 Reading time: 4 min.

Among the saints most venerated by Don Bosco, Saint Joseph holds a place of special importance. The Piedmontese Saint deepened his understanding of this figure through writings, daily devotions, and concrete choices, recognising in him a unique model of humility and silent service to God. Patron of the Oratory, protector of artisans and students, powerful intercessor for the dying: Saint Joseph accompanied Don Bosco in every aspect of his educational and spiritual mission. Let us discover together how this devotion shaped the Salesian Family and continues to inspire those who walk in Don Bosco's footsteps today.

Don Bosco's devotion

The mission of Saint Joseph was unique, completely different from all others, writes Don Bosco in the preface to the *Life of St. Joseph, Spouse of the Most Holy Mary and Putative Father of J. Christ*:

Saint Joseph had received from God a mission *entirely opposite* to that of the apostles. Theirs was the task of *making Jesus known*; Joseph's was *to keep Him hidden*. They were to be *torches* that showed Him to the world; them, a *veil* that covered Him. Therefore, Joseph was not for himself, but for Jesus Christ. It was thus in the economy of Divine Providence that Saint Joseph should remain obscure, showing himself only as much as was necessary to authenticate the legitimacy of his marriage to Mary, and to clear away any suspicion concerning that of Jesus (OE17 283s).

The first great crisis in Joseph's life occurred when Mary returned from her visit to her cousin Elizabeth. We read in the same *Life*:

Mary's return [from Elizabeth] prepared for Joseph a trial that was to be the prelude to many others. He soon noticed that Mary was in an interesting state and he was thus tormented by mortal anxieties (OE17 311).

What was to be done? "In this uncertainty, he resolved to leave her and to go abroad in order to cast all the odium of such a separation solely upon himself. Indeed, he had already made his preparations for departure when an angel descended from heaven to reassure him":

Joseph, son of David – the celestial messenger told him – do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her *is of the Holy Spirit*. She will

bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. From then on, Joseph, completely reassured, conceived the highest veneration for his chaste spouse. He saw in her the *living tabernacle* of the Highest and his care became more tender and more respectful (OE17 312).

In the *Pleasant Facts from the Life of Pius IX*, Don Bosco recalls that the bas-relief adorning the pedestal of the column erected in Rome in honour of the immaculate conception of Mary depicts “Saint Joseph being told by the angel, during his sleep, of the mystery of the incarnation” (OE23 96).

Saint Joseph in the Salesian Family

On the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, the Salesian Family can look to Don Bosco to learn from him how to follow in the footsteps of Jesus’ *putative father*.
Many of Don Bosco’s writings show how much the Piedmontese Saint loved Saint Joseph. He had named him among the patrons of the Oratory, had placed artisans under his protection, and had proclaimed him… protector of students’ exams.
Of Saint Joseph, Don Bosco particularly emphasises his mission as the protector of the dying. In the text of the *Companion of Youth*, he writes:

Saint Joseph, having had the enviable fate of dying assisted by Jesus and Mary, is given as the *Protector of the dying*. Let us show devotion to Saint Joseph during our lives, to have his help at the moment of death.

On the eve of the month of March, dedicated to Saint Joseph, Don Bosco would say to his young people:

Tomorrow begins the *month of St. Joseph* and I wish for you all to place yourselves under his *protection*. If you pray to him with all your heart, he will obtain for you *any grace*, whether spiritual or temporal, that you may need. When you get up in the morning, say, Jesus, Joseph, Mary, I give you my heart and my soul. In the evening when you go to bed say, Jesus, Joseph, Mary, assist me *in my final agony* (MB7 637).

The intercession of Saint Joseph is very powerful. In the aforementioned *Life of St. Joseph*, Don Bosco writes, among other things:

Should we not believe that, among the blessed who are the object of our religious worship, Saint Joseph is, after Mary, *the most powerful of all* before God, and the one who most rightly deserves our confidence and our homage? (OE17 362s).

Don Bosco turned to Saint Joseph for all his needs and urged others to invoke him. Several times a year, he spoke of the effectiveness of his intercession.
He rejoiced greatly when, on 8 December 1870, Pius IX proclaimed him Patron of the Universal Church; and in 1871, he declared that in all his Salesian houses a festive day should be observed on 19 March.
In the churches he built, Don Bosco always wanted *an altar* to Saint Joseph. Thus, pilgrims visiting the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin and that of the Sacred Heart in Rome can still today admire two splendid canvases depicting him, always together with Mary and Jesus.
For the *Turin canvas*, created by Tommaso Lorenzone, it was Don Bosco himself who gave precise instructions to the painter about the depiction. Saint Joseph is shown in the centre, standing on a cloud, carrying the child Jesus on his left arm, who holds a small basket full of roses. The Saviour offers the roses one by one to his father, who showers them like graces upon the house of Valdocco. Mary is, of course, also involved in the movement of intense, loving gazes between the three protagonists, and around them the joy of Paradise is already manifest, with angels framing the scene.
And *in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Rome* – which was initially to be dedicated to Saint Joseph and was Don Bosco's last great undertaking – the altar dedicated to Saint Joseph is adorned with a canvas by Giuseppe Rollini, which depicts Mary's spouse in a truly majestic way. In this case, he clearly fulfils his mission as Patron and protector of the Catholic Church, guarding St. Peter's Basilica from above with his hand, which a kneeling angel presents to him.
In both works, that of the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin and that of the Sacred Heart in Rome, cherubs are depicted holding out a banner, on which the message is made explicit: "*Ite ad Joseph*", "Go to Joseph!".

Prayer to Saint Joseph
Hail, Joseph, full of grace,
Jesus and Mary are with you;
you are blessed among men,
and blessed is the fruit of your spouse's womb, Jesus.
Saint Joseph, spouse of Mary,
pray for us sinners
now and at the hour of our death. Amen. (cf. OE17 386)