 Reading time: 4 min.

Doing good for the young requires not only dedication but also huge material and financial resources. Don Bosco used to say "I trust in Divine Providence without limit, but Providence also wants to be helped by our own immense efforts"; said and done.

Don Bosco gave 20 precious "Reminders" to his departing missionaries, on 11 November 1875. The first was: "Seek souls, but not money, nor honours nor dignity."

Don Bosco himself had to go in search of money all his life, but he wanted his sons not to toil in seeking money, not to worry when they lacked it, not to lose their heads when they found some, but to be ready for every humiliation and sacrifice in the search for what was needed, with full trust in Divine Providence who would never fail them. And he gave them the example.

"The Saint of millions!"

Don Bosco handled large sums of money in his lifetime, collected at the price of enormous sacrifices, humiliating begging, lotteries that were hard to organise, endless wanderings. With this money he gave bread, clothing, lodging and work to many poor boys, bought houses, opened hospices and colleges, built churches, launched great printing and publishing initiatives, launched Salesian missions in America and, finally, already weakened by the aches and pains of old age, he erected the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Rome, in obedience to the Pope.

Not everyone understood the spirit that animated him, not everyone appreciated his multifaceted activities and the anticlerical press indulged in ridiculous insinuations. On 4 April 1872 the Turin satirical periodical *Il Fischietto* said Don Bosco had "fabulous funds", while at his death Luigi Pietracqua published a blasphemous sonnet in *Il Birichin* in which he called Don Bosco a cunning man "capable of drawing blood from a turnip" and described him as "the Saint of millions" because he would have counted millions by the handful without earning them through his own sweat.

Those who know the style of poverty in which the Saint lived and died can easily understand how unfair Pietracqua's satire was. Yes, Don Bosco was a skilful steward of the money that the charity of good people brought him, but he never kept anything for himself. The furniture in his little room at Valdocco consisted of an iron bed, a small table, a chair and, later, a sofa, with no curtains on the windows,

no carpets, not even a bedside table. In his last illness, tormented by thirst, when they provided him with seltzer water to give him relief. He did not want to drink it, believing it to be an expensive drink. They needed to assure him that it only cost seven cents a bottle. A few days before he died, he ordered Fr Viglietti to look in the pockets of his clothes and give Fr Rua his purse, so that he could die without a penny in his pocket.

Philanthropic Aristocracy

Don Bosco's *Biographical Memoirs* and the *Epistolario* provide a wealth of documentation regarding his benefactors. There we find the names of almost 300 aristocratic families. It is impossible to list them all here.

Certainly, we must not make the mistake of limiting Don Bosco's benefactors to the aristocracy alone. He obtained help and disinterested collaboration from thousands of other people from the ecclesiastical and civil classes, the middle class and ordinary people, starting with the incomparable benefactor who was Mamma Margaret.

But let us look at one aristocrat who distinguished himself in supporting Don Bosco's work, pointing to the simple and delicate and at the same time, courageous and apostolic attitude that he knew how to keep in order to receive and do good.

In 1866 Don Bosco addressed a letter to Countess Enrichetta Bosco di Ruffino, née Riccardi, who had been in contact with the Valdocco Oratory for years. She was one of the women who met weekly to repair the clothes of the young boarders. Here is the text:

"Worthy Countess,

I cannot go and visit you as I would like to, but I am coming in the person of Jesus Christ hidden beneath these rags which I recommend to you, so that in your charity you may mend them. It is a poor thing in temporal terms, but I hope that it will be a treasure for eternity for you.

God bless you, your labours and all your family, while I have the honour to be able to profess myself with full esteem

Your most obliged servant".

Fr Bosco Gio. Turin, 16 May 1866

48-

Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales
Torino - Via Cottolengo, 32.

Altri modelli
vedi 65. XXXVII

Benemerito Signor

Ho ricevuto con vera gratitudine la generosa offerta che V.S. nella sua grande carità degnossi di fare pei nostri missionari che vanno a lavorare per guadagnare al Vangelo i selvaggi di America e specialmente della Patagonia.
Oltre i loro sinceri e ben dovuti ringraziamenti essi pregano immolo speciale per voi e per le vostre famiglie, incoraggiati poi dagli aiuti straordinari e morali che loro porgete, raddoppieranno di zelo, e se occorre daranno volentieri anche la vita per cooperare alla salvezza delle anime, dilatare il regno di G. C. portando la religione e la civiltà tra quei popoli e nazioni che l'una e l'altra tuttora ignorano.
Dio vi benedica tutti, Dio ricompensi largamente la vostra carità e vi renda felici nel tempo, più felici ancora nella Beata eternità.
Io godo grandemente di potermi professare in nostro Signor G. C.

Torino 27 novemb. 1886

Obblmo Servitore
Sac. Gio Bosco

Don Bosco’s letter to benefactors

In this letter Don Bosco apologises for not being able to go in person to visit the Countess. In return he sends her a bundle of rags from the Oratory boys to be patched up… *roba grama* (Piedmontese for rubbish) before human beings, but a precious treasure to those who clothe the naked for the love of Christ!

Some have tried to interpret Don Bosco’s relations with the rich as ingratiating himself with the wealthy. But there is an authentic evangelical spirit here!