 Reading time: 6 min.

*In the spirituality of Saint John Bosco, the Name of Jesus was not a mere invocation, but a daily saving presence, rooted in the Bible and in the tradition of the Church. In the Oratory, the ejaculation “Praised always be the Name of Jesus and Mary” would ring out, set to music by Don Bosco and inscribed on the walls. He also cultivated it with hymns he personally composed and with practices of reparation against blasphemy. It is a spiritual legacy that remains as relevant as ever for educating new generations in the faith.*

**A devotion lived and passed on**

In the spirituality of Saint John Bosco, the Name of Jesus holds an important place. It is not merely one devotional expression among many, but a key to interpreting his educational and pastoral charism. For Don Bosco, invoking the Name of Jesus meant making the very person of the Saviour present in daily life, in moments of joy as in times of trial, in the education of the young as in the apostolate among the neediest.

**The roots of a praying tradition**

Don Bosco inherited and lived a devotion that has its roots in biblical tradition and the constant practice of the Church. The Name of Jesus, according to the Christian faith, carries a particular saving power. As Saint Paul recalls in his Letter to the Philippians, it is the name before which every knee should bend, in heaven, on earth and under the earth. This theological truth became a living experience for Don Bosco, to be shared with his boys and with all those he met.

The ejaculation that resounded daily in the Church of Mary Help of Christians is eloquent testimony to this: “Praised always be the Name of Jesus and Mary”. This short prayer, which Don Bosco himself set to music, was sung at the end of the morning sermon, creating a moment of particular spiritual intensity. It was not a simple refrain, but a true act of faith that involved the entire educational community of the Oratory.

**The Name of Jesus in the spiritual architecture of the Oratory**

Don Bosco wanted this devotion to be physically visible as well. The words “Praised always be the Most Holy Name of Jesus and of Mary” were written on the frame of the wall, at the top of the door leading into the library. A particular episode, narrated in the Biographical Memoirs, reveals how much Don Bosco cared about the respect due to this invocation. When the lawyer Tua read those words in a mocking tone, the saintly educator stopped immediately and, with uncharacteristic firmness,

ordered everyone present to take off their hats. Faced with the hesitation of those present, he reiterated with authority that he who had begun in a mocking tone must finish with due respect, commanding everyone to uncover their heads. This seemingly severe gesture shows the deep reverence Don Bosco had for the Name of Jesus and his desire to educate others in respect for sacred realities.

**A strength in the darkness of prison**

One of the most moving aspects of his spirituality linked to the Name of Jesus emerges from his experience in the prisons of Turin. Accompanying his teacher Fr. Cafasso among the inmates, the young priest John Bosco saw with his own eyes how invoking the Name of Jesus could transform even the most degraded places. The cells, which through curses, blasphemies, and vices seemed like pits of hell, were gradually transformed into the dwellings of men who once again recognised themselves as Christians, capable of loving and serving God and of singing praises to the adorable Name of Jesus.

This experience was important for Don Bosco's pastoral formation. He understood that even the most hardened hearts could be touched by grace when the Name of the Saviour was invoked. The misfortune of those prisoners, in fact, stemmed more from a lack of religious instruction than from their own malice. The Name of Jesus thus became an instrument of redemption, a path back to lost dignity, a hope of spiritual rebirth.

**Indulgences: a pedagogy of mercy**

Don Bosco actively promoted the practice of indulgences linked to the invocation of the Name of Jesus, including them in his prayer books and in the rules of the associations he founded. In the "Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians" of 1869, he recalled how Pope Sixtus V had granted a hundred days of indulgence to those who said "Praised be Jesus Christ" and received the reply "May He always be praised". A plenary indulgence was then guaranteed to those who, at the point of death, invoked the Holy Name at least with their heart.

This attention to indulgences should not be understood as a form of mechanical or superstitious religiosity. For Don Bosco, it was rather a concrete way of educating his young people to be aware of the value of prayer and divine mercy. Indulgences were a pedagogy of grace, a constant invitation to remember the most holy Name of Jesus at every moment of the day.

**Praise in reparation for blasphemies**

Particularly significant is the prayer of praise that Don Bosco included in the "Mirror of Catholic Christian Doctrine" of 1862. This litany, which begins with "Blessed be

God” and continues by blessing in particular the Name of Jesus and of Mary, had a reparative purpose: to counter blasphemy with blessing, offence with praise. Pope Pius VII had granted a year’s indulgence to those who recited it with at least a contrite heart.
Don Bosco lived in an era when blasphemy was unfortunately widespread, especially among the working classes. Rather than simply condemning it, he preferred to educate positively, teaching the beauty of praise and the reparative power of blessing. The blessed Name of Jesus thus became a spiritual antidote to blasphemous language, a medicine to heal the tongue from the poison of impiety.

**Poetry and song: vehicles of devotion**
Don Bosco personally composed a hymn “To the Most Holy Name of Jesus”, published in the “Selection of Sacred Praises” of 1879. This poetic composition, divided into numerous verses, expresses with simple but effective language the joy and enthusiasm that should accompany the invocation of the divine Name. “Come children, sing, you beautiful innocent souls, with sweet harmonies, long live Jesus”. Thus begins the hymn, directly involving the young people in praise.
The use of song and poetry was not accidental. Don Bosco knew well that boys learn best through what touches the heart and remains impressed on the memory through melody. The Name of Jesus, sung with joy, became a lived experience, not just a learned doctrine. The verses of the hymn celebrate the sweetness of this Name, its saving power, the joy it gives to those who pronounce it with love.

**A missionary perspective**
In his letter to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, preserved in the Biographical Memoirs, Don Bosco expresses a further dimension of devotion to the Name of Jesus, the missionary one. He invites the Sisters to pray for their fellow Sisters who go to the most distant parts of the earth “to spread the Name of Jesus Christ, and to make Him known and loved”. It is therefore not just an interior devotion, but a concrete apostolic commitment to bring the Name of Jesus everywhere, so that it may be known and loved by all.
This missionary vision fits perfectly into the Salesian charism, which is entirely focused on the proclamation of the Gospel, especially among the young and the poor. The Name of Jesus thus becomes the synthesis of the entire work of evangelisation, to know that Name means to know the person of Christ; to love Him means to embrace His plan of salvation.

**The example of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga**
Don Bosco proposed to his young people the example of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga,

who, on his deathbed, making an effort to pronounce the Holy Name of Jesus, gently breathed his last. This detail, reported in the “Ecclesiastical History” of 1871, is not a marginal one. Don Bosco wanted to show his boys how the Name of Jesus should accompany a Christian to their last breath, becoming the gateway to eternal life.

**An ever-relevant legacy**

Don Bosco’s devotion to the Name of Jesus is not a historical curiosity or an outdated practice. It represents his spirituality and his educational method. Through the constant invocation of that Name, made with faith, the saintly educator formed generations of young people in the faith, converted sinners, consoled the afflicted, and transformed degraded environments into places of grace.

Today, as then, the Name of Jesus retains its saving power. The spiritual legacy of Don Bosco invites us to rediscover this simple but profound devotion, to pronounce with faith and love that holy Name which is above every other name, to make it resound in our families, in our communities, in our places of education. As the young people of the Oratory used to sing, “Long live Jesus! Long live that Name, to which no other in glory and honour was ever equal.”