 Reading time: 4 min.

In the biography of a famous abbot, the emotion of meeting Don Bosco.

Today it is quite easy to meet a Saint, as has happened to me several times. I have met several: the Cardinal of Milan Ildefonso Schuster (who confirmed me) and Popes John XXIII and Paul VI; I spoke with Mother Teresa, and even had lunch with Pope John Paul II. But a century ago it was not so easy, so to have personally approached a saint was an experience that remained etched in the mind and heart of the lucky person. Such was the case with the French Trappist abbot Dom Edmond Obrecht (18521935). Way back in 1934, when Don Bosco was canonised, three days after the solemn ceremony he confided to the editor of the US Catholic weekly, the *Louisville Record,* his great satisfaction at having personally met the new saint, having shaken his hand, indeed having had lunch with him.
What had happened? The episode is recounted in his biography.

Four hours with Don Bosco
Born in Alsace in 1852, Edmond Obrecht had become a Trappist monk at the age of 23. As soon as he was ordained a priest in 1879, Father Edmond was sent to Rome as secretary to the Procurator General of the three Trappist Observances, which in 1892 were to be united into a single Order with the General House the Trappa delle Tre Fontane in the Italian capital.
During his stay in Rome he had Sunday off and took advantage of it to go and celebrate with his Cistercian brethren in the basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme. The titular celebrant was the Vicar of Rome, Cardinal Lucido Maria Parocchi, so Father Edmond had the opportunity to serve him several times at solemn pontifical services and to get to know him well.
Now on 14 May 1887 the consecration of the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome, next to what is now Termini station, was scheduled: a magnificent church that had cost Don Bosco a fortune and for which he had given “body and soul” in order to succeed in completing it. He succeeded and in spite of his health, by then decidedly compromised (he would die eight months later), he wanted to attend the solemn consecration ceremony.
For this very long celebration (five hours behind closed doors), Card. Parocchi was accompanied by Father Edmond. It was a decidedly unforgettable experience for him. He would write 50 years later: “During that long ceremony I had the pleasure and honour of sitting next to Don Bosco in the sanctuary of the church and after the

consecration I was admitted to the same table as him and the Cardinal. It was the only time in my life that I came into close contact with a canonised saint and the deep impression he made on me has lingered in my mind for all these long years."
Father Edmond had heard a lot about Don Bosco, who, at a time when the Holy See's diplomatic relations with the new Kingdom of Italy were breaking down, was held in high esteem and high regard by the politicians of the time: Zanardelli, Depretis, Nicotera. The newspapers had spoken of his interventions to settle some serious questions concerning the appointment of new bishops and the taking possession of the property of individual dioceses.
Dom Edmond was not content with that unforgettable experience. Later on a trip he passed through Turin and wanted to stop and visit the great Salesian work of Don Bosco. He admired it and could only rejoice on the day of his beatification (2 June 1929).

Post Scriptum
The day before the consecration of the Sacred Heart Church, 13 May 1887, Pope Leo XIII had given Don Bosco an audience for an hour in the Vatican. He had been very warm with him and had even joked that Don Bosco, given his age, was close to death (but he was younger than the pope!), but Don Bosco had a thought that perhaps he did not dare express to the pope himself. He did so a few days later, on 17 May, on his departure from Rome: he asked him if he could pay all or part of the cost of the church façade: a handsome sum, 51,000 lire [230,000 euro]. Courage or impudence? Extreme confidence or simple impudence? The fact remains that a few months later, on 6 November, Don Bosco returned to the task and asked for the intervention of Monsignor Francesco della Volpe, the Pope's domestic prelate, to obtain – he wrote – "the sum of 51,000 francs, which the Holy Father's charity made him hope to pay himself… our Bursar is going to Rome to settle the expenses of this construction; he will come to you for the best answer he can get." He guaranteed that "Our over three hundred thousand orphans pray every day for His Holiness." And he concluded: "Please forgive this poor and ugly writing of mine. I can no longer write."
Poor Don Bosco: in May in that church, celebrating in front of the altar of Mary Help of Christians, he had wept several times because he saw his dream when he was nine come true; but six months later his heart was still in anguish because at the death he felt was near he left a heavy debt to close the accounts of that same church.
He truly spent several years, "until his last breath" doing it. Very few of the tens of thousands of people who pass by it every day on their way out of Termini station on

Via Marsala know this.