 Reading time: 4 min.

*Saint Louis Orione: “My most beautiful years were those spent in the Salesian Oratory.”*

**An emotional recollection of the saintly Father Orione.**
Who does not know the song *Giù dai colli, un dì lontano con la sola madre accanto* (Down from the hills, one day a long time ago, with just his mother beside him)? Very few, I would say, since it is still sung in dozens of languages in over 100 countries around the world. But I would think that very few would know the comment made by the elderly Fr (St) Louis Orione during the (sung!) mass on 31 January 1940 by the *Orionians* from Tortona at 4.45 a.m. (exactly the time when Don Bosco had died 52 years earlier). Here are his precise words (taken from Orione sources):
“The hymn to Don Bosco that begins with the words *Giù dai colli* was composed and set to music for Don Bosco’s Beatification. The explanation of the first stanza is this. On the death of the saint, the government of the time, despite the fact that all the young people wanted it and all Turin wanted it, did not allow Don Bosco’s body to be buried at Mary Help of Christians, and it seemed to be a great favour that his beloved body be buried at Valsalice… a beautiful house! So, the body was taken to Valsalice and there, every year until the Beatification, the Salesian pupils went to visit their Father on the day of Don Bosco’s death, to pray. After Don Bosco was beatified, his body was taken to Mary Help of Christians. And the verse you sang *Oggi, o Padre, torni ancora* (Today, Father, you return once more) also recalls this. It celebrates Don Bosco returning among the young again, from Valsalice – which is on a hill beyond the Po – to Turin, which is on the plain.”

**His memories of that day**

Fr Orione continued: “The Lord gave me the grace to be present, in 1929, at that glorious moment, which was a triumph in Turin in celebration, amidst unspeakable joy and enthusiasm, I too was close to the triumphal float. The whole journey was made on foot from Valsalice to the Oratory. And with me, immediately behind it, was a man in a red shirt, a Garibaldino; we were close together, side by side. He was one of the oldest of Don Bosco’s first pupils; when he heard that it was Don Bosco’s body that was being transported, he too was behind the carriage. And they

all sang: ‘Don Bosco returns among the young once more.’ It was a moment of joy; the young people sang and the people of Turin waved handkerchiefs and threw flowers. We also passed in front of the Royal Palace. I remember that the Prince of Piedmont stood on the balcony, surrounded by generals; the carriage stopped for a moment and he nodded his approval; the Salesian superiors bowed their heads, as if to thank him for that act of homage to Don Bosco. Then the carriage reached Mary Help of Christians. And a few minutes later the Prince also came, surrounded by members of the Royal Household, to pay an act of devotion to the new Blessed.”

**“My best years”**

As a boy, Louis Orione had lived with Don Bosco for three years, from 1886 to 1889. He recalled them forty years later in these moving terms: “My best years were those spent in the Salesian Oratory. Oh, if only I could relive even a few of those days spent at the Oratory when Don Bosco was alive!” He had loved Don Bosco so much that he had been granted, by way of exception, to go to confession to him even when his physical strength was at its lowest. In the last of these conversations (17 December 1887) the holy educator had confided to him: “We will always be friends.”


CHIUSURE DI SICUREZZA
PER IMBALLAGGI
MACCHINE ED ACCESSORI PER
INDUSTRIE MAGAZZENI UFFICI
STANDARD
Esso
STANDARD

*During the moving of Don Bosco's body from Valsalice to the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, we see Fr Louis Orione in a white surplice beside the casket*

A total friendship, theirs, which is why it is not surprising that shortly afterwards 15-year-old Louis immediately joined the list of boys at Valdocco who offered their lives to the Lord so that their beloved Father's life may be preserved. The Lord did not accept his heroic request, but "reciprocated" his generosity with Don Bosco's first miracle after his death: on contact with his corpse, the index finger of Louis' right hand was reattached and healed. The boy, who was left-handed, had cut it while he was preparing small pieces of bread to be placed on Don Bosco's body which was displayed in the church of St Francis de Sales, to distribute as relics to the many devotees.
Nonetheless, the young man did not become a Salesian: on the contrary, he had the certainty that the Lord was calling him to another vocation, precisely after having "consulted" with Don Bosco before his tomb at Valsalice. And so Providence wanted there to be one less Salesian, but one more religious Family, the Orione Family, which would radiate, in new and original ways, the "imprint" received from Don Bosco: love for the Blessed Sacrament and the sacraments of confession and communion, devotion to Our Lady and love for the Pope and the Church, the preventive system, apostolic charity towards "poor and abandoned" young people, etc.

**And Fr Rua?**
Fr Orione's sincere and deep friendship with Don Bosco then became an equally sincere and deep friendship with Fr Rua, which continued until the latter's death in 1910. In fact, as soon as he heard of the worsening of his health, Fr Orione immediately ordered a novena and rushed to his bedside. He would later recall this last visit with particular emotion: "When he fell ill, as I was in Messina. I telegraphed Turin to ask if I would still be able to see him alive if I left immediately. I was told yes; I took the train and left for Turin. Fr Rua welcomed me, smiling, and gave me his very special blessing for me and for all those who would come to our House. I assure you it was the blessing of a saint."
When the news of his death reached him, he sent a telegram to Fr (Blessed) Philip Rinaldi: "a past pupil pupil of the venerable Don Bosco, I join with the Salesians in mourning the death of Fr Rua who was an unforgettable spiritual father to me. We are all praying here. Fr Orione." The Salesians wanted to bury Fr Rua at Valsalice, next to Don Bosco, but there were difficulties from the city authorities. Immediately with another telegram, on 9 April, Fr Orione offered Fr Rinaldi his help: "If difficulties

arise for burying Fr Rua at Valsalice, please telegraph me, I could easily help them." It was a great sacrifice for him not to be able to cross Italy from Messina to Turin to attend Fr Rua's funeral. But now Bosco, Rua, Orione, Rinaldi are all in heaven, side by side in God's one big family.