 Reading time: 9 min.

(continuation from previous article)

5) Being authentic
In the digital age, authentic people are very important. They do not show off, they do not try to fit a mould, they are comfortable with who they are and are not afraid to show it. They express their thoughts and feelings with total honesty, without worrying about what others might think, creating an environment of honesty and acceptance.
In his *Memoirs,* this rather satisfying statement is recorded: “all of them [my companions] – including those older and bigger than I – respected my mettle and my strength.”
“It is useless”, Fr Cafasso was to say in his turn, “he wants to do it his own way; yet he must be allowed to do it; even when a project would be inadvisable, Don Bosco succeeds”; resentful at not having won him over to her cause, the Marchioness Barolo accused him of being “stubborn, obstinate, proud.”
They are good bricks. He knows how to use them well to build a masterpiece.

Simplicity
Many people need to pretend to be different, to appear stronger than they are. To want to be what they are not.
Flowers simply bloom. Silent lightness is what they are. The simple person is like the birds in the sky. Sometimes singing more often silent, always alive. Don Bosco lived as he breathed. He was always himself. Never duplicitous, never pretentious, never complex. Intelligence is not about ruffling, complication, snobbery. Reality is complex without a doubt. We could not easily describe a tree, a flower, a star, a stone… This does not prevent them from simply being what they are. The rose is without a ‘why’, it blooms because it blooms, it does not care for itself, it does not wish to be seen…
The *Biographical Memoirs* recount that in 1877, in Ancona, “Don Bosco went to celebrate Mass around ten o’clock in the Gesù church, run by the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. He was served Mass by a young man, who never forgot that meeting for the rest of his life. He saw a short little priest enter the sacristy, modest in face and attitude, indeed unknown.” But “in that dark face” he saw something of an attractive goodness, which immediately aroused in him a mixture of curiosity and reverence. As he celebrated, he noticed that there was something special about him, something inviting him to recollection and fervour. At the end of mass, after

thanksgiving, the priest placed his hand on his head, gave him ten cents, wanted to know who he was and what he did, and said a few kind words to him. Forty-eight years later, that young man, whose name was Eugenio Marconi and who was a pupil at the Good Shepherd Institute, was later to write: 'Oh the gentleness of that voice! The warmth, the affection contained in those words! I was confused and moved.' He discovered shortly afterwards that the "short little priest" was Don Bosco and he remained a devoted friend to him all his life.
The opposite of simple is not complicated, but false. Simplicity is nakedness, being stripped of self, poverty. With no wealth other than everything. Without other treasure than nothing. Simplicity is freedom, lightness, transparency. Simple as air, free as air. Like a window open to the great breath of the world, to the infinite and silent presence of everything.
Where the Spirit of the Gospel blows: "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Mt 6:26).
The *Biographical Memoirs* quietly state: "It was evident that he threw himself into the arms of divine Providence, like a child into those of its mother" (MB III, 36).
Everything is simple for God. Everything is divine for the simple. Even work. Even effort.

6) Being resilient

Life is full of surprises. Things don't always go smoothly and sometimes we face challenges that test our strength and determination. In these moments, resilience is a powerful quality. It is about having the mental and emotional strength to bounce back in the face of adversity, to keep going even when things get tough. And it is something that people admire. Having someone next to you who embodies courage can be an incredible source of inspiration. I think the best title for a life of Don Bosco is *Giovannino Semprinpiedi [Young John , always on his feet]*
Bishop Cagliero recalls, "I don't remember seeing him for a single moment, in the 35 years I was at his side, discouraged, annoyed or restless because of the debts he was often burdened with. He often said,'Providence is great, and as it thinks of the birds of the air, so it will think of my boys.'
"Look, I am a poor priest, but if I had even a piece of bread left over, I would share it with you." It was the phrase most often repeated by Don Bosco.
True friends are like the stars... you don't always see them, but you know they are always there.

7) Be humble

Humble people do not need constant praise or recognition to feel good about themselves and do not feel the need to prove their worth to others. Furthermore, they have an open mind and are always willing to learn from others, regardless of their status or position.
Don Bosco was never ashamed to ask for alms. Humble and strong, as his teacher had asked him to be. He held his head high with everyone.

8) Spreading tenderness
Michael Rua grew fond of Don Bosco, the priest beside whom one felt cheerful and as if full of warmth. Michelino lived at the Royal Arms Factory where his father had been employed. Four of his brothers had died very young, and he was very frail. That is why his mother often did not let him go to the oratory. But he still met Don Bosco at the De La Salle school where he attended third grade. He recounted:
“When Don Bosco came to say Mass and preach to us, as soon as he entered the chapel it seemed as if an electric current was passing through all those numerous children. We would jump up, get out of our seats, huddle around him. It took a long time for him to reach the sacristy. The good Brothers could not prevent that apparent disorder. When other priests came, nothing like that happened.”
Don Bosco was as attractive as a magnet. There is a comical and tender episode, recounted in Don Bosco’s *Biographical Memoirs:*
“One evening Don Bosco walking along the pavement in Via Doragrossa, now called Via Garibaldi, and passed in front of the glazed door of a magnificent clothier’s shop whose window was the whole width of the door. A good young man from the Oratory, who served as an errand boy there, saw Don Bosco, and in the first impulse of his heart, without thinking the door was closed, ran to go and reverence him; but he smashed his head into the glass and smashed it to pieces. At the crashing of the glass, Don Bosco stopped and opened the door; the mortified boy came up to him; the owner came out of the shop, raised his voice and shouted at him; the clients were huddled together. “What did you do?” Don Bosco asked the young man; and he naively replied: “I saw you passing by and, out of a great desire to reverence you, I no longer paid attention to the fact that you had to open the door and I broke it” (Biographical Memoirs MB III, 169-170).
It was an explosive sense of friendship that the boys felt for Don Bosco. Along the lines of St Francis de Sales, who wrote about spiritual friendship, Don Bosco felt that friendship founded on mutual benevolence and trust seemed essential to his preventive system.
Friendship for Don Bosco was that “extra touch” that transformed an educational method similar to others into a unique and original masterpiece.

Fr Rua, Bishop Cagliero and others called him papa….
At the end of the day, kindness is what matters most. It is the way you treat others, the compassion you show and the love you spread that really defines who you are as a person. Kindness can be as simple as a smile, a word of encouragement or an outstretched hand. The idea is to make others feel valued and loved. Don Bosco's boys would testify with an almost monotonous insistence: "He loved me" One of them, St Louis Orione, would write: "I would walk on hot coals to see him once more, and say thank you."
One boy could not understand how Don Bosco, whom he had met by chance weeks before in the courtyard, still remembered his name. He took courage and asked him. "Don Bosco, how did you remember my name?"
"I never forget my children!" he replied.

To a boy who was leaving the Oratory of his own free will, Don Bosco, meeting him, asked:
"What do you have in your hand?"
"Five lira that my mum gave me to buy a train ticket."
"Your mum paid your ticket for the journey from the Oratory to your house, and that's fine. Now take these other five lira. They are for your return ticket. Any time you need it, come and see me!"
Attention is a form of kindness, just as inattention is the greatest rudeness one can do. Sometimes it is implicit violence, especially when it comes to children: neglect is rightly considered abuse when it reaches an unbearable threshold, but in small doses it is part of the ordinary ignominies that many children are forced to endure. Inattention is frostbite: and it is difficult to grow up in frostbite, where the only consolation is perhaps a television full of violent or consumerist dreams. Attention is warmth and affection, which allows the best potential to develop and flourish.
"I also need people to know the importance of the Salesian Cooperators. So far it seems a small thing; but I hope that by this means a good part of the Italian population will become Salesian and open the way for many things. The Work of the Salesian Cooperators…will spread throughout all countries, will spread throughout Christendom, a time will come when the name Cooperator will mean true Christian…already I can see not only families, but whole towns and villages becoming Salesian Cooperators."
Since Don Bosco's predictions have come true, get ready to see some good things this century!

9) This is how Don Bosco preached about God

Those who write about him are blatantly wrong when they try to turn him into a pedagogue or even a brilliant social innovator. Certainly Don Bosco was concerned with charitable works like many others, and again with social justice. His exceptional strength lies, however, in the fact that in everything he did he relied solely and completely on God.
“It is truly admirable” exclaimed one of those present, “the way things proceed. Don Bosco starts, and never gives up.”
“That is why”, Don Bosco resumed, “we never give back, because we always go ahead on the safe side. Before undertaking something we make sure that it is God’s will that things be done. We begin our works with the certainty that it is God who wills them. Having this certainty, we go forward. It may seem that a thousand difficulties are encountered along the way; it does not matter; God wills it, and we remain intrepid in the face of any obstacle. I trust in Divine Providence without limit; but Providence also wants to be helped by our immense efforts.”
His efforts always have the colour of infinity.
Even Nietzsche states that the perception of people’s inner life is instinctive. Young people then have a natural aptitude for observing what lies behind a person’s exterior. They have special antennae to pick up signals that cannot be observed by ordinary means. They are able to perceive what is hidden to others.
Our spiritual antenna makes us sensitive to the moral beauty in people, instinctively makes us notice the moral and spiritual dimension of their lives.
In 1864 Don Bosco arrived in Mornese with his boys, on their autumn walks. It was already night time. People came to meet him preceded by the parish priest Fr Valle and Fr Pestarino. The band played, many knelt as Don Bosco passed by asking him to bless them. The young people and the people entered the church, then Benediction, then everyone went to dinner.
Afterwards, encouraged by applause, the Don Bosco boys gave a short concert of marches and happy music. In the front row was 27-year-old Mary Mazzarello. At the end, Don Bosco said a few words: “We are all tired, and my boys want to have a good night’s sleep. Tomorrow, however, we will speak at greater length”.
Don Bosco stayed five days at Mornese. Every evening Mary Mazzarello was able to listen to the “good night” he gave his youngsters. She climbed over the benches to get closer to the man. Someone reproached her for this as an improper gesture. She replied: “Don Bosco is a saint, I feel it.”

It is much more than just a feeling. How many women’s lives would he change? All it takes is a movement, a simple movement of the kind that children make when they rush forward with all their strength, without fear of falling or dying, oblivious to

the weight of the world.
It is again the case of a mirror: no one turned his face towards women more than Jesus Christ, as one turns one's gaze towards the foliage of trees, as one bends over the water flowing down river to draw strength and the will to continue on one's way. Women in the Bible are numerous. They are there at the beginning and they are there at the end. They give birth to God, watch him grow, play and die, then resurrect him with the simple gestures of foolish love.

There are still those who fret about demonstrations of God's existence. The most perfect demonstration of God is not difficult.
The child asked his mother: "In your opinion, does God exist?"
"Yes."
"How come?"
The woman drew her son to her.
She hugged him tightly and said, "God is like this."
"I have understood."
Fr Paul Albera said: "Don Bosco educated by loving, attracting, conquering and transforming. […] He enveloped us all and entirely almost in an atmosphere of contentment and happiness, from which sorrow, sadness, melancholy were banished…. Everything about him had a powerful attraction for us: his penetrating gaze, at times more effective than a sermon; the simple movement of his head; the smile that bloomed perpetually on his lips, always new and varied, and yet always calm; the flexion of his mouth, as when one wants to speak without pronouncing the words; the very words cadenced in one way rather than another; the bearing of his person and his slender, easy gait: all these things acted on our youthful hearts like a magnet from which it was impossible to escape; and even if we could have, we would not have done so for all the gold in the world, so happy was we with this unique ascendancy he had over us, which in him was the most natural thing, without study or effort."

Always present and alive. God as company, air that one breathes. God as water for fish. God as the warm nest of a loving heart. God as the scent of life. God is what children know, not adults.

Now let's go change the world (Willy Wonka)