 Reading time: 5 min.

The oldest pillar in the Becchi area appears to date back to 1700. It was erected at the bottom of the plain towards the “Mainito”, where the families who lived in the ancient “Scaiota” used to meet. It then became a Salesian farmstead, which has now been renovated and converted into a youth house that hosts groups of young pilgrims to the Church and the Don Bosco House.

This is the Consolata pillar, with a statue of Our Lady of Consolation, always honoured with country flowers brought by devotees. John Bosco must have passed by that pillar many times, taking off his hat and murmuring a Hail Mary as his mother had taught him.

In 1958, the Salesians restored the old pillar and, with a solemn religious service, began the renewed worship of the community and the population, as recorded in the Chronicle of that year kept in the archives of the “Bernardi Semeria” Institute.

That statue of the Consolata could therefore be the first image of Mary that Don Bosco venerated in his boyhood at his home.

At the “Consolata” in Turin

Already as a student and seminarian in Chieri Don Bosco must have gone to Turin to venerate the Consolata (BM I, 200). But it is certain that, as a new priest, he celebrated his second Holy Mass precisely at the Shrine of the Consolata “to thank the Great Virgin Mary for the innumerable favours she had obtained for me from her Divine Son Jesus.” (MO 96).

In the days of the wandering Oratory with no fixed abode, Don Bosco went with his boys to some churches in Turin for Sunday Mass, and mostly they went to the Consolata (BM II, 104, 193).

In May 1846-47, in order to thank Our Lady for having finally given them a stable home, he took his youngsters there to receive Holy Communion while the Oblate Fathers of the Virgin Mary, who officiated at the Shrine, were available to hear their confessions.

When, in the summer of 1846, Don Bosco fell seriously ill, his boys not only showed their grief in tears, but fearing that human means would not suffice for his recovery, they took turns from morning to night at the Shrine of the Consolata to pray to Our Lady to preserve their sick friend and father.

There were those who even made childish vows and those who fasted on bread and water so that Our Lady would hear them. They were heard and Don Bosco promised God that even his last breath would be for them.

The visits of Don Bosco and his boys to the Consolata continued. Invited once to sing Mass in the shrine with his youngsters, he arrived at the appointed time with the improvised “Schola cantorum”, bringing with him the score of a “mass” he had composed for the occasion.

The organist there was the famous maestro Bodoira whom Don Bosco invited to play the organ. The latter did not even take a look at Don Bosco’s score, but when he was about to play the music, he did not understand it at all and, leaving the organist’s post in a huff, he left.

Don Bosco then sat down at the organ and accompanied the Mass following his composition studded with signs that only he could understand. The young men who had previously been lost trying to follow the famous organist, continued to the end without a cue and their silvery voices attracted the admiration and sympathy of all the faithful at the service.

From 1848 until 1854 Don Bosco accompanied his boys in procession through the streets of Turin to the Consolata. His youngsters sang praises to the Virgin along the way and then participated in the Holy Mass he celebrated.

When Mamma Margaret died on 25 November 1856, Don Bosco went that morning to celebrate the Holy Mass of suffrage in the underground chapel of the Consolata, stopping to pray at length before the image of Our Lady, begging her to be a mother to him and his boys. And Mary fulfilled his prayers (BM V, 374).

Don Bosco at the Shrine of the Consolata not only had occasion to celebrate Holy Mass several times, but one day he also wanted to serve Mass there. Entering the shrine to pay a visit, he heard the signal for Mass to begin and realised that the altar server was missing. He got up, went to the sacristy, took the missal and served Mass with devotion (BM VII, 57).

And Don Bosco’s attendance at the Shrine never ceased especially on the occasion of the Novena and the Feast of the Consolata.

Statuette of the Consolata in the Pinardi Chapel

On 2 September 1847 Don Bosco bough a statuette of Our Lady of the Consolata for 27 lire, placing it in the Pinardi Chapel.

In 1856, when the Chapel was being demolished, Fr Francis Giacomelli, a seminary companion and great friend of Don Bosco, wishing to keep for himself what he called the most distinguished monument of the foundation of the Oratory, took the statuette to the family home to Avigliana.

In 1882, his sister had a pillar with a niche built at the house and placed the precious relic there.

When the Salesians came to know about the pillar in Avigliana, after the

Giacomelli family home was being demolished, they managed to get the ancient statuette back. On 12 April 1929 it returned to the Turin Oratory after 73 years from the day Fr Giacomelli had removed it from the first chapel (E. GIRAUDI, *L'Oratorio di Don Bosco,* Torino, SEI, 1935, p. 89-90).

Today the historic little statue remains the only reminder of the past in the new Pinardi Chapel, as its dearest and most precious treasure.

Don Bosco, who spread devotion to Mary Help of Christians throughout the world, never forgot his first devotion to the Virgin, venerated from his childhood at the Becchi pillar under the effigy of the "Consolata". When he arrived in Turin as a young diocesan priest, during the heroic period of his "Oratory", he drew light and advice, courage and comfort for the mission that the Lord had entrusted to him from Our Lady of the Consolata in her Sanctuary.

This is also why he is rightly considered one of Turin's saints.