 Reading time: 7 min.

In 1886, on the eve of the consecration of the new Basilica of the Sacred Heart in the centre of Rome, the 'Salesian Bulletin' wanted to prepare its readers – co-workers, benefactors, young people, families – for a vital encounter with 'the pierced Heart that continues to love'. For a whole year, the magazine presented the Salesian world with a veritable 'rosary' of meditations: each issue linked an aspect of devotion to a pastoral, educational or social urgency that Don Bosco – already exhausted but still lucid – considered strategic for the future of the Church and Italian society. Almost 140 years later, that series remains a small treatise on the spirituality of the heart, written in simple but ardent tones, capable of combining contemplation and practice. Here we present a unified reading of that monthly journey, showing how Salesian intuition still speaks to us today.

February – The guard of honour: in vigil over wounded Love
The new liturgical year opens in the *Bulletin* with a surprising invitation: not only to adore Jesus, present in the tabernacle, but to 'keep watch over Him' – a freely chosen hour in which every Christian, without interrupting their daily activities, becomes a loving sentinel who consoles the Heart pierced by the indifference of the carnal. The idea, which originated in Paray-le-Monial and flourished in many dioceses, became an educational programme: to transform time into a space for reparation; to teach young people that fidelity comes from small, constant acts; to make the day a widespread liturgy. The related vow – to donate the proceeds from the *Manual of the Guard of Honour* to the construction of the Roman Basilica – reveals the Salesian logic: contemplation that immediately translates into bricks and mortar, because true prayer (literally) builds the house of God.

March – Creative charity: the Salesian stamp
In his great conference on 8 May 1884, Cardinal Parocchi summarised the Salesian mission in one word: 'charity'. The *Bulletin* takes up that discourse to remind us that the Church conquers the world more with gestures of love than with theoretical disputes. Don Bosco did not establish elite schools but simple hospices. He did not take children out of their environment just to protect them, but to return them to society as solid citizens. It is charity 'according to the needs of the century': a response to materialism not with controversy, but with works that show the power of the Gospel. Hence the urgency of a large sanctuary dedicated to the Heart of Jesus, to make an outstanding visible sign of the love that educates and transforms

in the heart of Rome.

April – Eucharist: ‘masterpiece of the Heart of Jesus’
Nothing, for Don Bosco, is more urgent than bringing Christians back to frequent Communion. The *Bulletin* reminds us that ‘there is no Catholicism without Our Lady and without the Eucharist’. The Eucharistic table is the ‘genesis of Christian society’: from there fraternity, justice, and purity are born. If faith languishes, the desire for the living Bread must be rekindled. It is no coincidence that St. Francis de Sales entrusted the Visitation Sisters with the mission of guarding the Eucharistic Heart. Devotion to the Sacred Heart is not an abstract sentiment, but a concrete path that leads to the tabernacle and from there pours out into the streets. And it is once again the Roman construction site that serves as a test. Every lira offered for the basilica becomes a ‘spiritual brick’ that consecrates Italy to the Heart that gives itself.

May – The Heart of Jesus shines in the Heart of Mary
The Marian month leads the *Bulletin* to intertwine the two great devotions. There is a profound communion between the two Hearts, symbolised by the biblical image of the ‘mirror’. The Immaculate Heart of Mary reflects the light of the Divine Heart, making it bearable to human eyes. Those who dare not look at the Sun, look at its light reflected in the Mother. Latria for the Heart of Jesus, ‘hyperdulia’ for that of Mary: a distinction that avoids the misunderstandings of the Jansenist polemicists of yesterday and today. The *Bulletin* refutes the accusations of idolatry and invites the faithful to a balanced love, where contemplation and mission feed each other. Mary introduces us to her Son and her Son leads us to His Mother. In view of the consecration of the new temple, it asks that the two invocations that stand out on the hills of Rome and Turin be united: Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary Help of Christians.

June – Supernatural consolations: love at work in history
Two hundred years after the first public consecration to the Sacred Heart (Paray-le-Monial, 1686), the *Bulletin* affirms that the devotion responds to the illness of the times: ‘the cooling of charity due to an excess of iniquity’. The Heart of Jesus – Creator, Redeemer, Glorifier – is presented as the centre of all history: from creation to the Church; from the Eucharist to eschatology. Those who adore that Heart, enter into a dynamism that transforms culture and politics. This is why Pope Leo XIII asked everyone to contribute to the Roman shrine: a monument of reparation but also a ‘bulwark’ against the ‘impure flood’ of modern error. It is an appeal that

sounds timely: without ardent charity, society falls apart.

July – Humility: the physiognomy of Christ and of Christians
The summer meditation chooses the most neglected virtue: humility, ‘a gem transplanted by the hand of God into the garden of the Church.’ Don Bosco, spiritual son of St. Francis de Sales, knows that humility is the door to other virtues and the seal of every true apostolate. Those who serve young people without seeking visibility make present, ‘Jesus’ hidden life for thirty years.’ The *Bulletin* unmasks pride disguised as false modesty and invites us to cultivate a double humility: of the intellect, which opens itself to mystery; and of the will, which obeys recognised truth. Devotion to the Sacred Heart is not sentimentality. It is a school of humble thinking and concrete action, capable of building social peace because it removes the poison of pride from the heart.

August – Meekness: the strength that disarms
After humility comes meekness: a virtue that is not weakness but self-control, ‘the lion that produces honey’, says the text, referring to the enigma of Samson. The Heart of Jesus appears meek in welcoming sinners, firm in defending the temple. Readers are invited to imitate this twofold movement: gentleness towards people, firmness against error. St. Francis de Sales returns as a model. With a calm tone, he poured out rivers of charity in turbulent Geneva, converting more hearts than harsh polemics would have won over. In a century that ‘sins by being heartless,’ building the sanctuary of the Sacred Heart means erecting a training ground for social meekness—an evangelical response to the contempt and verbal violence that already poisoned public debate at that time.

September – Poverty and the social question: the Heart that reconciles rich and poor
The rumblings of social conflict, warns the *Bulletin*, threaten to ‘smash the civil edifice to pieces.’ We are in the midst of the ‘labour question’. Socialists are stirring up the masses, capital is concentrated. Don Bosco does not deny the legitimacy of honest wealth, but he reminds us that true revolution begins in the heart. The Heart of Jesus proclaimed the poor blessed and He experienced poverty firsthand. The remedy lies in evangelical solidarity nourished by prayer and generosity. Until the Roman Basilica is completed, writes the newspaper, the visible sign of reconciliation will be missing. In the following decades, the social doctrine of the Church will develop these insights, but the seed is already here. Charity is not almsgiving; it is justice that comes from a transformed heart.

October – Childhood: sacrament of hope
‘Woe to those who scandalise one of these little ones.” On the lips of Jesus, the invitation becomes a warning. The *Bulletin* recalls the horrors of the pagan world against children and shows how Christianity changed history by entrusting a central place to children. For Don Bosco, education is a religious act; the treasure of the future Church is preserved in schools and oratories. Jesus’ blessing of the children, reproduced on the front pages of the newspaper, is a manifestation of the Heart that “closes itself like a father’s” and announces the Salesian vocation: to make youth a “sacrament” that makes God present in the city. Schools, colleges, and workshops are not optional: they are the concrete way of honouring the Heart of Jesus alive in young people.

November – Triumphs of the Church: humility conquers death
The liturgy commemorates the saints and the dead. The *Bulletin* meditates on the ‘gentle triumph’ of Jesus entering Jerusalem. The image becomes the key to understanding Church history. Successes and persecutions alternate, but the Church, like the Master, always rises again. Readers are invited not to let themselves be paralysed by pessimism. The shadows of the moment (anticlerical laws, reduction of orders, Masonic propaganda) do not cancel out the dynamism of the Gospel. The Basilica of the Sacred Heart, built amid hostility and poverty, will be the tangible sign that, ‘the stone with the seals has been turned over’. Collaborating in its construction means betting on God’s future.

December – Beatitude of sorrow: the Cross welcomed by the heart
The year ends with the most paradoxical of the beatitudes: ‘Blessed are those who mourn’. Pain, scandalous to pagan reason, becomes in the Heart of Jesus a path to redemption and fruitfulness. The *Bulletin* sees in this logic, the key to understanding the contemporary crisis. Societies based on entertainment at all costs produce injustice and despair. Accepted in union with Christ, however, pain transforms hearts, strengthens character, stimulates solidarity, and frees us from fear. Even the stones of the sanctuary are ‘tears transformed into hope’; small offerings, sometimes the fruit of hidden sacrifices, which will build a place from which, the newspaper promises, ‘torrents of chaste delights will rain down.

A prophetic legacy
In the monthly montage of the *Salesian Bulletin* of 1886, the pedagogy of crescendo is striking. It starts with the little hour of watch and ends with the consecration of pain; from the individual faithful to the national building site; from the turreted

tabernacle of the oratory to the ramparts of the Esquiline Hill. It is a journey that intertwines three main axes:
Contemplation – The Heart of Jesus is first and foremost a mystery to be adored: vigil, Eucharist, reparation.
Formation – Every virtue (humility, meekness, poverty) is proposed as a social medicine, capable of healing collective wounds.
Construction – Spirituality becomes architecture: the basilica is not an ornament, but a laboratory of Christian citizenship.
Without forcing it, we can recognise here the pre-announcement of themes that the Church would develop throughout the 20th century: the apostolate of the laity, social doctrine, the centrality of the Eucharist in the mission, the protection of minors, and the pastoral care of those who suffer. Don Bosco and his collaborators recognised the signs of the times and responded with the language of the heart.

On 14 May 1887, when Leo XIII consecrated the Basilica of the Sacred Heart through his vicar Cardinal Lucido Maria Parocchi, Don Bosco—too weak to ascend the altar—watched hidden among the faithful. At that moment, all the words of the 1886 *Bulletin* became living stone: the guard of honour, educative charity, the Eucharist as the centre of the world, the tenderness of Mary, reconciling poverty, the blessedness of suffering. Today, those pages call for new breath. It is up to us, consecrated or lay, young or old, to continue the vigil, to build sites of hope, to learn the geography of the heart. The programme remains the same, simple and bold: **to guard, to atone, to love**.

In the photo: Painting of the Sacred Heart, located on the main altar of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Rome. The work was commissioned by Don Bosco and entrusted to the painter Francesco de Rohden (Rome, 15 February 1817 – 28 December 1903).