

Don Bosco, La Salette, Lourdes

In the month that recalls the apparitions at Lourdes for us, we take the opportunity to point out the error into which, some time ago, the author of a *negative life-story* of Don Bosco the Saint fell in his attempt to ridicule the devotion to Mary Help of Christians.

The essayist wrote:

“In such a saturation of Marian cult, history pretty much *sub specie Mariae*, it is surprising not to find traces in Don Bosco’s life of such important events as the apparitions of La Salette (1846) and Lourdes (1858); and yet everything that happened in France was resented in Turin, far more than what was unfolding in Italy. I do not understand this absence. Was it the mantle of Mary Help of Christians and the Consolata that formed a jealous barrier against other protections and appearances of the same figure?”

What is truly astonishing here is the surprise of a writer not unaware of Salesian sources, because Don Bosco spoke and wrote repeatedly about the apparitions of La Salette and Lourdes. In 1871, i.e. a good three years after the consecration of the Church of Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco’s commitment to spread the devotion, he himself compiled and published as the May issue of his “Catholic Readings”, the booklet entitled: *Apparition of the Blessed Virgin on mount La Salette*. In this little volume of 92 pages, which had a third edition in 1877, Don Bosco described the Apparition in all its details, then moved on to other prodigious events attributed to the Virgin.

Two years later, in 1873, he published, as the December issue of the same “Catholic Readings”, the booklet entitled: *The Wonders of Our Lady of Lourdes*. The issue came out anonymously but was preceded by an announcement “To our benefactors,

correspondents and readers” signed by Don Bosco.

In the Biographical Memoirs

And that is not all. In the *Biographical Memoirs*, describing the first feast of the Immaculate Conception celebrated at Pinardi House in Valdocco on 8 December 1846, the biographer, Fr G.B. Lemoyne, asserts that the feast was “made more cheerful by information regarding an apparition of Our Lady in France at La Salette”; and he continues: “This was Don Bosco’s favourite subject, repeated by him a hundred times.”



To anyone who is supercritical, the expression “a hundred times” will seem exaggerated, but those who know our language know that for us it simply means “many times” (“I have told you a hundred times”). And “many times” does not mean “a few”, much less so “never”.

We find in the same Memoirs on 8 December 1858:

“Don Bosco was delighted with such encouragement as he celebrated the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. All the more so since in this year a portentous event had made the glory and goodness of the heavenly Mother resound throughout the world and Don Bosco had narrated it several times to his youngsters and later gave a report of it to the press.” Clearly this was about Lourdes.

There is more. A chronicle from 1865 reports the “Good Night”, or evening sermon to the young people given by Don Bosco on 11 January that year:

“I would like to tell you magnificent things tonight. Our Lady deigned to appear many times over a few years to her devotees. She appeared in France in 1846 to two shepherd children, where, among other things, she foretold the blight affecting potatoes and grapes, which did happen; and she was sorrowed by blasphemy, people working on Sundays, acting like dogs in church, that had kindled the wrath of her Divine Son. She

appeared in 1858 to little Bernadette near Lourdes, recommending that she pray for poor sinners..."

Note that in work had begun that year on the construction of the Church of Mary Help of Christians; yet Don Bosco did not forget the Marian apparitions in France.

Then it is enough to look in the Salesian Bulletin to find many references to Lourdes and Salette.

How can it be insinuated, then, that *"the mantle of Mary Help of Christians"* formed *"a jealous barrier against other protections and appearances of the same figure"*? How can it be said that traces of such important events as the Apparitions at La Salette (1846) and Lourdes (1858) are missing in Don Bosco's life?

Since we are always on the lookout for "curiosities", we also wanted to record this one, which reveals how certain non-fiction has very little to do with authentic and serious historical knowledge.