your children, starting with the youngest and the poorest. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Have faith: Mary will also shows herself to us if we are able to strip ourselves of everything.

The Rector Major's words

We can say that the Virgin Mary is a beacon of humility and faith for us, accompanying us through the centuries, accompanying our lives, accompanying the experience of each and every one of us. Let us not forget, however, that Mary's humility is not simply outward modesty, it is not a facade, but rather a profound awareness of her smallness before the greatness of God.

Her 'yes, here am I, the servant of the Lord' spoken before the angel is an act of humility, not presumption. It is the trusting abandonment of someone who recognises herself as an instrument in God's hands. Mary does not seek recognition; Mary simply seeks to be a servant, placing herself in the last place with silence, humility and simplicity that we find disarming. This humility, this radical humility, is the key that opened Mary's heart to divine grace, allowing the Word of

God, with his greatness and immensity, to become incarnate in her human womb.

Mary teaches us to place ourselves as we are, with our humility, without pride, without needing to depend on our authority or self-referentiality, placing ourselves freely before God so that we may receive fully, with freedom and openness, like Mary; so that we may live his will with love. This is the second point, this is Mary's faith. The humility of the servant places her on a constant path of unconditional adherence to God's plan, even in the darkest, most incomprehensible moments, which means courageously facing the poverty of her experience in the cave at Bethlehem, the flight into Egypt, the hidden life in Nazareth, but above all at the foot of the cross where Mary's faith reaches its peak.

There, beneath the cross, with a heart pierced by pain, Mary does not waver, Mary does not fall, Mary believes in the promise. Her faith, then, is not a passing feeling, but a solid rock on which the hope of humanity, our hope, is founded. Humility and faith in Mary are inextricably linked.

Let us allow Mary's humility to enlighten our human condition, so that faith may also sprout in us, so that, recognising our smallness before God, we do not abandon ourselves because we are small, we do not allow ourselves to be overcome by presumption, but we place ourselves there, like Mary, with an attitude of great freedom, with an attitude of great openness, recognising our dependence on God, living with God in simplicity but at the same time in greatness. Mary therefore urges us to cultivate a serene, firm faith, capable of overcoming trials and trusting in God's promise. Let us contemplate the figure of Mary, humble and believing, so that we too may say our yes generously, as she did.

As for us, are we able to grasp her promises of love with the eyes of a child?

The prayer of an unfaithful child

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...

make my heart pure.

Make me humble, little, able to lose myself in your mother's embrace.

Help me rediscover how important the role of a child is and mark my steps.

You promise, I promise in a covenant that only a mother and child can make.

I will fall, mother, you know that.

I won't always keep my promises.

I won't always trust you.

I won't always be able to see you.

But you will stand there in silence, smiling, your arms and hands outstretched.

And I will take the rosary and pray with you for all children like me.

Hail Mary...

Day 2 – Our Lady of Fatima

Being Children – Simplicity and Hope

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there.

As for us, are we able to see her?

The little shepherd children in Cova di Iria

In Cova di Iria around 1:00 pm, the sky opened and the sun appeared. Suddenly, at about 1.30 pm, the improbable happened: before an astonished crowd, the most spectacular, grandest and most incredible miracle that has happened since biblical times took place. The sun began a frantic and frightening dance that would last more than ten minutes. A very long time.

Three little shepherd children, simple and happy, were there and spread news of the miracle that shocked millions of people. Nobody could explain it, from scientists to people of faith. Yet, three children saw Mary, heard her message. And they believed it, they believed the words of the woman who

showed herself and asked them to return to Cova di Iria every 13th of the month. They do not need explanations because they placed all their hope in Mary's repeated words. A difficult hope to keep alive, one which would have frightened any child: Our Lady revealed suffering and world conflicts to Lucia, Jacinta and Francesco. Yet they had no doubt: those who trust in the protection of Mary, the mother who protects, can face everything. And they knew this so well; they knew it first-hand, risking being killed so as not to betray the word they gave to their heavenly mother. The three little shepherd children were ready for martyrdom, imprisoned and threatened with a pot of boiling oil.

They were afraid:

"Why do we have to die without hugging our parents? I'd like to see Mum."

Yet they decided to keep hoping, believing in a love greater than themselves:

"Do not be afraid. We will offer this sacrifice for the conversion of sinners. It would be worse if Our Lady never came back."

"Why don't we say the Rosary?"

A mother is never deaf to the cries of her children. And the children placed their hope in her. Mary, Mother who protects, stayed with her three children from Fatima and saved them by keeping them alive. And today she still protects all her children around the world who go on pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima.

Mary, the Mother who protects.

You, who have taken care of humanity from the moment of the Annunciation, have remained beside your simplest and most hopeful children. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Place your hope in Mary: she will be able to protect you.

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, hope and renewal

The Virgin Mary is the dawn of hope, an inexhaustible source of renewal.

Contemplating the figure of Mary is like turning our gaze towards a bright horizon, a constant invitation to believe in a future full of grace. And this grace is transformative. Mary is the personification of Christian hope in action. Her unshakeable faith in the face of trials, her perseverance in following Jesus to the cross, her confident expectation of the resurrection are the most important things for me. They are a beacon of hope for all humanity.

In Mary, we see how certainty is, so to speak, the confirmation of the promise of a God who never fails to keep his word. That pain, suffering and darkness do not have the last word. That death is overcome by life.

Mary, then, is hope. She is the morning star announcing the coming of the sun of justice. Turning to her means entrusting our expectations and aspirations to a motherly heart that presents them with love to her risen Son. In some way, our hope is sustained by Mary's hope. And if there is hope, then things do not remain as they were before. There is renewal. The renewal of life. By welcoming the incarnate Word, Mary made it possible to believe in God's hope and promise. She made possible a new creation, a new beginning.

Mary's spiritual motherhood continues to generate us in faith, accompanying us on our journey of growth and inner transformation.

Let us ask Mary for the grace necessary so that this hope that we see fulfilled in her may renew our hearts, heal our wounds, and enable us to pass beyond the veil of negativity to embark on a journey of holiness, a journey of closeness to God. Let us ask Mary, the woman who stands with the apostles in prayer, to help us today, believers and Christian communities, so that we may be sustained in faith and open to the gifts of the Spirit, so that the face of the earth may be renewed.

Mary urges us never to resign ourselves to sin and mediocrity, but, filled with the hope fulfilled in her, to long for a new life in Christ. May Mary continue to be our model and support

so that we may always believe in the possibility of a new beginning, of an inner rebirth that conforms us ever more closely to the image of her son Jesus.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

As for us, are we able to hope in her and be protected with the eyes of a child?

The prayer of a discouraged child

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...

make my heart simple and full of hope.

I trust you: protect me in every situation.

I entrust myself to you: protect me in every situation.

I listen to your word: protect me in every situation.

Give me the ability to believe the impossible and do everything in my power

to bring your love, your message of hope and your protection to the whole world.

And please, my Mother, protect all humanity, even those who do not yet recognize you.

Hail Mary...

Day 3 – Our Lady of Guadalupe

Being Children – Obedience and dedication

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there.

As for us, are we able to see her?

Young Juan Diego

Juan Diego," said the Lady, "the little favourite among my children..." Juan sprang to his feet.

"Where are you going, Juanito?" asked the Lady.

Juan Diego replied as politely as he could. He told the Lady that he was going to the church of Santiago to hear the Mass in honour of the Mother of God.

"My beloved child," said the Lady, "I am the Mother of God,

and I want you to listen to me carefully. I have a very important message to give you. I want a church to be built on this spot, from where I can show my love to your people.

A gentle, simple and tender dialogue like that of a mother with a child. And Juan Diego obeyed: he went to the bishop to report what he had seen but he did not believe him. Then the young man returned to Mary and explained what had happened. Our Lady gave him another message and urged him to try again, and so on and so forth. Juan Diego obeyed, he did not give up: he would complete the task that the heavenly Mother was entrusting him with. But one day, overcome with the problems of life, he was about to skip the appointment with Our Lady: his uncle was dying. **“Do you think I would forget someone I love so much?” Mary healed his uncle, while Juan Diego obeyed once again:**

“My beloved child,” the Lady said, “go up to the top of the hill where we first met. Cut and pick up the roses you will find there. Put them in your tilma (cloak) and bring them to me. I’ll tell you what you have to do and say.” Despite knowing that there were no roses growing on that hill, and certainly not in winter, Juan ran all the way to the top. And there was the most beautiful garden he had ever seen. Castilian roses, still shining with dew, stretched as far as the eye could see. He gently cut the most beautiful blooms with his stone knife, filled his cloak, and quickly returned to where the Lady was waiting for him. The Lady took the roses and placed them back in Juan’s tilma. Then she tied it behind his neck and said, “This is the sign the bishop wants. Quickly, go to him and don’t stop along the way.”

The image of Our Lady had appeared on the cloak and at the sight of this miracle, the bishop was convinced. And today the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe still preserves this miraculous effigy.

Mary, the Mother who does not forget

You, who do not forget any of your children, leave no one behind, have looked upon the young people who have placed their hopes in you. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Obey even when you do not understand: a mother does not forget, a mother does not leave you on your own.

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, motherhood and compassion

Mary's motherhood does not end with her yes that made the incarnation of the Son of God possible. Certainly, that moment is the foundation of everything, but her motherhood is a constant attitude, a way of being for us, of relating to the whole of humanity.

Jesus on the cross entrusts John to her with the words, 'Woman, behold your son,' symbolically extending her motherhood to all believers of all times.

Mary thus becomes the mother of the Church, the spiritual mother of each one of us.

We see how this motherhood manifests itself in tender and thoughtful care, in constant attention to the needs of her children and in a deep desire for their good. Mary welcomes us, nourishes us with her expression of fidelity, protects us under her mantle. Mary's motherhood is an immense gift that brings us closer to her; we feel her loving presence accompanying us at every moment.

Mary's compassion is the natural corollary of her motherhood. Compassion is not simply a superficial feeling of pity, but a profound participation in the pain of others, a 'suffering with'. We see it manifested in a touching way during her son's passion. In the same way, Mary does not remain indifferent to our pain; she intercedes for us, consoles us, and offers us her maternal help.

Thus, Mary's heart becomes a safe refuge where we can lay down our burdens and find comfort and hope. Motherhood and compassion in Mary become, so to speak, two sides of the same

human experience in our favour, two expressions of her infinite love for God and for humanity.

Her compassion is then the concrete manifestation of her being a mother, compassion as a consequence of motherhood. Contemplating Mary as a mother opens our hearts to the hope that finds its fullest expression in her. Our Heavenly Mother who loves us.

Let us ask Mary to see her as a model of authentic humanity, of a motherhood capable of 'feeling with', capable of loving, capable of suffering with others, following the example of her son Jesus, who for love of us suffered and died on the cross.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

As for us, are we sure that a mother never forgets, just as children do?

The prayer of a lost child

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...
make my heart obedient.

When I'm not listening, please insist.

When I don't come back, please come and look for me.

When they do not forgive me, please teach me forgiveness.

Because we human beings get lost and we will always get lost

But you don't forget us, your wandering children.

Come and get us,

come and take us by the hand.

We do not and cannot be alone here.

Hail Mary...

Day 4 – Our Lady of La Salette

Being Children – Amazement and reflection

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there.

As for us, are we able to see her?

Little Melanie and Maximin from La Salette

On Saturday, September 19, 1846, the two boys climbed the slopes of Mount Planeau, above the village of La Salette, each leading four cows to graze. Halfway there, near a small spring, Melanie was the first to see a ball of fire on a pile of stones, "as if the sun had fallen there", and she pointed it out to Maximin. From that shining sphere a woman began to appear, sitting with her head in her hands, her elbows on her knees, deeply sad. Faced with their astonishment, the Lady stood up and in a soft voice, but in French, said to them, "Come closer, my children, do not be afraid, I am here to tell you great news." Heartened, the boys approached and saw that the figure was crying.

A mother announced great news to her children and did so in ears. Yet the youngsters were not surprised by these tears. They listened, in the tenderest of moments between a mother and her children. Because even mothers are sometimes worried, because even mothers entrust their children with their own feelings, thoughts and reflections. And Mary entrusted a great message to the two little shepherds, poor and neglected in their affection: "I am worried about humanity, I am worried about you, my children, who are distancing yourselves from God. And life away from God is a complicated, difficult life, made up of suffering." That is why she was crying. She cried like any mother and told her youngest and purest children a message as amazing as it was great. A message to be proclaimed to everyone, to be brought to the world.

And they would do so, because they could not keep such a beautiful moment for themselves: the expression of a mother's love for her children must be proclaimed to everyone. The Shrine of Our Lady of La Salette, which stands on the site of the apparitions, lays its foundations on the revelation of Mary's pain in the face of the pilgrimage of her sinful children.

Mary, the Mother who proclaims/who tells us who she is

You, who give yourself completely to your children so much

that you are not afraid to tell them about yourself, have touched the hearts of your youngest children, who are able to reflect on your words and welcome them in wonder. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Be amazed at a mother's words: they will always be the most authentic.

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, love and mercy

Do we feel this dimension of Mary, these two dimensions? Mary is the woman whose heart overflows with love, attention and also mercy. We feel that she is a harbour, a safe refuge in times of difficulty or trial.

Contemplating Mary is like immersing ourselves in an ocean of tenderness and compassion. We feel surrounded by an environment, by an inexhaustible atmosphere of comfort and hope. Mary's love is a maternal love that embraces all of humanity, because it is a love that has its roots in her unconditional yes to God's plan.

By welcoming her son into her womb, Mary welcomed God's love. As a result, her love knows no boundaries or distinctions; it bends over human frailty and misery with infinite delicacy. We see this manifested in her attention to Elizabeth, in her intercession at the wedding at Cana, in her silent, extraordinary presence at the foot of the cross.

Behold, Mary's love, this maternal love, is a reflection of God's own love, a love that draws near, that consoles, forgives, never tires, never ends. Behold, Mary teaches us that to love means to give oneself completely, to be close to those who suffer, to share the joys and sorrows of our brothers and sisters with the same generosity and dedication that animated her heart. Love, mercy.

Mercy then becomes the natural consequence of Mary's love, a compassion, we might say, that is visceral, when faced with the sufferings of humanity, the world. We look at Mary, we contemplate her, we encounter her with her maternal gaze and we feel it resting on our weaknesses, on our sins, on our

vulnerability, without aggression, indeed with infinite tenderness. It is an immaculate heart, sensitive to the cry of pain.

Mary is a mother who does not judge, does not condemn, but welcomes, consoles and forgives. We feel that Mary's mercy is a balm for the wounds of the soul, something that warms the heart. Mary reminds us that God is rich in mercy and never tires of forgiving those who turn to him with a contrite, serene, open and willing heart.

Love and mercy in the Virgin Mary merge in an embrace that envelops the whole of humanity. Let us ask Mary to help us open our hearts to God's love, as she did, and to let this love fill our hearts, especially when we feel most in need, most weighed down by trials and difficulties. In Mary, we find a tender and powerful mother, ready to welcome us into her love and to intercede for our salvation.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

As for us, are we still able to wonder like a child when faced with a mother's love?

The prayer of a distant child

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...
make my heart capable of compassion and conversion.

In silence, I find you.

In prayer, I hear you.

In reflection, I discover you.

And faced with your words of love, Mother, I am amazed
and discover the strength of your connection to humanity.

Far from you, who will hold my hand in times of difficulty?

Far from you, who will comfort me in my tears?

Far from you, who would advise me when I am taking a wrong
turn?

I will return to you, as one with you.

Hail Mary...

Day 5 – Catherine's Medal

Being Children – Trust and prayer

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there.

As for us, are we able to see her?

Little Catherine Labouré

On the night of July 18, 1830, around 11:30, she heard herself called by name. It was a child who told her, "Get up and come with me." Catherine followed the child. All the lights were on. The chapel door opened as soon as the child touched it with his fingertips. Catherine knelt down.

At midnight Our Lady came and sat in the armchair next to the altar. "Then I jumped up near her, at her feet, on the steps of the altar, and I placed my hands on her knees," Catherine said. "I stayed like this, I don't know how long. I thought it was the sweetest moment of my life..."

"God wants to entrust you with a mission," the Virgin said to Catherine.

Catherine, who lost her mother at 9 years of age, was not resigned to living without her mother. And she approached the Mother of Heaven. Our Lady, who was already looking at her from afar, would never abandon her. In fact, she had big plans for her. She, her caring and loving daughter, would have a great mission: to live an authentic Christian life, a personal relationship with God that was strong and firm. Mary believed in the potential of her child and entrusted her with the Miraculous Medal, capable of interceding and working graces and miracles. An important mission, a difficult message. **Yet Catherine was not discouraged. She trusted her Heavenly Mother and knew that she would never abandon her.**

Mary, the Mother who gives confidence

You, who are trusting, and entrust missions and messages to each of your children, have accompanied them on their journey as a discreet presence, remaining close to all, but especially

to those who have experienced great suffering. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Trust: a mother will always entrust you only with tasks that you can complete and will be by your side all the way.

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, trust and prayer

The Virgin Mary presents herself to us as a woman of unshakeable trust, a powerful intercessor through prayer. Contemplating these two aspects, trust and prayer, we see two fundamental dimensions of Mary's relationship with God.

We can say that Mary's trust in God is a golden thread that runs through her entire existence, from beginning to end. That 'yes' pronounced with awareness of the consequences is an act of total abandonment to the divine will. Mary entrusts herself, Mary lives her trust in God with a heart firmly fixed on divine providence, knowing that God would never abandon her.

So, for us, in our daily lives, looking to Mary, this abandonment, which is not passive but active and trusting, is an invitation not to forget our anxieties and fears, but in some way to look at everything in the light of God's love, which in Mary's case never failed, and neither will it fail in our lives. This trust leads to prayer, which we can say is almost the breath of Mary's soul, the privileged channel of her intimate communion with God. Trust leads to communion. Her life of abandonment was a continuous dialogue of love with the Father, a constant offering of herself, of her concerns, but also of her decisions.

The visit to Elizabeth is an example of prayer that becomes service. We see Mary accompanying Jesus to the cross, after the Ascension we see her in the Upper Room united with the Apostles in fervent expectation. Mary teaches us the value of constant prayer as a consequence of total and complete trust, abandoning oneself into God's hands, precisely to encounter God and live with God.

Trust and prayer and Mary Most Holy are closely interconnected. A deep trust in God gives birth to and brings forth persevering prayer. Let us ask Mary to be our example so that we may feel urged to make prayer a daily habit because we want to feel continually abandoned in God's merciful hands. Let us turn to her with filial trust so that, imitating her, imitating her trust and perseverance in prayer, we may experience the peace that only when we abandon ourselves to God can we receive the graces necessary for our journey of faith.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

As for us, are we able to trust unconditionally like children?

The prayer of a mistrustful child

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...
make my heart capable of praying.

I am unable to hear you, open my ears.

I am unable to follow you, guide my steps.

I am unable to keep faith with what you wish to entrust to me;
make my soul steadfast.

The temptations are many, let me not give in.

The difficulties seem insurmountable, let me not fall.

The contradictions of the world shout loudly, let me not follow them.

I, your worthless child, am here for you to use.

Making me an obedient child.

Hail Mary...

Day 6 – Our Lady of Sorrows of Kibeho Being Children – Suffering and healing

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there.

As for us, are we able to see her?

Little Alphonsine Mumiremana and her companions

The story began at 12:35 on a Saturday, November 28, 1981, in a boarding school run by local Sisters, attended by just over a hundred girls in the area. A rural, poor school, where one learned to become a teacher or secretary. The building was not equipped with a Chapel and, therefore, there was not a particularly strong religious atmosphere. That day all the girls from the school were in the refectory. The first of the group to "see" was 16-year-old Alphonsine Mumureke. According to what she herself wrote in her diary, she was serving her companions at the table, when she heard a female voice calling her: "My daughter, come here." She headed for the corridor, next to the refectory, and there a woman of incomparable beauty appeared to her. She was dressed in white, with a white veil over her head, which hid her hair, and which seemed joined to the rest of the dress, which had no seams. She was barefoot and her hands were clasped on her chest with her fingers pointing towards the sky.

Subsequently, Our Lady appeared to other of Alphonsine's school friends who at first were sceptical but then, faced with Mary's appearance, they had to reconsider. Mary, speaking to Alphonsine, described herself as the Lady of Sorrows of Kibeho and told the children about all the cruel and bloody events that would soon take place with the outbreak of war in Rwanda. **The sorrow would be great, but so too would be the consolation and healing from that sorrow, because she, the Lady of Sorrows, would never leave her children in Africa on their own. The children remain there, stunned by these visions, but they believed in this mother who reached out her arms to them, calling them "my children."** They knew that only in her would there be consolation. And in order to pray that the consoling mother would alleviate the suffering of her children, a shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows of Kibeho was erected, now a place marked by extermination and genocide. And Our Lady continues to be there and embrace all her children.

Mary, the Mother who consoles

You, who comforted your children like John beneath the cross, have looked upon those who live in suffering. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Do not be afraid to go through suffering: the mother who consoles will wipe away your tears.

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, suffering and invitation to conversion

Mary is an emblematic figure of suffering transfigured, and a powerful invitation to conversion. When we contemplate her painful journey, it is a silent yet eloquent warning, a profound call to review our lives and our choices, and a call to return to the heart of the Gospel. The suffering that runs through Mary's life, like a sharp sword, prophesied by the elderly Simeon, marked by the disappearance of the Child Jesus, to the indescribable sorrow at the foot of the cross, Mary experiences all this, the weight of human fragility and the mystery of innocent suffering in a unique way.

Mary's suffering was not sterile suffering, passive resignation, but in some way we notice that there is an activity, a silent and courageous offering, united with the redemptive sacrifice of her son Jesus.

When we look at Mary, the woman who suffers, with the eyes of our faith, that suffering, rather than depressing us, reveals the depth of God's love for us, which is visible in Mary's life. Mary teaches us that even in the most acute pain we can find meaning, a possibility for spiritual growth, which is the fruit of union with the Paschal Mystery.

Thus, from the experience of transfigured pain, a powerful call to conversion emerges. Looking at Mary, contemplating how she endured so much for love of us and for our salvation, we too are called not to remain indifferent to the mystery of redemption.

Mary, the gentle and motherly woman, urges us to abandon the ways of evil and embrace the path of faith. Mary's famous

words at the wedding at Cana, 'Do whatever he tells you', still resound for us today as an urgent invitation to listen to the voice of Jesus in times of difficulty, in times of trial. In times of unexpected and unknown situations.

We immediately notice that Mary's suffering is not an end in itself, but is intimately linked to the redemption wrought by Christ. Her example of faith is unshakeable in pain. May it be a light and guide for us to transform our sufferings into opportunities for spiritual growth and to respond generously to the urgent call to conversion, so that the depth that still resounds in the heart of every person, the invitation of God, of a God who loves us, may find meaning, an outlet and growth through Mary's intercession, even in the most difficult moments, in the most painful moments.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

As for us, do we let ourselves be comforted like children?

The prayer of a suffering child

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...
make my heart capable of healing.

When I am down, hold out your hand to me, Mother.

When I feel broken, put the pieces back together, Mother.

When suffering takes over, open me to hope, Mother.

Because I am not only seeking healing for my body, but also
realising how much my heart
needs peace.

Lift me up from the dust, Mother.

Lift me up and all your children who are in distress.

Those beneath bombing,

those who are persecuted,

those who are unjustly imprisoned,

those who are harmed in rights and dignity,

those whose lives are cut short too soon.

Lift them up and console them.

because they are your children. Because we are your children.

Hail Mary...

Day 7 – Our Lady of Aparecida

Being Children – Justice and dignity

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there. As for us, are we able to see her?

The little fishermen Domingos, Felice and Joao

At dawn on October 12, 1717, Domingos Garcia, Felipe Pedroso and Joao Alves pushed their boat into the waters of the Paraiba River that flowed near their village. They didn't seem lucky that morning: they cast their nets for hours without catching anything. They had almost decided to give up when Joao Alves, the youngest, wanted to give it one last try. So he cast his net into the waters of the river and slowly pulled it up. There was something there, but it wasn't a fish... it looked more like a piece of wood. When he freed it from the meshes of the net, the piece of wood turned out to be a statue of the Virgin Mary, unfortunately minus its head. Joao threw the net back into the water and this time, pulling it up, he found another piece of rounded wood entangled in it that looked just like the head of the same statue: he tried to put the two pieces together and realized that they matched perfectly. As if obeying an impulse, Joao Alves threw the net back into the water and, when he tried to pull it up, he realized he couldn't do it, because it was full of fish. His companions threw cast nets into the water in turn and the fishing that day was really abundant.

A mother sees the needs of her children, Mary saw the needs of the three fishermen and went to their rescue. Her children gave her all the love and dignity that can be given to a mother: they put the two pieces of the statue back together, placed it on a hut and turned it into a shrine. From the top of the hut, Our Lady of Aparecida – which means She Appeared – saved one of her slave sons who was running away from his masters: she saw his suffering and restored his dignity. And

today, that hut is the largest Marian shrine in the world and bears the name of the Basilica of Our Lady of Aparecida.

Mary, the Mother who sees

You, who have seen the suffering of your abused children, starting with the disciples, have stood beside your poorest and most persecuted children. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Do not hide from a mother's gaze: she also sees into your most hidden desires and needs.

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, dignity and social justice

The Virgin Mary is a mirror of fully realised human dignity, silent but powerful and inspiring for a just sense of social life. Reflecting on the figure of Mary in relation to these themes reveals a profound and surprisingly relevant perspective.

Let us look to Mary, the woman full of dignity, as a gift that helps us today to see her original purity, which does not place her on an inaccessible pedestal but reveals Mary in the fullness of that dignity to which we all feel a little attracted, called.

Contemplating Mary, we see shining forth the beauty and nobility, precisely the dignity of the human being, created in the image and likeness of God, free from the game of sin, fully open to divine love, a humanity that is not lost in details, in superficial things.

We can say that Mary's free and conscious 'yes' is the gesture of self-determination that elevates Mary to the level of God's will, entering in some way into God's logic. Her humility then makes her even freer, far from being diminished by humility. Mary's humility becomes an awareness of the true greatness that comes from God.

Here, then, is this dignity that Mary helps us to see how we are living it in our daily lives. The theme of social justice

may seem less explicit, but from a careful contemplative reading of the Gospel, especially the Magnificat, we can grasp, feel and encounter the revolutionary spirit that proclaims the overthrow of the powerful from their thrones and the raising up of the humble, that is, the reversal of worldly logic and God's privileged attention to the poor and hungry. These words flow from a humble heart, filled with the Holy Spirit. We can say that they are a manifesto of social justice ante litteram, a foretaste of the kingdom of God, where the last will be first.

Let us contemplate Mary so that we may feel attracted to this dignity that is not limited to closing in on itself but is a dignity that in the Magnificat challenges us not to remain closed in our own logic but to become open, praising God and seeking to live the gift we have received for the good of humanity, with dignity for the good of the poor and for the good of those who are rejected by society.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

As for us, do we hide or do we say everything like children do?

The prayer of a child who is afraid

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...
make my heart capable of restoring dignity.

In a time of trial, look at my shortcomings and make them whole.

In a time of fatigue, look at my weaknesses and heal them.

In a time of waiting, look at my impatience and heal it.

So that when I look at my brothers and sisters I can look at their shortcomings and make them whole,
see their weaknesses and heal them, feel their impatience and heal it.

Because nothing cares like love and no one is as strong as a mother seeking justice for her children.

And then I too, Mother, will stop at the foot of the hut, look with confident eyes at your image and pray for the dignity of

all your children.

Hail Mary...

Day 8 – Our Lady of Banneaux

Being Children – Gentleness and everyday life

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there.

As for us, are we able to see her?

Little Marietta of Banneaux

On January 18, Marietta was in the garden, praying the rosary. Mary came and took her to a small spring on the edge of the forest, where she said, “This spring is for me”, and invited the little girl to immerse her hand and the rosary in it. Her father and two other people followed Marietta in all her gestures and words with indescribable amazement. And that same evening the first to be conquered by Banneaux’s grace was Marietta’s father, who ran to go to confession and receive the Eucharist: he had not been to confession since his first communion.

On January 19, Marietta asked, “Ma’am, who are you?” “I am the Virgin of the poor.”

At the spring, she added, “This spring is for me, for all the nations, for the sick. I come to console them!”

Marietta was a normal girl who lived her days like all of us, like our children, our grandchildren. Hers was a small and unknown village. She prayed that she would stay close to God. She prayed to her Heavenly Mother to keep the bond with her alive. **And Mary spoke to her gently, in a place familiar to her.** She would appear to her several times, confide secrets to her and tell her to pray for the conversion of the world: this was a strong message of hope for Marietta. All children are embraced and consoled by their Mother, all the sweetness that Marietta found in the “Gentle Lady” she passed on to the world. And from this encounter came a great chain of love and

spirituality that found its fulfilment in the Shrine of Our Lady of Banneaux.

Mary, the Mother who stays beside us

You who remained beside your children without ever losing a single one, have enlightened the daily path of the simplest people. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Abandon yourself into Mary's embrace: do not be afraid, she will comfort you.

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, education and love

The Virgin Mary is an incomparable teacher of education, because she is an inexhaustible source of love, and those who love educate, truly educate those they love.

Reflecting on the figure of Mary in relation to these two pillars of human and spiritual growth, we have here an example to contemplate, to take seriously, to incorporate into our daily choices.

The education that emanates from Mary is not made up of precepts or formal teachings but is manifested through her example of life. A contemplative silence that speaks, her obedience to God's will, both humble and great, her profound humanity.

Here, the first educational aspect that Mary communicates to us is that of listening.

Listening to the word of God, listening to that God who is always there to help us, to accompany us. Mary keeps this in her heart, meditates on it carefully, encourages attentive listening to the word of God and, in the same way, to the needs of others. Mary teaches us that humility which does not choose to remain detached and passive, but rather the humility which, while recognising our smallness before God's greatness, places us as people who are active in his service. Our hearts are open to truly be those who accompany, living the plan that God has for us.

Mary is an example that helps us to let ourselves be educated by faith. She teaches us perseverance, remaining steadfast in love for Jesus, even at the foot of the cross.

Education and love. Behold, Mary's love is the beating heart of her existence. It continues to be for us. Every time we draw close to Mary, we feel this maternal love that extends to all of us. It is a love for Jesus that becomes a love for humanity. Mary's heart opens with the infinite tenderness that she receives from God, which she communicates to Jesus and to her spiritual children.

Let us ask the Lord that in contemplating Mary's love, which is a love that educates, we may allow ourselves to be moved to overcome our selfishness and our closed attitudes and to open ourselves to others. In Mary, we see a woman who educates with love and who loves with a love that is educational. Let us ask the Lord to give us the gift of love, which is the gift of his love, which in turn is a love that purifies us, sustains us and makes us grow, so that our example may truly be an example that communicates love and, by communicating love, we may allow ourselves to be educated by her and let her help us so that our example may also educate others.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

As for us, are we able to abandon ourselves as children do?

The prayer of a child of our times

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...
make my heart gentle and docile.

Who will put me back together after breaking under the weight
of the crosses I carry?

Who will bring light back to my eyes after seeing the ruins of
human cruelty?

Who will alleviate the sufferings of my soul, after the
mistakes I have made on my journey?

Mother, only you can comfort me.

Hold me tight and keep me with you to keep me from falling
apart.

Let my soul rest in you and find peace like a child in its mother's arms.

Hail Mary...

Day 9 – Mary Help of Christians

Being Children – Building and dreaming

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there.

As for us, are we able to see her?

Little John Bosco

At the age of 9, I had a dream. All my life this remained deeply impressed on my mind. In this dream I seemed to be near my home in a very large yard. A crowd of children were playing there. Some were laughing, some were playing games, and quite a few were swearing. When I heard these evil words, I jumped immediately amongst them, and tried to stop them by using my words and my fists. At that moment, a dignified man appeared, a nobly-dressed adult.

"You will have to win these friends of yours not by blows but by gentleness and love."

"Who are you, ordering me to do the impossible?"

"Precisely because it seems impossible to you, you must make it possible through obedience and the acquisition of knowledge."

"Where, by what means can I acquire knowledge?"

"I will give you a teacher. Under her guidance you can become wise. Without her all wisdom is foolishness."

At that moment I saw a lady of stately appearance standing beside him. She was wearing a mantle that sparkled all over as though covered with bright stars.

"This is the field of your work. Make yourself humble, strong and energetic. And what you will see happening to these animals in a moment is what you must do for my children.

I looked around again and where before I had seen wild animals, I now saw gentle lambs. They were all jumping and

bleating as if to welcome that man and lady. At that point, still dreaming, I began crying. I begged the lady to speak so that I could understand her, because I did not know what all this could mean. She then placed her hand on my head and said, "In good time you will understand everything."

Mary guided and accompanied young John Bosco throughout his life and mission. He, a child, thus discovered his vocation from a dream. He would not understand it but he would let himself be guided. He would not understand it for many years but in the end he would be aware that "she did everything". And his mother, both the earthly and the heavenly one, would be the central figure in the life of this son who would provide bread for his children. And after meeting Mary in his dreams, John Bosco, by then a priest, would build a Shrine to Our Lady so that all her children can rely on her. And he would dedicate it to Mary Help of Christians, because she had been his safe haven, his constant help. Thus, all those who enter the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin are taken under the protective mantle of Mary who becomes their guide.

Mary, a Mother who accompanies/guides

You who accompanied your son Jesus throughout his journey, offered yourself as a guide to those who listened to you with the enthusiasm that only children can have. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Let yourself be accompanied: your Mother will always be by your side to show you the way.

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, our help in conversion

The Virgin Mary is a powerful and silent help on our journey of growth.

It is a journey that constantly needs to free itself from whatever blocks its growth. It is a journey that must

continually renew itself, so as not to turn back or stop in the dark corners of our existence. This is conversion.

Mary's presence is a beacon of hope, a constant invitation for us to continue walking towards God, helping our hearts to remain focused on God and his love. Reflecting on Mary, on her role, means discovering Mary who does not impose, who does not judge, but rather supports, encourages, with her humility, with her maternal love, helping our hearts to remain close to her so that we may draw ever closer to her son Jesus, who is the way, the truth and the life.

Mary's 'yes' at the Annunciation, which opens up the history of salvation to humanity, remains valid for us too. Her intercession at the Wedding at Cana supports those who find themselves in unexpected, unprecedented situations. Mary is a model of continuous conversion. Her life, a life of the Immaculate, was a gradual adherence to God's will, a journey of faith that led her through joys and sorrows, culminating in the sacrifice of Calvary.

Mary's perseverance in following Jesus becomes an invitation for us to live this continuous closeness, this inner transformation, which we know well is a gradual process, but one that requires constancy, humility and trust in God's grace.

Mary helps us in our conversion through her attentive and focused listening to the Word of God. Listening that helps us find the strength to abandon the ways of sin, because we recognise the strength and beauty of walking towards God. Let us turn to Mary with filial trust, because this means that, while recognising our frailties, our sins and our faults, we want to foster those desires for change. A change of heart that seeks to let itself be accompanied by the maternal heart of Mary. And in Mary, let us find that precious help to discern the false promises of the world and rediscover the beauty and truth of the Gospel. May Mary, the Help of Christians, be for all of us a constant help in discovering the beauty of the Gospel. And in accepting to walk towards goodness, the greatness of God's word, alive in our hearts so

that we can communicate it to others.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

As for us, are we capable of being taken by the hand like children?

The prayer of a motionless child

Mary, you who reveal yourself to those who are able to see...
make my heart capable of dreaming and building.

I who do not let anyone else help me.

I who get discouraged, lose patience and never believe I have
built anything.

I who always believe I am a failure.

Today I want to be a son or daughter who can give you their
hand, my Mother

to be accompanied on life's paths.

Show me my field,

show me my dream

and make sure that in the end I too can understand everything
and recognise that you were there
in my life.

Hail Mary...

Is Confession Still Necessary?

The Sacrament of Confession, often overlooked in today's hectic world, remains for the Catholic Church an irreplaceable source of grace and inner renewal. We invite you to rediscover its original meaning: not a mere formal ritual, but a personal encounter with God's mercy, established by Christ himself and entrusted to the ministry of the Church. In an age that

downplays sin, Confession proves to be a compass for the conscience, medicine for the soul, and a wide-open door to peace of heart.

The Sacrament of Confession: A Necessity for the Soul

In the Catholic tradition, the Sacrament of Confession—also called the Sacrament of Reconciliation or Penance—holds a central place on the journey of faith. It is not merely a formal act or a practice reserved for a few particularly devout faithful, but a profound necessity involving every Christian called to live in God's grace. In an age that tends to relativize the concept of sin, rediscovering the beauty and liberating power of Confession is fundamental to fully responding to God's love.

Jesus Christ himself instituted the Sacrament of Confession. After His Resurrection, He appeared to the Apostles and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained" (Jn 20:22-23). These words are not symbolic; they establish a real and concrete power entrusted to the Apostles and, through succession, to their successors, the bishops and priests.

The forgiveness of sins, therefore, does not happen only privately between man and God, but also passes through the ministry of the Church. God, in His plan of salvation, willed that personal confession before a priest be the ordinary means of receiving His forgiveness.

The Reality of Sin

To understand the necessity of Confession, one must first become aware of the reality of sin.

Saint Paul states, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). And, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 Jn 1:8).

No one can claim immunity from sin, not even after Baptism, which purified us from original sin. Our human nature, wounded by concupiscence, continually leads us to fall, to betray

God's love through actions, words, omissions, and thoughts. Saint Augustine writes, "It is true; man's nature was originally created without fault and without any vice. conversely, the present nature of man, through which everyone is born from Adam, now needs the Physician, because it is not healthy. Certainly, all the goods it possesses in its structure, in its life, senses, and mind, it receives from the supreme God, its creator and maker. The vice, however, which obscures and weakens these natural goods, thus making human nature needy of illumination and care, was not derived from its irreproachable maker, but from original sin which was committed through free will." (Nature and Grace).

Denying the existence of sin is tantamount to denying the truth about ourselves. Only by recognizing our need for forgiveness can we open ourselves to the mercy of God, who never tires of calling us back to Himself.

Confession: Encounter with Divine Mercy

The Sacrament of Confession is, first and foremost, a personal encounter with Divine Mercy. It is not simply self-accusation or a session of self-analysis. It is an act of love from God who, like the father in the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32), runs to meet the repentant child, embraces him, and clothes him with new dignity.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: *"Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God's mercy for the offense committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example, and by prayer cooperates for their conversion."* (CCC, 1422).

To confess is to allow oneself to be loved, healed, and renewed. It is to welcome the gift of a new heart.

Why Confess to a Priest?

One of the most common objections is, "Why must I confess to a

priest? Can't I confess directly to God?" Certainly, every member of the faithful can – and should – turn directly to God with a prayer of repentance. However, Jesus established a concrete, visible, and sacramental means for forgiveness: confession to an ordained minister. And this applies to every Christian, meaning also priests, bishops, and popes.

The priest acts *in persona Christi*, that is, in the person of Christ Himself. He listens, judges, absolves, and offers spiritual counsel. This is not a human mediation that limits God's love, but rather a guarantee offered by Christ Himself; forgiveness is communicated visibly, and the faithful can have certainty of it.

Furthermore, confessing before a priest demands humility, an indispensable virtue for spiritual growth. Openly acknowledging one's faults frees us from the yoke of pride and opens us to the true freedom of the children of God.

It is not enough to confess only once a year, as required by the minimum of ecclesiastical law. The saints and spiritual masters have always recommended frequent confession – even bi-weekly or weekly – as a means of progress in the Christian life.

Saint John Paul II went to confession every week. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, despite being a Carmelite nun living in enclosure, confessed regularly. Frequent confession allows one to refine the conscience, correct ingrained faults, and receive new graces.

Obstacles to Confession

Unfortunately, many faithful today neglect the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Among the main reasons are:

Shame: fearing the priest's judgment. But the priest is not there to condemn, but to be an instrument of mercy.

Fear that confessed sins will be made public: confessors

cannot reveal to anyone, under any circumstances (including the highest ecclesiastical authorities), the sins heard in confession, even at the cost of their own lives. If they do, they immediately incur *latae sententiae* excommunication (Canon 1386, Code of Canon Law). The inviolability of the sacramental seal admits no exceptions or dispensations. And the conditions are the same even if the Confession did not end with sacramental absolution. Even after the penitent's death, the confessor is bound to observe the sacramental seal.

Lack of a sense of sin: in a culture that minimizes evil, one risks no longer recognizing the gravity of one's faults.

Spiritual laziness: postponing Confession is a common temptation that leads to a cooling of the relationship with God.

Erroneous theological convictions: some mistakenly believe that simply "repenting in one's heart" is sufficient without the need for sacramental Confession.

Despair of salvation: Some think that for them, there will be no more forgiveness anyway. Saint Augustine says: "Indeed, some, after having fallen into sin, lose themselves even more through despair and not only neglect the medicine of repentance but become slaves to lusts and wicked desires to satisfy dishonest and reprehensible cravings, as if by not doing so they would lose even that to which lust incites them, convinced they are already on the brink of certain damnation. Against this extremely dangerous and harmful disease, the memory of the sins into which even the just and holy have fallen is beneficial." (ibid.)

To overcome these obstacles, one must seek advice from those who can give it, educate oneself, and pray.

Preparing Well for Confession

A good confession requires adequate preparation, which includes:

1. Examination of conscience: sincerely reflecting on one's sins, perhaps aided by lists based on the Ten Commandments, the capital sins, or the Beatitudes.

2. Contrition: sincere sorrow for having offended God, not just fear of punishment.

3. Purpose of amendment: a real desire to change one's life, to avoid future sin.

4. Integral confession of sins: confessing all mortal sins completely, specifying their nature and number (if possible).

5. Penance: accepting and performing the act of reparation proposed by the confessor.

The Effects of Confession

Confession does not merely produce an external cancellation of sin. The internal effects are profound and transformative:

Reconciliation with God: Sin breaks communion with God; Confession re-establishes it, bringing us back into full divine friendship.

Inner peace and serenity: Receiving absolution brings profound peace. The conscience is freed from the burden of guilt, and a new joy is experienced.

Spiritual strength: Through sacramental grace, the penitent receives special strength to fight future temptations and grow in virtue.

Reconciliation with the Church: Since every sin also damages the Mystical Body of Christ, Confession also mends our bond with the ecclesial community.

The spiritual vitality of the Church also depends on the personal renewal of its members. Christians who rediscover the Sacrament of Confession become, almost without realizing it, more open to others, more missionary, more capable of

radiating the light of the Gospel in the world. Only those who have experienced God's forgiveness can proclaim it convincingly to others.

The Sacrament of Confession is an immense and irreplaceable gift. It is the ordinary way through which Christians can return to God whenever they stray. It is not a burden, but a privilege; not a humiliation, but a liberation.

We are called, therefore, to rediscover this Sacrament in its truth and beauty, to practice it with an open and trusting heart, and to joyfully propose it also to those who have strayed. As the psalmist affirms, "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (Ps 32:1).

Today, more than ever, the world needs purified and reconciled souls, capable of testifying that God's mercy is stronger than sin. If we did not do so at Easter, let us take advantage of the Marian month of May and approach Confession without fear; there awaits us the smile of a Father who never stops loving us.

Finally in Patagonia!

Between 1877 and 1880, the Salesian missionary shift towards Patagonia took place. After the offer of the parish of Carhué on May 12, 1877, Don Bosco dreamed of evangelizing the southern lands, but Don Cagliero urged caution in the face of cultural difficulties. The initial attempts were delayed, while General Roca's "desert campaign" (1879) reshaped the balance with the indigenous people. On August 15, 1879, Archbishop Aneiros entrusted the Patagonian mission to the Salesians: "The time has finally come when I can offer you the Mission of Patagonia, for which your heart has long yearned."

On January 15, 1880, the first group led by Don Giuseppe Fagnano set out, marking the beginning of the Salesian epic in southern Argentina.

What made Don Bosco and Fr Cagliero suspend, at least temporarily, any missionary project in Asia was the news on 12 May 1877: the Archbishop of Buenos Aires had offered the Salesians the mission of Caruhé (south east of Buenos Aires Province), a place of garrison and frontier between numerous tribes of indigenous people from the vast desert of the Pampas and Buenos Aires Province.

Thus the doors of Patagonia were open to the Salesians for the first time: Don Bosco was thrilled, but Fr Cagliero immediately cooled his enthusiasm: "I repeat, however, that with regard to Patagonia we must not run with electric speed, nor go there by steam, because the Salesians are not yet prepared for this enterprise [...] too much has been published and we have been able to do too little with regard to the Indians. It is easy to conceive, difficult to accomplish, and it is too short a time that we have been here, and we must work with zeal and activity to this end, but not make a fuss, so as not to arouse the admiration of these people here, seeking to aspire, having arrived yesterday, to the conquest of a country that we do not yet know and whose language we do not even know."

With the option of Carmen de Patagónes no longer available, since archbishop had entrusted the parish to a Lazarist (Vincentian) priest, the Salesians were left with the northernmost parish of Carhué and the southernmost parish of Santa Cruz. Fr Cagliero had obtained a passage there by sea in the spring, which would have delayed his planned return to Italy by six months.

The decision of who should "enter Patagonia first" was thus left to Don Bosco, who intended to offer him that honour. But before he even knew it, Fr Cagliero decided to return: "Patagonia is waiting for me, those from Dolores, Carhué, Chaco are asking for us, and I will please them all by

running away!" (8 July 1877). He returned to attend the 1st General Chapter of the Salesian Society to be held in Lanzo Torinese in September. Among other things, he was always a member of the Congregation's Superior Chapter, where he held the important position of Catechist General (he was number three in the Congregation, after Don Bosco and Fr Rua).

1877 closed with the third expedition of 26 missionaries led by Fr Giacomo Costamagna and with Don Bosco's new request to the Holy See for a Prefecture at Carhué and a Vicariate at Santa Cruz. Yet, to tell the truth, in the whole year the direct evangelisation of the Salesians outside the city had been limited to the brief experience of Fr Cagliero and cleric Evasio Rabagliati in the Italian colony at Villa Libertad, near Entre Ríos (April 1877) on the borders of the Diocese of Paraná, as well as some excursions to the Salesian camp in St. Nicolas de los Arroyos.

The dream is realised (1880)

In May 1878 the first attempt to reach Carhué by Fr Costamagna and the cleric Rabagliati failed because of a storm (they were travelling by sea). But in the meantime Don Bosco had already resumed his efforts with the new Prefect of Propaganda Fide, Cardinal Giovanni Simeoni, proposing a Vicariate or Prefecture based in Carmen, as Fr Fagnano himself had suggested, which he saw as a strategic point to reach the natives.

The following year (1879), just as a plan for the Salesians to enter Paraguay was eventuating, the doors of Patagonia were finally opened to them. In April in fact, General Julio A. Roca started the famous "desert campaign" with the aim of subduing the Indians and obtaining internal security, pushing them back beyond the Río Negro and Neuquén rivers. It was the "coup de grace" in their extermination, after the numerous massacres of the previous year.

The Vicar General of Buenos Aires, Monsignor Espinosa, as chaplain to an army of six thousand men, was accompanied by the Argentinean cleric Luigi Botta and Fr

Costamagna. The future bishop immediately realised the ambiguity of their position, immediately wrote to Don Bosco, but saw no other way to open the road to Patagonia to the Salesian missionaries. And indeed, as soon as the government asked the archbishop to establish some missions on the banks of the Río Negro and in Patagonia, the Salesians were immediately thought of.

The Salesians, for their part, had the intention of asking the government for a ten-year concession of a territory administered by them in which to construct, with materials paid for by the government and with labour from the Indians, the buildings necessary for a sort of *reducción* in that territory: the poor would avoid the contamination of the “corrupt and vicious” Christian settlers and the missionaries would plant the cross of Christ and the Argentine flag there. But Salesian Provincial Fr Francis Bodrato did not feel like deciding on his own, and Fr Lasagna advised against it in May on the grounds that the Avellaneda government was at the end of its term and was not interested in the religious problem. It was therefore better to preserve Salesian independence and freedom of action.

On 15 August 1879 Archbishop Aneiros formally offered Don Bosco the Patagonian mission: “The moment has finally arrived, in which I can offer you the Patagonian Mission, for which your heart has so longed, as the care of souls among the Patagonians, which can serve as a centre for the mission.”

Don Bosco accepted it immediately and willingly, even though it was not yet the longed-for consent to the erection of ecclesiastical circumscriptions autonomous from the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires, a reality constantly opposed by the diocesan Ordinary.

The departure

The group of missionaries left for the longed-for Patagonia on 15 January 1880: it was made up of Fr Giuseppe Fagnano, director of the Mission and parish priest in Carmen

de Patagónes (the Lazarist Father had retired), two priests, one of whom was in charge of the parish of Viedma on the other bank of the Río Negro, a lay Salesian (Brother) and four Sisters. In December, Fr Dominic Milanesio arrived to help out, and a few months later Fr Joseph Beauvoir arrived with another novice Brother. The Salesian missionary epic in Patagonia was beginning.

Habemus Papam: Leo XIV

On 8 May 2025, the feast day of Our Lady of the Rosary of Pompeii, **Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost** (69) was elected as the **267th Pope**. He is the first Pope born in the United States and has chosen the name *Leo XIV*.

Here is a brief biography

Birth: 14 September 1955, Chicago (Illinois, USA)

Family: Louis Marius Prevost (of French and Italian origin) and Mildred Martínez (of Spanish origin); brothers Louis Martín and John Joseph

Languages: English, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and French; reads Latin and German

Nickname in Peru: '*Latin Yankee*' – a summary of his dual cultural identity

Citizenship: American and Peruvian

Education

– Augustinian minor seminary (1973)

– Bachelor's degree in Mathematical Sciences, Villanova University (1977)

– Master of Divinity, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago

(1982)

- Licentiate in Canon Law, Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas – Angelicum (1984)
- Doctorate in Canon Law, Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas – Angelicum (1987), with a thesis entitled: 'The role of the local prior of the Order of St. Augustine'
- Religious profession: novitiate of Saint Louis of the Province of Our Lady of Good Counsel of the Order of Saint Augustine (1977)
- Solemn vows (29 August 1981)
- Priestly ordination: 19 June 1982, Rome (by Archbishop Jean Jadot)

Ministry and main appointments

1985-1986: Missionary in Chulucanas, Piura (Peru)

1987: Director of vocations and director of missions of the Augustinian Province 'Mother of Good Counsel' in Olympia Fields, Illinois (USA)

1988: Sent to the mission in Trujillo (Peru) as director of the joint formation program for Augustinian aspirants from the Vicariates of Chulucanas, Iquitos, and Apurímac

1988-1992: Director of the community

1992-1998: Teacher of professed friars

1989-1998: Judicial Vicar in the Archdiocese of Trujillo, professor of Canon Law, Patristics, and Morals at the Major Seminary 'San Carlos y San Marcelo'

1999: Provincial Prior of the Province "Mother of Good Counsel" (Chicago)

2001-2013: Prior General of the Augustinians for two terms (approx. 2,700 religious in 50 countries)

2013: Teacher of professed religious and Provincial Vicar in his Province (Chicago)

2014: Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Chiclayo and Titular Bishop of Sufar, Peru (episcopal appointment on 3 November 2014)

2014: Episcopal consecration on the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe (12 December 2014)

2015: appointed bishop of Chiclayo (26 September 2015)
2018: 2nd vice-president of the Episcopal Conference of Peru (8 March 2018 – 30 January 2023)
2020: Apostolic Administrator of Callao, Peru (15 April 2020 – 17 April 2021)
2023: Archbishop ad personam (30 January 2023 – 30 September 2023)
2023: Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops (30 January 2023 [12 April 2023] – 9 May 2025)
2023: President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America (30 January 2023 [12 April 2023] – 9 May 2025)
2023: Created Cardinal Deacon, titular of St. Monica of the Augustinians (30.09.2023 [28.01.2024] – 06.02.2025)
2025: Promoted to Cardinal Bishop of the Suburbicarian Diocese of Albano (06.02.2025 – 08.05.2025)
2025: Elected Supreme Pontiff (08.05.2025)

Service in the Roman Curia

He was a member of the Dicasteries for Evangelization, Section for First Evangelization and New Churches; for the Doctrine of the Faith; for the Eastern Churches; for the Clergy; for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life; for Culture and Education; for Legislative Texts, and of the Pontifical Commission for the Vatican City State

May the Holy Spirit enlighten his ministry, as he did with the great Saint Augustine.

Let us pray for a fruitful pontificate rich with hope!

Young people's gifts to Mary

(1865)

In a dream recounted by Don Bosco in the Chronicle of the Oratory, dated May 30th, Marian devotion transforms into a vivid, symbolic judgment of the Oratory's youth: a procession of boys comes forward, each bearing a gift, before an altar magnificently adorned for the Virgin. An angel, the community's guardian, accepts or rejects these offerings, unveiling their moral meaning—fragrant or withered flowers, thorns symbolizing disobedience, animals embodying grave vices such as impurity, theft, and scandal. At the heart of this vision resonates Don Bosco's educational message: humility, obedience, and chastity are the three pillars for earning Mary's crown of roses.

Don Bosco found consolation in acts of devotion to Mary, Help of Christians, whom the whole Oratory honored particularly in the month of May. Of his "Good Nights" the chronicle records but one—a most precious one—which he gave on the 30th:

30th May

I dreamed that you boys were heading in procession toward a lofty, richly decorated altar of Our Lady. You were all singing the same hymns to Her but not in the same way: many sang beautifully, others rather poorly and some totally out of tune. I saw too that some kept silent, strayed from the ranks, yawned or kept disturbing others.

Everyone carried gifts, mostly flowers, to Our Lady. The bouquets differed in size and kind. There were bouquets of roses, carnations, violets and so on. Some boys carried very odd presents, such as pigs' heads, cats, slimy toads, rabbits, lambs and so on. A handsome youth stood by the altar. A close look would show that he had wings. He may have been the Oratory's guardian angel. As you boys presented your gifts, he took each and placed it on the altar.

The first to reach the altar offered gorgeous bouquets which

the angel silently placed on it. From other bouquets, instead, he had to remove decayed or scentless flowers, such as dahlias, camelias and the like, because Mary is not satisfied with mere looks. Some bouquets even had thorns and nails which, of course, were promptly plucked out and thrown away. When a boy carrying a pig's head came up, the angel said to him, "How dare you offer this to Our Lady? Don't you know that this animal symbolizes the ugly vice of impurity? Mary Most Pure cannot tolerate such a sin. Step aside. You are not worthy to stand in Her presence."

To those who offered a cat the angel said: "Don't you know better? A cat represents theft, and you dare present it to Mary? Those who take what does not belong to them, those who steal food from the house, tear their clothes out of spite or waste their parents' money by not studying as they ought, are nothing but thieves!" These too the angel ordered to withdraw. He was equally indignant with boys offering toads. "Toads symbolize the shameful sin of scandal, and dare you offer them to Our Lady? Step aside.

Join the unworthy ones." These boys too shamefully withdrew. Some lads came up with a knife stuck in their hearts, a symbol of sacrilege. "Don't you realize that there is death in your soul?" the angel asked them. "If it weren't for God's mercy, you would be lost forever. For heaven's sake, have that knife removed from your heart!"

Eventually the rest of the boys reached the altar and presented their gifts-lambs, rabbits, fish, nuts, grapes and so on. The angel took them and placed them before Our Lady. Then he lined up all the boys whose gifts had been accepted in front of the altar. I noticed to my deep regret that those who had been made to step aside were much more numerous than I had thought.

Two other angels now appeared at each side of the altar carrying ornate baskets filled with gorgeous, exceedingly beautiful crowns of roses. They were not earthly roses, but heaven-grown, symbolizing immortality. With these the guardian angel crowned all the boys ranged before Our Lady's altar. I

noticed among them many whom I had never seen before. Another remarkable thing is this: some of the most beautiful crowns went to boys who were so ugly as to be almost repulsive. Obviously, the virtue of holy purity which they eminently possessed amply made up for their unattractive appearance. Many other boys possessed this virtue too, though not to the same degree. Youngsters excelling in obedience, humility, or love of God were also crowned according to their deserts.

The angel then addressed all the boys as follows: "It was Our Lady's wish that you should be crowned today with these beautiful roses. See to it that they may never be taken from you. Humility, obedience and chastity will safeguard them for you. With these three virtues you will always find favor with Mary and one day receive a crown infinitely more beautiful than that you wear today."

All of you then sang the first stanza of the *Ave Maris Stella*. Afterward you turned around and filed away as you had come, singing the hymn *Lodate Maria* so full-heartedly that I was really amazed. I followed you for a while; then I went back to take a look at the boys whom the angel had pushed aside, but they were no longer there.

My dear children, I know who was crowned and who was turned down.

The latter I will warn privately so that they may strive to bring gifts pleasing to Our Lady.

Now let me make a few observations:

1. All you were carrying a variety of flowers, but unfailingly every bouquet had its share of thorns-some more, some less. After much thinking I came to the conclusion that these thorns symbolized acts of disobedience, such as keeping money instead of depositing it with Father Prefect, asking leave to go to one place and then going to another, being late to school, eating on the sly, going to other boys' dormitories although knowing that this is always strictly forbidden, lingering in bed after rising time, neglecting prescribed practices of

piety, talking during times of silence, buying books and not submitting them for approval, sending or receiving letters on the sneak, and buying and selling things among yourselves. This is what the thorns stand for.

“Is it a sin to break the house rules?” many will ask.

After seriously considering this question, my answer is a firm “yes.” I will not say whether it is mortal or venial. Circumstances will determine that, but it certainly is a sin.

Some might counter that the Ten Commandments say nothing about obeying house rules. Well, the Fourth Commandment says: “*Honor thy father and thy mother.*” Do you know what “*father*” and “*mother*” stand for? Not only parents, but also those who take their place. Besides, doesn’t Holy Scripture say: “... *Obey your superiors*”? [Heb. 13, 17] If you must obey them, it follows that they have the power to command. This is why we have rules, and these must be obeyed.

2. Some bouquets had nails among the flowers, the nails which crucified Jesus. How could that be? As usual, one starts with little things and goes on to more serious ones ... He allows himself undue liberties and falls into mortal sin. This is how nails managed to find their way into those bouquets, how they again crucified Jesus, as St. Paul says: “... crucifying again ... the Son of God.” [Heb. 6, 6]

3. Many bouquets contained rotten or scentless flowers, symbols of good works done in the state of mortal sin – and therefore unmeritorious – or from human motives such as ambition, or solely to please teachers and superiors. That’s why the angel, after scolding those boys for daring to offer such things to Our Lady, sent them back to trim their bouquets. Only after they had done this did the angel accept them and place them on the altar. In returning to the altar, these boys did not follow any order, but went up to the angel as soon as they had trimmed their bouquets and then joined those to be crowned.

In this dream I saw both your past and your future. I have

already spoken of it to many of you. I shall likewise tell the rest. Meanwhile, my children, see to it that the Blessed Virgin may always receive gifts from you which She will not have to refuse.

(*BM VIII, 73-76*)

Opening photo: Carlo Acutis during a visit to the Marian Shrine of Fátima.

St Dominic Savio. The places of his childhood

Saint Dominic Savio, the “little great saint,” lived his brief but intense childhood among the hills of Piedmont, in places now steeped in memory and spirituality. On the occasion of his beatification in 1950, this young disciple of Don Bosco was celebrated as a symbol of purity, faith, and devotion to the Gospel. We retrace the principal places of his childhood—Riva presso Chieri, Morialdo, and Mondonio—through historical testimonies and vivid accounts, revealing the family, scholastic, and spiritual environment that forged his path to sainthood.

The Holy Year 1950 was also the year Dominic Savio was beatified, which took place on 5 March. The 15-year-old disciple of Don Bosco was the first lay saint ‘confessor’ to ascend the altars at such a young age.

On that day, St Peter’s Basilica was packed with young people who bore witness, by their presence in Rome, to a Christian youth entirely open to the most sublime ideals of the Gospel. It was transformed, according to Vatican Radio, into an immense and noisy Salesian Oratory. When the veil

covering the figure of the new Blessed fell from Bernini's rays, a frenzied applause rose from the whole basilica and the echo reached the square, where the tapestry depicting the Blessed was uncovered from the Loggia of Blessings.

Don Bosco's educational system received its highest recognition on that day. We wanted to revisit the places of Dominic's childhood after re-reading the detailed information of Fr Michele Molineris in his *Nuova Vita di Domenico Savio*, in which he describes with his well-known solid documentation what the biographies of St Dominic Savio do not say.

At Riva presso Chieri

Here we are, first of all, in [San Giovanni di Riva presso Chieri](#), the hamlet where our "little great Saint" was born on 2 April 1842 to Carlo Savio and Brigida Gaiato, as the second of ten children, inheriting his name and birthright from the first, who survived only 15 days after his birth.

His father, as we know, came from Ranello, a hamlet of Castelnuovo d'Asti, and as a young man had gone to live with his uncle Carlo, a blacksmith in Mondonio, in a house on today's Via Giunipero, at no. 1, still called 'ca dèlfré' or blacksmith's house. There, from 'Barba Carlòto' he had learned the trade. Some time after his marriage, contracted on 2 March 1840, he had become independent, moving to the Gastaldi house in San Giovanni di Riva. He rented accommodation with rooms on the ground floor suitable for a kitchen, storeroom and workshop, and bedrooms on the first floor, reached by an external staircase that has now disappeared.

The Gastaldi heirs then sold the cottage and adjoining farmhouse to the Salesians in 1978. And today a modern youth centre, run by Salesian Past Pupils and Cooperators, gives memory and new life to the little house where Dominic was born.

In Morialdo

In November 1843, i.e. when Dominic had not yet reached the age of two, the Savio family, for work reasons, moved to [Morialdo](#), the hamlet of Castelnuovo linked to the name of St John Bosco, who was born at Cascina Biglione, a hamlet in the Becchi district.

In Morialdo, the Savios rented a few small rooms near the entrance porch of the farmstead owned by Viale Giovanna, who had married Stefano Persoglio. The whole farm was later sold by their son, Persoglio Alberto, to Pianta Giuseppe and family.

This farmstead is also now, for the most part, the property of the Salesians who, after restoring it, have used it for meetings for children and adolescents and for visits by pilgrims. Less than 2 km from Colle Don Bosco, it is situated in a country setting, amidst festoons of vines, fertile fields and undulating meadows, with an air of joy in spring and nostalgia in autumn when the yellowing leaves are gilded by the sun's rays, with an enchanting panorama on fine days, when the chain of the Alps stretches out on the horizon from the peak of Monte Rosa near Albugnano, to Gran Paradiso, to Rocciamelone, down as far as Monviso. It is truly a place to visit and to use for days of intense spiritual life, a Don Bosco-style school of holiness.

The Savio family stayed in Morialdo until February 1853, a good nine years and three months. Dominic, who lived only 14 years and eleven months, spent almost two thirds of his short existence there. He can therefore be considered not only Don Bosco's pupil and spiritual son, but also his countryman.

In Mondonio

Why the Savio family left Morialdo is suggested by Fr Molineris. His uncle the blacksmith had died and Dominic's father could inherit not only the tools of the trade but also the clientele in Mondonio. That was probably the reason for the move, which took place, however, not to the house in Via Giunipero, but to the lower part of the village, where they

rented the first house to the left of the main village street, from the Bertello brothers. The small house consisted, and still consists today, of a ground floor with two rooms, adapted as a kitchen and workroom, and an upper floor, above the kitchen, with two bedrooms and enough space for a workshop with a door on the street ramp.

We know that Mr and Mrs Savio had ten children, three of whom died at a very young age and three others, including Dominic, did not reach the age of 15. The mother died in 1871 at the age of 51. The father, left alone at home with his son John, after having taken in the three surviving daughters, asked Don Bosco for hospitality in 1879 and died at Valdocco on 16 December 1891.

Dominic had entered Valdocco on 29 October 1854, remaining there, except for short holiday periods, until 1 March 1857. He died eight days later at [Mondonio](#), in the little room next to the kitchen, on 9 March of that year. His stay at Mondonio was therefore about 20 months in all, at Valdocco 2 years and 4 months.

Memories of Morialdo

From this brief review of the three Savio houses, it is clear that the one in Morialdo must be the richest in memories. San Giovanni di Riva recalls Dominic's birth, and Mondonio a year at school and his holy death, but Morialdo recalls his life in the family, in church and at school. '*Minòt*', as he was called there – how many things he must have heard, seen and learnt from his father and mother, how much faith and love he showed in the little church of San Pietro, how much intelligence and goodness at the school run by Fr Giovanni Zucca, and how much fun and liveliness in the playground with his fellow villagers.

It was in Morialdo that Dominic Savio prepared for his First Communion, which he then made in the parish church of Castelnuovo on 8 April 1849. It was there, when he was only 7 years old, that he wrote his "Reminders", that is, the resolutions for his First Communion:

1. I will go to confession very often and take communion as often as the confessor gives me permission;
2. I want to keep feast days holy;
3. My friends will be Jesus and Mary;
4. Death but not sin.

Memories that were the guide for his actions until the end of his life.

A boy's demeanour, way of thinking and acting reflect the environment in which he lived, and especially the family in which he spent his childhood. So if one wants to understand something about Dominic, it is always good to reflect on his life in that farmstead in Morialdo.

The family

His was not a farming family. His father was a blacksmith and his mother a seamstress. His parents were not of robust constitution. The signs of fatigue could be seen on his father's face, his mother's face stood out for its delicate lines. Dominic's father was a man of initiative and courage. His mother came from the not too distant Cerreto d'Asti where she kept a dressmaker's shop "and with her skill she made it possible for the local inhabitants to get clothes there rather than go elsewhere." And she was still a seamstress in Morialdo too. Would Don Bosco have known this? His conversation with little Dominic who had gone to look for him at the Becchi was interesting:

"Well, what do you think?"

"It seems to me that there is good stuff (in piem.: Eh, m'a smia ch'a-j'sia bon-a stòfa!)."

"What can this fabric be used for?"

"To make a beautiful suit to give to the Lord."

"So, I am the cloth: you be the tailor; take me with you (in piem.: ch'èmpija ansema a chiel) and you can make a beautiful suit for the Lord." (OE XI, 185).

A priceless conversation between two countrymen who understood each other at first sight. And their language was just right for the dressmaker's son.

When their mother died on 14 July 1871, the parish priest of Mondonio, Fr Giovanni Pastrone, said to his weeping daughters, to console them: "Don't cry, because your mother was a holy woman; and now she is already in Paradise."

Her son Dominic, who had preceded her into heaven by several years, had also said to her and to his father, before he passed away: "Do not weep, I already see the Lord and Our Lady with open arms waiting for me." These last words of his, witnessed by his neighbour Anastasia Molino, who was present at the time of his death, were the seal of a joyful life, the manifest sign of that sanctity that the Church solemnly recognised on 5 March 1950, later giving it definitive confirmation on 12 June 1954 with his canonisation.

Frontispiece photo. The house where Dominic died in 1857. It is a rural dwelling, likely dating from the late 17th century. Rebuilt upon an even older house, it is one of the most cherished landmarks for the people of Mondonio.