 Reading time: 5 min.

We have a dream. And it is our greatest wealth

Two hundred years ago, a nine-year-old boy, poor and with no future other than to be a farmer, had a dream. He told it in the morning to his mother, grandmother and siblings, who laughed it off. The grandmother concluded, “Don’t pay attention to dreams.” Many years later, that boy, John Bosco, wrote, “I was of my grandmother’s opinion, yet it was never possible to get that dream out of my mind.”
Because it was not a dream like so many others and it did not die with the coming of dawn.
It came back again and again. With an overwhelming charge of energy. It was a source of joyful security and inexhaustible strength for John Bosco. The source of his life.
At the diocesan process for Don Bosco’s cause of Beatification, Fr. Rua, his first successor, testified, “I was told by Lucia Turco, a member of a family where D. Bosco often went to stay with her brothers, that one morning they saw him arrive more joyful than usual. Asked what was the cause, he replied that he had had a dream during the night, which had cheered him up. Asked to recount it, he said that he had seen a Lady coming towards him, who had a very large flock behind her, and who approached him, called him by name and said ‘Here you are John: all this flock I entrust to your care.’ I then heard from others that he asked, ‘How will I take care of so many sheep? And so many lambs? Where will I find pastures to keep them?’ The Lady answered him, ‘Fear not, I will assist you’, and then she disappeared.
From that moment on, his desires to study to become a priest became more ardent; but serious difficulties arose because of his family’s straits, and also because of opposition from his half-brother Anthony, who would have liked him to do farm work like him…”
Indeed, everything seemed impossible, but Jesus’ command had been “pressing” and Our Lady’s assistance had been sweetly certain.
Fr Lemoyne, Don Bosco’s first historian, in fact summarised the dream as follows, “It seemed to him that he saw the Divine Saviour dressed in white, radiant with the most splendid light, in the act of leading an innumerable crowd of young men. Turning to him, he had said, ‘Come here: put yourself at the head of these young men and lead them yourself.’ ‘But I am not capable’, John replied. The Divine Saviour insisted until John placed himself at the head of that multitude of boys and began to lead them just as he had been commanded.”

In the seminary, Don Bosco wrote a page of admirable humility as a motivation for his vocation, “The Morialdo dream always made an impression on me; indeed it had been renewed at other times in a much clearer way, so that if I wanted to believe it I had to choose the clerical state, to which he felt I was inclined: but I did not want to believe in dreams, and my way of life, and the absolute lack of the virtues necessary for this state made that decision doubtful and very difficult.”
We can be sure: he had recognised the Lord and his Mother. Despite his modesty, he did not doubt at all that he had been visited by Heaven. Nor did he doubt that those visits were intended to reveal to him his future and that of his work. He said it himself, “The Salesian Congregation has not taken a step without being advised to do so by a supernatural fact. It has not arrived at the point of development it is at without a special command from the Lord. All our past history, we could have written in advance in its humblest details…”
That is why the Salesian Constitutions begin with an “act of faith”: “With a feeling of humble gratitude we believe that the Society of St Francis de Sales came into being not as a merely human venture but by the initiative of God”.

Don Bosco’s Testament
The Pope himself asked Don Bosco to write the dream down for his sons. He began: “Now, what purpose can this chronicle serve? It will be a record to help people overcome problems that may come in the future by learning from the past. It will serve to make known how God himself has always been our guide. It will give my sons some entertainment to be able to read: about their father’s adventures. Doubtless they will be read much more avidly when I have been called by God to render my account, when I am no longer amongst them.”
Don Bosco clearly reveals his intention to involve the reader in the adventure narrated, to the point of making him participate in it as a story that concerns him and that he, drawn into the tale, is called upon to continue. The narration of the dream clearly becomes Don Bosco’s “testament”.
There is the mission: the transformation of the world starting with the smallest, the youngest, the most abandoned. There is the method: goodness, respect, patience. There is the security of the strong protection of the Holy Trinity and the tender and maternal protection of Mary.
In the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Don Bosco recounts that twenty years after the first dream, in 1824, he had “another dream, which seems to be an appendix to the one I had at Becchi when I was nine years old. I think it advisable to relate it literally. I dreamt that I was standing in the middle of a multitude of wolves, goats and kids, lambs, ewes, rams, dogs, even birds. All together they made a din, a racket, or

better, a bedlam to frighten the stoutest heart. I wanted to run away, when a lady very handsomely dressed as a shepherdess signaled me to follow her and accompany that strange flock while she went ahead. … After we had walked a long way, I found myself in a field where all the animals grazed and gamboled together and none made attacks on the others.

Worn out, I wanted to sit down beside a nearby road, but the shepherdess invited me to continue the trip. After another short journey, I found myself in a large courtyard with porticoes all round. At one end was a church. I then saw that four-fifths of the animals had been changed into lambs and their number greatly increased. Just then, several shepherds came along to take care of the flock; but they stayed only a very short time and promptly went away. Then something wonderful happened. Many of the lambs were transformed into shepherds, who as they grew took care of the others. I wanted to be off because it seemed to me time to celebrate Mass; but the shepherdess invited me to look to the south. I looked and saw a field sown with maize, potatoes, cabbages, beetroot, lettuce, and many other vegetables. “Look again,” she said to me. I looked again and saw a wondrously big church. An orchestra and music, both instrumental and vocal, were inviting me to sing Mass. Inside the church hung a white banner on which was written in huge letters, *Hic domus mea, inde gloria mea*.

That is why, when we enter the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, we enter Don Bosco’s dream.

Which asks to become “our” dream.