

The shepherdess, the sheep and lambs (1867)

In the following passage, Don Bosco, founder of the Valdocco Oratory, recounts a dream he had between 29 and 30 May 1867 to his young people, which he narrated on the evening of Holy Trinity Sunday. In a boundless plain, flocks and lambs become an allegory for the world and the boys: lush meadows or arid deserts represent grace and sin; horns and wounds denounce scandal and dishonour; the number “3” foretells three famines – spiritual, moral, material – that threaten those who stray from God. From the account flows the saint’s urgent appeal: to preserve innocence, to return to grace through penance, so that every young person can be clothed in the flowers of purity and partake in the joy promised by the good Shepherd.

On Trinity Sunday, June 16 [1867]—the feast on which twenty-six years before Don Bosco had celebrated his first Mass – the Oratory boys eagerly awaited the narration of the dream he had promised them on the 13th. He took to heart the good of his spiritual flock and always abided by the exhortations of Holy Scripture: “Take good care of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds.” [Prov. 27, 23] He constantly prayed for an intimate knowledge of his little lambs, for the grace of carefully watching over them and providing for their well-being after his death, and for their daily spiritual and bodily nourishment. On that Sunday, therefore, after night prayers, he thus addressed the Oratory community:

The night of the 29th or 30th of May, as I was lying in bed unable to fall asleep, I began thinking of my dear boys. I wish I could dream up something good for them, I said to myself. After mulling over this for a short while, I made up my mind to have a dream. Lo and behold, I fell asleep and found myself in an immense plain packed tight with huge sheep. Divided into flocks, they were grazing on meadows which

stretched as far as the eye could see. Wanting to get closer to them and marveling that anyone could own so many flocks, I looked for the shepherd. I soon spotted him leaning on a staff and went up to him.

"Whose flock is this?" I asked him.

He did not answer. I repeated my question.

"Is that any of your business?" he replied.

"That's no answer!" I countered.

"All right! They belong to their owner!"

"Thanks, but who is he?"

"Don't be so impatient. We'll come to that."

I then followed him for a close look at the flocks and the land. In places the meadows were luscious and dotted with shade trees. Here the sheep were healthy and gorgeous. In other places the plain was barren and forbidding, bristling with thorns and yellow thistles, and with not a blade of grass in sight. Here a large flock was grazing, but it looked miserable. I kept asking questions about the sheep, but my guide ignored them and simply told me, "You need not concern yourself with the sheep. I'll show you the flock you must shepherd."

"Who are you?"

"I am the owner. Follow me."

He took me to another area where I saw thousands of little lambs so weak that they could hardly move. The land was parched and grassless. Short, withered tufts and brush were the only vegetation because the countless lambs had devoured everything else. It was obvious that the soreplagued little things had suffered and were still suffering a great deal. Strangely, all sported thick, long horns like those of old rams, tipped with an appendage in the shape of an S.

Puzzled and perplexed at this sight, I could not believe that such little lambs could have so quickly consumed their feed and could already sport such thick, long horns.

"How is it," I asked the shepherd, "that these little lambs have such horns?"

"Take a close look," he replied.

I did and was surprised to see the figure 3 all over their bodies: back, neck, head, snout, ears, legs, hoofs.

"What's this?" I exclaimed. "I don't understand."

"I'll tell you! This great plain is the world. The lush meadows symbolize the Word of God and His grace. The parched and barren areas are the places where people don't listen to the Word of God and only aim at pleasing the world. The sheep are the adults; the lambs are the youngsters. For these God has sent Don Bosco. This area of the plain is the Oratory; the lambs are your boys. The parched soil represents the state of sin; horns symbolize dishonor; the letter S stands for scandal. Scandal-giving is the cause of these boys' perdition. Those with broken horns once gave scandal but do not do so now. The figure 3 stands for their triple punishment—spiritual, moral and material famine: spiritual famine by the lack of spiritual aid they will seek in vain; moral famine by being deprived of God's Word; material famine by the lack of food. Having devoured all their pasture, the lambs have nothing left but dishonor and the three famines. This scene also shows the present pitiful state of so many boys in the world; at the Oratory, at least, even the unworthy have something to eat."

While I listened and in bewilderment observed everything that was pointed out to me, a new wonder took place. All the lambs reared up on their hind legs, grew tall, and turned into boys. I got closer to see if I knew any of them. All were Oratory boys. Very many I had never before seen, but all claimed to be Oratory pupils. Among those I did not know were also a few who are now here. They never let themselves be seen by Don Bosco, never ask his advice, always dodge him. They are the boys Don Bosco does not know. But the greatest majority by far comprised boys who will come to the Oratory in the future.

As I sadly eyed that multitude, my guide took my hand and said, "Come, I'll show you something else." He led me to a far corner of the valley where hillocks and a thick hedge of dense foliage enclosed a vast, luxuriant meadow covered by patches of aromatic herbs of all kinds and dotted with wild flowers

and shady groves through which limpid streamlets made their way.

Here I found a multitude of very happy youngsters. Using the meadow's flowers, they had fashioned or were still making themselves very beautiful robes.

"At least you have these boys to console you," my guide remarked.

"Who are they?"

"Boys in the state of grace."

I can truthfully say that never had I seen anything or anyone so beautiful beyond compare! Never could I have imagined such splendor. I will not try to describe what I saw. It defies description. But a more wonderful sight was in store for me. As I was enjoying the vision of those happy boys and noting that many were yet unknown to me, my guide said, "Let's go. I want to show you something that will bring you greater pleasure and comfort."

He took me to another meadow carpeted with flowers prettier and sweeter-scented than those I had just seen. It looked like a royal garden. There were but few lads here, yet they were so extraordinarily handsome and brilliant as to outshine and eclipse those I had shortly before admired. Some of those boys are here now; others are still to come.

"These boys have preserved untainted the lily of purity," my guide explained. "They still wear the spotless robe of innocence."

I stood entranced. Nearly all wore floral wreaths of indescribable beauty. Each flower was a cluster of thousands of tiny, brightly-hued disk florets of unbelievable charm, each with more than a thousand colors. The boys wore an ankle-length garment of dazzling white, embroidered with flowers like those of the crowns. Sparkling light radiated from these flowers to swathe the boys' bodies and reflect its comeliness upon them. In turn, the flowers reflected each other's beauty, those in the crowns mirroring those of the garments, and each throwing back the rays emanating from the others. As the rays of one color hit others of a different color, new rays and new

colors were generated in an endless array of splendor. Never could I imagine such a fascinating, bewildering spectacle in heaven itself!

Yet that is not all. The sparkling flowers of the boys' crowns and dazzling garments were mirrored in the flowers and garments of their companions. Let me add that the brilliant countenance of each boy blended with those of his companions and, in reflection, increased its own intensity a hundredfold, so that those beautiful faces of innocence were clothed in blinding light, each boy mirroring the loveliness of his companions in unspeakable splendor. We call this the "external" glory of the saints. There is no way to describe even faintly each boy's beauty in that ocean of light! I recognized some boys who are now here at the Oratory. Could they see but one-tenth of their present beauty, I am sure that they would endure fire and torture or the cruelest martyrdom rather than lose it.

Once I could tear myself away from this heavenly vision, I asked my guide, "Are these the only ones who never lost God's grace?"

"Well," he replied, "don't you think that their number is quite large? Furthermore, lads who have lost their baptismal innocence can still follow their companions along the way of penance. Look at that meadow; it still boasts of many flowers. They too can be woven into most beautiful crowns and garments, and the boys can join their companions in the glory of heaven."

"What other suggestion can you give my boys?" I asked.

would make every sacrifice to preserve it. Tell them to be brave and to practice this fair virtue, which overrides all others in beauty and splendor. The chaste are lilies growing in God's sight.

I walked toward the boys to mingle among them, but I stumbled against something and awoke to find myself in bed.

My dear sons, are you all innocent? Perhaps a few of you are. To them I say: for heaven's sake, never lose such a priceless gem! It is a treasure worth God Himself. If you could only

have seen how beautiful those boys were with their crowns! I would have given anything in the world to prolong the enjoyment of that spectacle. If I were a painter, I would consider it a rare privilege to be able to paint what I saw. Could you but know how beautiful innocence is in a lad, you would undergo the most painful ordeal and death itself in order to safeguard that treasure. Though I was profoundly comforted by the number of those who had returned to the state of grace, I still wished that it might have been greater. I was also very much surprised to see that some boys who here appear to be good wore long, thick horns.

Don Bosco ended his narrative with a warm exhortation to those who had lost their innocence to strive earnestly to regain it by penance. Two days later, on June 18, after night prayers, Don Bosco gave more explanations of his dream:

There should be no further need of explaining, but I will repeat some things I have said. The great plain is the world, particularly the places and states of life from which you were called to come here. The area where the lambs grazed symbolizes the Oratory, and they are its past, present, and future pupils. The arid, the fertile, and the flowery meadows represent the state of sin, of grace, and of innocence. Horns stand for scandal; broken horns symbolize an end to scandal-giving. The figure 3 on every lamb stands for the three punishments that God will inflict upon those boys: famine of spiritual aid, famine of religious instruction and of God's Word, and famine of material food. The boys radiating light are those in the state of grace, particularly those still retaining their baptismal innocence. What glory awaits them!

Let us then, dear boys, bravely practice virtue. Those lads in the state of sin must do their utmost to start a new life and, with God's help, persevere till death. If we cannot all join the innocent ones around the Immaculate Lamb, let us at least follow along after them.

One boy asked me if he was among the innocent ones. I told him no, but that his horns were broken off. He also asked if he had any sores, and I said yes.

“What do you mean?” he insisted.

“Don’t worry,” I replied. “They are dried up and will disappear. They are no longer a dishonor. They are like the scars of a soldier who, regardless of his many wounds, was still able to overcome his enemy. They are marks of glory. But, yet, it is more glorious to come away from the combat unscathed. To achieve this is truly admirable!”

In the course of his explanation, Don Bosco also said that before long there would be an epidemic, a famine, and a lack of means to do good to ourselves. He predicted that within three months something would happen. This dream was as impressive and effective as others in the past.

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Nobody frightened the hens (1876)

Set in January 1876, the piece features one of Don Bosco’s most evocative “dreams,” his favourite tool for stirring and guiding the young people of the Oratory. The vision opens onto a vast plain where sowers are hard at work: the wheat, symbolising the Word of God, will only sprout if protected. But ravenous hens swoop down on the seed, and while the farmers sing verses from the Gospels, the clerics tasked with guarding it remain silent or distracted, letting everything be lost. The scene, brought to life with witty dialogue and biblical quotes, becomes a parable of the murmuring that stifles the fruit of preaching and a warning to be actively vigilant. With tones that are both paternal and stern, Don Bosco transforms the fantastical element into a sharp moral lesson.

In the latter half of January, Don Bosco had a symbolic dream which he mentioned to several Salesians. One of them, Father Barberis, urged him to tell it at a "Good Night" because the boys loved to hear his dreams, which greatly benefited them and made them feel closer to the Oratory.

"True," Don Bosco replied, "these dreams help a lot and the boys are eager to hear them. My only trouble is that I need lungs of steel. Truthfully, these dreams do shake people up because almost always they touch everybody and each one asks in what condition I saw him, what he is to do and how he should understand the different facets of the dream. They pester me day and night. All I need do to urge them to make a general confession is tell them one of my dreams. Well, let's do this. Next Sunday while I give the 'Good Night' to the boys, you ask me some questions and I then will tell my last dream."

On January 23 he mounted the platform after night prayers, his beaming countenance revealing, as always, his joy at being with his sons. When everybody quieted down, Father Barberis raised his hand. "Excuse me, Don Bosco," he said, "may I ask you a question?"

"Certainly."

"I heard that recently you had a dream about seeds, sowers, and hens and that you told the cleric Calvi about what you saw. Would you kindly tell us too? We'd like to hear it."

"Aren't you nosy!" Don Bosco replied in mock rebuke that provoked general laughter.

"I won't mind your calling me nosy, so long as you tell us the dream," Father Barberis insisted. "I think all the boys back me up, and I am sure that they are most eager to hear you."

"In that case, I will tell you. I had intended to keep it to myself because of some things which concern some of you personally, things which might even make you uneasy, but since you asked for it, I will narrate it."

"Oh, Don Bosco, if you have a hard knock in store for me, please spare me in public."

"I will tell things just as I saw them and let each one take what pertains to him. Before I begin, just remember that dreams happen during sleep when we have no control over our mind. If you find anything good in this dream, a warning or anything at all, take heed, but do not become ill at ease because of it. I said that I dreamed while I was sleeping because some boys dream while they are awake, much to their teachers' annoyance. [So, let me start.]

I seemed to be in Castelnuovo d' sti where I was born. Before me stretched a vast field set in a beautiful plain. The field was not ours, and I had no idea who owned it. Many people were working with hoes, spades, rakes and other tools; some were plowing, sowing, harrowing and doing other chores. Scattered foremen supervised the work; I seemed to be one of them. Elsewhere a group of peasants were singing. I gazed in astonishment, unable to figure out where I was. Why are these people working so hard? I kept asking myself. Then I answered my own question: To provide bread for my boys. It was truly delightful to see these good peasants working so hard and pursuing their tasks with untiring zest and diligence.

A few, however, were having fun.

As I took in the scene, I noticed several priests and many clerics of ours, some close to me, others farther away. I must be dreaming, I told myself.

My clerics are in Turin, not here at Castelnuovo. But why am I wearing winter clothing? Yesterday the temperature was near freezing, and still these people are sowing wheat. I clapped my hands and began walking off, saying, I am not dreaming; this really is a field; that cleric over there is so-and-so; that other one I know too. If I were dreaming, how could I see all this?

Just then I spotted nearby a kindly old man whose countenance inspired trust. He was watching me and the other people intently. I went up to him.

"Tell me, my good man," I said, "what's going on over here? What is this place? Who are these workers? Whose field is

this?"

"Fine questions you ask!" the man answered. "A priest, and you don't know these things?"

"Please tell me if this is a dream. I feel I'm dreaming and all I see is just unreal."

"What you see is quite real, and I think you are wide-awake. Don't you realize it? You are talking, laughing and joking."

"People can dream that they are talking, listening and acting as though they were awake," I objected.

"Forget that! You are here in body and soul."

"All right, if I am awake, tell me who owns this field."

"You studied Latin. Which is the first noun of the second declension that you learned in Donatus? 1 Do you remember?"

"Surely, but what does that have to do with my question?"

"A great deal. Now tell me what that noun was."

"Dominus."

"And its genitive?"

"Domini."

"Very good! Therefore this field is Domini, of the Lord."

"Ah! Now I see!" I exclaimed.

I was surprised at the old gentleman's explanation. Just then I saw several people carrying bags of wheat grains while a group of peasants sang, *Exiit, qui seminat, seminare semen suum* [The sower went out to sow his seed-Luke 8, 5].

I thought it was a shame to throw good seed into the ground to rot. Would it not be better, I wondered, to grind it into flour for bread or pasta? But then I thought: He who sows not, reaps not. Unless the seed is sown and rots, what can one reap? Meanwhile a large flock of hens were scurrying from all sides to peck at the wheat that was being scattered, while the peasants were singing, *Venerunt aves caeli, sustulerunt frumentum et reliquerunt zizaniam* [The birds came, ate up the wheat and left the cockle].

I looked about me and observed the clerics. One stood with arms folded, totally unconcerned; another was chatting with his companions; others shrugged their shoulders or looked the other way. There were some who laughed at what they saw and

unconcernedly went on with their games or chores. No one tried to shoo the hens away. Resentfully I said to each of them, "What's wrong with you? Don't you see those hens eating up all the seeds and destroying the hopes of these good peasants? What kind of harvest are we going to have? Why do you stand there so mum? Why don't you shoo the hens away?"

Their only response was a shrug of the shoulders and a blank stare. Some did not even move. They had been totally unconcerned with what was going on in the field before I shouted at them, and they were paying no attention now.

"You are a bunch of fools," I went on. "Can't you see that the hens have had their fill? Couldn't you at least clap your hands to scare them off?"

As my words were ineffective, I began clapping my own hands, and this prompted some of them to begin chasing the hens away, while I muttered to myself: Now they chase them away, now that all the wheat has been gobbled up!

Just then the same choir of peasants sang these words, *Canes muti nescientes latrare* [Dumb dogs unable to bark-Is. 56, 10]. Astounded and exasperated, I faced the kindly old man. "Please tell me what this is all about," I pleaded. "I can't make any sense out of it. What does the seed mean?"

"The seed is the word of God."

"What is the meaning of the hens gobbling it up?"

Changing tone, the old man went on, "If you want a full explanation, here it is. The field is the Lord's vineyard as the Gospel says, but it can also symbolize the heart of man. The farmhands are Gospel workers who sow the word of God, especially by preaching. This word can bear much fruit in people's hearts if they are prepared, but then birds come and pluck it away."

"What do the birds symbolize?"

"They symbolize murmuring. After hearing an inspiring sermon, one lad joins his companions and finds fault with the preacher's gestures, voice, or some word of his. He destroys the good effect of the sermon.

Another will point out a physical or intellectual shortcoming

of the preacher or ridicule his pronunciation. Again the sermon is made fruitless. The same can be said about good books; finding fault with them destroys the good they can do. Murmuring is all the nastier because it is generally done on the sly; it grows and thrives where we would least expect it. Wheat, even when sown in a poorly tilled field, will take root, grow and bear fruit. When a storm breaks over a freshly sown field, that field becomes soggy, but it still yields a harvest. Even where the seed is not of the finest quality, it will still grow; it may yield less, but yield it will.

However, when hens or birds flock and peck at it, the field will yield nothing at all. So it is with sermons, exhortations and good resolutions; if they are followed by distractions or temptations, their good effect will be lessened but not destroyed, but if there is murmuring or backbiting or some similar thing, all is wiped out. Whose duty is it to sound the alarm, take a firm stand, cry out and make sure that murmuring and unbecoming talk are silenced? You know the answer."

"What were those clerics doing?" I asked. "Couldn't they have prevented all that?"

"Of course, but they did not," he went on. "Some just stood there watching; others paid no attention; some were unaware of what was going joined the murmurers and did their share to destroy the word of God.

You are a priest. Insist on this point. Preach, exhort, speak out, and never be afraid of saying too much. Make everybody understand that criticizing those who preach, exhort or give good advice is very harmful indeed. Furthermore, being silent and passive when a wrong is being done and one's duty calls for action makes one an accomplice in the evil deeds of others."

Deeply impressed by these words, I kept looking for other failings so as to shame the clerics into doing their duty, but they had already begun shoving the hens away. I took a few steps but tripped over an abandoned rake and woke up.

"Now let's draw a lesson from all this," Don Bosco said.

"Father Barberis, what do you think of this dream?"

"I think it's a good reprimand. Let the chips fall where they may."

"It should certainly do us some good," Don Bosco went on. "My dear boys, avoid murmuring because it is a very grave evil. Shun it like the plague and try to make others avoid it too. At times even good advice and excellent deeds are not as effective as is the prevention of murmuring or of harmful talk. Let us bolster our courage and attack these evils openly. There is no greater misfortune than to rob one of the benefit of God's word. One utterance, one smart remark can do just that."

"This dream came several nights ago, but last night I dreamed again and I wish to tell you about it, too. It's only about nine o'clock, and I'll try to be brief."

I found myself somewhere else. I can't remember where. I know I was not in Castelnuovo, but I don't think I was at the Oratory either. Someone dashed over to me. "Don Bosco!" he cried. "Come quickly!"

"Why the hurry?" I asked.

"Don't you know what has happened?"

"No! Tell me!"

"So-and-so is very ill. He is dying. Such a fine, lively lad!"

"Are you joking?" I replied. "Just this morning I was talking with him while strolling about the porticoes and now you tell me he is dying!"

"Don Bosco, I am not trying to fool you. I must tell you the truth: that boy needs you very badly. He wants to see you and speak to you one more time. Quickly, or you will be too late."

With no idea of direction, I hurriedly followed the messenger and came to a crowd of people who in tears begged me, "Hurry! His end is near!"

"What happened?" I asked. I was taken to a room where a boy lay in bed, his face sunken and deadly pale. A racking cough and rattle in his throat barely allowed him to speak.

"Are you not so-and-so?" I asked him.

"Yes, I am."

"How are you feeling?"

"Very sick."

"What happened? Yesterday and today you were walking happily along the porticoes."

"Yes, but let's hurry. I must make my confession because I have little time."

"Do not be upset. You made your confession only a few days ago."

"I know, and I don't think I have any big sin on my conscience, but I want to be absolved again before I go to my Divine Judge."

While hearing his confession I noticed that he was rapidly failing. Phlegm nearly choked him. We must hurry, I thought, if he is still to receive Holy Viaticum and the Anointing of the Sick. Really, he will not be able to receive Viaticum because it would take too long and his cough would keep him from swallowing. I must get the oil of the sick.

I left the room and sent someone for it. Meanwhile the boys around me kept asking, "Is he really in danger? Is he really dying, as people are saying?"

"Unfortunately, yes," I replied. "Don't you see how his breathing has become more labored and the phlegm is choking him?"

"Then it would be better to give him Holy Viaticum too, to strengthen him before sending him to Our Lady's arms."

As I busied myself getting things ready I heard someone say, "He is dead!"

I went back into the room and found the boy lying with his eyes wide open, no longer breathing.

"Is he dead?" I asked those who had been caring for him.

"Yes," they answered.

"How did it happen so quickly? Isn't he so-and-so?"

"Yes."

"I can't believe it! Just yesterday he was walking with me along the porticoes."

"Yesterday he was walking and now he is dead," they answered.

"Fortunately he was a good lad," I exclaimed. Then, turning to the boys around me, I went on: "See, he was not even able to receive the Last Sacraments. Let us thank the Lord, though, for giving him time to make his confession. He was a good boy and frequented the sacraments. Let us hope he has gone to a better life or at least to purgatory. But if this had happened to others, what would their fate have been?"

We then knelt down and recited the *De Profundis*.

I was about to re-enter my room when I saw Ferraris come in great haste.

"Don Bosco," he cried breathlessly, "do you know what happened?"

"Yes, unfortunately I do know? So-and-so is dead."

"That's not what I wanted to tell you. Two others have died."

"What?"

"Yes!" And he named them.

"When? I don't understand."

"Yes, two others died before you could get to them."

"Why didn't you call me?"

"There was no time. Still, can you tell me when the one you mentioned died?"

"Just a few minutes ago."

"Do you know what day this is and what month?"

"Of course! It's January 22, the second day of the novena of St. Francis de Sales."

"No, Don Bosco," Ferraris countered. "Check your calendar." I looked at the calendar and saw May 26.

"Incredible!" I exclaimed. "We are in January, and I am sure because I'm wearing winter clothing. No one dresses like this in May, and we would not have the heat on."

"I can't explain it either, but today is May 26."

"Just yesterday one of our boys died, and it was January."

"You are wrong," Ferraris insisted. "It was Easter time."

"That's even more incredible."

"But it was Easter time! He was far luckier than the other two who died in Mary's month."

"You are confusing me," I told him. "Explain things better. I

can't make heads or tails of what you are saying."

"I am not lying. Things are just as I told you. If you want to know more and get a better explanation, take heed!"

He spread out his arms and loudly clapped his hands. The sound woke me up.

"Thank heaven," I said, "that it was only a dream. Was I scared!"

That is the dream I had last night. Make what you want of it. I don't care to give it too much importance. Today I checked out the boys who seemed to be dead in my dream, and I found them alive and well. It is certainly not advisable for me to tell you who they are. Still, I shall keep an eye on them and if necessary give them wholesome advice. I'll prepare them with caution and not make them aware of it. If death should overtake them, it will not find them unprepared. But let no one go about saying, "It could be this one or that one." Let each one keep himself ready.

Don't let this dream frighten you. Its only effect should be that one which Our Divine Savior Himself pointed out in the Gospel: "Be ready, because at an hour that you do not expect, the Son of Man is coming." [Luke 12, 40] My dear boys, the warning the Lord gives us is a grave one. Let us always be ready because, when we least expect it, death may overtake us. The unprepared risk a bad death. I shall do my best to keep myself ready, and you should do the same, so that at whatever hour it may please the Lord to call us, we may be ready to pass into eternal happiness. Good night.

Don Bosco was always listened to in religious silence, but when he narrated these extraordinary things, not a cough or even the slightest shuffling of feet was to be heard from the hundreds of boys present. The deep impression he made lasted for weeks, even months, and radical changes were noticeable in the conduct of certain young scamps. Don Bosco's confessional would also be crowded. It never occurred to anyone that he might have invented these stories to frighten the boys and thus improve their conduct, since his predictions of

forthcoming deaths always came true and the states of conscience which he saw in his dreams corresponded to reality. But was not the fear produced by such gloomy predictions a crushing nightmare? It does not seem so. In a crowd of over eight hundred boys the odds against being one of the doomed ones were too great for any one individual to feel unduly threatened. Besides, the general belief that Don Bosco prepared those who were destined to die without frightening them and that those who did die would certainly go to heaven helped to dissipate fears. Then, too, it is common knowledge that young people quickly change their mood. Momentarily they may be shaken, but they soon shake off their fears. Those who lived through those days have unanimously confirmed this.

After the boys had gone to bed, a few confreres gathered around Don Bosco to learn if one of them would be among those to die. Shaking his head with his usual smile, Don Bosco kept them at bay, saying, "Do you really expect me to tell you who it is and risk having someone die before his time?"

Realizing that he would not disclose names, they asked him whether his first dream had shown him any clerics among the murmurers. Don Bosco, who had taken a few steps, stopped and, with a sweeping gaze at his questioners, smiled enigmatically, as if to say, "Yes, a few, but only a few, no more!"

They then pressed him to say at least if they had been among the silent observers. Don Bosco dodged the question, merely saying that they were to avoid murmuring and help others to avoid it along with any kind of wrongdoing, especially unbecoming talk.

"God help the priest or cleric," he said, "who is supposed to be in charge and sees wrongdoing and does not stop it. I want it to be known and borne well in mind that when I say 'murmuring' I do not mean merely backbiting, but every word and expression that may destroy the wholesome effect of God's word. In conclusion, I insist that it is a serious evil to keep silent in the face of wrongdoing, taking no personal action to stop it or have those in charge do so."

One of the bolder bystanders daringly asked Don Bosco, "How

does Father Barberis fit into the dream? You said that there was something in it which concerned him, and Father Barberis himself seemed to expect a reprimand." When Father Barberis seemed to be pleased to have the secret revealed, Don Bosco said, "Well, Father Barberis does not speak enough of this topic; he does not stress it as much as is needed." The latter admitted that for two years he had not specifically dwelt on this topic with his novices.

He was therefore quite grateful for the observation and resolved to keep it in mind for the future.

Then all went upstairs and, after kissing Don Bosco's hand, withdrew to their quarters, except Father Barberis who, as usual, saw Don Bosco to his room. Because it was still early and he knew that he was too deeply stirred by his own narrative to sleep, Don Bosco, contrary to his custom, invited Father Barberis to enter, saying: "It's early. Let's walk in my room a bit." For another half-hour they conversed. Among other things, Don Bosco said, "I saw everyone in that dream, and the part that each played. I use this knowledge when hearing confessions or when exhorting publicly or privately as long as I see it has a good effect. Years ago, I paid no serious attention to these dreams, until I noticed that, generally, they were more effective than a sermon, and in some cases even more effective than a retreat. Now I make use of them, and why not? Holy Scripture says: 'Test everything; retain what is good.' [1 Thess. 5, 21] I see that these dreams do a lot of good and are liked, so why keep them secret? In fact, I notice that they also help to make many boys fond of our Congregation."

"I too have experienced the benefit and help of these dreams," Father Barberis interrupted. "They are even helpful when told to others. Where people know you, we can say that they are your dreams; where you are unknown, they can be presented as parables. I wish that I could gather them together and present them in the form of parables. Both old and young, great and small would eagerly read them and benefit spiritually."

"Yes, I also firmly feel that they would do a lot of good."

"But I suppose no one has put them down in writing," Father Barberis sighed regretfully.

"I have no time," Don Bosco went on, "and some dreams I no longer remember."

"I remember those concerning the progress of our Congregation and Our Lady's mantle," Father Barberis added.

"Ah, yes," exclaimed Don Bosco, and he mentioned several such dreams. Then his countenance became grave and, almost in a worried tone, he went on, "When I think of the responsibilities of my position, I tremble all over... What a fearful account I shall have to give God for all the favors He bestowed on our Congregation!"

(BM XII, 28-37)

Photo: shutterstock.com

The Tenth Hill (1864)

Don Bosco's dream of the "Tenth Hill", recounted in October 1864, is one of the most evocative passages in Salesian tradition. In it, the saint finds himself in a vast valley filled with young people: some already at the Oratory, others yet to be met. Guided by a mysterious voice, he must lead them over a steep embankment and then through ten hills, symbolising the Ten Commandments, towards a light that prefigures Paradise. The chariot of Innocence, the penitential ranks, and the celestial music paint an educational fresco: they show the effort of preserving purity, the value of repentance, and the irreplaceable role of educators. With this prophetic vision, Don Bosco anticipates the worldwide expansion of his work and the commitment to accompany every young person on the path to salvation.

It came to him the night of October 21, and he narrated it the following night. [Surprisingly] C ...E... a boy from Casale Monferrato, had the same dream, during which he seemed to be with Don Bosco, talking to him. In the morning the boy was so deeply impressed that he went to tell it all to his teacher, who urged him to report to Don Bosco. The youngster met Don Bosco as he was coming down the stairs to look for the boy and tell him the very same dream. [Here is the dream]:

Don Bosco seemed to be in a vast valley swarming with thousands and thousands of boys-so many, in fact, that their number surpassed belief. Among them he could see all past and present pupils; the rest, perhaps, were yet to come. Scattered among them were priests and clerics then at the Oratory.

A lofty bank blocked one end of the valley. As Don Bosco wondered what to do with all those boys, a voice said to him: "Do you see that bank? Well, both you and the boys must reach its summit."

At Don Bosco's word, all those youngsters dashed toward the bank. The priests too ran up the slope, pushing boys ahead, lifting up those who fell, and hoisting on their shoulders those who were too tired to climb further. Father Rua, his sleeves rolled up, kept working hardest of all, gripping two boys at a time and literally hurling them up to the top of the bank where they landed on their feet and merrily scampered about. Meanwhile Father Cagliero and Father Francesia ran back and forth encouraging the youngsters to climb.

It didn't take long for all of them to make it to the top. "Now what shall we do?" Don Bosco asked.

"You must all climb each of the ten hills before you," the voice replied.

"Impossible! So many young, frail boys will never make it!"

"Those who can't will be carried," the voice countered. At this very moment, at the far end of the bank, appeared a gorgeous, triangular-shaped wagon, too beautiful for words. Its three wheels swiveled in all directions. Three shafts rose from its corners and joined to support a richly embroidered

banner, carrying in large letters the inscription *Innocentia* [Innocence]. A wide band of rich material was draped about the wagon, bearing the legend: *Adiutorio Dei Altissimi, Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti*. [With the help of the Most High, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.]

Glittering with gold and gems, the wagon came to a stop in the boys' midst. At a given order, five hundred of the smaller ones climbed into it. Among the untold thousands, only these few hundred were still innocent.

As Don Bosco kept wondering which way to go, a wide, level road strewn with thorns opened before him. Suddenly there also appeared six white-clad former pupils who had died at the Oratory. Holding aloft another splendid banner with the inscription *Poenitentia* [Penance], they placed themselves at the head of the multitude which was to walk the whole way. As the signal to move was given, many priests seized the wagon's prow and led the way, followed by the six white-clad boys and the rest of the multitude.

The lads in the wagon began singing *Laudate pueri Dominum* [Praise the Lord, you children – Ps. 112, 1] with indescribable sweetness.

Don Bosco kept going forward, enthralled by their heavenly melody, but, on an impulse, he turned to find out if the boys were following. To his deep regret he noticed that many had stayed behind in the valley, while many others had turned back. Heartbroken, he wanted to retrace his steps to persuade those boys to follow him and to help them along, but he was absolutely forbidden to do so. "Those poor boys will be lost!" he protested.

"So much the worse for them," he was told. "They too received the call but refused to follow you. They saw the road they had to travel. They had their chance."

Don Bosco insisted, pleaded, and begged, but in vain.

"You too must obey," he was told. He had to walk on.

He was still smarting with this pain when he became aware of another sad fact: a large number of those riding in the wagon

had gradually fallen off, so that a mere hundred and fifty still stood under the banner of innocence. His heart was aching with unbearable grief. He hoped that it was only a dream and made every effort to awake, but unfortunately it was all too real. He clapped his hands and heard their sound; he groaned and heard his sighs resound through the room; he wanted to banish this horrible vision and could not.

"My dear boys," he exclaimed at this point of his narration, "I recognized those of you who stayed behind in the valley and those who turned back or fell from the wagon. I saw you all. You can be sure that I will do my utmost to save you. Many of you whom I urged to go to confession did not accept my invitation. For heaven's sake, save your souls."

Many of those who had fallen off the wagon joined those who were walking. Meanwhile the singing in the wagon continued, and it was so sweet that it gradually abated Don Bosco's sorrow. Seven ills had already been climbed. As the boys reached the eighth, they found themselves in a wonderful village where they stopped for a brief rest. The houses were indescribably beautiful and luxurious.

In telling the boys of this village, Don Bosco remarked, "I could repeat what St. Teresa said about heavenly things-to speak of them is to belittle them. They are just too beautiful for words. I shall only say that the doorposts of these houses seemed to be made of gold, crystal, and diamonds all at once. They were a most wonderful, satisfying, pleasing sight. The fields were dotted with trees laden simultaneously with blossoms, buds, and fruit. It was out of this world!" The boys scattered all over, eager to see everything and to taste the fruit.

(It was in this village that the boy from Casale met Don Bosco and talked at length with him. Both of them remembered quite vividly the details of their conversation. The two dreams had been a singular coincidence.)

Here another surprise awaited Don Bosco. His boys suddenly looked like old men: toothless, wrinkled, white-haired, bent over, lame, leaning on canes. He was stunned, but the voice

said, "Don't be surprised. It's been years and years since you left that valley. The music made your trip seem so short. If you want proof, look at yourself in the mirror and you will see that I am telling the truth." Don Bosco was handed a mirror. He himself had grown old, with his face deeply lined and his few remaining teeth decayed.

The march resumed. Now and then the boys asked to be allowed to stop and look at the novelties around them, but he kept urging them on. "We are neither hungry nor thirsty," he said.

"We have no need to stop. Let's keep going!"

Far away, on the tenth hill, arose a light which grew increasingly larger and brighter, as though pouring from a gigantic doorway. Singing resumed, so enchanting that its like may possibly be heard and enjoyed only in paradise. It is simply indescribable because it did not come from instruments or human throats. Don Bosco was so over

joyed that he awoke, only to find himself in bed.

He then explained his dream thus: "The valley is this world; the bank symbolizes the obstacles we have to surmount in detaching ourselves from it; the wagon is self-evident. The young sters on foot were those who lost their innocence but repented of their sins." He also added that the ten hills symbolized the Ten Commandments whose observance leads to eternal life. He concluded by saying that he was ready to tell some boys confidentially what they had been doing in the dream: whether they had remained in the valley or fallen off the wagon.

When he came down from the stand, a pupil, Anthony Ferraris, approached him and told him within our hearing that, the night before, he had dreamed that he was with his mother and that when the latter had asked him whether he would be coming home next Easter, he had replied that by then he would be in paradise. He then whispered something else in Don Bosco's ear. Anthony Ferraris died on March 16, 1865.

We jotted down Don Bosco's dream that very evening, October 22, 1864, and added this note: "We are sure that in explaining

the dream Don Bosco tried to cover up what is most mystifying, at least in some instances. The explanation that the ten hills symbolized the Ten Commandments does not convince us. We rather believe that the eighth hill on which Don Bosco called a halt and saw himself as an old man symbolizes the end of his life in the seventies. The future will tell."

The future is now past; facts have borne out our belief. The dream revealed Don Bosco's life-span. For comparative purposes, let us match this dream with that of The Wheel of Eternity, which we came to learn only years later. In that dream each tum of the wheel symbolized a decade, and this also seems to be the case in the trek from hill to hill. Each hill stands for a decade, and the ten hills represent a century, man's maximum life-span. In his life's first decade, Don Bosco, as a young boy, begins his mission among his companions at Becchi and starts on his journey; he climbs seven hills-seven decades-and reaches the age of seventy; he climbs the eighth hill and goes no farther. He sees beautiful buildings and meadows, symbols of the Salesian Society which, through God's infinite goodness, has grown and borne fruit. He has still a long way to go on the eighth hill and therefore sets out again, but he does not reach the ninth because he wakes up. Thus he did not live out his eighth decade; he died at the age of seventy-two years and five months.

What do our readers think of this interpretation? On the following evening, Don Bosco asked us our opinion of the dream. We replied that it did not concern only the boys, but showed also the worldwide spread of the Salesian Society.

"What do you mean?" a confrere countered. "We already have schools at Mirabella and Lanzo, and we'll have a few more in Piedmont. What else do you want?"

"No," we insisted. "This dream portends far greater things."

Don Bosco smiled and nodded approval.

(1864, BM VII, 467-471)

The Little Lambs and the Summer Storm (1878)

The dreamlike tale that follows, recounted by Don Bosco on the evening of 24 October 1878, is far more than just simple evening entertainment for the young people of the Oratory. Through the delicate image of lambs caught in a violent summer storm, the saintly educator paints a vivid allegory of school holidays: a seemingly carefree time, but one fraught with spiritual dangers. The inviting meadow represents the outside world, the hailstones symbolise temptations, while the protected garden alludes to the safety offered by a life of grace, the sacraments, and the educational community. In this dream, which becomes a catechism, Don Bosco reminds his boys – and us – of the urgency to be vigilant, to seek divine help, and to support each other in order to return to daily life unscathed.

No information has been left us about the boys' leaving for their fall vacation and their return, save for a dream which Don Bosco had concerning the effects of vacation. He narrated it after night prayers on October 24 to an audience which became excited the moment he mentioned it.

I am glad to see that my army of soldiers *contra diabolum* [against the devil] has returned-he began. This is Latin, but even Cottino 12 understands it! I have lots of things to tell you since this is the first chance I've had to talk to you after your vacation, but let me just tell you a dream. You know that dreams come in sleep and don't have to be believed. However, just as there is nothing wrong in disbelieving them, sometimes there is no harm in believing them, and they can teach things.

So, too, this dream.

I was at Lanzo during the first spiritual retreat, when I dreamed one night that I was in some unknown region, but near a village which had a fine garden and an adjacent huge meadow. Some friend I was with told me to go into the garden. I did so and there I saw a numerous flock of lambs cavorting and prancing about. The sheepgate leading into the meadow was open, and the lambs scampered out to graze.

Many, however, remained inside browsing here and there, though the pasture was nowhere as abundant as in the meadow where most of the lambs had gone. "Let me see what those lambs are up to over there," I said. We went and saw that they were all quietly grazing. Suddenly the sky darkened, flashed with lightning and rolled with thunder.

"What will happen to all those poor little things if they are caught in the storm?" I asked. "Let's get them under a shelter." We all spread out and tried to herd them together toward the sheepgate, but they kept dodging us and their legs were a lot swifter than ours. Meanwhile, rain began to fall in heavy drops, and soon came a downpour. I could not herd the lambs together. One or two did find their way into the garden, but the rest, the greater number, remained in the meadow. "Well," I said, "if they won't come back, all the worse for them! Let's go." And we returned to the garden.

There stood a fountain bearing an inscription in black capitals: FONS SIGNATUS [Sealed Fountain]. It was covered, but now it opened, and as the water shot high into the air, it sprayed out and formed a rainbow vault over us, something like this arch.

Meanwhile, the lightning and thunder grew worse, and hailstones began to pelt us. With the young lambs that had come into the garden, we took shelter beneath that arching vault which shielded us from rain and hail.

"What's this all about?" I kept asking my friends.

"What will become of those poor little lambs out there?"

"You will see!" they answered. "Look at the foreheads of these lambs."

I did so and read on each the name of an Oratory boy.

"What does it mean?"

"You shall see!"

Too impatient to wait, I decided to dash out and find out what had happened to the lambs outside. I will gather those that were killed and send them back to the Oratory, I thought to myself. As soon as I left the rainbow shelter I was deluged with rain. There, on the ground, were those poor lambs struggling in vain to raise themselves and limp toward the garden. I opened the gate and shouted to them, but they were too weak. Rain and hail kept pelting them so hard that they were truly a pitiful sight, wounded in the head or eyes or legs and other parts of their bodies.

The storm gradually spent itself.

"Look at their foreheads," someone at my side told me.

I did. Again, each forehead bore the name of an Oratory boy. "Why," I cried, "know these boys but they do not look like lambs."

"You will see," was the reply I got. Then he handed me a golden jar covered with a silver lid.

"Apply this ointment to the wounds of these lambs," he told me, "and they will instantly be healed."

I called out to them, but none of them stirred. Again and again I called, but they would not budge. I stepped toward one of them, but it dragged itself away. "Well, so much the worse for you," I exclaimed and turned to another, but that too dragged itself away. And so it was with every lamb I tried to reach. Finally, I managed to get close to one lamb whose badly battered eyes were protruding from their sockets. It was a pitiful sight. I touched it, and the lamb, instantly healed, skipped off into

the garden.

On seeing that, many other lambs allowed me to heal them, and they too scampered back into the garden. Still, many stayed outside, the most battered of them all, but I could not get near them.

"If they do not want to be healed, they can only blame themselves," I said, "but how can I heard them back into the garden?"

"Leave them alone," a friend told me. "They will come back."

"Let's wait and see," I replied and, returning the gold jar, I went back to the garden. It was completely changed. Over the gate I read the word

"Oratory." As soon as I stepped in, the lambs that had formerly avoided

me now inched forward and entered the garden stealthily, quickly

squatting anywhere. But even then I couldn't get close to them. A few

reluctantly let me rub the ointment on them, but it turned into poison on

them and reopened their wounds.

At this point one of my friends said, "Do you see that banner?"

I turned around to where he was pointing and saw a large banner in the air, blazoned with the word "VACATION" in tall letters.

"Yes," I answered.

"ll this happened during vacation," one of my friends told me, as I

bewailed the destruction, beside myself with grief. "Your boys leave the Oratory honestly intent upon avoiding sin and being good, but no sooner come storm and rain-signs of the devil's temptations and assaults and the pelting hail than the poor little wretches fall into sin. Some recover through a good confession. Others receive the sacrament carelessly or avoid

it altogether. Bear this in mind: never tire of reminding your boys that a vacation is a devastating tempest for their souls."

Gazing at those lambs again, I noticed that some were dying of their wounds. Just as I sought ways to heal them, Father Scappini, who was then getting out of bed next door, made some noise and I too awoke.

And this was my dream. Even though it is only a dream, it carries a message which will not harm those who accept it. I can also say that, as I matched the names of the lambs' foreheads with the boys being identified, I could agree that they were really behaving as did the lambs of my dream. Be that as it may, however, let us accept God's mercy and heal our wounds by a good confession during this novena in honour of All Saints. We are all to be determined to wage war against the devil. With God's help, we shall win and will one day receive the heavenly crown of victory.

Doubtless this dream effectively helped give the new school year a good start. Everything was moving along so smoothly during the novena of the Immaculate Conception that Don Bosco remarked with warm satisfaction, "The boys have already reached a point which they would have barely attained in February in past years. "On the feast of the Immaculate Conception they once more witnessed the inspiring farewell ceremony of the fourth missionary expedition.

(MB XIII 761-764 / BM XIII 584-587)

Don Bosco attends a devils meeting (1884)

The following pages take us into the heart of Saint John Bosco's mystical experience, through two vivid dreams he had between September and December 1884. In the first, the Saint crosses the plain towards Castelnuovo with a mysterious person and reflects on the scarcity of priests, warning that only tireless work, humility, and morality can make authentic vocations flourish. In the second dream cycle, Bosco witnesses an infernal council: monstrous demons plot to annihilate the nascent Salesian Congregation, spreading gluttony, greed for riches, freedom without obedience, and intellectual pride. Amidst omens of death, internal threats, and signs of Providence, these dreams become a dramatic mirror of the spiritual struggles that await every educator and the entire Church, offering both severe warnings and bright hopes.

Two dreams he had in September and December provide a precious teaching. The first, which he had the night of September 29th, was a lesson to priests.

He had found himself walking through a plain on his way to Castelnuovo. An old priest, whose name he did not recall, was walking beside him. Their conversation was about priests. "Work, work, work" they both said. "That should be the purpose and the glory of a priest! Never grow weary of working. How many souls might thereby be saved! How much one could accomplish for the glory of God! If only the missionary were truly a missionary, the pastor a pastor. How many miracles of holiness would be shown forth everywhere! But unfortunately, many are work-shy and prefer their own comforts."

As they were talking on this subject, they came to a place known as Filippelli. Here, Don Bosco deplored the current scarcity of priests.

"It is true that priests are few," the other said, "but if all

priests would only act as priests, there would be enough of them. Yet how many priests there are who do nothing for the ministry, whereas if they were to be active in their ministry, if they would pass their examinations as confessors, they would fill an immense void within the church. God gives us vocations in keeping with our needs. When clerics were subjected to military draft, everyone was scared, as if no one would ever become a priest.

But when these fantastic ideas subsided, we saw that instead of diminishing, the number of vocations were increasing."

"What can be done now to increase the number of vocations among boys?" Don Bosco asked.

"Nothing more than to safeguard their morality jealously," his companion said. "Morals represent the nursery garden of vocations."

"Presbyter discat domum regere et sanctificare. No greediness, no excessive preoccupation with temporal things. Let a priest first become a model in his own home, and then he will be the first model outside of it."

At a certain moment as they were walking, the other priest asked Don Bosco where he was going. Don Bosco pointed toward Castelnuovo.

Then, he let the other priest go ahead of him, lingering behind with a group of people who walked on ahead. After walking only a few steps, Don Bosco woke up. In the dream, we see a recollection of his former walks in that area.

Predicting the death of Salesians

The second dream concerned the Congregation, and forewarned against threats that might undermine its existence. More than a dream, this was a theme that recurred in a series of dreams.

The night of December 1st, the cleric Viglietti was abruptly awakened by piercing screams coming from Don Bosco's room. He leapt out of bed immediately and listened.

In a voice choked by sobs, Don Bosco was calling, "Ah! Oh, help! Help!"

Viglietti entered his room at once and asked, "Are you sick, Don Bosco?"

"Oh, Viglietti!" he said as he woke up. "No I am not sick, but I was unable to breathe, you know. That is enough, now. Go back to bed and sleep peacefully."

Next morning when Viglietti brought him his usual cup of coffee after Mass, Don Bosco confessed, "Oh, Viglietti, I cannot take it anymore. My whole chest is sore from having screamed so much last night. I have been dreaming now for four consecutive nights. These dreams force me to scream out and they tire me out. Four nights ago I saw a long line of Salesians walking one after the other, every one of them carrying a flagstaff with placards with a printed number on them. On one I saw 73, on another 30, 62 on a third, and so on. When many of them had gone by, the moon appeared in the sky, and as soon as a Salesian appeared you could have spotted a number, which was never higher than 12, and behind it there were many little black dots. All the Salesians that I saw went by and sat down beside an empty grave."

This is the explanation of his dream as it was given him: the number on the placards represented the number of years that each of them was to live; the appearance of the moon in different shapes and phases indicated the last month of their existence; the black dots represented the days of the month in which they were to die. He kept on seeing more and more of them, at times standing in groups; these were Salesians who were to die all together, on the same day. He said that if he were to mention all the accessory details and circumstances minutely, it would take him at least ten full days.

He witnesses a devils council

"I dreamed again three nights ago," he continued. "I will tell you about it in brief. I thought I was in a big hall where many great devils were gathered as though for a convention. They were discussing how they could destroy the Salesian Congregation. They looked like lions, tigers, serpents and other animals, though their appearance was

somewhat muddled, looking somewhat like human beings. They also looked like shadows, now higher, now lower; now smaller and now taller – just like bodies would look behind a lamp if one were to move it this way or that way. Now lowered to ground level and then raised up again. The whole fantastic vision was terrifying.

“One of the devils stepped forward to open the session. He proposed one way by which the pious Society might be destroyed: gluttony. He expounded on the consequences of this vice: sluggishness in doing good, corruption of morals, scandal, no spirit of sacrifice, and no concern for the boys.

“But another devil responded, ‘Your suggestion is neither general nor effective, nor can all members of the Society be undermined by it collectively, for the dining table of religious is always frugal, the wine measured, their regular meals are set by their rules, their superiors are alert so as to prevent disorder. Instead of causing scandal, anyone who was to eat or drink to excess would sooner arouse disgust. No, this is not a weapon to use against the Salesians. I will find some other way that is more effective, and more likely to help us in our intent: love of riches. When the love of riches enters a religious Congregation, the love for comforts will also enter with it and the members will attempt everything to secure money (peculium) for themselves, the bond of love will be shattered. Since everyone will think only about his own needs, the poor will be neglected in order to dedicate themselves only to those who have means, and there will be stealing from the Congregation.’

“This devil would have continued speaking, but a third stood up and said, ‘Gluttony? Get lost! Riches? Get lost! The love of riches will affect only a few among the Salesians! The Salesians are all poor; they have but a few opportunities of making money for themselves. On the whole, their structure is so designed, their needs so immense with all the boys and the houses they have, that no matter how big any sum of money may be, it will soon be used up. It is impossible that they hoard anything. But I do have one infallible means by which we can

conquer the Salesian Society for ourselves, and this is freedom. So let us teach the Salesians to disregard their rules, refuse certain assignments because they are burdensome and less glamorous, create division from their superiors by proposing conflicting opinions, and go home on the pretext they have been invited, and so on.'

"While the devils were discussing among themselves, Don Bosco was thinking I am all ears to hear what you are saying. I want to know. Go ahead – talk! By all means, talk because this will enable me to upset your conspiracy.

"Just then a fourth devil leapt to his feet, shouting, 'Rubbish! You are only proposing broken weapons! The superiors will know how to check such a freedom, and will expel from their houses anyone who ventures to rebel against the rules. Maybe a few will be led astray by their craving for freedom, but the vast majority will remain steadfast in their duty. Now I have a weapon that will surely undermine the whole Congregation down to its foundations. It is a weapon against which the Salesians will hardly be able to defend themselves. It will carry the rot to their very roots. Now listen to me carefully – convince them that their main glory should consist in their learning! This means inducing them to study for the sake of study, learning for the sake of attaining fame and not for the sake of practicing what they preach and not for using their learning for the benefit of their neighbor. They will become arrogant in their attitude toward the poor, ignorant and lazy as far as their sacred ministry. No more Festive Oratories, no more catechism classes for the boys, no more humble classrooms where they could teach poor, abandoned boys, no more long hours in the confessional. They will hold onto only preaching, but only occasionally, in a form well measured and sterile because it will only be an outlet for their own vanity, aimed at being praised by their listeners, not at saving souls.'

"This devil's suggestion was hailed by applause. Don Bosco foresaw the day when the Salesians might really be led to believe that the interests of the Congregation and its honor

lay solely in learning, and he grew afraid that not only would they act accordingly, but they would also preach that such a belief should be shared far and wide.

“Don Bosco was again standing in a corner of the room, watching everything and listening to all that was said. One of the devils discovered him, and shouted, pointing him out to the others. At his scream, all the devils rushed at him and yelled, ‘We will put an end to this!’

“A whirl of infernal ghosts pushed and seized him by his arms, and at this point, he began to yell, ‘Let me go! Help!’

“At last he woke up, his chest all sore from so much screaming.”

Lions, tigers and monsters dressed as lambs

The following evening, he saw that the devil had begun working on the Salesians in their most essential core, urging them to neglect their rules. He was able to see them all distinctly, some were keeping the rules and others were breaking them.

The last night, the dream became more fearful than ever. Don Bosco saw a big flock of sheep and lambs representing so many Salesians. He approached them, trying to caress the lambs, but as he drew nearer, he saw that their wool was not real. It was not a lamb’s wool, for hidden under it there were lions, tigers, pigs, panthers, and bears. Every one of them had a hideous, ferocious monster at their sides.

Some were standing in a huddle talking in the midst of the flock. Unnoticed, Don Bosco approached the group to hear what they were saying. They were discussing what to do in order to destroy the Salesian Congregation.

One was saying, “We must cut the Salesians’ throats.”

Another chuckled and said, “We should strangle them.”

But just then, someone saw that Don Bosco was standing by listening. This demon sounded the alarm and they all shrieked together that they should start by killing Don Bosco. At that, they all rushed at him to choke him. It was then that he uttered the terrible cry that had awakened Viglietti.

Don Bosco had a heavy heart, not only because of the diabolical violence with which he had been attacked, but also because he had seen a great banner floating over the heads of the flock, and on it was written "*BESTIIS COMPARATI SUNT*" [They are like beasts]. As he said this, he bowed his head and wept.

Viglietti took his hand and pressed it against his own heart. He said, "Ah, Don Bosco! With the help of God, all of us will always be faithful, devoted sons, will we not?"

"Dear Viglietti, be good and get ready to see what is going to happen. I have barely outlined these dreams to you. It would have taken me much longer were I to have told you everything in detail. How many things did I see! Some of the confreres of our houses will not live to see another Christmas Novena.

"Oh, if I could only talk to the boys. If I only had the strength to be among them, if I could only make a tour of all our houses, do all that I used to do, revealing the secrets of individual consciences to everyone as I saw them in the dream. If I could only say to some, 'Break the ice, make a good confession for once!' They would answer, 'But I do make a good confession!' Then I could reply by telling them all that they concealed, and that would stop them from opening their lips again. If I could only say a word to some of our Salesians, as well, to show them how much they need to put their own conscience in order by repeating their confessions.

I saw how some kept their rules and others didn't. I saw many youths who would go to San Benigno and become Salesians, but then leave us again.

Even some, who are now already Salesians, will defect. There will be those who will seek only knowledge, the brand of knowledge that inflates the ego and craves praise. This will have them disregard the advice of those whom they consider less learned as they are."

These sorry thoughts were interwoven with providential consolations that filled Don Bosco's heart with joy.

The evening of December 3rd, the bishop of Para (that is the focal point of his dream about the missions) arrived at the

Oratory. The following day, he said to Viglietti, "How mighty Divine Providence is! Listen and then tell me if God does not protect us. Father Paul Albera wrote to tell me that he could no longer go on, but needed one thousand francs immediately. That same day, a religious lady in Marseille, who was looking to see her brother in Paris, gave Father Paul Albera a thousand francs, delighted for having obtained from our Lady the grace of seeing him again. Father Joseph Ronchail is in a serious predicament, and has urgent need of four thousand francs. Today, a lady wrote to Don Bosco and told him that she is holding four thousand francs at his disposal. Father Francis Dalmazzo does not know where to turn for money. Today, a lady donated a substantial sum of money for the Church of the Sacred Heart."

Then on December 7th, he experienced a great joy for Bishop John Cagliero's consecration. All of these things were even more encouraging because they were manifest signs of God's hand over the work of His servant.

(BM XVII 352-358)

St Francis de Sales instructs him. Future of vocations (1879)

In the prophetic dream Don Bosco recounted on 9 May 1879, Saint Francis de Sales appeared as a caring teacher and gave the Founder a booklet full of warnings for novices, professed members, directors, and superiors. The vision was dominated by two epic battles: first young men and warriors, then armed men and monsters, while the banner of "Mary Help of Christians" guaranteed victory to those who followed it. The survivors set

off for the East, North, and South, foreshadowing the Salesian missionary expansion. The Saint's words emphasised obedience, chastity, educational charity, love of work, and temperance, indispensable pillars for the Congregation to grow, withstand trials, and leave its children a legacy of active holiness. It concluded with a coffin, a stern reminder to be vigilant and prayerful.

Think as we may of this particular dream, Don Bosco had another dream which he narrated on May 9. In it he saw the fierce battles which faced the men called to his Congregation, and he was given several valuable instructions for all his sons and sound advice for the future.

[I saw] a hard-fought, long-drawn-out battle between youngsters and a varied array of warriors who were armed with strange weapons. Survivors were few.

A second fiercer and more terrifying battle was being waged by gigantic monsters fully armed, well-trained tall men who unfurled a huge banner, the center of which bore an inscription in gold, *Maria Auxilium Christianorum*. The combat was long and bloody, but the soldiers fighting under the banner were protected against hurt and conquered a vast plain. The boys who had survived the previous battle linked forces with them, each combatant holding a crucifix in his right hand and a miniature of the banner in his left. After engaging together in several sallies over that vast plain, they split, some heading eastward, a few to the north, and many for the south. Once they all left, the same skirmishes, maneuvers and leave-takings were repeated by others.

I recognized some boys who fought in the first skirmishes, but none of the others, who nevertheless seemed to know me and asked me many questions.

Shortly afterward I witnessed a shower of flashing, fiery tongues of many colors, followed by thunder and then clear skies. Then I found myself in a charming garden. A man who looked like Saint Francis de Sales silently handed me a

booklet. I asked him who he was. "Read the book," was the reply.

I opened it, but had trouble reading, managing only to make out these precise words:

"For the Novices: Obedience in all things. Through obedience they will deserve God's blessings and the good will of men. Through diligence they will fight and overcome the snares set by the enemies of their souls.

"For the Confreres: Jealously safeguard the virtue of chastity. Love your confreres' good name, promote the honor of the Congregation.

"For the Directors: Take every care, make every effort to observe and promote observance of the rules through which everyone's life is consecrated to God.

"For the Superior: Total self-sacrifice, so as to draw himself and his charges to God."

The book said many other things, but I couldn't read any further, for the paper turned as blue as the ink.

"Who are you?" I again asked the man who serenely gazed at me.

"Good people everywhere know me. I have been sent to tell you of future events."

"What are they?"

"Those you have already seen and those which you will ask about."

"How can I foster vocations?"

"The Salesians will harvest many vocations by their good example, by being endlessly kind toward their pupils, and by urging them constantly to receive Holy Communion often."

"What should we bear in mind when admitting novices?"

"Reject idlers and gluttons."

"And when admitting to vows?"

"Make sure that they are well grounded in chastity."

"How are we to maintain the right spirit in our houses?"

"Let superiors very often write, visit and welcome the confreres, dealing kindly with them."

"What of our foreign missions?"

"Send men of sound morality and recall any who give you

serious reason to doubt; look for and foster native vocations."

"Is our Congregation on the right path?"

"Let those who do good keep doing good. [Rev. 22, 11] Not to go forward is to go backward. [St. Gregory the Great] The man who stands firm to the end will be saved." [Mt. 10, 22]

"Will the Congregation grow?"

"It will reach out so that no one will be able to check its growth, as long as the superiors meet their obligations."

"Will it have a long life?"

"Yes, but only as long as its members love work and temperance.

Should either of these two pillars fall, your entire edifice will collapse and crush superiors, subjects and followers beneath it."

Just then four men showed up bearing a coffin and approaching me.

"Whom is that for?" I asked.

"For you."

"How soon?"

"Do not ask. Just remember that you are mortal."

"What are you trying to tell me with this coffin?"

"That while you are still living you must see to it that your sons practice what they must continue to practice after your death. This is the heritage, the testament you must bequeath to them; but you must work on it and leave it [to your sons] as a well-studied and well-tested legacy."

"Can we expect roses or thorns?"

"Many roses and joys are in store, but very sharp thorns also threaten.

They will cause all of you acute distress and sorrow. You must pray much."

"Should we open houses in Rome?"

"Yes, but not hurriedly; proceed with extreme prudence and caution."

"Is the end of my mortal life near at hand?"

"Don't be concerned. You have the rules and other books.

Practice what you preach and be vigilant.”

I wanted to ask more questions, but muffled thunder rumbled through the air with flashes of lightning. Several men, rather horrid monsters, dashed toward me as if to tear me to pieces. But then a deep darkness enveloped me, shutting everything out. I felt that I must be dead and started to scream frenziedly. I awoke and found I was still alive. It was a quarter to five in the morning.

If we can draw some good from this dream, let us do so. In all things let honor and glory be given to God forever and ever.

(BM XIV, 88-90)

Photo on the title page. Saint Francis de Sales. Anonymous. Sacristy of Chieri Cathedral

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.

The way to hell paved with

feeble resolutions (1873)

San Giovanni Bosco recounts in a "good night" the result of a long plea to Mary Help of Christians: to understand the main cause of eternal damnation. The answer, received in repeated dreams, is shocking in its simplicity: the lack of a firm, concrete resolution at the end of Confession. Without a sincere decision to change one's life, even the sacrament becomes ineffective and sins are repeated.

A solemn warning: Why do so many go to destruction? Because they do not make good resolutions when they go to confession.

At the "Good Night" on May 31, 1873, Don Bosco gave his pupils a serious warning, which, he said, was "the result of his humble prayers" and came from the Lord:

Throughout the whole month of May-he said-particularly during the novena of Mary, Help of Christians, I constantly offered Masses and prayers to Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin imploring them to let me know what, most of all, drags souls into hell. I do not say now that the Lord did or did not enlighten me. I only say that almost every night I dreamed that this is due to the lack of firm resolves in confessions. I seemed to see boys leaving church after confession, their heads sprouting two horns.

What causes this? I asked myself. *Ah, this is due to feeble resolutions.* That's why so many go frequently to confession but never mend their ways and keep confessing the same sins over and over again. There are some (I am only conjecturing. not going on anything heard in confession, because of the seal) who at the start of the school year were doing rather poorly in studies and are still doing no better: there are others who griped and are still griping. I thought it best to let you know this, because it is the result of my humble prayers and because it does come from the Lord.

Publicly he gave no other details, but undoubtedly he took advantage of this dream to encourage and admonish. What little he did say and the way he said it constituted a grave warning, such as should frequently be given to our boys.
(BM X, 48-49)

Purity and ways it can be safeguarded (1884)

In this dream of Don Bosco, a heavenly garden appears: a green slope, festooned trees, and, in the center, an immense, snow-white carpet adorned with biblical inscriptions praising purity. On its edge sit two twelve-year-old girls, dressed in white with red sashes and floral crowns: they personify Innocence and Penance. With gentle voices, they discuss the value of baptismal innocence, the dangers that threaten it, and the sacrifices needed to preserve it: prayer, mortification, obedience, purity of the senses.

He seemed to see before him an enchanting and immense green slope, gently inclined and leveled. At the foot of it, a meadow formed that was equivalent to a low step from which one could jump off onto the little path where Don Bosco was standing. All around it looked like an earthly paradise, magnificently illuminated by a light that was brighter and purer even than that of the sun. It was covered all around by green vegetation, star-spangled by a thousand different kinds of flowers, and shaded by an infinite number of trees, whose branches intertwined, stretching out like immense festoons.

In the center of the garden and stretching to its further border was a carpet of magic candor, so dazzling that the eyes were blinded. It was several miles wide, as

magnificent as royal pomp. Several inscriptions in golden letters ornamented the border encircling it. On one side it read: *Beati immaculati in via, qui ambulant in lege Domini*; on another side: *Non privabit bonis eos, qui ambulant in innocentia*; on the third side: *Non confundentur in tempore malo, in diebus famis saturabuntur*; on the fourth: *Novit Dominus dies immaculatorum et haereditas eorum in aeternum erit*.

At the four corners of the area surrounding a magnificent rose bed were four more inscriptions: *Cum simplicibus sermocinatio eius; Proteget gradientes simpliciter; Qui ambulant simpliciter, ambulant confidenter; Voluntas eius in iis, qui simpliciter ambulant*.

In the middle of this area was the last inscription: *Qui ambulant simpliciter, salvus erit*. In the middle of the slope and on the upper border of this carpet, there was a pure white streamer with gold letters that read: *Fili mi, tu semper mecum es et omnia mea tua sunt*.

Though Don Bosco was enchanted by the garden, his attention was drawn to two lovely, little maidens who were about twelve years old and who were sitting at the edge of the carpet where the slope formed a low step. Their whole gracious mien emanated a heavenly modesty. One did not only perceive the innocent simplicity of a dove in their eyes that gazed steadily upward, but also a most pure, fervent love and a joyful, heavenly happiness. Their broad, serene brows seemed to harbor candor and sincerity, while a sweet, enchanting smile hovered on their lips. Their features denoted tender, ardent hearts, and the graceful movements of their bodies conferred a dignity and nobility on them that contrasted oddly with their youth.

A pure, white garment fell to their feet, and no stain, wrinkle, or even speck of dust was apparent on it. Around their waists were fiery red sashes, bordered with gold and adorned by what looked like a ribbon embroidered with lilies, violets and roses. They wore a similar ribbon like a necklace that was made of the same flowers, though somewhat

different in design. There were little wreaths of white daisies at their wrists, like bracelets, and all of these things and flowers were so beautiful in form and color that it would have been impossible to describe them. Even the most precious jewels of this world mounted with the most exquisite work-manship would have looked like mud in contrast.

Their pure, white shoes were edged with a white ribbon interwoven with gold, handsomely tied into a center bow. They were laced with a narrow white cord, in which small golden threads glinted.

Their long hair, forming a shadow in its thickness and falling in curled ringlets over their shoulders, was covered by a crown.

They were talking with each other. They took turns to speak, asking each other questions and issuing exclamations. They would both sit, or one sat while the other stood or they would stroll together, but they never stepped off the candid carpet or touched either the grass or the flowers. Don Bosco stood there like a spectator in his dream, without speaking to the little maidens, and they did not seem to be aware of his presence. One of them addressed the other in a harmonious voice: "What is innocence? The happy condition of sanctifying grace preserved by constant, scrupulous observance of the Divine Commandments."

The other girl answered in a voice that was no less sweet: "The purity of innocence preserved is the source and origin of all knowledge and virtue."

The first maiden: "How splendid, how glorious, how magnificent is the virtue to live honestly among those who are evil, to retain the candor of innocence and purity of one's habits amid those who are evil."

The other maiden rose to her feet and standing beside her companion said, "Blessed is the boy who does not heed the council of the godless, who does not walk in the way of the sinner, but who delights in the Commandments of the Lord, contemplating them day and night. He shall be like a tree planted beside the river where the water of God's grace

flows, and which shall, in its good time, yield the abundant fruit of good works. The leaves of his holy intentions and his merit shall not fall before the blowing of the wind, and all that he shall do shall be successful. In all circumstances of his life, he shall work to enhance his reward."

So saying, she pointed to the trees laden with beautiful, fragrant fruits in the garden around them, while sparkling little brooks ran between two flowering banks or fell in tiny waterfalls, forming small lakes, bathing the trunks of the trees with a murmur that sounded like the mysterious strains of distant music.

The first maiden answered, "He is like a lily amid the thorns which God shall pluck in His garden to wear as an ornament over His heart. He may say to his Lord, 'My Beloved is mine, and I am His, who feeds among the lilies.'"

So saying, she pointed to a great cluster of beautiful lilies that lifted their candid heads amid the grass and other flowers, and also to a tall hedge in the distance that surrounded the gardens with greenery. This hedge was thick with thorns and beyond it one could perceive horrible monsters moving around like shadows, trying to get inside the garden, though the thorns on the hedge barred their way.

"It is true! How much truth there is in your words!" the other girl said. "Blessed is the boy who shall be found without sin! But who can he be? How are we to praise him? For he has done wondrous things in his life. He was found to be perfect and shall have glory in eternity. He could sin and did not; he could have done wrong, but did not. For this the Lord has prepared his reward, and his good deeds shall be celebrated by all the Congregations of Saints."

"And what great glory God has in store for them here on earth! He will summon them, giving them a place in His Sanctuary, He will make them ministers of His Mysteries, and shall confer on them an eternal name which shall never perish," the first said.

The second rose to her feet now and exclaimed, "Who could describe the beauty of the innocent? The soul is

magnificently arrayed like one of us, adorned with the white stole of Holy Baptism. His neck and arms are ablaze with divine jewels, and on his finger gleams the ring of an alliance with God. His soul moves lightly along its journey toward eternity. Before him there is a path spangled with stars. The innocent is a living tabernacle of the Holy Spirit. The blood of Jesus runs through his veins, staining crimson his cheeks and lips, and the Most Holy Trinity on his immaculate heart sheds torrents of light all around it, which clothes it in the brightness of the sun. From on high, clouds of celestial flowers fill the air in a downpour of rain. All around him, sweet melodies are heard and the angels echo the prayer of his soul. The Most Holy Mary is at his side, ready to defend him. Heaven stands open for him. The infinite legions of the saints and of the Blessed Spirits stand ranged before him, inviting him to advance by waving their palms. In the inaccessible radiance of His Throne of Glory, God lifts His Right Hand to indicate the place prepared for him, while in His Left, He holds the magnificent crown with which he shall be crowned forever. The innocent is the desire, the joy and the pride of Paradise. An ineffable joy is engraved on his countenance. He is the Son of God. God is his Father. Paradise is his heritage. He is constantly with God. He sees Him, loves Him, serves Him, possesses Him, enjoys Him, and possesses a range of heavenly delights. He is in possession of all treasures, all graces, all secrets, all gifts, all perfections, and the whole of God himself.

“That is why the innocence of saints, and especially of the martyrs in the old and New Testament, is depicted so gloriously. Oh, innocence! How beautiful you are! Tempted, you grow in perfection; humiliated, you soar even higher; embattled, you emerge triumphant; when slain, you soar toward your crown. You are free in slavery, serene and certain in peril, happy when in chains. The mighty bow before you, princes hail you, the great do seek you. The pious obey you, the evil envy you, your rivals emulate you, and your enemies succumb before you. Always shall you be victorious, even when

men shall condemn you unjustly!"

The two little maidens were silent for a moment, as if to take a breath after this impassioned rhapsody. Then, they took each other by the hand, exchanged glances, and spoke in turn.

"Oh, if only the young knew how precious is the treasure of innocence, how jealously would they defend the stole of Holy Baptism from the beginning of their days! But alas, they do not reflect, and do not know what it means to soil it. Innocence is a most precious nectar."

"But it is contained in a jar of fragile clay, and unless one carries it with great care, it is easily broken."

"Innocence is a most precious jewel."

"But if one is unaware of its value, it can be lost and will easily be transformed into base metal."

"Innocence is a golden mirror which reflects the likeness of God."

"Yet a breath of humid air is enough to make it rusty, and one must needs keep it wrapped in a veil."

"Innocence is a lily."

"Yet a mere touch from a rough hand will wither it."

"Innocence is a candid garment. *Omni tempore sint vestimenta tua candida* [May your garment be always white]."

"Yet a single blemish will defile it, so one must proceed with great caution."

"Innocence and integrity are violated if soiled by only one stain, and will lose the treasure of grace."

"Only one mortal sin is enough."

"And once lost, it is lost forever."

"What a tragedy it is that so many lose their innocence in one single day! When a boy falls victim to sin, Paradise closes its doors; the Blessed Virgin and his Guardian Angel disappear; music is silent; light fades away. God will no longer be in his heart; the star-spangled path he was following vanishes; he falls and will linger like an island in

the midst of the sea, in one single place; a sea of fire will extend to the furthest horizon of eternity, falling down into the abyss of chaos. Over his head in the darkly menacing sky, flash the lightning flares of divine justice. Satan has hastened to join him, and loads him now with chains; he places a foot upon his neck, and raising his horrible countenance toward the sky, he shouts, 'I have won. Your son is now my slave. He is no longer yours. Joy is over for him.' If in His Justice God then removes from beneath him that one little place where he is standing, he will be lost forever."

"Yet he may rise again! The Mercy of God is infinite! A good confession will restore grace to him and his title as the son of God."

"But not his innocence! And what consequences will linger on in him after that initial sin! He is now aware of the sin of which he had no knowledge previously; terrible will be the evil inclinations he will experience; he will feel the terrible debt he has contracted toward Divine Justice and will find that he is now weaker in his spiritual battles. He will feel that which he had never felt before: shame, sadness, remorse."

"To think that previously it was said of him, 'Let the little children come unto Me. They will be like God's Angels in Heaven. My Son, give me your heart.'"

"Ah, those wretches who are guilty for the loss of innocence in a child commit a hideous crime. Jesus said, 'Whoever shall give scandal to any of these little ones who believe in Me, it would have been better if he had put a millstone around his neck, and drown in the depths of the sea. Woe unto the world because of scandal. It is not possible that scandal be prevented, but woe unto him who is guilty of it. Beware, lest you despise any of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in Heaven see constantly the face of My Father Who is in Heaven and Who demands vengeance.'"

"Wretches, indeed, are they! But no less wretched are those who permit them to steal their innocence."

Then they both began to stroll up and down,

talking about how innocence could be preserved.

One of them said, "Boys make a great mistake when they think that only those who have sinned should do penance. Penance is necessary so that innocence may be retained. Had St. Aloysius not done penance, he would, beyond any doubt, have committed mortal sins. This should be preached, driven home, and taught constantly to the young. How many more there would be who would retain their innocence, whereas now there are so few."

"The Apostle says it. We should be carrying within our own body the mortification of Jesus Christ everywhere, so that the life of Jesus may manifest in our body."

"Jesus, who was holy, immaculate and innocent lived His Life in privation and suffering."

"So did the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints."

"They did this to give an example to youth. St. Paul says, 'If you live by the flesh, you shall die; but if you slay the action of the flesh with the spirit, you shall live.'"

"So innocence can only be retained through penance!"

"Yet, many wish to retain their innocence while living in freedom!"

"Fools! Is it not written that he was taken away, so that malice should not destroy his spirit, and temptation might not lead his soul into sin? For the lure of vanity obscures what is good, and the vortex of lust perverts the innocent soul. The innocent, therefore, has two enemies: the evil maxims and bad words of the wicked and concupiscence. Does not the Lord say that death at an early age is the reward of the innocent because it sets him free from battle? 'Because he was pleasing to God, He was loved, and because he lived among sinners, he snatched him away.' 'He lived but briefly, and had a great career.' 'For his soul was loved by God, and for this He hastened to pluck him forth out of iniquity.' 'He

was taken away so that malice might not destroy his spirit, and temptation might not lead his soul into sin.’”

“Fortunate are the young who embrace the cross of penance and who repeat with Job (27:5) with a steadfast resolution ‘*Donec deficiam, non recedam ab innocentia mea* [I will maintain my innocence to my dying day].’”

“Hence, mortification is needed to overcome the boredom they experience in prayer.”

“It is also written: *Psallam et intelligam in via immaculata* (Psalm 100:2). *Quando venies ad me? Petite et accipietis. Pater noster!* [All along the immaculate path I will sing and I will understand. When will you come to me and ask and you shall receive Our Father!]

“Mortification of the mind by accepting humiliation, by obedience to one’s superiors and to the rules.”

“It is likewise written: *Si mei non fuerint dominati, tunc immaculatus ero et emendabor a delicto maximo* [Never let (pride) dominate me, then I shall be above reproach and free from grave sin] (Psalm 19:13). This is pride. God resists against the proud and gives grace to the humble. He who humbles himself shall be exalted, and he who exalts himself shall be humbled. Obey your superiors.”

“Mortification always in telling the truth, in acknowledging one’s faults and whatever dangers one may find himself in. Then, one will always be well advised, especially by his confessor.”

“*Pro anima tua ne confundaris dicere verum*, for your soul be not ashamed to tell the truth (Ecclesiasticus 4:24). For there is a kind of blush that calls for sin, and another kind of blush which calls for glory and grace.”

“Mortification of the heart by restraining its ill-advised impulses, by loving everyone for God’s sake, and resolutely turning away from anyone who we realize is tempting our innocence.”

“Jesus said it. If your hand or your foot give

scandal, cup it off and cast it from thee; it is better that you go through life without a foot or without a hand than to be cast into eternal fire with both your hands and your feet. If your eye offends you, pluck it out and cast it away from you; it is better that you should enter eternity with but one eye only than to be cast with both your eyes into the flames of Hell."

"Mortification in courageously and frankly enduring the scorn of human respect. *Exacu'erunt, ut gladium, linguas suas: intenderunt arcum, rem amaram, ut sagittent in occultis immaculatum* [They sharpened their tongues like swords shooting bitter words like arrows shooting them at the innocent from cover](Psalm 64:3)."

"They will overcome the evil person who scoffs, fearing that his superiors may find him out, at the thought of the terrible words of Jesus: 'The son of man shall be ashamed of the one who will be ashamed of him and his words, when He shall come in all His majesty, and the majesty of His Father and of the Holy Angels.'"

"Mortification of the eyes, in looking at things, and people, in reading, and by avoiding all bad or unsuitable books."

"One essential thing. I have made a pact with my eyes never to even think of a virgin. And in the psalms: Turn away your eyes, so that they may not look on vanity."

"Mortification of the ears: never listen to evil conversations or mawkish or godless speech."

"In Ecclesiasticus 28:28, we read: *Sepi aures tuas spinis, linguam nequam noli audire* [Fence your ears with a quick thorn hedge never heed a wicked tongue]."

"Mortification is speech: do not let curiosity overcome you."

"It is likewise written: Put a door and a lock upon you lips. Take heed, lest you slip with your tongue and fall in the sight of you enemies who lie in wait for you, and your fall will be incurable unto death (Ecclesiasticus, ib)."

"Mortification of the palate: Do not eat or drink

too much."

"Too much eating and drinking brought the flood upon the world, and fire rained down over Sodom and Gomorrah, and a thousand other punishments came over the Jewish people."

"In short, mortification by bearing all that happens to us during the course of the day, the cold and heat, without seeking our own comforts. Mortify your members that are on earth (Colossians 3:5)."

"Remember that Jesus told us: *Si quis vult post me venire, abneget semetipsum et tollat crucem suam quotidie et sequatur me* [If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself, carry his cross daily and follow Me] (Luke 9:23)."

"With his provident hand, God surrounds the innocent with crosses and thorns, even as He did with Job, Joseph, Tobias and other saints. *Quia acceptus eras Deo, necesse fuit, ut tentatio probaret te* [Because you were acceptable to God, it was necessary that you be tested]."

"The path of the innocent has its trials and sacrifices, but it finds strength in Holy Communion, for he who goes often to Communion will have life everlasting: he lives in Jesus and Jesus lives in him. He lives of the very life of Jesus, and will he be raised by Him on the Last Day. This is the wheat of the elect, the vine that buds with virgins. *Parasti in conspectu meo mensam adversus eos, qui tribulant me. Cadent a latere tuo mille et decem millia a dextris tuis, ad te autem non appropinquabunt* [You set up a dining table right in front of those who give me trouble, but they will fall thousands and ten thousands by your sides and they shall not get close to you]."

"And the most sweet Virgin by Him beloved is His Mother. *Ego mater pulchrae. dilectionis et timoris et agnitionis et sanctae spei. In me gratia omnis (to know) viae et veritatis; in me omnis spes vitae et virtutis. Ego diligentes me diligo. Qui elucidant me, vitam aeternam habebunt Terribilis, ut castrorum acies ordinata.* [I am the mother of beautiful love and fear and knowledge. In me you will come to know the right way and the ways to truth; all

hope to live and be virtuous is found in me. I love those who love me. Those who make me known will have eternal life. I am terrible just like an army set for war].”

The two little maidens then turned and slowly climbed the slope. One of them exclaimed, “The salvation of the just stems from the Lord. He is their protector in times of tribulation. The Lord shall help them and shall set them free. He seizes them from the hands of sinners and shall save them because they put their hopes in Him (Psalm 57).”

The other went on: “God girdled me with strength and made the road I was to follow immaculate.”

When the two of them came to the center of the magnificent carpet, they turned around.

“Yes!” one of them cried out. “Innocence, when crowned by penance, is the queen of all virtue.”

The other also exclaimed, “How beautiful and splendid is a chaste generation! Its memory is immortal in the eyes of God and man. Men imitate it when it is present, and long for it when it is gone to Heaven, crowned triumphantly in eternity, having wrested their reward for their chaste battles. What a triumph! What rejoicing! How glorious a thing to present God with the immaculate stole of one’s Holy Baptism after so many battles waged, amid the applause, the canticles, the splendor of the heavenly hosts!”

As they were thus speaking of the rewards awaiting innocence retained through penance, Don Bosco saw hosts of angels appear, who descended on that candid carpet. They joined the two young maidens, who took their place in the middle of them all. There was a vast multitude of them, and they sang, “*Benedictus Deus et Pater Domini Nostri Iesu Christi, qui benedixit nos in ipso in omni benedictione spirituali in coelestibus in Christo; qui elegit nos in ipso ante mundi constitutionem, ut essemus sancti et immaculati in conspectu eius in charitate et praedestinavit nos in adoptionem per Iesum Christum* (Eph. 1:4) [Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of Heaven in Christ. Before the world

was made, He chose us, chose us in Christ to be holy and spotless and live through love in His presence, determining that we should become his adopted sons, through Jesus Christ].”

The two maidens then intoned a magnificent hymn, with such words and notes that only the angels nearer to the center were able to follow. The others sang too, but Don Bosco could not hear their voices, although they made gestures and moved their lips as if singing.

The two maidens sang, “*Me propter innocentiam suscepisti et confirmasti me in conspectu tuo in aeternum. Benedictus Dominus Deus a saeculo et usque in saeculum. Fiat! Fiat!* [You have made me welcome because I was innocent, you have made me steadfast in Your presence forever. May the Lord God be ever praised, forever and ever. So be it! So be it!”

Now, other hosts of angels came to join the first ones, and the others after them. They were arrayed in many colors, with ornaments differing one from the other, and very different from those worn by the two little maidens. Yet, the richness and splendor of it was magnificent. They were each so handsome that the human mind could never in any way conceive even a remote idea of what they were like. Nothing could describe this scene, though if one adds words to words, one may perhaps render some confused idea of it.

When the two girls had completed their canticle, they could all be heard singing together in one immense, harmonious canticle, the likes of which has never before been heard nor will ever be heard here on earth.

They sang, “*Ei, qui potens est vos conservare sine peccato et constituere ante conspectum gloriae suae immaculatos in exultatione, in adventu Domini nostri Iesu Christi; Soli Deo Salvatori nostro, per Iesum Christum Dominum nostrum, gloria et magnificentia, imperium et potestas ante omne saeculum, et nunc et in omnia saecula saeculorum. Amen* [To him, who is able to keep you without sin and has allowed you to stand immaculate right in front of His glory, when our Lord Jesus will appear, to him alone, who is our Savior Jesus

Christ our Lord, be glory and splendor, power and rule before all ages for now and for all ages. Amen].”

As they were singing, ever more angels came to join them, and when the canticle was over, they all soared slowly aloft, one after the other, and disappeared together with the entire vision.

Then, Don Bosco woke up.

(*MB IT XVII, 722-730 / MB EN XVII, 688-697*)

The dream of the 22 moons (1854)

In March 1854 on a feast day, after evening prayer Don Bosco gathered all the pupils in the back sacristy saying he wanted to tell them about a dream. Among others present were young Cagliero, Turchi, Anfossi, clerics Reviglio and Buzzetti. Our narration is based on their accounts. All of them believed that Don Bosco's dreams were true supernatural revelations. Don Bosco spoke as follows:

I was with you in the playground, delighted to see all of you so lively and happy, jumping, shouting, and running about. Suddenly, however, one of you came out of the building wearing some sort of top hat and began strolling around in the playground. The transparent headgear was lit from the inside and revealed the picture of a moon with the number '22' in its center. Amazed, I was about to walk up to the boy and tell him to cut off that nonsense when suddenly all of you stopped playing as if the bell had rung and lined up as usual on the porch by classes. It was now semi-dark. While all of you looked frightened, nearly a dozen of you were deathly pale. I

passed in front of these pale ones for a closer look, and among them I saw the boy with the top hat. He was even paler than the rest, and a black drape-like those used at funerals was hanging from his shoulders. I was about to ask him what his strange garb meant when a grave and dignified-looking stranger stopped me and said: "Wait! Know that this boy has only twenty-two moons to live. Before these are over, he will die. Take care of him and prepare him!" I wanted some explanation of this message and his sudden appearance, but the stranger had already vanished. My dear boys, I know who that lad is. He is right here among you.

Terror gripped all of the boys. This was the very first time that Don Bosco had ever predicted the death of anyone in the house publicly and so solemnly. He could not help noticing their fear, and so he continued: "Don't be afraid! True, I know that boy, and he is here now, but this is a dream, as I have said, and you know that dreams are only dreams. One thing is certain, though-we must always be prepared, just as Our Divine Savior has warned us in the Gospel, and never commit sin. If we follow this rule, death will not frighten us. Put your conscience in order, therefore, and resolve not to offend God anymore. On my part, I shall look after the boy of the twenty-two moons. These moons signify twenty-two months. I hope that he will die a good death."

Understandably, this announcement frightened the boys, but in the long run it did them good because their attention was focused on death as they kept themselves in God's grace and counted the months. Now and then when Don Bosco would ask: "How many more moons?" they would reply "Twenty" or "Eighteen²" or "Fifteen" and so on. Sometimes those who paid the closest attention to everything he said would tell him that so many moons had already gone by, attempting at the same time to make their own predictions or guesses, but Don Bosco would say nothing. When [John Baptist] Piano entered the Oratory as a young student in

November, 1854, he heard his companions say that nine moons had already passed. He then found out about Don Bosco's prediction and he too began keeping track of the moons.

The year 1854 went by, and so did many months of 1855, and then came October, the twentieth month. At this time the cleric [John] Cagliero was in charge of three adjoining rooms in the old Pinardi house. They served as a dormitory for several boys, including Secundus Gurgo a handsome, healthy, seventeen-year-old from Pettinengo (Biella) who seemed destined to live to a ripe old age. His father had asked Don Bosco to take him in as a boarder. The youth, an excellent pianist and organist, studied music assiduously and earned good money by giving lessons in town. From time to time during the course of the year Don Bosco had asked Cagliero about the conduct of his charges with more than routine interest. In October he called him and asked: "Where do you sleep?"

"In the last room," Cagliero answered. "From there I can keep an eye on the other two."

"Wouldn't it be better if you moved your bed into the middle room?"

"If you say so, but I think I'd better tell you that it is rather damp because one of its walls is actually the wall of the church tower, which is still very porous. Winter is coming and I might get sick. Besides, I can watch all the boys in the dormitory quite well from where I am!"

"I know you can," Don Bosco replied, "but it would be better if you moved into the middle room." Cagliero complied, but after a while he asked Don Bosco's permission to move his bed back to the last room. Don Bosco did not let him do so. "Stay where you are and don't worry," he told him. "You won't get sick!"

Cagliero felt at ease again. A few days later Don Bosco summoned him again. "How many sleep in your room?"

"There are three of us: Gurgo, Garavaglia, and myself-four, if you include the piano!"

"Good," Don Bosco said. "You are all musicians and Gurgo can teach you to play the piano. Make sure that you look after him well." That was all he said, but Cagliero's curiosity was aroused.

Suspecting something, he tried to question Don Bosco, but he cut him short, saying: "You'll know in due time." The secret, of course, was that the boy of the twenty-two moons was in that room.

One evening, at the beginning of December, after night prayers, Don Bosco mounted the podium as usual to give the Good Night and announced that one of the boys would die before Christmas. We must note that no one at the Oratory was sick at that time. Naturally this announcement, coupled with the fact that the twenty-two moons would soon be over, made everyone jittery. There was much talk about what he had said as well as fear that it would come true.

During these days Don Bosco once more sent for the cleric Cagliero. He asked him how Gurgo was behaving and whether he returned to the Oratory punctually after giving his music lessons in town. Cagliero replied that the boy was doing fine, as were the other boys. "Good," Don Bosco said. "See that they keep it up, and let me know if anything goes wrong."

About the middle of December Gurgo had a sudden attack of abdominal pains so violent that the doctor, who had been summoned at once, recommended that the boy receive the Last Sacraments. The pains continued for eight days, but, thanks to Dr. Debernardi's care, they at last began to subside and Gurgo was able to get up again. The trouble apparently vanished, but – in the doctor's opinion – the boy had had a narrow escape. Meanwhile, his father had been informed. No one had, as yet, died at the Oratory, and Don Bosco wanted to spare the boys

the sight of a funeral. The Christmas novena had begun and Gurgo – now almost completely recovered – was planning to go home for Christmas. Nevertheless, Don Bosco seemed to doubt the good news of the boy's recovery. His father arrived and, finding his son in good condition, asked permission to take him home for some further convalescence. He then went to book two seats on the stagecoach, intending to leave on the next day for Novara and Pettinengo. It was Sunday, December 23 [1855]. That evening Gurgo felt a craving for meat, although the doctor had forbidden it. Thinking that it would help to build his strength, his father went out to buy some and cooked it in a little pot. The boy drank the broth and ate the half-cooked meat-perhaps to excess. At bedtime his father retired for the night while Cagliero and the infirmarian remained with the boy. Sometime during the night Gurgo suffered another very severe attack of colic. "Cagliero, Cagliero!" he gasped. "I'm through giving you piano lessons."

"Come now, don't say that!" Cagliero protested.

"I'll never see home again. Pray for me. Oh, what pains. Pray to Our Lady for me."

"Of course I'll pray, and you do likewise."

Cagliero began praying but, overcome by fatigue, he soon fell asleep. He was suddenly awakened by the infirmarian who pointed to Gurgo and ran out to call Father Alasonatti whose room was next door. He came immediately, but within minutes Gurgo was dead. That morning Cagliero met Don Bosco as he was coming down the stairs on his way to say Mass. He had been informed of the death and looked very, very sad.

The whole Oratory was stunned. The twenty-second moon was not yet over. By dying shortly before dawn on December 24 Gurgo had also fulfilled Don Bosco's second prediction-namely that one of the boys would die before Christmas.

After lunch, the boys and the clerics silently gathered around Don Bosco. The cleric John Turchi asked him point-blank whether Gurgo had been the boy of the moons. "Yes," Don Bosco replied, "it was he; he was the one I saw in my dream." Then he added: "You may have noticed that some time ago I had him sleep in a special room. Into that same room I also moved one of the best clerics, John Cagliero, so that he could look after him constantly." As he said this, he turned to Cagliero and said: "The next time you'll know better than object to Don Bosco's arrangements. Do you understand now why I did not allow you to leave that room? I did not let you have your way because I wanted Gurgo to have someone to look after him. If he were still alive, he could tell you how often I spoke to him of death in a roundabout way and prepared him for it."

"I understood then," Bishop Cagliero later wrote, "why Don Bosco had given me those instructions. I learned to appreciate more and more his words and fatherly advice."

"I still remember," Peter Enria stated, "that on the evening of that day-Christmas Eve-at the Good Night Don Bosco was looking about as though searching for someone. After a while he said: 'Gurgo is the first boy to die here at the Oratory. He was well prepared and we hope he is now in heaven. I exhort you to be ever ready. . . .' He could say no more, so great was his grief at the loss of one of his boys."

(BM V, 243-247)