

Apparition of the Blessed Virgin on the Mountain of La Salette

Don Bosco presents a detailed account of the "Apparition of the Blessed Virgin on the mountain of La Salette," which occurred on 19 September 1846, based on official documents and the testimonies of the visionaries. He reconstructs the historical and geographical context – two young shepherds, Maximin and Mélanie, in the heights of the Alps – the miraculous encounter with the Virgin, her warning message against sin, and the promise of graces and providences, as well as the supernatural signs that accompanied these demonstrations. He recounts the spread of the devotion, its spiritual influence on the inhabitants and the whole world, and the secret revealed only to Pius IX to strengthen the faith of Christians and testify to the perpetual presence of miracles in the Church.

Author's Protest

In obedience to the decrees of Urban VIII, I protest that regarding what is said in this book about miracles, revelations, or other events, I do not intend to attribute any authority other than human; and in bestowing the title of Saint or Blessed upon anyone, I do so only according to opinion, excepting those things and persons already approved by the Holy Apostolic See.

To the Reader

A certain and marvellous fact, attested by thousands of people and which all may still verify today, is the apparition of the Blessed Virgin, which occurred on 19 September 1846. (On this extraordinary event, many pamphlets and several newspapers printed at the time may be consulted, notably: "Account of the Apparition of Mary Most Holy," Turin,

1847; "Official Decree on the Apparition," etc., 1848; the booklet printed under the care of Fr. Giuseppe Gonfalonieri, Novara, Enrico Grotti.)

Our merciful Mother appeared in the form and figure of a great Lady to two shepherds – a boy of 11 years and a peasant girl of 15 – on a mountain in the Alps situated in the parish of La Salette in France. She appeared not only for the good of France, as the Bishop of Grenoble states, but for the good of the whole world, to warn us of the great wrath of her Divine Son, kindled especially by three sins: **blasphemy, the profanation of Sundays, and eating meat on forbidden days.**

Other miraculous events follow, gathered from public documents or attested by persons whose faith excludes all doubt about what they report.

May these facts confirm the good in religion and refute those who, perhaps out of ignorance, would limit the power and mercy of the Lord by saying: "It is no longer the time of miracles." Jesus said that greater miracles would be performed in His Church than those He Himself worked, and He set neither time nor number. Therefore, as long as the Church exists, we shall always see the hand of the Lord manifesting His power through wondrous events, because yesterday, today, and always, Christ will be the one who governs and assists His Church until the end of time.

But these visible signs of Divine Omnipotence are always harbingers of grave events that reveal the mercy and goodness of the Lord or His justice and indignation, yet in such a way as to bring greater glory to Him and greater benefit to souls. Let us ensure they are for us a source of graces and blessings, an encouragement to a living faith, active faith, faith that moves us to do good and flee evil, making us worthy of His infinite mercy in time and eternity.

Apparition of the Blessed Virgin on the Mountains of La Salette

Maximin, son of Pierre Giraud, a carpenter from the village of Corps, was an 11-year-old boy. Françoise

Mélanie, daughter of poor parents, also from Corps, was a 15-year-old girl. There was nothing remarkable about them: both were ignorant and rough, both tending cattle in the mountains. Maximin knew only the Our Father and Hail Mary; Mélanie knew little more, so much so that, due to her ignorance, she had not yet been admitted to Holy Communion.

Sent by their parents to tend cattle in the pastures, it was purely by chance that on 18 September, the eve of the great event, they met on the mountain while watering their cows at a spring.

That evening, returning home with the cattle, Mélanie said to Maximin: "Who will be the first to reach the mountain tomorrow?" And the next day, 19 September, a Saturday, they ascended together, each leading four cows and a goat. The day was fine and clear, the sun bright. Around noon, hearing the *Angelus* bell, they made a short prayer with the sign of the Cross; then they took their provisions and ate by a small spring to the left of a stream. After eating, they crossed the stream, left their bags by a dry fountain, descended a little further, and fell asleep some distance apart, which was not usual for them.

Now let us hear the account from the shepherds themselves, as they gave it that evening to the owners and later thousands of times to thousands of people.

"We had fallen asleep..." recounts Mélanie. "I woke first and, not seeing my cows, woke Maximin, saying, 'Come, let's find our cows.' We crossed the stream, climbed a little, and saw them lying on the opposite side. They were not far. Then I went back down, and five or six steps before reaching the stream, I saw a brightness like the sun but more brilliant, though not the same colour, and said to Maximin, 'Come, come quickly and see this light below.' (It was between two and three in the afternoon.)

Maximin came down at once, asking: 'Where is this light?' I pointed to the small spring with my finger, and he stopped when he saw it. Then we saw a Lady in the midst of the light;

she was seated on a pile of stones, her face in her hands. In fear, I dropped my stick. Maximin said: 'Hold your stick; if she does anything to us, I'll give her a good beating.'

Then the Lady rose, crossed her arms, and said, 'Come near, my children. Do not be afraid; I am here to give you great news.' We crossed the stream, and she advanced to where we had slept. She stood between us, weeping all the while she spoke (I saw her tears clearly). 'If my people will not submit, I am forced to let go of the hand of my Son. It is so strong, so heavy, I can no longer restrain it.'

'How long I have suffered for you! If I wish my Son not to abandon you, I must pray to Him unceasingly; yet you take no heed. However much you pray or do, you can never repay the care I have taken for you.'

'I gave you six days to work; I reserved the seventh, and you will not grant it to me. This is what makes my Son's hand so heavy.'

'If the potatoes spoil, it is all your fault. I showed you last year (1845), yet you paid no heed, and finding spoiled potatoes, you blasphemed, mingling my Son's name with it.'

'They will continue to spoil, and by Christmas this year (1846), you will have none left.'

'If you have wheat, do not sow it; what you sow will be eaten by worms, and what grows will turn to dust when you thresh it.'

'A great famine will come.' (Indeed, a great famine occurred in France, with crowds of starving beggars flocking to cities by the thousands. While grain prices rose in Italy in early 1847, France suffered severe hunger throughout the winter of 1846–47. But the true scarcity of food, the real famine, was felt during the disasters of the 1870–71 war. In Paris, a grand personage hosted a lavish meal of meat on Good Friday. Months later, even the wealthiest citizens were reduced to eating vile food and the flesh of unclean animals. Many died of hunger.)

'Before the famine, children under seven will tremble and die in the arms of those holding them. Others will do penance for the famine.'

'The walnuts will spoil, and the grapes will rot...' (In 1849, walnuts spoiled everywhere, and grapes were ruined for over twenty years across Europe due to cryptogamic disease from 1849 to 1869.)

'If they convert, stones and rocks will turn into heaps of grain, and potatoes will spring from the earth.'

Then she said:

'Do you say your prayers well, my children?'

We both replied: 'Not very well, Lady.'

'Ah, my children, you must say them well morning and evening. When you have no time, say at least an Our Father and Hail Mary; when you have time, say more.'

'Only a few old women go to Mass; the others work all summer on Sundays. In winter, the young, when idle, go to Mass only to mock religion. In Lent, they go to the butchers like dogs.'

Then she asked: 'Have you seen spoiled wheat, my boy?'

Maximin answered: 'Oh no, Lady.' Unsure whom she addressed, I whispered,

'No, Lady, I have not seen any yet.'

'You must have seen some, my boy' (turning to Maximin). 'Once near the Coin area with your father. The field's owner told your father to see his spoiled wheat; you both went. You took some ears in your hands, and rubbing them, they turned to dust, and you returned. Half an hour from Corps, your father gave you bread, saying: 'Take, my son, eat bread this year; I know not who will eat it next if the wheat keeps spoiling.'

Maximin replied: 'Oh yes, Lady, now I remember; I had forgotten.'

Then the Lady said: 'Well, my children, you will make this known to all my people.'

She crossed the stream and, without turning, repeated: 'Well, my children, you will make this known to all my people.'

She then climbed about fifteen steps to where we had gone to

find our cows, walking on the grass without touching it, her feet barely grazing the tips. We followed; I passed before her, Maximin slightly on the side. The beautiful Lady rose (Mélanie gestured, raising her hand a metre or more), hovering momentarily. She looked to Heaven, then earth; then we saw her no more—no head, arms, or feet—as if melting away, leaving only a light in the air, which then vanished.

I said to Maximin: 'Perhaps she is a great saint?' He replied: 'Had we known, we'd have asked her to take us.' I said: 'What if she were still here?' Maximin reached for the light, but it was gone. We looked carefully but saw nothing.

I said: 'She does not wish us to see where she goes.' Then we returned to our cows."

This is Mélanie's account. Asked how the Lady was dressed, she replied,

"She wore white shoes with roses around them—of all colours; yellow stockings, a yellow apron, a white dress covered in pearls, a white neckerchief edged with roses, a high cap slightly tilted with a crown of roses. She had a chain with a crucifix: on the right, pincers; on the left, a hammer; at the cross's end, another large chain hung, like the roses around her neckerchief. Her face was white, elongated; I could not look long, for she dazzled us."

Questioned separately, Maximin gave the same account without variation in substance or form, which we refrain from repeating here.

Innumerable and crafty questions were put to them, especially for two years, under interrogations lasting 5, 6, or 7 hours, aiming to confuse or trap them in contradictions. Surely no accused was ever so rigorously examined by courts of justice regarding an alleged crime.

Secret of the two little shepherds

Immediately after the apparition, Maximin and Melanie, on their way home, questioned each other about why the great Lady, after saying "the grapes will rot," had paused briefly before speaking and merely moved her lips without

making audible what she was saying?

As they discussed this between themselves, Maximin said to Melanie: "She told me something, but forbade me to tell you." They both realised they had each separately received a secret from the Lady, with the prohibition not to reveal it to others. Now consider, dear reader, whether children can keep silent.

It is incredible to recount how much was done and attempted to extract this secret from them in any way possible. It is astonishing to read of the thousands upon thousands of attempts made for this purpose by hundreds upon hundreds of people over twenty years. Prayers, surprises, threats, insults, gifts, and seductions of every kind—all came to nothing; they remained impenetrable.

The Bishop of Grenoble, an octogenarian, felt it his duty to command the two privileged children to at least convey their secret to the Holy Father, Pius IX. At the name of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the two little shepherds promptly obeyed and resolved to reveal a secret that until then nothing had been able to wrest from them. They therefore wrote it themselves (from the day of the apparition onwards, they had been sent to school, each separately); then they folded and sealed their letter—all this in the presence of distinguished persons chosen by the bishop himself to serve as witnesses. The bishop then sent two priests to deliver this mysterious dispatch to Rome.

On 18 July 1851, they presented to His Holiness Pius IX three letters: one from Monsignor Bishop of Grenoble, accrediting these two envoys; the other two contained the secret of the two young children of La Salette. Each had written and sealed the letter containing their secret in the presence of witnesses who had attested to their authenticity on the envelope.

His Holiness opened the letters and began reading Maximin's. "There is truly," he said, "the candour and simplicity of a child." During this reading, a certain emotion manifested on the Holy Father's face; his lips tightened, his cheeks

swelled. "It concerns," the Pope said to the two priests, "it concerns scourges with which France is threatened. She is not alone in guilt—Germany, Italy, all of Europe are guilty too, and deserve punishment. I greatly fear religious indifference and human respect."

Pilgrimage to La Salette

The fountain near which the Lady—that is, the Virgin Mary—had rested was, as we said, dry; and according to all the shepherds and villagers of those parts, it only gave water after heavy rains and the melting of snow. Now this fountain, dry on the very day of the apparition, began to gush the following day, and from that time the water has flowed clear and uninterrupted.

That barren, rugged, deserted mountain, inhabited by shepherds for barely four months a year, has become the stage for an immense gathering of people. Entire populations flock from all sides to this privileged mountain. Weeping with tenderness and singing hymns, they bow their foreheads to this blessed ground where Mary's voice resounded. They are seen kissing reverently the spot sanctified by Mary's feet, and they descend filled with joy, trust, and gratitude.

Every day, an immense number of faithful devoutly visit the site of the miracle. On the first anniversary of the apparition (19 September 1847), over seventy thousand pilgrims of every age, sex, condition, and even nation covered the surface of that land...

But what makes the power of that voice from Heaven felt even more is the remarkable change in morals among the inhabitants of Corps, La Salette, the entire canton, and all the surrounding areas—and it spreads still further afield... They have ceased working on Sundays; they have abandoned blasphemy... They attend church, heed their pastors' voices, receive the sacraments, and fulfil the Easter duty with edification—until then generally neglected. I omit the many striking conversions and extraordinary graces in the spiritual order.

On the site of the apparition now stands a majestic church with extensive buildings, where travellers, after satisfying their devotion, can comfortably refresh themselves and even spend the night if they wish.

After the event of La Salette, Melanie was sent to school, making marvellous progress in knowledge and virtue. But she always felt so inflamed with devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary that she resolved to consecrate herself entirely to Her. She entered the Discalced Carmelites, among whom, according to the journal *Echo de Fourvière* (22 October 1870), she was called to Heaven by the Holy Virgin. Shortly before her death, she wrote the following letter to her mother.

11 September 1870.

Dearest and most beloved mother,

May Jesus be loved by all hearts. This letter is not only for you but for all the inhabitants of my dear village of Corps. A family father, most loving towards his children, seeing that they forgot their duties, despised the law imposed on them by God, and became ungrateful, resolved to punish them severely. The spouse of the Father of the family begged for mercy and at the same time went to the two youngest children of the Father—the weakest and most ignorant. The spouse, who cannot weep in her spouse's house (Heaven), finds abundant tears in the fields of these wretched children. She expresses her fears and threats if they do not turn back, if they do not observe the Master's law. A very small number embrace the reform of the heart and set themselves to observe the holy law of the Father; but alas! The majority remain in sin and sink deeper into it. Then the Father sends punishments to chastise them and draw them from this state of hardness. These wretched children think to escape punishment—they seize and break the rods that strike them instead of falling to their knees, begging for mercy, and above all promising to change their lives. Finally, the Father, further angered, takes up a

stronger rod and strikes—and will strike—until He is acknowledged, until they humble themselves and beg mercy from Him who reigns on earth and in Heaven.

You understand me, dear mother and beloved inhabitants of Corps: this Father is God. We are all His children; neither you nor I have loved Him as we ought; we have not kept His commandments as we should, now God chastises us. A great number of our soldier brothers die; families and entire cities are reduced to misery; and if we do not turn to God, it is not over. Paris is very guilty for rewarding a wicked man who wrote against the divinity of Jesus Christ. Men have but one time to sin; but God is eternal and punishes sinners. God is angered by the multitude of sins and because He is almost unknown and forgotten. Now who can stop the war that does so much harm in France and will soon recommence in Italy? etc., etc. Who can halt this scourge?

We must: 1) recognise that in this war there is solely the hand of God; 2) humble ourselves and ask with mind and heart forgiveness for our sins; sincerely promise to serve God with mind and heart and obey His commandments without human respect. Some pray, asking God for the triumph of us French. No—this is not what the good God wants. He wants the conversion of the French. The Blessed Virgin came to France, and France did not convert. She is thus more guilty than other nations; if she does not humble herself, she will be greatly humbled. Paris, this hearth of vanity and pride—who can save her if fervent prayers do not rise to the heart of the good Master?

I remember, dear mother and beloved inhabitants, my dear village—I remember those devout processions you made to the sacred mountain of La Salette so God's wrath would not strike your land! The Holy Virgin heard your fervent prayers, your penances, and all you did for love of God. I think and hope you must now do even more—beautiful processions for France's salvation; that is, for France to return to God, for God waits

only for this to withdraw the rod with which He scourges His rebellious people. Let us pray much—yes, pray; hold your processions as you did in 1846 and '47: believe that God always hears the sincere prayers of humble hearts. Let us pray much, pray always. I never loved Napoleon, for I remember his whole life. May the divine Saviour forgive him all the evil he has done—and still does!

Let us remember we were created to love and serve God, and that outside this there is no true happiness. Mothers must raise their children Christianly, for the time of tribulations is not over. If I revealed their number and nature, you would be horrified. But I do not wish to frighten you; trust in God, who loves us infinitely more than we can love Him. Let us pray, pray—and the good, divine, tender Virgin Mary will always be with us: prayer disarms God's wrath; prayer is the key to Heaven.

Let us pray for our poor soldiers, for so many grieving mothers who have lost their children; let us consecrate ourselves to our good Heavenly Mother; pray for the blind who do not see it is God's hand now striking France. Pray much and do penance. Hold fast to the Holy Church and our Holy Father, her visible head and the Vicar of Our Lord Jesus Christ on earth. In your processions and penances, pray much for him. Lastly, remain at peace, love one another as brothers, promising God to keep His commandments—and truly keep them. And by God's mercy, you will be happy and die a good and holy death, which I desire for all, placing you under the protection of the august Virgin Mary. I embrace you heartily (relatives). My health is in the Cross. The Heart of Jesus watches over me.

Maria of the Cross, victim of Jesus

First part of the publication, "Apparition of the Blessed Virgin on the Mountain of La Salette with Other Miraculous Events, Collected from Public Documents by the Priest John Bosco," Turin, Oratory of St. Francis de Sales Printing Press,

Crown of the Seven Sorrows of Mary

The publication "Crown of the Seven Sorrows of Mary" represents a cherished devotion that St. John Bosco instilled in his young followers. Following the structure of the "Way of the Cross," the seven sorrowful scenes are presented with brief reflections and prayers to guide towards a deeper participation in the sufferings of Mary and her Son. Rich in tender imagery and contrite spirituality, the text reflects the desire to unite with the Sorrowful Mother in redemptive compassion. The indulgences granted by various Popes attest to the pastoral value of this text—a small treasury of prayer and reflection to nurture love for the Mother of Sorrows.

Preface

The primary aim of this booklet is to facilitate remembrance and meditation of the bitterest Sorrows of the tender Heart of Mary, a devotion most pleasing to her, as she has often revealed to her devotees, and a most efficacious means for us to obtain her patronage.

To make this meditation easier, it is first practised with a chaplet indicating Mary's seven principal sorrows, which can then be meditated upon in seven distinct brief reflections, much like the *Way of the Cross*.

May the Lord accompany us with His heavenly grace and blessing so that the desired intention is achieved, so that each soul may be deeply moved by the frequent remembrance of Mary's sorrows for spiritual benefit and the greater glory of God.

Chaplet of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary with Seven Brief Reflections Presented in the Form of the Way of the Cross

Preparation

Dearest brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, we undertake our usual devotions by meditating devoutly on the bitterest sorrows that the Blessed Virgin Mary endured in the life and death of her beloved Son, our Divine Saviour. Let us imagine ourselves present at Jesus hanging on the Cross, as His afflicted Mother says to each of us, "Come and see if there is any sorrow like mine."

Trusting that this merciful Mother will grant us special protection as we meditate on her sorrows, let us invoke divine aid with the following prayers:

Antiphon: Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Thy faithful, and kindle in them the fire of Thy love.

*Send forth Thy Spirit, and they shall be created,
And Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.*

*Remember Thy Congregation,
Which Thou hast possessed from the beginning.
O Lord, hear my prayer,
And let my cry come unto Thee.*

Let us pray.

*Enlighten our minds, we beseech Thee, O Lord, with the light of Thy brightness, that we may see what is to be done and have the strength to do what is right. Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

First Sorrow: The Prophecy of Simeon

The first sorrow was when the Blessed Virgin Mother of God presented her only Son in the Temple in the arms of the holy elder Simeon, who said to her, "This child shall be a sword that shall pierce thy soul," foretelling the Passion and death

of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

One *Our Father* and seven *Hail Marys*.

Prayer`

O sorrowful Virgin, by that sharp sword with which the holy elder Simeon foretold that thy soul would be pierced in the Passion and death of thy dear Jesus, I beseech thee to obtain for me the grace always to remember thy wounded heart and the bitterest pains suffered by thy Son for my salvation. Amen.

Second Sorrow: The Flight into Egypt

The second sorrow of the Blessed Virgin was when she had to flee to Egypt due to the persecution of cruel Herod, who wickedly sought to kill her beloved Son.

One *Our Father* and seven *Hail Marys*.

Prayer

O Mary, most sorrowful sea of tears, by the anguish thou didst endure fleeing to Egypt to protect thy Son from Herod's barbaric cruelty, I implore thee to be my guide, that through thee I may be freed from the persecutions of visible and invisible enemies of my soul. Amen.

Third Sorrow: The Loss of Jesus in the Temple

The third sorrow of the Blessed Virgin was when, after being in Jerusalem with her spouse Joseph and her beloved Son Jesus the Saviour during Passover, she lost Him on the return to her humble home and mourned the loss of her only Beloved for three days.

One *Our Father* and seven *Hail Marys*.

Prayer

O disconsolate Mother, thou who sought thy Son anxiously for three days after losing His bodily presence, pray that sinners too may seek Him with acts of contrition and find Him. Amen.

Fourth Sorrow: Meeting Jesus Carrying the Cross

The fourth sorrow of the Blessed Virgin was when she met her most sweet Son carrying a heavy Cross on His tender shoulders

to Mount Calvary to be crucified for our salvation.

One *Our Father* and seven *Hail Marys*.

Prayer

O Virgin, more afflicted than any other, by the agony thou didst feel in thy heart upon meeting thy Son as He bore the wood of the Holy Cross to Calvary, grant that I may accompany Him continually in thought, weep for my sins, the cause of His and thy torment, and grow in love for Him. Amen.

Fifth Sorrow: The Crucifixion of Jesus

The fifth sorrow of the Blessed Virgin was when she saw her Son raised upon the hard wood of the Cross, shedding blood from every part of His Most Sacred Body.

One *Our Father* and seven *Hail Marys*.

Prayer

O Rose among thorns, by the bitter sorrow that pierced thy heart as thou beheld thy Son wounded and lifted on the Cross, grant that I may seek only Jesus

crucified, remembering always that my sins caused His suffering. Amen.

Sixth Sorrow: The Descent from the Cross

The sixth sorrow of the Blessed Virgin was when her beloved Son, wounded in the side after His death and taken down from the Cross, was placed in thy most holy arms, so pitilessly slain.

One *Our Father* and seven *Hail Marys*.

Prayer

O afflicted Virgin, thou who received thy dead Son into thy arms, kissing His most sacred wounds and weeping a sea of tears, grant that I too may wash with tears of true contrition the mortal wounds my sins inflicted upon thee. Amen.

Seventh Sorrow: The Burial of Jesus

The seventh sorrow of the Virgin Mary, our Lady and Advocate,

was when she accompanied the Most Holy Body of her Son to the tomb.

One *Our Father* and seven *Hail Marys*.

Prayer

O Martyr of Martyrs, Mary, by the bitter torment thou didst suffer when, after burying thy Son, thou had to depart from that beloved tomb, obtain for all sinners the grace to recognise the grave harm of being far from their God. Amen.

Three *Hail Marys* shall be recited in profound respect for the tears shed by the Blessed Virgin in all her sorrows, to implore through her a similar sorrow for our sins.

Hail Mary, etc.

After finishing the Chaplet, the Lament of the Blessed Virgin is recited—the hymn “*Stabat Mater*,” etc.

Hymn – Lament of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The Supreme Pontiff Innocent XI, grants the indulgence of 100 days each time the *Stabat Mater* is recited. Benedict XIII granted the seven-year indulgence to those who recite the Crown of the Seven Sorrows of Mary. Many other indulgences were granted by other Popes especially to the Brothers and Sisters of the Company of the Sorrowful Mary.

The seven sorrows of Mary meditated in the form of the Way of the Cross

Stabat Mater dolorosa
 Iuxta crucem lacrymosa,
 Dum pendebat Filius.
 Cuius animam gementem
 Contristatam et dolentem
 Pertransiuit gladius.
 O quam tristis et afflicta
 Fuit illa benedicta
 Mater unigeniti!
 Quae moerebat, et dolebat,
 Pia Mater dum videbat.
 Nati poenas inclyti.
 Quis est homo, qui non fleret,
 Matrem Christi si videret
 In tanto supplicio?
 Quis non posset contristari,
 Christi Matrem contemplari
 Dolentem cum filio?
 Pro peccatis suae gentis
 Vidit Iesum in tormentis
 Et flagellis subditum.
 Vidit suum dulcem natura
 Moriundo desolatum,
 Dum emisit spiritum.
 Eia mater fons amoris,
 Me sentire vim doloris
 Fac, ut tecum lugeam.
 Fac ut ardeat cor meum
 In amando Christum Deum,
 Ut sibi complaceam.
 Sancta Mater istud agas,
 Crucifixi fige plagas
 Cordi meo valide.
 Tui nati vulnerati
 Tam dignati pro me pati
 Poenas mecum divide.
 Fac me tecum pie flere,
 Crucifixo condolere,
 Donec ego vixero.
 Iuxta Crucem tecum stare,
 Et me tibi sociare
 In planctu desidero.
 Virgo virginum praeclara,
 Mihi iam non sia amara,
 Fac me tecum plangere.
 Fac ut portem Christi mortem,
 Passionis fac consortem,
 Et plagas recolere.
 Fac me plagis vulnerari,
 Fac me cruce inebriari,
 Et cruore Filii.
 Flammis ne urar succensus,
 Per te, Virgo, sim defensus
 In die Iudicii.
 Christe, cum sit hinc exire,
 Da per matrem me venire
 Ad palmam victoriae.
 Quando corpus morietur,
 Fac ut animae donetur
 Paradisi gloria. Amen.

At the cross her station keeping,
 Stood the mournful Mother weeping,
 Close to Jesus to the last.
 Through her heart, His sorrow sharing,
 All His bitter anguish bearing,
 Now at length the sword had passed.
 Oh, how sad and sore distressed
 Was that Mother highly blest,
 Of the sole begotten One!
 Christ above in torment hangs.
 She beneath beholds the pangs
 Of her dying glorious Son.
 Is there one who would not weep,
 Whelmed in miseries so deep,
 Christ's dear Mother to behold?
 Can the human heart refrain
 From partaking in her pain,
 In that Mother's pain untold?
 Bruised, derided, cursed, defiled,
 She beheld her tender Child,
 All with bloody scourges rent.
 For the sins of His own nation,
 Saw Him hang in desolation
 Till His spirit forth He sent.
 O thou Mother, fount of love!
 Touch my spirit from above,
 Make my heart with thine accord.
 Make me feel as thou hast felt;
 Make my soul to glow and melt
 With the love of Christ my Lord.
 Holy Mother, pierce me through;
 In my heart each wound renew
 Of my Savior crucified.
 Let me share with thee His pain,
 Who for all my sins was slain,
 Who for me in torment died.
 Let me mingle tears with thee,
 Mourning Him who mourned for me,
 All the days that I may live.
 By the Cross with thee to stay;
 There with thee to weep and pray,
 Is all I ask of thee to give.
 Virgin of all virgins best,
 Listen to my fond request:
 Let me share thy grief divine.
 Let me to my latest breath,
 In my body bear the death
 Of that dying Son of thine.
 Wounded with His every wound,
 Steep my soul till it hath swooned
 In His very blood, away.
 Be to me, O Virgin, nigh,
 Lest in flames I burn and die,
 In His awful Judgment day.
 Christ, when Thou shalt call me hence,
 Be Thy Mother my defence,
 Be Thy Cross my victory.
 While my body here decays,
 May my soul Thy goodness praise,
 Safe in Paradise with Thee. Amen.

Invoke divine help by saying:

We beseech Thee, O Lord, to anticipate our actions by inspiring us, and to continue them by helping us, so that all our prayer and work may always begin with Thee, and, having begun through Thee, may be ended. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Act of Contrition

Most Afflicted Virgin, alas! How ungrateful I have been in the past towards my God, with what ingratitude I have responded to His countless benefits! Now I repent, and in the bitterness of my heart and the weeping of my soul, I humbly ask Him for forgiveness for having offended His infinite goodness, firmly resolved in the future with heavenly grace, never to offend Him again. Ah! By all the sorrows you endured in the barbaric passion of your beloved Jesus, I beg you with the deepest sighs to obtain for me from Him, pity and mercy for my sins. Accept this holy exercise I am about to perform and receive it in union with those pains and sorrows you suffered for your son Jesus. Ah, grant me! Yes, grant me that those same swords that pierced your spirit may also pierce mine, and that I may live and die in the friendship of my Lord, to eternally partake of the glory He has acquired for me with His precious Blood. Amen.

First Sorrow

In this first sorrow, let us imagine ourselves in the temple of Jerusalem, where the Most Blessed Virgin heard the prophecy of the old Simeon.

Meditation

Ah! What anguish the heart of Mary must have felt upon hearing the sorrowful words with which the holy old Simeon foretold the bitter passion and atrocious death of her sweetest Jesus: while at that same moment there came to her mind the insults, abuses, and tortures that the wicked Jews would inflict on the Redeemer of the world. But do you know what was the most

piercing sword that wounded her in this circumstance? It was the consideration of the ingratitude with which her beloved Son would be repaid by men. Now reflecting that, because of your sins, you are miserably among these, ah! Throw yourself at the feet of this Sorrowful Mother and say to her weeping (all kneel): Ah! Most Compassionate Virgin, who experienced such bitter anguish in your spirit seeing the abuse which I, unworthy creature, would make of the blood of your beloved Son, grant, yes grant by your most afflicted Heart, that in the future I may respond to the Divine Mercies, make use of heavenly graces, and not receive in vain so many lights and inspirations which you will deign to obtain for me, so that I may be among those for whom the bitter passion of Jesus is an eternal salvation. Amen. *Hail Mary* etc. *Glory be* etc.

Mary, my sweet love,
Imprint your sorrows in my heart.

Second Sorrow

In this second sorrow, let us consider the most painful journey the Virgin made towards Egypt to save Jesus from Herod's cruel persecution.

Meditation

Consider the bitter sorrow Mary must have felt when, at night, she had to set out on her journey by the Angel's order to preserve her Son from the massacre ordered by that fierce Prince. Ah! At every animal cry, at every gust of wind, at every rustle of leaves she heard in those deserted roads, she was filled with fear lest some harm befall the child Jesus she carried with her. Now she turned one way, now another, now hastened her steps, now hid herself, thinking she was overtaken by soldiers who might tear her most beloved Son from her arms and subject Him to barbaric treatment before her eyes. Fixing her tearful gaze upon her Jesus and pressing Him tightly to her breast, giving Him a thousand kisses, she sent forth the most anguished sighs from her heart. And here reflect how many times you have renewed this bitter sorrow for

Mary by forcing her Son with your grave sins to flee from your soul. Now that you know the great evil committed, turn repentantly to this merciful Mother and say to her:

Ah, sweetest Mother! Once Herod forced you and your Jesus to flee because of the inhuman persecution he commanded; but I, oh! How many times have I obliged my Redeemer, and consequently you too, to depart quickly from my heart, introducing into it the cursed sin, merciless enemy of you and my God. Ah! Full of sorrow and contrition, I humbly ask your forgiveness.

Yes, mercy, O dear Mother, mercy, and I promise in the future with Divine help to always keep my Saviour and You in full possession of my soul. Amen. *Hail Mary* etc. *Glory be* etc.

Mary, my sweet love,
Imprint your sorrows in my heart.

Third Sorrow

In this third sorrow, let us consider the most afflicted Virgin who, weeping, searches for her lost Jesus.

Meditation

How great was Mary's sorrow when she realised, she had lost her beloved Son! And how her grief increased when, having diligently searched for Him among friends, relatives, and neighbours, she could find no trace of Him. Not minding discomfort, fatigue, or dangers, she wandered for three continuous days through the regions of Judea, repeating those words of desolation: Has anyone seen Him whom my soul truly loves? Ah! The great anxiety with which she sought Him made her imagine at every moment that she saw Him or heard His voice, but then, finding herself disappointed, oh how she shuddered and felt more keenly the grief of such a deplorable loss! Great confusion for you, O sinner, who, having so often lost your Jesus through grave faults, took no care to seek Him, a clear sign that you make little or no account of the precious treasure of Divine friendship. Weep, then, for your blindness, and turning to this Sorrowful Mother, say to her

sighing thus:

Most Afflicted Virgin, ah, make me learn from you the true way to seek Jesus whom I have lost by following my passions and the wicked suggestions of the devil, so that I may succeed in finding Him, and when I have regained possession of Him, I will continually repeat those words of yours, I have found Him whom my heart truly loves. I will keep Him always with me, and never let Him depart again. Amen. *Hail Mary* etc. *Glory be* etc.

Mary, my sweet love,
Imprint your sorrows in my heart.

Fourth Sorrow

In the fourth sorrow, let us consider the meeting of the sorrowful Virgin with her suffering Son.

Meditation

Come, then, O hardened hearts, and see if you can endure this most tearful spectacle. It is the most tender, most loving mother meeting her sweetest, most beloved Son; and how does she meet Him? O God! Amidst the most impious mob dragging Him cruelly to death, covered with wounds, dripping with blood, torn by injuries, with a crown of thorns on His head and a heavy beam on His shoulders, weary, gasping, languishing, seeming at every step about to breathe His last.

Ah! Consider, my soul, the mortal shock the Most Holy Virgin felt at the first glance she fixed upon her tormented Jesus. She would want to bid Him a last farewell, but how, when grief prevents her from uttering a word? She would throw herself at His neck, but remains motionless and petrified by the force of inner affliction. She would vent her grief with tears, but her heart feels so constricted and oppressed that she cannot shed a tear. Oh! And who can restrain tears seeing a poor mother plunged in such great anguish? But who is the cause of such bitter sorrow? Ah, I know, yes, it is I with my sins who have made such a barbaric wound in your tender heart, O Sorrowful

Virgin. Yet who would believe it? I remain unmoved, without being touched. But if I was ungrateful in the past, I shall be so no more.

Meanwhile, prostrate at your feet, O Most Holy Virgin, I humbly ask your forgiveness for so much sorrow I have caused you. I know and confess that I do not deserve pity, being the true reason you fell with grief upon meeting your Jesus all covered with wounds; but remember, yes remember that you are the mother of mercy. Ah, show yourself thus to me, and I promise in the future to be more faithful to my Redeemer, and so make up for so much displeasure I have given your most afflicted spirit. Amen. *Hail Mary* etc. *Glory be* etc.

Mary, my sweet love,
Imprint your sorrows in my heart.

Fifth sorrow

In this fifth sorrow, let us imagine ourselves on Mount Calvary where the most afflicted Virgin saw her beloved Son expire on the Cross.

Meditation

Here we are at Calvary where two altars of sacrifice are already raised, one in the body of Jesus, the other in the heart of Mary. Oh, tragic spectacle! We behold the Mother drowned in a sea of anguish as she sees her dear and beloved child torn from her by pitiless death. Alas! Every hammer blow, every wound, every laceration that the Savior receives upon His flesh deeply reverberates in the heart of the Virgin. She stands at the foot of the Cross so penetrated by sorrow and pierced by grief that you could not decide who would be the first to expire—Jesus or Mary. She fixes her eyes on the face of her agonizing Son, observes His languishing pupils, His pale face, His livid lips, His laboured breath, and finally realizes that He no longer lives and has already surrendered His spirit into the hands of His eternal Father. Ah, her soul then makes every possible effort to separate from her body and unite with that of Jesus. And who can endure such

a sight?

Oh, most sorrowful Mother, instead of withdrawing from Calvary to avoid feeling such acute anguish, you remain motionless there to drink to the last drop the bitter cup of your afflictions. What confusion this must bring to me, who seek every means to avoid the crosses and small sufferings that the Lord deigns to send for my good? Most sorrowful Virgin, I humble myself before you—ah! Grant that I may once clearly know the preciousness and great value of suffering, that I may become so attached to it that I never tire of exclaiming with St. Francis Xavier: “More, Lord, more, Lord—more suffering, my God.” Ah yes, more suffering, O my God. So be it. *Hail Mary*, etc. *Glory be*, etc.

Mary, my sweet beloved,
Imprint your sorrows upon my heart.

Sixth sorrow

In this sixth sorrow, let us imagine ourselves seeing the disconsolate but Virgin Mother receiving into her arms her deceased Son taken down from the Cross.

Meditation

Consider the most bitter pain that pierced Mary’s soul when she saw the lifeless body of her beloved Jesus placed in her lap. Ah! As she fixed her gaze upon His wounds and sores, beholding Him crimson with His own blood, the force of her inner grief was such that her heart was mortally pierced, and had she not died, it was Divine omnipotence that preserved her life. Oh, poor Mother—yes, poor Mother, who leads to the tomb the dear object of your tenderest affections, who from a bouquet of roses has become a bundle of thorns due to the mistreatment and lacerations inflicted by wicked executioners. And who would not pity you? Who would not feel crushed by sorrow seeing you in such a state of affliction as to move even the hardest stone to pity? I see John inconsolable, Magdalene and the other Marys weeping bitterly, Nicodemus unable to bear the grief any longer. And I? I alone shed no

tear amid such sorrow! Ungrateful and thankless wretch that I am!

Ah! Most merciful Mother, here I am at your feet, receive me under your powerful protection and let my heart be pierced by the same sword that passed through your most afflicted spirit, that it may soften at last and truly weep for my grave sins, which brought you such cruel martyrdom. So be it. *Hail Mary*, etc. *Glory be*, etc.

Mary, my sweet beloved,
Imprint your sorrows upon my heart.

Seventh sorrow

In this seventh sorrow, let us consider the most sorrowful Virgin as she sees her deceased Son enclosed in the tomb.

Meditation

Consider the mortal sigh that escaped Mary's afflicted heart when she saw her beloved Jesus laid in the tomb! Oh, what pain, what grief her spirit felt when the stone was raised to seal that most sacred monument! It was impossible to detach her from the edge of the sepulchre, for her sorrow rendered her insensible and immobile, never ceasing to gaze upon those wounds and cruel lacerations. And when the tomb was finally sealed—ah, then the force of her inner anguish was such that she would undoubtedly have fallen dead had God not preserved her life. Oh, most tormented Mother! You will now depart from this place with His body, but surely your heart remains here, for here lies your true treasure. Ah, fate—may all our affection, all our love, remain with Him. How can we not be consumed with love for the Savior, who shed all His blood for our salvation? How can we not love you, who suffered so much for our sake?

Now, sorrowful and repentant for having caused so much pain to your Son and such bitterness to you, we prostrate ourselves at your feet. And for all those sorrows you allowed us to meditate upon, grant us this favour, that the memory of them may remain vividly impressed upon our minds, that our hearts

may be consumed with love for our good God and for you, our sweetest Mother, and that the last sigh of our life may be united to those you poured forth from the depths of your soul in the sorrowful Passion of Jesus, to whom be honour, glory, and thanksgiving for all ages. Amen. *Hail Mary*, etc. *Glory be*, etc.

Mary, my sweet beloved,
Imprint your sorrows upon my heart.

Then the *Stabat Mater* is recited, as above.

Antiphon: *"A sword shall pierce your own soul also"—Simeon's prophecy to Mary.*

Pray for us, O most sorrowful Virgin.

That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray

O God, in whose Passion, according to the prophecy of Simeon, a sword of sorrow pierced the sweetest soul of the glorious Virgin and Mother Mary, mercifully grant that we who recall her sorrows may attain the blessed fruit of Your Passion. You who live, etc.

Praise be to God and to the most sorrowful Virgin.

With ecclesiastical approval

The Feast of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary, celebrated by the Pious Union and Society, falls on the third Sunday of September in the Church of St. Francis of Assisi.

Text of the 3rd edition, Turin, Typography of Giulio Speirani and Sons, 1871

The Seven Joys of the Madonna

At the heart of St. John Bosco's educational and spiritual work, the figure of the Madonna holds a privileged and luminous place. Don Bosco was not only a great educator and founder but also a fervent devotee of the Virgin Mary, whom he venerated with deep affection and to whom he entrusted all his pastoral projects. One of the most distinctive expressions of this devotion is the practice of the "Seven Joys of the Madonna," presented in a simple and accessible way in his publication "The Well-Provided Young Man," one of the most widely circulated texts in his spiritual pedagogy.

A Work for the Souls of the Young

In 1875, Don Bosco published a new edition of "The Well-Provided Young Man for the Practice of His Duties in the Exercises of Christian Piety," a manual of prayers, spiritual exercises, and rules of Christian conduct designed for boys. This book, written in a sober and fatherly style, aimed to accompany young people in their moral and religious formation, introducing them to a full Christian life. It also included devotion to the "Seven Joys of the Most Holy Mary," a simple yet intense prayer structured in seven points. Unlike the "Seven Sorrows of the Madonna," which is much more well-known and widespread in popular piety, Don Bosco's "Seven Joys" focus on the joys of the Most Holy Virgin in Heaven, the result of an earthly life lived in the fullness of God's grace.

This devotion has ancient origins and was particularly dear to the Franciscans, who spread it from the 13th century onwards, as the Rosary of the Seven Joys of the Blessed Virgin Mary (or Seraphic Crown). In the traditional Franciscan form, it is a devotional prayer composed of seven decades of Hail Marys, each preceded by a joyful mystery (joy) and introduced by an Our Father. At the end of each decade, a Glory Be is recited. The joys are: 1. The Annunciation by the Angel; 2. The

Visitation to St. Elizabeth; 3. The Birth of the Saviour; 4. The Adoration of the Magi; 5. The Finding of Jesus in the Temple; 6. The Resurrection of the Son; 7. The Assumption and Coronation of Mary in Heaven.

Drawing from this tradition, Don Bosco offers a simplified version, suited to the sensibilities of young people.

Each of these joys is meditated upon through the recitation of a Hail Mary and a Glory Be.

The Pedagogy of Joy

The choice to propose this devotion to young people was not merely a personal preference of Don Bosco but fits entirely within his educational vision. He was convinced that faith should be transmitted through joy, not fear; through the beauty of goodness, not the dread of evil. The "Seven Joys" thus become a school of Christian gladness, an invitation to recognise that, in the life of the Virgin, God's grace manifests as light, hope, and fulfilment.

Don Bosco was well aware of the difficulties and sufferings many of his boys faced daily: poverty, family abandonment, job insecurity. For this reason, he offered them a Marian devotion that was not limited to tears and sorrow but was also a source of consolation and joy. Meditating on Mary's joys meant opening oneself to a positive vision of life, learning to recognise God's presence even in difficult moments, and entrusting oneself with confidence to the tenderness of the heavenly Mother.

In "The Well-Provided Young Man," Don Bosco writes touching words about Mary's role: he presents her as a loving mother, a sure guide, and a model of Christian life. Devotion to her joys is not merely a devotional practice but a means to enter into a personal relationship with the Madonna, to imitate her virtues, and to receive her maternal help in life's trials.

For the saint from Turin, Mary is not distant or inaccessible but close, present, and active in the lives of her children. This Marian vision, strongly relational, permeates all Salesian spirituality and is reflected in the daily life of

the oratories: environments where joy, prayer, and familiarity with Mary go hand in hand.

A Living Legacy

Even today, devotion to the “Seven Joys of the Madonna” retains its spiritual and educational value. In a world marked by uncertainties, fears, and fragility, it offers a simple yet profound way to discover that Christian faith is, above all, an experience of joy and light. Don Bosco, a prophet of joy and hope, teaches us that authentic Christian education involves valuing affections, emotions, and the beauty of the Gospel.

Rediscovering the “Seven Joys” today also means recovering a positive outlook on life, history, and God’s presence. The Madonna, with her humility and trust, teaches us to cherish and meditate in our hearts the signs of true joy, the kind that does not fade, because it is founded on God’s love.

In a time when even young people seek light and meaning, Don Bosco’s words remain relevant: “If you wish to be happy, practice devotion to the Most Holy Mary.” The “Seven Joys” are, then, a small ladder to Heaven, a rosary of light that unites earth to the heart of the heavenly Mother.

Here is also the original text taken from “The Well-Provided Young Man for the Practice of His Duties in the Exercises of Christian Piety,” 1875 (pp. 141-142), with our own titles.

The Seven Joys That Mary Enjoys in Heaven

1. Purity Cultivated

Rejoice, O immaculate Spouse of the Holy Spirit, for the contentment you now enjoy in Paradise, because through your purity and virginity you are exalted above all the Angels and elevated above all the saints.

Hail Mary and Glory Be.

2. Wisdom Sought

Rejoice, O Mother of God, for the pleasure you experience in

Paradise, because just as the sun here on earth illuminates the whole world, so you, with your splendour, adorn and make all of Paradise shine.

Hail Mary and Glory Be.

3. Filial Obedience

Rejoice, O Daughter of God, for the sublime dignity to which you were raised in Paradise, because all the hierarchies of Angels, Archangels, Thrones, Dominions, and all the Blessed Spirits honour, revere, and acknowledge you as the Mother of their Creator, and at your slightest command, they are most obedient.

Hail Mary and Glory Be.

4. Continuous Prayer

Rejoice, O Handmaid of the Most Holy Trinity, for the great power you have in Paradise, because all the graces you ask of your Son are immediately granted; indeed, as St. Bernard says, no grace is granted here on earth that does not pass through your most holy hands.

Hail Mary and Glory Be.

5. Humility Lived

Rejoice, O most august Queen, because you alone deserved to sit at the right hand of your most holy Son, who sits at the right hand of the Eternal Father.

Hail Mary and Glory Be.

6. Mercy Practised

Rejoice, O Hope of sinners, Refuge of the afflicted, for the great pleasure you experience in Paradise in seeing that all who praise and revere you in this world are rewarded by the Eternal Father with His holy grace on earth and with His immense glory in Heaven.

Hail Mary and Glory Be.

7. Hope Rewarded

Rejoice, O Mother, Daughter, and Spouse of God, because all

the graces, all the joys, all the delights, and all the favours you now enjoy in Paradise will never diminish; indeed, they will increase until the day of judgment and last for eternity.

Hail Mary and Glory Be.

Prayer to the Most Blessed Virgin

O glorious Virgin Mary, Mother of my Lord, source of all our consolation, through these your joys, which I have recalled with the greatest devotion I could muster, I beg you to obtain for me from God the remission of my sins and the continual help of His holy grace, so that I may never render myself unworthy of your protection but rather have the fortune to receive all those heavenly favours you are accustomed to bestow upon your servants, who devoutly remember these joys that overflow from your beautiful heart, O immortal Queen of Heaven.

Photo: shutterstock.com

Don Bosco and the titles of Our Lady

Don Bosco's devotion to Mary stems from a filial and vibrant relationship with Mary's maternal presence, which he experienced throughout every stage of his life. From the votive pillars erected during his childhood in Becchi, to the revered images in Chieri and Turin, and the pilgrimages he made with his boys to the sanctuaries of Piedmont and Liguria, each stop reveals a different title for the Virgin—Consolata, Addolorata, Immacolata, Madonna delle Grazie, and many others—that speaks to the faithful of protection, comfort, and

hope. However, the title that would forever define his veneration was *"Mary Help of Christians"*: according to Salesian tradition, it was the Madonna herself who indicated it to him. On December 8, 1862, Don Bosco confided to the cleric Giovanni Cagliero: "Up until now," he added, "we have celebrated the feast of the Immaculate Conception with solemnity and pomp, and on this day our first works of the festive oratories began. But the Madonna wants us to honor her under the title of Mary Help of Christians: the times are so sad that we truly need the Most Holy Virgin to help us preserve and defend the Christian faith." (MB VII, 334)

Marian titles

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

Leaving deeper reflections that justify these titles from a historical, theological and devotional point of view to the experts, we will content ourselves with a passage from *Lumen Gentium*, the document on the Church of the Second Vatican Council, which reassures us, reminding us that Mary is our mother and that "her constant intercession continued to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and cultics, until they are led into the happiness of their true home. Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked by the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and Mediatrix." (*Lumen Gentium* 62).

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

"O Virgin, O Lady, O All-holy One, what beautiful names every

language holds up to thee: more than one proud people boast to be in thy gentle guardianship" (from *The Name of Mary*).

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

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

In his youth

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

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

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

The oldest pedestal in the Becchi region appears to date back to 1700. It was erected at the bottom of the 'plain' towards the *Mainito*, where the families living in the ancient *Scaiota*' later a Salesian farmstead, now undergoing renovation, used to meet.

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

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

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

That little statue of the Consolata may be the first effigy of

Mary that Don Bosco worshipped outdoors in his lifetime.

In the old house

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

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

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

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

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

Immaculate.

In Turin

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

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

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

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

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

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

On the autumn walks

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

from his mother.

And then again...

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

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

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

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

Don Bosco before this Queen of Victories in Paris gave a "sermon de charité" in 1883, that is, one of those conferences to obtain help for his works of charity for poor and abandoned youth. It was his first conference in the French capital, in the shrine that is to Parisians what the shrine of the Consolata is to the people of Turin.

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

Novena to Mary Help of Christians 2025

This 2025 Novena to Mary Help of Christians invites us to rediscover ourselves as children under Mary's maternal gaze. Each day, through the great apparitions – from Lourdes to Fatima, from Guadalupe to Banneaux – we contemplate an aspect of her love: humility, hope, obedience, wonder, trust, consolation, justice, gentleness, dream. The meditations by the Rector Major and the prayers of the “children” accompany us on a nine-day journey that opens the heart to the simple faith of the little ones, nourishes prayer, and encourages us to build, with Mary, a healed world full of light, for ourselves and for all those who seek hope and peace.

Day 1 – Our Lady of Lourdes

Being Children – Humility and faith

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

As for us, are we able to see her?

Little Bernadette Soubirous

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

Mary showed herself to her daughter Bernadette Soubirous. She who could neither read nor write; she who spoke in dialect and

did not go to catechism class. A poor girl, pushed around by everyone in the village, yet ready to trust and rely on others, like someone who has nothing. Nothing to lose. Mary entrusted her secrets to her and did so because she trusted her. She treated her with loving kindness, spoke to her kindly, and said 'please' to her. And Bernadette let herself go and believed her, just like a child does with its mother. She believed in her promise that Our Lady **would make her happy not in this world, but in the next.** She remembered this promise for the rest of her life. A promise that would allow her to face all her difficulties with her head held high, with strength and determination, doing what Our Lady asked her to do: pray, always pray for all of us sinners. She also made a promise: she would look after Mary's secrets and give voice to her request for a Shrine in the place where Mary appeared. And as she lay dying, Bernadette smiled, thinking back to Mary's face, her loving gaze, her silences, her few but intense words, and above all, that promise. And she still felt like a daughter, the daughter of a Mother who keeps her promises.

Mary, the Mother who promises.

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

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

The Rector Major's words

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

Her 'yes, here am I, the servant of the Lord' spoken before the angel is an act of humility, not presumption. It is the

trusting abandonment of someone who recognises herself as an instrument in God's hands. Mary does not seek recognition; Mary simply seeks to be a servant, placing herself in the last place with silence, humility and simplicity that we find disarming. This humility, this radical humility, is the key that opened Mary's heart to divine grace, allowing the Word of God, with his greatness and immensity, to become incarnate in her human womb.

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

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

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

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

The prayer of an unfaithful child

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

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

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

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

I will fall, mother, you know that.

I won't always keep my promises.

I won't always trust you.

I won't always be able to see you.

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

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

Hail Mary...

Day 2 – Our Lady of Fatima

Being Children – Simplicity and Hope

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

As for us, are we able to see her?

The little shepherd children in Cova di Iria

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

Three little shepherd children, simple and happy, were there and spread news of the miracle that shocked millions of people. Nobody could explain it, from scientists to people of faith. Yet, three children saw Mary, heard her message. And they believed it, they believed the words of the woman who showed herself and asked them to return to Cova di Iria every 13th of the month. They do not need explanations because they placed all their hope in Mary's repeated words. A difficult hope to keep alive, one which would have frightened any child: Our Lady revealed suffering and world conflicts to Lucia, Jacinta and Francesco. Yet they had no doubt: those who trust in the protection of Mary, the mother who protects, can face everything. And they knew this so well; they knew it first-hand, risking being killed so as not to betray the word they gave to their heavenly mother. The three little shepherd children were ready for martyrdom, imprisoned and threatened with a pot of boiling oil.

They were afraid:

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

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

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

"Why don't we say the Rosary?"

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

Mary, the Mother who protects.

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

to them.

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

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, hope and renewal

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

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

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

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

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

Let us ask Mary for the grace necessary so that this hope that we see fulfilled in her may renew our hearts, heal our wounds, and enable us to pass beyond the veil of negativity to embark on a journey of holiness, a journey of closeness to God. Let us ask Mary, the woman who stands with the apostles in prayer,

to help us today, believers and Christian communities, so that we may be sustained in faith and open to the gifts of the Spirit, so that the face of the earth may be renewed.

Mary urges us never to resign ourselves to sin and mediocrity, but, filled with the hope fulfilled in her, to long for a new life in Christ. May Mary continue to be our model and support so that we may always believe in the possibility of a new beginning, of an inner rebirth that conforms us ever more closely to the image of her son Jesus.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

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

The prayer of a discouraged child

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...
make my heart simple and full of hope.

I trust you: protect me in every situation.

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

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

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

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

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

Hail Mary...

Day 3 – Our Lady of Guadalupe

Being Children – Obedience and dedication

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

As for us, are we able to see her?

Young Juan Diego

Juan Diego," said the Lady, "the little favourite among my

children..." Juan sprang to his feet.

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

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

"My beloved child," said the Lady, "I am the Mother of God, and I want you to listen to me carefully. I have a very important message to give you. I want a church to be built on this spot, from where I can show my love to your people.

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

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

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

Mary, the Mother who does not forget

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

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

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, motherhood and compassion

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

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

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

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

Mary's compassion is the natural corollary of her motherhood. Compassion is not simply a superficial feeling of pity, but a profound participation in the pain of others, a 'suffering with'. We see it manifested in a touching way during her son's

passion. In the same way, Mary does not remain indifferent to our pain; she intercedes for us, consoles us, and offers us her maternal help.

Thus, Mary's heart becomes a safe refuge where we can lay down our burdens and find comfort and hope. Motherhood and compassion in Mary become, so to speak, two sides of the same human experience in our favour, two expressions of her infinite love for God and for humanity.

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

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

The prayer of an unfaithful child

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

The prayer of a lost child

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

When I'm not listening, please insist.

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

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

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

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

Come and get us,

come and take us by the hand.

We do not and cannot be alone here.

Hail Mary...

Day 4 – Our Lady of La Salette

Being Children – Amazement and reflection

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

Little Melanie and Maximin from La Salette

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

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

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

Mary's pain in the face of the pilgrimage of her sinful children.

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

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

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

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, love and mercy

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

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

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

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

Mercy then becomes the natural consequence of Mary's love, a compassion, we might say, that is visceral, when faced with the sufferings of humanity, the world. We look at Mary, we contemplate her, we encounter her with her maternal gaze and we feel it resting on our weaknesses, on our sins, on our vulnerability, without aggression, indeed with infinite tenderness. It is an immaculate heart, sensitive to the cry of pain.

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

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

The prayer of an unfaithful child

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

The prayer of a distant child

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

In silence, I find you.

In prayer, I hear you.

In reflection, I discover you.

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

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

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

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

turn?

I will return to you, as one with you.

Hail Mary...

Day 5 – Catherine's Medal

Being Children – Trust and prayer

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

As for us, are we able to see her?

Little Catherine Labouré

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

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

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

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

Mary, the Mother who gives confidence

You, who are trusting, and entrust missions and messages to each of your children, have accompanied them on their journey as a discreet presence, remaining close to all, but especially to those who have experienced great suffering. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

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

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, trust and prayer

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

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

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

The visit to Elizabeth is an example of prayer that becomes service. We see Mary accompanying Jesus to the cross, after the Ascension we see her in the Upper Room united with the

Apostles in fervent expectation. Mary teaches us the value of constant prayer as a consequence of total and complete trust, abandoning oneself into God's hands, precisely to encounter God and live with God.

Trust and prayer and Mary Most Holy are closely interconnected. A deep trust in God gives birth to and brings forth persevering prayer. Let us ask Mary to be our example so that we may feel urged to make prayer a daily habit because we want to feel continually abandoned in God's merciful hands.

Let us turn to her with filial trust so that, imitating her, imitating her trust and perseverance in prayer, we may experience the peace that only when we abandon ourselves to God can we receive the graces necessary for our journey of faith.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

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

The prayer of a mistrustful child

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

I am unable to hear you, open my ears.

I am unable to follow you, guide my steps.

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

The temptations are many, let me not give in.

The difficulties seem insurmountable, let me not fall.

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

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

Making me an obedient child.

Hail Mary...

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

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

Little Alphonsine Mumiremana and her companions

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

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

children, a shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows of Kibeho was erected, now a place marked by extermination and genocide. And Our Lady continues to be there and embrace all her children.

Mary, the Mother who consoles

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

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

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, suffering and invitation to conversion

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

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

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

Thus, from the experience of transfigured pain, a powerful call to conversion emerges. Looking at Mary, contemplating how

she endured so much for love of us and for our salvation, we too are called not to remain indifferent to the mystery of redemption.

Mary, the gentle and motherly woman, urges us to abandon the ways of evil and embrace the path of faith. Mary's famous words at the wedding at Cana, 'Do whatever he tells you', still resound for us today as an urgent invitation to listen to the voice of Jesus in times of difficulty, in times of trial. In times of unexpected and unknown situations.

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

The prayer of an unfaithful child

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

The prayer of a suffering child

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

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

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

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

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

Lift me up from the dust, Mother.

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

Those beneath bombing,

those who are persecuted,

those who are unjustly imprisoned,

those who are harmed in rights and dignity,
those whose lives are cut short too soon.
Lift them up and console them.
because they are your children. Because we are your children.

Hail Mary...

Day 7 – Our Lady of Aparecida

Being Children – Justice and dignity

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

The little fishermen Domingos, Felice and Joao

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

A mother sees the needs of her children, Mary saw the needs of the three fishermen and went to their rescue. Her children

gave her all the love and dignity that can be given to a mother: they put the two pieces of the statue back together, placed it on a hut and turned it into a shrine. From the top of the hut, Our Lady of Aparecida – which means She Appeared – saved one of her slave sons who was running away from his masters: she saw his suffering and restored his dignity. And today, that hut is the largest Marian shrine in the world and bears the name of the Basilica of Our Lady of Aparecida.

Mary, the Mother who sees

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

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

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, dignity and social justice

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

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

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

We can say that Mary's free and conscious 'yes' is the gesture of self-determination that elevates Mary to the level of God's

will, entering in some way into God's logic. Her humility then makes her even freer, far from being diminished by humility. Mary's humility becomes an awareness of the true greatness that comes from God.

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

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

The prayer of an unfaithful child

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

The prayer of a child who is afraid

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

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

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

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

So that when I look at my brothers and sisters I can look at their shortcomings and make them whole,

see their weaknesses and heal them, feel their impatience and heal it.

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

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

Hail Mary...

Day 8 – Our Lady of Banneaux

Being Children – Gentleness and everyday life

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

As for us, are we able to see her?

Little Marietta of Banneaux

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

On January 19, Marietta asked, "Ma'am, who are you?" "I am the Virgin of the poor."

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

Marietta was a normal girl who lived her days like all of us, like our children, our grandchildren. Hers was a small and unknown village. She prayed that she would stay close to God. She prayed to her Heavenly Mother to keep the bond with her alive. **And Mary spoke to her gently, in a place familiar to**

her. She would appear to her several times, confide secrets to her and tell her to pray for the conversion of the world: this was a strong message of hope for Marietta. All children are embraced and consoled by their Mother, all the sweetness that Marietta found in the “Gentle Lady” she passed on to the world. And from this encounter came a great chain of love and spirituality that found its fulfilment in the Shrine of Our Lady of Banneaux.

Mary, the Mother who stays beside us

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

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

The Rector Major’s words

The Virgin Mary, education and love

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

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

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

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

Listening to the word of God, listening to that God who is always there to help us, to accompany us. Mary keeps this in her heart, meditates on it carefully, encourages attentive listening to the word of God and, in the same way, to the

needs of others. Mary teaches us that humility which does not choose to remain detached and passive, but rather the humility which, while recognising our smallness before God's greatness, places us as people who are active in his service. Our hearts are open to truly be those who accompany, living the plan that God has for us.

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

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

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

The prayer of an unfaithful child

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

The prayer of a child of our times

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

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

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

human cruelty?

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

Mother, only you can comfort me.

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

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

Hail Mary...

Day 9 – Mary Help of Christians

Being Children – Building and dreaming

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

As for us, are we able to see her?

Little John Bosco

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

though covered with bright stars.

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

I looked around again and where before I had seen wild animals, I now saw gentle lambs. They were all jumping and bleating as if to welcome that man and lady. At that point, still dreaming, I began crying. I begged the lady to speak so that I could understand her, because I did not know what all this could mean. She then placed her hand on my head and said, "In good time you will understand everything."

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

Mary, a Mother who accompanies/guides

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

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

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, our help in conversion

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

It is a journey that constantly needs to free itself from whatever blocks its growth. It is a journey that must continually renew itself, so as not to turn back or stop in the dark corners of our existence. This is conversion.

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

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

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

Mary helps us in our conversion through her attentive and focused listening to the Word of God. Listening that helps us find the strength to abandon the ways of sin, because we recognise the strength and beauty of walking towards God. Let us turn to Mary with filial trust, because this means that, while recognising our frailties, our sins and our faults, we want to foster those desires for change. A change of heart that seeks to let itself be accompanied by the maternal heart

of Mary. And in Mary, let us find that precious help to discern the false promises of the world and rediscover the beauty and truth of the Gospel. May Mary, the Help of Christians, be for all of us a constant help in discovering the beauty of the Gospel. And in accepting to walk towards goodness, the greatness of God's word, alive in our hearts so that we can communicate it to others.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

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

The prayer of a motionless child

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

I who do not let anyone else help me.

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

I who always believe I am a failure.

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

to be accompanied on life's paths.

Show me my field,

show me my dream

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

Hail Mary...

Marian Devotion from Don

Bosco's Perspective

Saint John Bosco had a deep devotion to Mary Help of Christians, a devotion that had its roots in the numerous experiences of her maternal intervention in his life, beginning with the Dream of Nine. This true devotion could not remain merely personal. Don Bosco felt the need to share it with others. In 1869, he founded the Association of Mary Help of Christians (ADMA), which continues to be a vibrant spiritual reality today. Every 5-6 years, the association organizes international congresses in honor of Mary Help of Christians. The latest, the IX Congress, was held in Fatima, Portugal, from August 29 to September 1 2024. We present the concluding address of the Vicar of the Rector Major, Don Stefano Martoglio.

I gladly take the floor at this Marian Congress, after what we have heard and experienced, in order to reaffirm a personal and institutional act of entrustment, according to the heart of Don Bosco and the faith of the Church. We conclude these days with one of the characteristic dimensions of Don Bosco's life and mission, namely, Marian devotion. We entrust ourselves to the maternal hands of Mary. Here and now, in this place made holy by the apparition of Mary, we ask her to make what we have heard, experienced, and prayed over in this Congress ever fruitful.

I hope that my words, after all that we have heard and experienced, may stay imprinted in your memories. This memory is important. It means that we acknowledge that it is not ours; rather it is a legacy entrusted to us and we should pass it on to succeeding generations.

With great simplicity, I share with myself and each of one of you some central aspects of the presence of Mary in Don Bosco's life and mission, and thus in our devotion.

1. Mary in the Writings of Don Bosco, from the very beginning.

The woman "of majestic appearance, dressed in a mantle that shone from all sides," was described in the Dream of Nine. We have meditated on her in this Bicentennial of the Dream. She is the Madonna dear to the popular tradition of the masses. Don Bosco emphasized her maternal kindness. This image of Mary was most in tune with his soul and it will accompany him until his last breath.

Many popular devotions were recounted in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*. Among these were the family rosary, the Angelus, novenas and tridua, short invocations, consecrations, visits to altars and shrines, Marian feasts (Divine Motherhood, the Name of Mary, the Madonna of the Rosary, Our Lady of Sorrows, Our Lady of Consolation, Mary Immaculate, and the Madonna of Grace). By popular devotion, we do not refer to easy and spontaneous practices. Popular religiosity is the quintessence of centuries of experience that is given to us as a gift. We must own it.

During his studies in Chieri, more elements appeared that connected Marian devotion to the spiritual choices of the young Bosco. This was linked especially to his vocational growth and to the maturing of the virtues that would form a good seminarian. The Madonna of the seminary was the Mary Immaculate. In all the Piedmontese seminaries, and in those influenced by the Lazarist tradition, the seminary chapel was dedicated to the Immaculate Conception since the 1600's.

This characterized the Marian piety of the young Bosco, formed in the school of St. Alphonsus. *True devotion must be expressed in virtuous living; it guaranteed the most powerful patronage one can have in life and in death.*

Don Bosco would also write in *The Companion of Youth* in 1847: "If you are her devotees, in addition to filling you with blessings in this world, you will have paradise in the next life."

But it was especially in the booklet *The Month of May Dedicated to Mary Most Holy Immaculate for the Use of the People* (1858) that the saint explicitly and insistently discussed popular and youthful Marian devotion within the context of serious, fervent, and loving Christian commitment.

"Three things are to be practiced the whole month: 1. Do what you can to commit no sin during this month: let it be entirely dedicated to Mary. 2. Take great care in fulfilling the spiritual and temporal duties of your state of life. 3. Invite your relatives and friends and all those who depend on you to participate in the pious practices that are done in honor of Mary during the month."

The other theme discussed by Don Bosco was inherited from a whole devout tradition. It is the link between Marian devotion and eternal salvation: "Since the most beautiful ornament of Christianity is the Mother of the Savior, Most Holy Mary, so to you I turn, O most clement Virgin Mary, I am sure of obtaining the grace of God, the right to Paradise, to regain my lost dignity, if you pray for me: *Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis.*" Don Bosco was convinced that Mary intervenes as a most effective advocate and a powerful mediatrix before God.

Ten years later (1868), for the inauguration of the church of Mary Help of Christians, the saint wrote and distributed a pamphlet entitled *Wonders of the Mother of God invoked under the Title of Mary Help of Christians*. In this work, Don Bosco emphasized the ecclesial dimension of Marian devotion. Don Bosco meant to expand his missionary outlook and his educational concerns.

The titles of *Immaculate Conception* and of *Help of Christians* in the ecclesial context of the time evoked struggles and produced triumphs. It was the "great clash" between the Church and liberal society. A religious reading of political and social events was made, along the lines of the Catholic reaction to atheism, liberalism, and de-Christianization.

However, Don Bosco continued to emphasize among his boys and his Salesians the predominantly ascetic-spiritual and apostolic dimensions of Marian piety. In fact, the practice of the month of Mary and the various devotions aimed at instilling in young people the aspiration to greater commitment to duty, to the practice of virtue, to asceticism with mortifications offered in honor of Mary, to an operative charity, to a generous apostolate among one's companions.

Don Bosco tended to assign to the Immaculate Conception and to the Help of Christians a decisive role in the educational and formative work and in the enhancement of virtue and devotion, within a climate of Marian fervor, in order to lead a life free from sin and its enticements and to grow in total self-giving to God.

Therefore, Don Bosco urged young people to struggle against sin and to direct one's life to God, to the sanctification of oneself and of others, to the service of charity, to the patient carrying of the cross, and to missionary commitment. These are the salient traits of a Marian devotion that was devoid of sentimentalism. despite the climate of the times.

What a journey it was for Don Bosco – the man of faith that he was! He said: "Among the preoccupations of your hearts, I would like to emphasize that we cannot stagnate in our devotion. We must always move on! One who does not move forward, always moves backward, and there is no room for such a one in the Oratory!"

2. Mary in the Life of Don Bosco; the Daily Expressions of Don Bosco's Devotion and of Our Devotion

2.1. The Sense of a Presence

Mary was, in the life of Don Bosco, a perceived, loved, active, and stimulating presence, aimed at salvation and holiness. He felt her closeness and entrusted himself to her, allowing himself to be guided and led by her in the pursuit of

his vocation. Don Bosco dreamed of her. It seemed he was seeing her.

At Nizza Monferrato in June 1885, Don Bosco was conversing in the parlor with the chapter members of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. He felt very tired and his voice was faint. He was asked to leave them a final remembrance. "Oh then, you want me to say something. If I could speak, how many things I would like to tell you! But I am old, old and frail, as you see; I can hardly speak. I want to tell you only that the Madonna loves you very, very much. And, you know, she is here among you." Then Don Bonetti, seeing him moved, interrupted him and began to say, solely to distract him:

– "Yes, that's right! Don Bosco means that the Madonna is your Mother and that she watches over you and protects you."

– "No, no," the Saint replied, "I mean that the Madonna is really here, in this house, and that she is happy with you, and that if you continue to live with the present spirit, which is what the Madonna desires ..." The good Father became even more emotional, and Don Bonetti took the floor again:

– "Yes, that's right! Don Bosco means to tell you that if you are always good, the Madonna will be happy with you."

– "But no, but no," Don Bosco struggled to explain, trying to control his emotion. "I mean that the Madonna is truly here, here among you! The Madonna walks in this house and covers it with her mantle." – In saying this, he stretched out his arms, raised his tearful eyes upwards, and seemed to want to persuade the sisters that he saw the Madonna walking here and there as in her own home.

It is an operative presence: Mary accompanies, supports, guides, and encourages. She was given to him as Teacher: "I will give you the Teacher under whose discipline you can become wise, and without whom all wisdom becomes foolishness." Mary's presence stimulates living consciously in the presence of God: "At the thought of God present / let the lips, the heart, the mind / follow the way of virtue / O great Virgin

Mary. / Sac. Gio Bosco" (prayer written by the saint at the foot of one of his photographs).

Splendid and essential: what is not a living presence in one's life means total absence! The sense of Presence is one of God's Providence and of Mary's action. This is a continuous journey for each one of us and for all of us together in the Salesian Family.

2.2. The Energy of the Mission

Don Bosco closely linked Mary with his vocation and his ministry. Here it is good to revisit the presentation that Don Bosco made of the Dream of Nine: "Taking me kindly by the hand, 'Look,' he said to me, here is your field, here is where you must work. Make yourself humble, strong, and robust; and what you see happening with these animals at this moment, you must do for my children." It is the mission of salvation, of transformation, and of formation of young people, through prevention, education, instruction, evangelization, and a solid set of virtues in the educator.

Mary's Son taught Don Bosco the method and the objective for the realization of the dream: "Not with blows, but with meekness and charity you must win over these friends of yours. Therefore, immediately instruct them on the ugliness of sin and the beauty of virtue."

The narration made in 1873-74 of the Dream of Nine brings together all the many other accounts of Marian interventions and inspirations, where the Blessed Mother took on the role of animation, guidance, and support for his mission of saving young people.

It is in this context that Don Bosco recognized as miraculous Mary's interventions: the "graces" granted to people, both spiritual and physical, her powerful protection for the Oratory and the nascent Salesian Family, and her intervention for its prodigious growth for the good of souls.

Personal graces and the awareness of the particular presence of God, through the intercession of Mary, were evident in the

personal life of Don Bosco and in the life of the Salesian Family. If one does not perceive the presence of Mary, one is at the mercy of chance.

2.3. Stimulus to Holiness

Don Bosco lived his Marian devotion as a stimulus and support for the movement towards Christian perfection. In this same perspective, he wisely instilled in the young the promotion of Christian life and the desire for holiness.

Don Bosco knew well the sensitivity of his boys and their popular taste of piety. Thus, he was able to transform a devotional tendency, touched with romantic sentiment, into a powerful tool for spiritual formation, for encouraging, correcting, and directing the young.

Mary never leaves us where she finds us. As at the beginning of the Book of Signs in the Gospel of John, she knows that we must be guided, and accompanied for a precise goal. Don Bosco says: "Do what Jesus tells you and you will arrive at where he is waiting for you," which is to see the Invisible.

3. Salesian Identity and Marian devotion

In conclusion, I wish to share with you, simply, what we as brothers and sisters live at the very center of our Salesian vocation. I love to conclude with what is the very backbone of my life and of yours as well. If it does so much good to me, it will also do a lot of good to you and to everyone.

First of all, the *Constitutions* outline the characteristic traits of our Marian devotion. Article 8, found in the first chapter on the elements that comprise the identity of the Salesian Congregation, summarizes the meaning of Mary's presence in our Society. She showed Don Bosco his field of work. She constantly guided and supported him. She continued among us her mission as Mother and Helper: we "entrust ourselves to her, humble servant in whom the Lord has done great things, to become among the young witnesses of the inexhaustible love of her Son."

Article 92 presents the role of Mary in the life and piety of the Salesian. She is a model of prayer and of pastoral charity, a teacher of wisdom, and a guide of our family, an example of faith, of solicitude for the needy, of fidelity in the hour of the cross, and of spiritual joy. She is our educator to the fullness of self-donation to the Lord and to the courageous service of our brothers and sisters. It follows, therefore, that a filial and strong devotion, is expressed in prayer, like the daily rosary and the celebration of her feasts, and in convinced personal imitation of her.

The best summary, however, is found, in my opinion, in the Prayer of entrustment to Mary Help of Christians, which is recited daily in each of our communities after meditation. It was composed by Don Rua in 1894 as an expression of daily consecration in the commitment to fidelity and generosity. Today it has been revised, but it retains the same structure as the old one and the same contents. Here is the original text:

"Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Helper, we consecrate ourselves entirely to you and promise to always act for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.

We ask you to turn your merciful gaze upon the Church, its august Head, the priests and missionaries, upon the Salesian Family, our relatives and benefactors, and the youth entrusted to our care, upon poor sinners, the dying, and the souls in purgatory.

Teach us, O most tender Mother, to replicate in ourselves the virtues of our Founder, especially angelic modesty, profound humility, and ardent charity.

Grant, O Mary Help of Christians, that your powerful intercession may make us victorious against the enemies of our soul in life and in death, so that we may come to crown you with Don Bosco in Paradise. Amen."

As can be seen, the current version merely takes up, with some developments, the text of Don Rua. I believe it is good, every now and then, to revisit it and meditate on it. It is structured in four parts: promise; intercession; docility, entrustment.

In the first part (*Most Holy*), the ultimate purpose of our consecration is recalled by promising to orient every action solely to the service of God and the salvation of others, in fidelity to the essence of the Salesian vocation.

In the second part (*We ask you*), the ecclesial, Salesian, and missionary sense of our consecration is condensed, entrusting to Mary's intercession the Church, the Congregation, and the Salesian Family, the youth, especially the poorest, all men redeemed by Christ. Here, the passion that must nourish and characterize Salesian prayer is well outlined: universality, ecclesiality, youthful missionary spirit.

In the third part (*Teach us*), the virtues that characterize the typical physiognomy of the Salesian disciple of Don Bosco are concentrated: we place ourselves in the school of Mary to grow in union with God, in chastity, in humility, and in poverty, in love for work and temperance, in ardent loving charity (goodness and unlimited self-donation to our brothers and sisters), in fidelity to the Church and its Magisterium.

In the last part (*Grant, O Mary Help of Christians*), we entrust ourselves to the intercession of the Virgin to obtain fidelity and generosity in the service of God until death and admission into the eternal communion of saints.

This excellent summary, which contains a complete program of spiritual life and outlines the physiognomy of our identity, can serve us today as a point of reference and as a concrete guideline for our spiritual verification and planning. May it be so for each one of us!

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

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

Graces obtained through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians.

I. Grace received from Mary Help of Christians.

It was the year of our Lord 1866 when my wife, in the month of October, was struck by a very serious illness, namely a severe inflammation combined with great congestion, and a parasitic infection. In these painful circumstances, we first turned to the experts of the art, who quickly declared that the illness was extremely dangerous. Seeing that the illness was getting much worse, and that human remedies were of little or no use, I suggested to my companion that she recommend herself to Mary Help of Christians, and that she would certainly grant her health if it was necessary for the soul; at the same time I added the promise that if she obtained health, as soon as the church was finished, which was being built in Turin, I would take us both to visit her and make some donation. She replied that she could recommend herself to some Shrine closer so as not to be obliged to go so far away; to this I replied that one should not look so much at convenience as at the greatness of the benefit one hopes for.

She then prayed as recommended and promised what

she proposed. O power of Mary! Barely 30 minutes after she had made her promise I asked her how she was, and she said: "I am feeling much better, my mind is clearer, my stomach is no longer oppressed, I feel an aversion to ice which I had so craved before, and I am more inclined to have broth which I previously found so distasteful."

At these words I felt myself born to new life, and if it had not been at night I would immediately have left my room to publish the grace received from the Blessed Virgin Mary. The fact is that she passed the night peacefully, and on the following morning the doctor appeared and declared her free from all danger. Who healed her if not Mary Help of Christians? In fact, after a few days she left her bed and took up domestic chores. Now we anxiously await the completion of the church dedicated to her, and thus fulfil the promise made.

I have written this, as a humble son of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, and I desire that all such publicity be given to it as will be judged good for the greater glory of God and the august Mother of the Saviour.

Luigi COSTAMAGNA
of Caramagna.

II. Mary Help of Christians Protectress of the countryside.

Mornese is a small village in the diocese of Acqui, province of Alessandria, of about one thousand inhabitants. This village of ours, like so many others, was sadly plagued by phomopsis cane (a grape disease), which for over twenty years had devoured almost the entire grape harvest, our main wealth. We had already used many kinds of things to ward it off, but to no avail. When word spread that some peasants from neighbouring towns had promised a portion of the fruit from their vineyards for the continuation of the work on the church dedicated to Mary Help of Christians in Turin, they were wonderfully favoured and had grapes in

abundance. Moved by the hope of a better harvest and even more by the thought of contributing to a work of religion, the people from Mornese decided to offer the tenth part of the harvest for this purpose. The protection of the Holy Virgin made itself felt among us in a truly merciful way. We had the abundance of happier times, and we were very happy to be able to scrupulously offer in kind or in money what we had promised. When we invited the construction manager for the church to come and collect the offerings, there was a feast of true joy and public exultation.

He appeared deeply moved by the promptness and selflessness with which the offerings were made, and by the Christian words with which they were accompanied. But one of our patriots spoke loudly in the name of all of what was happening. He said that we owe great things to the Holy Virgin Help of Christians. Last year, many people from this area, having to go to war, placed themselves under the protection of Mary Help of Christians, most of them wearing a medal around their necks. They went bravely, and had to face the gravest dangers, but none fell victim to that scourge of the Lord. Moreover, in the neighbouring districts there was a plague of cholera, hail and drought, and we were spared all of that. Hardly any of our neighbours' harvests survived, and we were blessed with such abundance, more than for or twenty years. For these reasons we are happy to be able to manifest our indelible gratitude to the great Protectress of mankind in this way.

I believe I am a faithful interpreter of my fellow-citizens in asserting that what we have done now, we will also do in the future, convinced that we will thus make ourselves ever more worthy of heavenly blessings.

25 March 1868

An inhabitant of Mornese.

III. Prompt recovery.

Young Giovanni Bonetti from Asti in the College at Lanzo had the following grace. On the evening of the 23rd of December last, he suddenly entered the director's room with uncertain steps and a distraught face. He approached him, leaned his body against the pious priest, and with his right hand rubbed his forehead without saying a word. The priest, astonished to see him so distressed, supported him bidding him sit down he asked what it was he wanted. In response to the repeated questions, the poor man could only sigh more laboriously and deeply. The priest then looked more closely at his face and saw that his eyes were motionless, his lips pale, and his body, succumbing to the weight of his head, threatened to collapse. Seeing then in what life-threatening danger the young man was, they immediately sent for the doctor. Meanwhile, his condition worsened by the moment; his face became distorted and no longer looked the same as before, his arms, legs, and forehead were cold, phlegm choked him, his breathing grew increasingly shallow, and his pulse could barely be felt. He remained in this state for five agonising hours.

The Doctor arrived, applied various remedies, but always to no avail. No hope, the doctor said sorrowfully, before morning this young man will be dead.

Thus, in defiance of human hopes, the good priest turned to heaven, praying that if it was not his will that the young man should live, he would at least give him a little time for confession and communion. He then took a small medal of Mary Help of Christians. The graces he had already obtained from invoking the Virgin with that medal were many, and increased his hope of obtaining help from the heavenly Protectress. Full of confidence in her, he knelt down, placed the medal on his heart and, together with other pious people who had come, said a few prayers to Mary and the Blessed Sacrament. And Mary listened to the prayers that were raised to her with such confidence. Little John's breathing became freer, and his eyes, which had been as if petrified, turned lovingly around to look at and thank the onlookers for the

compassionate care they were giving him. Nor was the improvement short-lived; on the contrary, everyone held his recovery to be ensured. The doctor himself, astonished at what had happened, exclaimed: "It was the grace of God that wrought his recovery. In my long career I have seen a great number of sick and dying people, but I have never seen any of those who were at Bonetti's point recover. Without the beneficent intervention of heaven, this is for me an inexplicable fact. And science, used nowadays to breaking that admirable bond that unites it to God, paid humble homage to him, judging itself powerless to achieve what God alone had accomplished. The young man who was the object of the Virgin's glory continues to this day to be very well. He tells and preaches to all that he owes his life doubly to God and to his most powerful Mother, from whose valid intercession he obtained this grace. He would consider himself ungrateful of heart if he did not give public testimony of gratitude, and thus invite others and other unfortunates who in this valley of tears suffer and go in search of comfort and help.

(From the newspaper: *La Vergine*).

IV. Mary Help of Christians frees one of her devotees from a severe toothache.

In an educational institution in Turin, there was a young man of 19 or 20 years who had been suffering from severe toothaches for several days. All the usual medical treatments for such cases had already been tried without any success. As a result, the poor young man was reduced to such a state of agony that he aroused the pity of all who heard him. While the day seemed dreadful to him, the night appeared eternal and most wretched, during which he could not close his eyes to sleep except for brief and interrupted moments. What a deplorable state his was! It continued like this for some time, but on the evening of April 29th, the pain seemed to become far worse. The young man groaned incessantly in his

bed, sighed and cried out loudly without anyone being able to relieve him. His companions, concerned about his unhappy condition, went to the director to ask if he would come and comfort him. He came and attempted to soothe him and his companions with words, essential for him to regain calm and for his companions to find rest. However, the intensity of the pain was so overwhelming that, despite being obedient, he couldn't cease his lamenting. He expressed that he doubted if even in hell itself one could endure more excruciating agony. Recognising the severity of the situation, the superior decided to place him under the protection of Mary Help of Christians, whose honour is upheld by a majestic church in our city. We all knelt down and said a short prayer. And? Mary's help was not long in coming. As the priest bestowed the blessing on the desolate young man, he was instantly calm, and fell into a deep and placid sleep. At that instant a terrible suspicion flashed into our minds; that the poor young man had succumbed to illness but no, he had already fallen deeply asleep, and Mary had heard the prayer of her devotee, and God the blessing of his minister.

Several months passed, and the young man subject to the toothache was no longer troubled by it.

(By the same).

V. Some of Mary Help of Christians' wonders.

I believe that your noble periodical will take a good look at some of the events that have taken place among us, which I set out in honour of Mary Help of Christians. I will only select a few that I witnessed in this city, omitting many others that are recounted every day.

The first concerns a lady from Milan who for five months had been consumed by pneumonia combined with the fact that her whole life was ebbing away.

Passing through these parts, Fr B. advised her to have recourse to Mary Help of Christians by means of a novena of

prayer in her honour, with the promise of some donation to continue the work on the church which was being built in Turin under the title of Mary Help of Christians. This donation was only to be made once the grace had been obtained.

How marvellous! On that very day, the sick woman was able to resume her ordinary and serious occupations, eating all kinds of food, going for walks, entering and leaving the house freely as if she had never been ill. When the novena was over, she was in a flourishing state of health, such as she never remembered having enjoyed before.

Another Lady had been suffering from palpitations for three years, with many of the problems that go hand in hand with this illness. A fever and a kind of dropsy had rendered her immobile in bed. Her illness had reached such a point that when the aforementioned priest gave her his blessing, her husband had to hold her hand so that she could make the sign of the holy cross. A novena in honour of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Help of Christians was also recommended, with the promise of some donation for the aforementioned sacred edifice, but only after the grace had been given. On the very day on which the novena ended, the sick woman was free of all illness, and she herself was able to compile the narrative of her illness, in which I read the following:

“Mary Help of Christians has cured me of an illness, for which all doctors’ advice and ministrations has been useless. Today, the last day of the novena, I am free from all illness, and I can join my family at table, something I had not been able to do for three years. As long as I live, I shall not cease to glorify the power and goodness of the august Queen of Heaven, and I shall endeavour to promote devotion to her, especially in the church that is being built in Turin.”

Let me add yet another fact, which is even more marvellous than the preceding ones.

A young man in the prime of life was in the midst of one of the most luminous careers in the sciences when he

was struck down by a cruel illness in one of his hands. In spite of every treatment, every solicitude of the most accredited doctors, no improvement could be achieved, nor could the progress of the disease be halted. All the conclusions of the experts in this skill concurred that amputation was necessary to prevent the total ruin of the body. Frightened by this judgement, he decided to have recourse to Mary Help of Christians, applying the same spiritual remedies that others had practised so fruitfully. The acuteness of the pains ceased instantly, wounds were mitigated, and in a short time the healing appeared complete. Whoever wished to satisfy his curiosity could admire that hand with the indentations and holes of the healed sores, which recall the severity of his illness and the marvellous healing of it. He wanted to go to Turin to offer his donation in person, to further demonstrate his gratitude to the august Queen of Heaven.

I have many other stories of this kind which I will tell you in other letters, if you judge this to be appropriate for your periodical. I beg you to omit the names of the persons to whom the facts refer, so as not to expose them to importunate questions and observations. However, may these facts serve to revive trust in the protection of Mary Help of Christians more and more among Christians, to increase her devotees on earth, and to have one day a more glorious crown of her devotees in heaven.

(From the *Vera Buona Novella*, Florence).

With Ecclesiastical approval.

End

Wonders of the Mother of God invoked under the title of Mary Help of Christians (12/13)

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

A memento of the ceremony for the laying of the cornerstone of the church consecrated to Mary Help of Christians on 27 April 1865.

PHILIP, BENEDICT, CRISPIN AND THEODORE.

Phil. What a fabulous celebration it is today

Cris. Yes, it is fabulous; I've been in this Oratory for many years, but I have never seen a celebration like it before, and I don't think we will ever have another one like it.

Ben. Let me introduce myself to you, my friends. I'm gob-smacked: I just can't get over it.

Phil. Get over what?

Ben. I can't get over what I've seen.

Theo. Who are you? Where do you come from? What have you seen?

Ben. I'm a kid from way outa town. I left my place to join the boys at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. When I rocked up to Turin, I asked to be taken here but the moment I walked in, I saw these flash carriages, horses, footmen, and coachies, all done up to the nines. "Is it possible", I asked myself, "that this is the house where I, a poor orphan, am coming to live?" Then I step into the Oratory grounds, and I see a mob of young kids yelling, buzzing with joy, and almost going bonkers: "Viva, glory, triumph" getting cheers and good vibes from everyone, all the time. Then I raise my gaze towards the bell tower and see a small bell moving in all directions producing a harmonious ringing with all its effort. In the

courtyard, it's a symphony of sound: tunes coming from here, tunes coming from there. Some kids tearing around, some leaping about, some belting out songs, and others getting stuck into games. So I say to myself, "what the hell's goin on?"

Phil. Here's why in just a few words. Today the cornerstone of our new church was blessed. His Royal Highness Prince Amedeo has been good enough to lay down the first brick. His Lordship the Bishop of Susa shows up to do the religious part. And there's a crowd of well-to-do people and our top-notch benefactors who've come to show respect to the King's son and make this solemn day even more grand.

Ben. Now it all makes sense why everyone's in such high spirits, and you lot have every reason to throw a top-notch party. But, mate, if you'll permit me to point out something, I reckon you've slipped up on the main bit. On a day as big as this, to welcome so many bigwigs, including the royal Heir, you'd reckon there'd be some fair dinkum grand preparations sorted. You should've thrown up triumphal arches, thrown flowers all over the streets, decked out every nook with roses, laid out classy frescoes on every wall, and a thousand other fancy touches.

Theo. You are right, dear Ben, you are right. This is what we all wanted to do. But think about it. As the battlers we are, us young guys weren't held back by a lack of keenness, but by our lack of muscle.

Phil. To give our beloved Prince a decent welcome, we all got together a few days back to yarn about what needed sorting for this big day. One of us piped up, saying, "If I had a kingdom to spare, I'd throw it his way, 'cause he's really worthy of it." "Spot on!" we all chimed in, "But strewth, we're as broke as a bloke without a bob." "That's right" our mates jumped in, "If we haven't got no kingdom to hand over, we can at least crown him King of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales." "Lucky us!" the whole mob yelled, "Then we'd be laughing! No more misery, just one big endless festa!" Then another kid, seeing that the others' ideas were a bit far-fetched, reckoned we

could make him the king of our hearts, the boss of our affections. And since a few of our mates are already taking orders from him in the military, we could offer up our loyalty, our full attention when it's our turn to serve in the regiment he's running.

Ben. What did your mates say to that?

Phil. Everyone happily agreed with the plan. When it came to sorting out how to welcome him, we all agreed without a second thought: These gents are used to the high life, seeing grandeur and magnificence wherever they go, and they'll understand our humble setup and be gentle with us. We've got every reason to reckon they'll come through with flying colours, given the generosity and kindness we know they're made of.

Ben. Great. You've put it well.

Theo. Yep. I reckon you've got it right. But it wouldn't go astray, would it, to give 'em a word of thanks, a few kind words to show our appreciation?

Ben. OK mates, but first I've got a few questions about the Oratories and what goes on in 'em that I need to get sorted.

Phil. But that would mean that our kind benefactors will have to be pretty patient.

Ben. True, but I reckon they'd love to hear it. Since they've been and still are our main benefactors, they'll be chuffed to bits to hear from those who've been on the receiving end of their generosity.

Phil. I'm a bit limited in what I can do, you see, 'cause I've only been around for about a year, give or take. Maybe Crispin, one of the older ones, will be able to satisfy us; is that right, Cris?

Cris. If you reckon I'm up to the task, I'll give it my best shot to meet your expectations. First off, I'll say that back in 1841, these Oratories were just a bunch of youngsters, mostly from out of town, who'd turn up on Sundays to certain spots to get schooled in the Catechism. Then, when they scored better lodgings, these Oratories in 1844 turned into spots where kids could hang out and enjoy themselves in proper ways

after doing their religious part. So, our idea of a good time was playing, having a laugh, jumping about, running amok, singing our hearts out, and belting out tunes on the trumpet and drums. Soon afterwards (1846) Sunday school was added, then (1847) evening classes followed. The first Oratory is the one where we are now, called St Francis de Sales. After this another was opened at Porta Nuova, then another one later in Vanchiglia, and a few years ago the St Joseph's Oratory in St Salvano.

Ben. You're telling me about the history of the festive Oratories, and that's great, I like it, but I would like to know something about this one. So what's the deal for the kids taken in here? What are they up to?

Cris. I can fill you in on that. Among the kids at the Oratories, and even some who roll in from other places outside of town, you've got some who, either 'cause they're completely on their own or 'cause they're flat broke and haven't got much to their name, would be staring down the barrel of a bleak future if someone with a bit of heart didn't take 'em under their wing, look out for 'em like a dad, and sort 'em out with the basics for life.

Ben. From what you're telling me, it seems that this place is for poor kids, but I can see you are all spruced up like little gents. What gives?

Cris. Check it out, Ben. Knowing we've got this massive show on today, everyone's gone all out, showing up in their fanciest stuff, making sure we're all looking spick and span, if not downright flashy.

Ben. Are there many of you in this house?

Cris. There's about eight hundred of us.

Ben. Eight hundred! Eight hundred, you said! And how do you reckon you're gonna fill the bellies of all these ravenous loaf demolishers?

Cris. Not our problem, that's for the baker to work out.

Ben. But who coughs up the cash?

Cris. Just cast your eyes around at all these good people who are lending us their ears, and you'll figure out who's

stepping up to the plate and how – sorting us out with grub, gear, and anything else we need to make this happen.

Ben. But I can't get over that number – eight hundred! What can all these kids possibly be doing, both day and night!

Cris. It's a breeze to keep them busy at night. They're all asleep in their own bunk, keeping to the rules, everything tidy, and as quiet as a mouse till the morning.

Ben. You gotta be joking.

Cris. I thought you were the one joking. If you're keen to know what we get up to each day, I'll give it to you in a nutshell. There's two groups. One is the working boys, the other is the students. The working boys (they call them artisans) here are flat out with lots of trades – tailoring, cobbling, smithing, woodworking, bookbinding, composing, typesetting, doing music, and painting. For example, these lithographs, these paintings are their work. This book was printed here, and was bound in our workshop.

So, basically, they're all students since they're all attending evening classes, but the ones who really shine and behave well usually get the nod from our superiors to focus solely on their studies. That's why it's pretty sweet having all kinds around here from among us. Some are docs, others are notaries, lawyers, teachers, professors, and even a few priests in the mix.

Ben. Is this music all from the kids from this house?

Cris. Yeah, those lads who just belted out a tune or played a riff are from right here in the house. In fact, most of the music you hear is cooked up right here in the Oratory. See, every day at a set time, there's a class just for music, so everyone, on top of their regular trade or book learnin', can level up their musical skills.

That's why we're chuffed to have a bunch of our mates holding down top-notch civil and military roles, thanks to their smarts. Plus, loads of 'em are dabbling in music in different regiments, the National Guard, and even in His Royal Highness's Regiment, Prince Amedeo's.

Ben. Stoked to hear that! So, the smart ones can really flex

their brains and nurture their talents, instead of being held back by poverty or having to do stuff that's not their cup of tea. But tell me one more thing: when I came in I saw a beautiful church already built and decked out, and you told me you need another one: Why do you need this?

Cris. The reason is very simple. The church we have so far used was meant especially for the kids from outside who come on Sundays. But with the number of young kids we're taking in skyrocketing, our church is chockers, and there's barely any room for outsiders. We reckon that not even a third of the ones who would like to come can find a place. Imagine! We've had to send lots of 'em away, leaving 'em to stir up trouble in the squares, all because there's no more space left in the church!

I reckon it's also worth mentioning that from the parish church of Borgo Dora to St Donato, there's a whole bunch of houses and thousands of people living there, but there's not a church or chapel in sight – not a small one, nor a big one. And there's heaps of kids and grown-ups who'd really benefit from having one around. So there was a real need for a big enough church that could fit all the kids and still have room for the adults. That urgent, genuine need is what got us cracking on building the church that's the centerpiece of all our celebrations.

Ben. The stuff you've filled me in on paints a clear picture of what the Oratories are all about and why we're building this church, and I reckon it'll sit well with these gents, knowing where their kindness is headed. I don't really have the gift of the gab or able to spin poetry to come up with a good speech or deep bit of poetry about what you have told me, but hey, even a few heartfelt words of thanks can go a long way in showing these people how much we appreciate their help.

Theo. I'd love to do it, but I have just learned about lines and rhymes in poems; it's all a bit tricky. So on behalf of my mates and beloved superiors, I'll just say this to H.R.H. Prince Amedeo and all the others: We reckon this celebration was great. We're even planning on engraving it in gold

letters, saying:

May this day live on forever!

Sooner shall the sun reverse
Journey eastward in its course;
Every river backward flow

To its source begin to go,

Than this day be lost or fade
From our hearts, where it shall stay,
Among the fairest ever made.

And to you, Your Royal Highness, I want to say that we've got a real soft spot for you. Your visit means the world to us, and whenever we're lucky enough to catch sight of you in the city or anywhere else, or even just hear people talking about you, it'll always be a source of pride, honour, and genuine joy for us. But before we part ways, I've got a little request from my esteemed superiors and my mates. We'd be over the moon if you'd be up for swinging by again in the future, so we can remember what a great time we've had.

And you, Your Lordship the Bishop, if you could keep showing us that same fatherly kindness you've been showing so far, we'd be forever grateful. And you, Mr Mayor, who've played a big role in looking out for us, please keep watching our backs and see if you can arrange to have Via Cottolengo rerouted in front of the new church. We'll make sure to double down on our heartfelt thanks to you.

And to you, our Parish Priest, please keep seeing us not just as parishioners, but as your own dear kids, always finding in you a caring and gentle father. We urge all of you to keep up the stellar work as renowned benefactors, just as you've been in the past, especially when it comes to finishing up that church we're celebrating today.

The work's already underway, rising up from the ground, and that in itself calls out to the generous souls among us to lend a hand and see it through to the finish. Lastly, rest assured that the memory of this splendid day will be forever

cherished in our hearts. We all join together in praying to the Queen of Heaven, to whom the new church is dedicated, asking her to bless you with a long life and many joyous days ahead, bestowed by the Source of all blessings.

[*\(continued\)*](#)

Wonders of the Mother of God invoked under the title of Mary Help of Christians (11/13)

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

Appendix

I. Ancient custom of consecrating churches

Once a church has been built, it is not possible to sing the divine offices, celebrate the holy sacrifice and other ecclesiastical functions in it unless it is first blessed or consecrated. The bishop, with a multiplicity of signs of the cross and the sprinkling of holy water, intends to purge and sanctify the place through exorcisms against evil spirits. This blessing can be performed by the bishop or a simple priest, but with different rites. Where the anointing of the sacred chrism and holy oils is involved, the blessing is the responsibility of the bishop, and it is called solemn, royal and consecutive because it is the completion of all the others, and even more so because blessed and consecrated things cannot be converted into profane use; hence it is

strictly called consecration. If then in such ceremonies only certain prayers are performed with similar rites and ceremonies, the function can be performed by a priest, and it is called a blessing.

The blessing can be performed by any priest, with the permission of the Ordinary, but the consecration belongs to the Pope, and to the bishop alone. The rite of consecrating churches is very ancient and filled with serious mysteries, and Christ as a child sanctified its observance while his cave and crib were changed into a church in the offering made by the Magi. The cave therefore became a church, and the crib an altar. St Cyril tells us that the upper room where they received the Holy Spirit was consecrated by the apostles into a church, a hall that also represented the universal Church. Indeed, according to Nicephorus Calistus, hist. lib. 2, ch. 33, such was the apostles' solicitude that in every place where they preached the gospel they consecrated some church or oratory. The Pontiff St Clement I, Pope in the year 93, successor no less than disciple of St Peter, among his other orders decreed that all places of prayer should be consecrated to God. Certainly in St Paul's time the churches were consecrated, as some of the scholars say, writing to the Corinthians in c. III, *aut Ecclesiam Dei contemnitis?* St. Urban I, elected in the year 226, consecrated the house of St. Cecilia into a church, as Burius *in vita eius* wrote. St. Marcellus I, Pope in the year 304, consecrated the church of St. Lucina, as Pope St. Damasus relates. It is also true that the solemnity with which the consecration is performed today, increased in time, after Constantine, in restoring peace to the Church, built sumptuous basilicas. Even the temples of the Gentiles, formerly the habitation of false gods and nest of lies, were converted into churches with the approval of the pious emperor, and were consecrated with the sanctity of the venerable relics of the martyrs. Thereupon, according to the prescriptions of his predecessors, Pope St Silvester I established the solemn rite which was expanded and confirmed by other popes, especially by St Felix III. St Innocent I

established that churches should not be consecrated more than once. The Pontiff St. John I on his way to Constantinople to deal with the Arian question consecrated the churches of the heretics as Catholic churches, as we read in Bernini^[i].

II. Explanation of the main ceremonies used in the consecration of churches.

It would take too long to describe the mystical explanations that the holy Fathers and Doctors give of the rites and ceremonies of church consecration. Cecconi speaks of them in chapters X and XI, and Father Galluzzi in chapter IV, from which we can summarise the following.

The holy Doctors therefore did not hesitate to assert that the consecration of the church is one of the greatest of ecclesiastical sacred functions, as can be deduced from the sermons of the holy Fathers, and from the liturgical treatises of the most famous authors, demonstrating the excellence and nobility that encompasses such a beautiful function, all directed towards making the house of God respected and venerated. The vigils, fasts and prayers are preached in order to prepare for exorcisms against the devil. The relics represent our saints. And so that we always have them in mind and in our hearts, they are placed in a receptacle with three grains of incense. The steps by which the bishop ascends to the anointing of the twelve crosses reminds us that our final and primary goal is Paradise. The sins of the cross and candles signify the twelve Apostles, the twelve Patriarchs, and the twelve Prophets who are the guide and pillars of the Church.

Furthermore, the consecration involves the anointing of the twelve crosses in as many places distributed on the walls, and the church and its walls are said to be consecrated, as St. Augustine notes, lib. Augustine, lib. 4, *Contra Crescent*. The church is closed to represent the heavenly Sion, where one does not enter unless purged of all imperfection, and the help of the saints and the light of the

Holy Spirit is invoked with various prayers. The bishop goes around the church three times, in unity with the clergy, alluding to the turns that the priests made with the ark around the walls of Jericho, not so that the walls of the church might fall, but so that the pride of the devil and his power might be destroyed through the invocation of God, and the repetition of the sacred prayers which are far more effective than the trumpets of the ancient priests or Levites. The three blows that the bishop gives with the tip of his crozier at the threshold on the door show us the power of the Redeemer over his Church, as well as the priestly dignity that the bishop exercises. The Greek and Latin alphabet depicts the ancient union of the two peoples produced by the cross of the Redeemer; and the writing that the bishop does with the tip of the crozier signifies the apostolic doctrine and ministry. The form then of this writing signifies the cross, which must be the ordinary and principal object of all learning of faithful Christians. It signifies also the belief and faith of Christ passed from the Jews to the Gentiles, and transmitted to us from them. All blessings are filled with grave significance, as are all things that are employed in this august service. The sacred anointing with which the altar and the walls of the church are imbued signifies the grace of the Holy Spirit, which cannot enrich the mystical temple of our soul unless it is first cleansed of its stains. The service ends with the blessing in the style of the holy Church, which always begins its actions with the blessing of God and ends them with it, because everything begins with God and ends in God. It is accomplished through the sacrifice not only to fulfil the pontifical decree of St Hyginus, but because there is no consecration accomplished where the victim is not also entirely consumed in the Mass.

From the grandeur of the sacred rite, from the eloquence of its mystical signification, we can easily see how much importance the holy Church our mother attaches to it, and therefore how much importance we must attach to it. But what must increase our veneration for the house of the Lord is to

see how much this rite is founded on and informed by the true spirit of the Lord revealed in the Old Testament. The spirit that guides the Church today to surround the churches of Catholic worship with such veneration is the same spirit that inspired Jacob to sanctify with oil the place where he had the vision of the ladder; it is the same spirit that inspired Moses and David, Solomon and Judas Maccabaeus to honour with special rites the places destined for the divine mysteries. Oh how much this union of spirit of one and the other Testament, of one and the other Church teaches us and comforts us! It shows us how much God likes to be worshipped and invoked in his churches, so how willingly he answers the prayers we address to him in them. How much respect for a place, the profanation of which armed the hand of God with a scourge and changed him from a meek lamb into a severe punisher!

Let us therefore come to the holy church but frequently, for the need we have of God is a daily one. Let us go there, but with confidence and with religious fear. With confidence since we find there a Father ready to hear us, to multiply the bread of his graces to us as on the mountain, to embrace us like the prodigal son, to console us like the Canaanite woman, in temporal needs as at the wedding in Cana, in spiritual needs as on Calvary; with fear, for the Father does not cease to be our judge, and if he has ears to hear our prayers, he also has eyes to see our offences, and if he is silent now as a patient lamb in his tabernacle, he will speak with a terrible voice on the great day of judgement. If we offend him outside the church, we shall still have the church to escape to for forgiveness; but if we offend him within the church, where shall we go to be forgiven?

In the church divine justice is appeased, divine mercy is received, *suscepimus divinam misericordiam tuam in medio templi tui*. In the church Mary and Joseph found Jesus when they had lost him, in the church we shall find him if we seek him with that spirit of holy trust and holy fear with which Mary and Joseph sought him.

Copy of the inscription sealed in the corner stone
of the church dedicated to Mary Help of Christians in
Valdocco.

D. O. M.

UT VOLUNTATIS ET PIETATIS NOSTRAE
SOLEMNE TESTIMONIUM POSTERIS EXTARET
IN MARIAM AGUSTAM GENITRICEM
CHRISTIANI NOMINIS POTENTEM
TEMPLUM HOC AB INCHOATO EXTRUERE
DIVINA PROVIDENTIA UNICE FRETIS
IN ANIMO FUIT
QUINTA TANDEM CAL. MAI. AN. MDCCCLXV
DUM NOMEN CHRISTIANUM REGERET
SAPIENTIA AC FORTITUDINE
PIUS PAPA IX PONTIFEX MAXIMUS
ANGULAREM AEDIS LAPIDEM
IOAN. ANT. ODO EPISCOPUS SEGUSINORUM
DEUM PRECATUS AQUA LUSTRALI
RITE EXPIAVIT
ET AMADEUS ALLOBROGICUS V. EMM. II FILIUS
EAM PRIMUM IN LOCO SUO CONDIDIT
MAGNO APPARATU AC FREQUENTI CIVIUM CONCURSU
HELLO O VIRGO PARENS
VOLENS PROPITIA TUOS CLIENTES
MAIESTATI TUAE DEVOTOS
E SUPERIS PRAESENTI SOSPITES AUXILIO.

I. B. Francesia scripsit.

Translation.

As a solemn testimony for posterity of our benevolence and
religion regarding the august Mother of God, Mary Help of
Christians, we resolved to build this church from its
foundations on 27April of the year MDCCCLXV, when the Catholic
Church was governed with wisdom and fortitude by the Supreme

Pontiff Pius IX . The cornerstone of the church was blessed according to the religious rites by Giovanni Antonio Odone bishop of Susa, and Amedeo of Savoy son of Vittorio E. II put it in place for the first time amidst great pomp and large crowds of people. Hail, O Virgin Mother, graciously succour those devoted to your majesty and defend them from heaven with efficacious help.

Hymn read during the solemn blessing of the cornerstone.

When the worshipper of idols
Moved to wage war on Jesus,
Oh how many fearless thousands
Stained the earth with blood!
From fierce battles unscathed,
the Church of God came out
spreading still its life,
from one sea to the other.

And it boasts its own martyrs
in this humble valley,
Ottavio died here,
and Solutor fell.
Beautiful immortal victory!
Rises on the bloody ground
Of the Martyrs
perhaps the divine altar.

And here the afflicted youth
opens his sighs,
Finding solace for his soul
in his martyrs;
Here the scorned widow
with a devout and holy heart
Places her humble tears
in the bosom of the King of Kings,

And to you who often conquer

More than a thousand swords,
To You who boast glories
In all lands,
To You powerful and humble
OF whom Your name speaks,
MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS,
we build a church to You.

So, O merciful Virgin,
So great to your devotees,
Above them in abundance
Ah! pour out your favours.
Already with tender pupil
Keep the youth in mind,
Who aspires to your laurels,
Oh Mother of the Redeemer!

He, of mind and nature,
of noble feeling,
gives himself to You, O Virgin,
in flourishing of his youth;
he, with constant devotion
hears sacred songs to You,
and now desires the
usual sound of arms.

The glory of Amedeo,
The great virtues of Umberto
Nourish in the heart, and remember
Their heavenly garland;
And from the white clouds,
From the heavenly hosts
Of the blessed Mother
He listens to the pious speech.

Dear and beloved Prince,
A host of holy heroes,
What beneficent thought

Brings you here among us?
Use to the aurate royalty,
Of the world's lofty splendour
Of miserable squalor
Did you deign to visit?

Beautiful hope to the people,
In whose midst thou comest,
May your days live
Calm, sweet and serene:
Never on thy young head
On thy secure soul
Let not misfortune shriek,
Let no bitter day dawn.

Wise and zealous prelate,
And noble lords,
How much does the Eternal One like
Your holy ardours?
Blessed life and placid
He lives who for the decorum
Of the Temple his treasure
Or the work he lavished.

O sweet and pious spectacle!
O memorable day!
Most beautiful and noble day!
What was ever seen and when?
Well you speak to my soul:
Of this even more beautiful
The day will surely be
That the Temple opens to heaven.

In the difficult work
Gilded benefits,
And soon come to an end,
With joy in God you rest;
And then melting fervently

On my zither a song:
Praise we will say to the Holy One
To the Fortress of Israel.

[*\(continued\)*](#)

^[i] Compendium of Heresies p. 170. On temples of Gentiles converted into churches, see Butler Lives, November, p. 10.

One million children pray the Rosary

‘If one million children pray the Rosary, the world will change’ (St Pio of Pietrelcina – Padre Pio)

Every year in October, a wave of prayer spreads across the world, uniting children of different nationalities, cultures and backgrounds in one powerful gesture of faith. This extraordinary initiative, entitled **‘One million children pray the Rosary’**, has become an annual appointment awaited by many, embodying the hope of a better future through the prayer and devotion of the youngest.

Origins and significance of the initiative

The idea for this initiative originated **in 2005 in Caracas**, capital of Venezuela, when a group of children gathered to pray the Rosary in front of an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Many of the women present there strongly felt the presence of the Virgin Mary, and remembered the prophecy of **Saint Pio of Pietrelcina(Padre Pio)**: *‘When a million children*

pray the Rosary, the world will change'. That seemingly simple phrase expressed the profound conviction that the prayer of the little ones has a special ability to touch God's heart and positively influence the world.

Inspired by this experience and by Padre Pio's words, these women decided to turn that image into reality. They began by organising local prayer events, inviting children to pray the Rosary. The initiative grew rapidly, crossing the borders of Venezuela and spreading to other Latin American countries.

In 2008, the initiative attracted the attention of the *Pontifical Foundation 'Aid to the Church in Need' (ACS)*, an international Catholic organisation that supports the Church in need around the world. Recognising the potential of this prayer campaign, the ACS decided to adopt it and promote it globally, with the aim of involving one million children in the recitation of the Rosary, one of the oldest and best-loved prayers in the Catholic Christian tradition.

Under the leadership of the ACS, 'One million children pray the Rosary' has grown into a worldwide event. Every year, on 18 October, children from all continents join in prayer, praying the Rosary for peace and unity in the world. The date of **18 October** is no coincidence: it is the day on which the Catholic Church celebrates the feast of St Luke the Evangelist, known for his special attention to the Virgin Mary in his writings.

The Rosary: Marian prayer and symbol of peace

The Rosary is a very ancient prayer, centred on **reflection on the mysteries of the life of Jesus and Mary**, his mother. It consists of repetitions of prayers such as the **Hail Mary**, the **Our Father** and the **Glory Be**, and allows the faithful to meditate on the central moments of Christ's journey on earth. This practice is not only a form of individual devotion, but has a strong community and intercessory dimension, so much so

that in many Marian apparitions, such as those at **Fatima** and **Lourdes**, Our Lady expressly asked children to recite the Rosary as a means of obtaining peace in the world and the conversion of sinners.

The Rosary, being repetitive, allows even young children, often unable to follow complex prayers or lengthy readings, to actively participate and understand the meaning of prayer. Through the simple act of repeating the words of the Hail Mary, children are spiritually united with the global community of the faithful, interceding for peace and justice in the world.

The spiritual and educational dimension

The initiative takes place every year on 18 October, although many groups, parishes and schools choose to extend it throughout the month, traditionally dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary.

On the day of the event, children gather in various places: schools, churches, private homes or public spaces. Often, children are instructed on how to pray the Rosary and the spiritual meanings of the various mysteries, so that they can participate with awareness and faith. Under the guidance of adults – parents, teachers or religious leaders – children pray the Rosary together. Many communities organise special events around this prayer, such as songs, Bible readings or short reflections suitable for young people.

Some parishes organise actual celebrations, during which children bring handmade Rosary beads or made of creative materials, to express their participation in an active and engaging way. The initiative ends with the celebration of a special Holy Mass dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary and world peace.

‘A Million Children Pray the Rosary’ is not only a time of prayer, but also an educational opportunity. Many schools and

pastoral groups use this event to teach children the values of **peace, solidarity** and **social justice**. Through the Rosary, children learn the importance of entrusting their worries and the suffering of the world to God, and understand that peace begins in their hearts and families.

Moreover, the initiative seeks to make children understand the universality of the Church and the Christian faith. Knowing that, at the same time, thousands of other children in every part of the world are praying the same prayer creates a sense of global community and fraternity that transcends language, cultural and geographic barriers.

The value of children's prayer

Children's prayer is often seen as particularly powerful in the Christian tradition because of their **innocence** and **purity of heart**. In the Bible, Jesus himself invites his disciples to look to children as an example of faith: 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven' (Mt 18:3).

Children, with their open and sincere hearts, are able to pray with total trust in God, without doubt or reservation. This trust and simplicity make their prayer particularly effective in God's eyes. Moreover, children's prayer can also have a strong impact on adults, calling them to a purer and deeper faith.

The global impact

Over the years, 'One Million Children Pray the Rosary' has seen growing participation, involving millions of children in over 140 countries. In 2023, more than one million children joined in prayer, praying especially for peace in the Holy Land and for other urgent intentions.

The event also attracted media attention in various countries, helping to spread a message of hope and unity in a world often

dominated by negative news. Social media became an important tool to promote the initiative and share experiences. Hashtags such as *#MillionChildrenPraying* and *#ChildrenPrayingTheRosary* have gone viral in many countries, creating a sense of global community among participants.

The Million Children Praying the Rosary initiative has received support from many leaders of the Catholic Church, including Popes. Pope Francis, in particular, has repeatedly expressed his appreciation for this campaign, emphasising the importance of children's prayer for world peace.

Beyond the religious sphere, the initiative has attracted the attention of educators and psychologists, who have emphasised the benefits of involving children in activities that promote reflection, compassion and a sense of global connectedness.

Campaign Goals

The One Million Children Pray the Rosary campaign has several key objectives:

1. **Spiritual Education:** To teach children the importance of prayer and the Rosary as an integral part of their spiritual life, to grow in faith.
2. **Honouring the Virgin Mary:** The initiative strengthens Marian devotion, a central element of the Catholic faith.
3. **Learning to pray together:** The event creates a sense of unity and solidarity among participants, overcoming geographical and cultural barriers.
4. **Promoting world peace:** Children's prayer is seen as a powerful tool to invoke peace in a world often plagued by conflict and division.
5. **Raising awareness of global challenges:** Through prayer, children are encouraged to reflect on global issues and their role in creating a better future.

How to participate

Participating in the initiative is very simple. Simply:

1. **Get informed:** Visit the [official ACS website](#) to download free materials, such as posters, illustrated stories and prayer guides.

2. **Organise a time for prayer:** Choose a time to pray the Rosary, on the 18th of October (or another day closer if the 18th is not possible). It can be done in a group or individually.

3. **Involve the children:** from your family, school or parish in a moment of common prayer. Explain to the children the importance of prayer and the meaning of the Rosary. Encourage them to actively participate.

4. Register **online:** Register your participation on the ACS website to make your voice heard and help reach the goal of one million children.

5. **Share the experience:** Share photos, videos and testimonials on social media using the hashtag *#MillionChildrenPraying*. This helps create a global community of prayer

‘A Million Children Pray the Rosary’ is an extraordinary initiative that demonstrates the power of prayer and the importance of faith. Through praying the Rosary, children around the world can unite in a global community of faith, bringing hope and peace. Let us join them in this great chain of prayer and help build a more beautiful world.