

Family Conversation

Son: "Have you heard what happened in Ukraine?"

Father: "Bah!"

Mother: "Is the soup salty enough?"

Son: "That's a problem, isn't it?"

Father: "Yes."

Son: "Then what do you think?"

Father: "You are right, it lacks a little salt."

Mother: "Here, have some."

Son: "It's strange how it could have come to this."

Mother: "How much did you get for mathematics?"

Father: "I never understood anything about maths."

Mother: "It's cold tonight..."

A husband listens to his wife at most for 17 seconds and then he starts talking.

A wife listens to her husband for a maximum of 17 seconds and then she starts talking.

Husband and wife listen to their children for...

The tree

A man had four children. He wanted his children to learn not to judge things quickly. Therefore, he invited each of them to take a trip to look at a tree that was planted in a distant place. He sent them out one at a time, three months apart. The children obeyed.

When the last one returned, he gathered them together and asked them to describe what they had seen.

The first son said that the tree was ugly, twisted and bent.

The second son said, however, that the tree was covered with

green buds and promise of life.

The third son disagreed; he said it was covered with flowers which smelled so sweet and were so beautiful that he said they were the most beautiful thing he had ever seen.

The last son disagreed with all the others; he said that the tree was full of fruit, life and bounty.

The man then explained to his sons that all the answers were correct as each had only seen one season of the tree's life.

He said that one cannot judge a tree, or a person, by a single season, and that their essence, the pleasure, joy and love that come from those lives can only be measured at the end, when all the seasons are complete.

When spring is over all the flowers die, but when it returns they smile happily. In my eyes everything passes, on my head everything goes white.

But never believe that in spring's dying moments all flowers die because, just last night, a peach branch was blooming.

(anonymous from Vietnam)

Do not let the pain of one season destroy the joy of what will come later.

Do not judge your life by a difficult season. Persevere through the difficulties, and surely better times will come when you least expect it! Live each of your seasons with joy and the power of hope.

The wise man

Emperor Cyrus the Great loved to converse amiably with a very wise friend named Akkad.

One day, having just returned exhausted from a war campaign against the Medes, Cyrus stopped by his old friend to spend a

few days with him.

"I am exhausted, dear Akkad. All these battles are wearing me out. How I wish I could stop and spend time with you, chatting on the banks of the Euphrates...."

"But, dear sire, by now you have defeated the Medes, what will you do?"

"I want to seize Babylon and subdue it."

"And after Babylon?"

"I will subdue Greece."

"And after Greece?"

"I will conquer Rome."

"And after that?"

"I will stop. I will return here and we will spend happy days conversing amiably on the banks of the Euphrates...."

"And why, sire, my friend, shall we not begin at once?"

There will always be another day to say "I love you".

Remember your loved ones today, and whisper in their ear, tell them how much you love them. Take the time to say "I am sorry", "Please listen to me", "Thank you".

Tomorrow you will not regret what you did today.

The cricket and the Coin

A wise man from India had a close friend who lived in Milan. They had met in India, where the Italian had gone with his family on a tourist trip. The Indian had acted as a guide for the Italian, taking them to explore the most characteristic corners of his homeland.

Grateful, the Milanese friend had invited the Indian to his home. He wanted to return the favour and introduce him to his city. The Indian was very reluctant to leave, but then gave in to his Italian friend's insistence and one fine day he

disembarked from a plane at Malpensa.

The next day, the Milanese and the Indian were walking through the city centre. The Indian, with his chocolate-coloured face, black beard and yellow turban attracted the gaze of passers-by, and the Milanese man walked around proud to have such an exotic friend.

Suddenly, in Piazza San Babila, the Indian stopped and asked, "Do you hear what I hear?" The Milanese, a little bewildered, strained his ears as much as he could, but admitted that he heard nothing but the great noise of the city traffic.

"There is a cricket singing nearby," the Indian continued, confidently.

"You are wrong," replied the Milanese. "I only hear the noise of the city. Besides, there can't be crickets around here."

"I am not mistaken. I hear the song of a cricket," retorted the Indian and resolutely started searching among the leaves of some shrunken saplings. After a while he pointed out to his friend, who was watching him sceptically, a small insect, a splendid singing cricket, which was cowering and grumbling at those disturbing his concert.

"Did you see that there was a cricket there?" said the Indian.

"It's true," admitted the Milanese. "You Indians have much sharper hearing than us Whites..."

"This time it is you who are wrong," smiled the wise Indian.

"Be careful..." The Indian pulled a coin out of his pocket and pretending not to notice, dropped it on the pavement.

Immediately four or five people turned to look.

"Did you see that?" the Indian explained. "This coin's jungle was more thinner and fainter than the cricket's trill. Yet have you noticed how many Whites heard it?"

"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

The exegetes

A famous biblical scholar had invited a group of colleagues to his home. They sat around a table that had a magnificent vase of flowers in the middle and began to argue over a page of the Bible. They argued animatedly, breaking down every word, hypothesising ancient roots, conjecturing, postulating, comparing, distilling, historicising, demythologising, psychologising, feminising...

They could agree on almost nothing.

Suddenly the host interrupted the discussion and turned to one of the guests who was taking flowers from the vase in the middle of the table and systematically destroying them.

"What are you doing?"

"I am counting the whorls, dividing the stamens and pistils, setting aside stalks and filaments..."

"This scientific zeal does you credit, but you are ruining all the beauty of these beautiful flowers!"

The man smiled bitterly: "That is exactly what you are doing."

Rabbi Elimelekh had delivered a wonderful sermon on the art of living. Full of enthusiasm, the listeners joyfully accompanied him as he took the carriage back to his village.

At one point, the rabbi brought the carriage to a halt and asked the driver to go ahead without him as he mingled with the people.

"What an example of humility!" said one of his disciples.

"Humility has nothing to do with it," replied Elimelekh. "Here people walk happily, sing, drink wine, chat, make new friends, and all thanks to an old rabbi who came to speak on the art of living. So I prefer to leave my theories in the carriage and enjoy the party."

The name

In the Faculty of Medicine at a major university, the professor of anatomy distributed a questionnaire to all students as a final exam.

One student who had prepared meticulously answered all the questions promptly until he came to the last one.

The question was: "What is the first name of the cleaning lady?"

The student handed in the test, leaving the last answer blank. Before handing in the paper, he asked the professor if the last question on the test would count towards the grade.

"It is clear!" replied the professor. "In your career you will meet many people. They all have their own degree of importance. They deserve your attention, even with a small smile or a simple hello."

The student never forgot the lesson and learned that the cleaning lady's first name was Marianne.

A disciple asked Confucius, "If the king asked you to rule the country, what would be your first action?"

"I would like to learn the names of all my collaborators."

"What nonsense! It is certainly not a matter of primary concern for a prime minister."

"A man cannot hope to receive help from what he does not know," replied Confucius. "If he does not know nature, he will not know God. Similarly, if he does not know who he has by his side, he will have no friends. Without friends, he will not be able to devise a plan. Without a plan, he will not be able to direct anyone's actions. Without direction, the country will plunge into darkness and even the dancers will no longer know how to put one foot next to the other. Thus a seemingly trivial action, learning the name of the person next to you, can make a huge difference."

The incorrigible sin of our time is that everyone wants to put things right immediately and forgets that they need others to

do this."

The "Good Night"

One evening, saddened by a certain general indiscipline noticed at the Valdocco Oratory among the boarders, Don Bosco came, as usual, to say a few words to them after evening prayer. He stood for a moment in silence on the small desk at the corner of the porticoes where he used to give the youngsters the so-called "Good Night", which consisted of a short evening sermon. Glancing around, he said:

"I am not satisfied with you. That's all I can say tonight!"

Then, without allowing them to kiss his hand [a customary mark of respect to a priest] he would slowly walk away toward the stairs leading to his room without saying another word. Stifled sobs could be heard while tears ran down many faces as all went to bed sorrowful and pensive. To them, offending Don Bosco was the same as offending God. (BM IV, 394).

The evening peal

Salesian Fr John Gnolfo says in his study: *Don Bosco's "Good Night"*, points out that the morning is the awakening of life and activity, the evening instead is suitable for sowing an idea in the minds of young people that germinates in them even while sleep. And with a daring comparison he even refers to Dante's 'evening peal':

*Era già l'ora che volge il desìo
ai naviganti e intenerisce il core...*

*"It was the hour when longing stirs
the hearts of sailors and softens their souls..."*

It is precisely at the hour of evening prayer that

Alighieri describes, in fact, in the eighth Canto of "Purgatory", the kings in a small valley while they sing the hymn of the Liturgy of the Hours *Te lucis ante terminum...* (Before the light ends, O God, we seek Thee, that Thou mayest keep us).

Don Bosco's "Good Night" was a fond and sublime moment! It began with praise and evening prayers and ended with his words that opened his children's hearts to reflection, joy and hope. He really cared about that evening meeting with the whole Valdocco community. Fr G. B. Lemoyne traces its origin to Mamma Margaret. The good mother, putting the first orphan boy who came from Val Sesia to bed, offered some recommendations to him. From there came the beautiful custom in Salesian boarding schools of addressing brief words to the youngsters before sending them off to rest (BM, 142). Fr E. Ceria, quoting the Saint's words when thinking back to the early days of the Oratory, "I began to give a very short little sermons in the evening after prayers" (MO, 156 New Rochelle, 2010), thinks rather of a direct initiative of Don Bosco. However, if Fr Lemoyne accepted the idea of some of the early disciples, it was because he thought that Mamma Margaret's "Good Night" emblematically fulfilled Don Bosco's purpose in introducing that custom (Annals III, 857).

Characteristics of the "Good Night"

A characteristic of Don Bosco's "Good Night" was the topic he dealt with: some topical time that made an impression, something actual that created suspense and also allowed questions from the listeners. Sometimes he would ask questions himself, thus establishing a dialogue that was highly attractive to all.

Other characteristics were the variety of topics covered and the brevity of the discourse to avoid monotony and consequent boredom in the listeners. However, Don Bosco was not always brief, especially when he recounted his famous dreams or the journeys he had made. But it was usually a speech of just a few minutes.

These were, in short, neither sermons nor school lessons, but short affectionate words that the good father addressed to his sons before sending them off to rest.

Exceptions to the rule, of course, made an enormous impression, as happened on the evening of 16 September 1867. After every means of correction had been attempted by the superiors, some boys turned out to be incorrigible and were a scandal to their companions.

Don Bosco stood up on the little podium. He began by quoting the Gospel passage where the Divine Saviour pronounces terrible words against those who scandalise the children. He recalled the serious admonitions he had repeatedly made to the boys causing scandal, the benefits they had obtained at the college, the fatherly love with which they had been surrounded, and then he continued:

"They think they are not known, but I know who they are and could name them in public. If I do not name them, do not think that I am not fully aware of them... That if I wanted to name them, I could say: It is you, A... (and pronounced first and last name) a wolf who prowls among his companions and drives them away from the superiors by ridiculing their warnings... It is you, B... a thief whose words tarnish the innocence of others... You, C... a murderer who with certain notes, with certain books, tears Mary's children from her side... You, D... a demon who spoils his companions and prevents them from attending the Sacraments with your taunts..."

Six were thus 'named'. Don Bosco's voice was calm. Every time he mentioned a name, a muffled cry from the culprit could be heard echoing amidst the sullen silence of his stunned companions.

The next day some were sent home. Those who were allowed to stay changed their lives: the "good father" Don Bosco was not an easy-going man! And exceptions of this kind confirm the rule of his "Good Night".

The key to morality

There was a reason why, one day in 1875, Don Bosco

listed the secrets employed at Valdocco to those who were amazed that the Oratory did not have certain disorders complained of in other colleges, and among them he pointed out the following: " Another powerful means of persuasion, exercising a good influence over the boys, was the short fatherly talks addressed to them every evening after prayers. These short talks forestalled any trouble" (BM XI, 203-204).

And in his precious document on *The Preventive System in the Education of Youth*, he left it written that the "Good Night" from the Rector of the House could become "the key to morality, good progress and success in education" (Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, p. 239-240).

Don Bosco saw that his boys experienced their day between two solemn moments, even if they were of very different kinds. In the morning the Eucharist, so that the day would not dampen their youthful ardour, in the evening, prayers and the "Good Night" so that before sleep they would reflect on the values that would illuminate the night.

The perfume

One cold March morning, in a hospital, due to serious complications, a baby girl was born much earlier than expected, after only six months of pregnancy.

She was a tiny little creature and the new parents were painfully shocked by the doctor's words: "I don't think the baby has much chance of survival. There is only a 10 per cent chance that she will survive the night, and even if that happens by some miracle, the probability that she will have future complications is very high." Paralysed with fear, the mother and father listened to the doctor's words as he described to them all the problems the child would face. She

would never be able to walk, talk, see. She would be mentally retarded and much more.

Mum, dad and their five-year-old boy had waited so long for that child. Within a few hours, they saw all their dreams and wishes broken forever.

But their troubles were not over, the little one's nervous system was not yet developed. So, any caress, kiss or hug was dangerous, the disconsolate family members could not even convey their love to her, they had to avoid touching her.

All three held of them held hands and prayed, forming a small beating heart in the huge hospital:

"Almighty God, Lord of life, do what we cannot do: take care of little Diana, hold her to your breast, cradle her and make her feel all our love."

Diana was like a vibrant little baby doll and slowly began to improve. Weeks passed and the little one continued to gain weight and become stronger. Finally, when Diana turned two months old, her parents were able to hold her for the first time.

Five years later, Diana had become a serene child who looked towards the future with confidence and a zest for life. There were no signs of physical or mental deficiency, she was a normal child lively and full of curiosity.

But that is not the end of the story.

One warm afternoon, in a park not far from home, while her brother was playing football with friends, Diana was sitting in her mother's arms. As always she was chatting happily when suddenly she fell silent. She tightened her arms as if hugging someone and asked her mum: "Do you smell that?"

Smelling rain in the air, Mum replied: "Yes. It smells like when it's going to rain."

After a while, Diana raised her head and stroking her arms exclaimed: "No, it smells like Him. It smells like when God hugs you tightly."

The mother began to cry hot tears, as the little girl scampered towards her little friends to play with them.

Her daughter's words had confirmed what the woman had known in

her heart for a long time. Throughout her time in hospital, as she struggled for life, God had taken care of the little girl, embracing her so often that his perfume had remained imprinted in Diana's memory.

God's perfume remains in every child. Why are we all in such a hurry to erase it?

I killed her for a piece of bread

A man who had not entered a church for twenty years hesitantly approached a confessional. He knelt down and, after a moment's hesitation, said through tears: "I have blood on my hands. It was during the retreat to Russia. Every day some of my people died. The hunger was terrible. We were told never to enter the isbas without a rifle in our hands, ready to shoot at the first sign of... Where I had entered, there was an old man and a blond girl with sad eyes: "Bread! Give me some bread!" The girl bent down. I thought she was reaching for a weapon, a bomb. I fired decisively. She fell to the ground.

When I got closer, I saw that the girl was clutching a piece of bread in her hand. I had killed a 14-year-old girl, an innocent girl who wanted to offer me bread. I started drinking to forget: Imagine!

Can God forgive me?"

Whoever goes around with a loaded rifle will end up shooting. If the only tool you have is a hammer, you end up seeing everything else as nails. And you spend the day hammering away.

Remember the sermon

One Sunday, around noon, a young woman was washing salad in the kitchen, when she was approached by her husband who asked her teasingly:

“Could you tell me what the pastor said in this morning’s sermon?”

“I don’t remember any more,” the woman confessed.

“Why then do you go to church to hear sermons if you don’t remember them?”

“You see, dear: the water washes my salad and yet it does not remain in the colander; yet my salad is completely washed.

It is not important to take notes. It is important to let oneself be “washed” by the Word of God.