 Reading time: 11 min.

In the dream recounted by Don Bosco on the night of 25 April 1875, the dream dimension becomes living catechesis and a symbolic representation of the spiritual struggle of young people. Set in a vast valley, the narrative weaves together friendly figures – Buzzetti, Gastini, and the other Salesians – with powerful images: the horse of trust in God, the two-pronged fork of Confession and Communion, the beasts of temptation, and the protective mantle of Mary. In vivid language, Don Bosco shows how the path to salvation is fraught with pitfalls, falls, and courageous choices, but also how each boy possesses the "weapon" to resist. This vision, revisited in the "good nights" of May and June, becomes an invitation to sincerity, trust in superiors, and perseverance in grace.

Here I am to keep my promise. You know that dreams come during sleep. As the time for the retreat drew near I was wondering how my boys would make it and what I should suggest to make it fruitful. On Sunday night, April 25, the eve of the retreat, I went to bed with this thought in mind. I fell asleep immediately and I seemed to be standing all alone in a very vast valley enclosed on both sides by high hills. At the far end of the valley along one side where the ground rose steeply, there was a pure, bright light; the other side was in semi-darkness. As I stood gazing at the plain, Buzzetti and Gastini came up to me and said, "Don Bosco you will have to mount a horse. Hurry! Hurry!"

"Are you joking?" I said. "You know how long it has been since I last rode a horse." They insisted, but in an attempt to excuse myself I kept repeating, "I don't want to ride a horse; I did it once and fell off."

Gastini and Buzzetti kept pressing me ever more and said, "Get on a horse, and quickly. There's no time to lose."

"But suppose I do mount a horse, where are you taking me?"

"You'll see. Now, hurry and mount!"

"But where's the horse? I don't see any."

“There it is,” shouted Gastini pointing to one side of the valley. I looked and saw a beautiful spirited steed. It had long, strong legs, a thick mane, and a very glossy coat.

“Well, since you want me to mount it, I will. But woe to you if 1 fall …” I said.

“Don’t worry,” they replied, “We’ll be here with you for any emergency.”

“And if I break my neck, you’ll have to fix it,” I told Buzzetti.

Buzzetti broke into a laugh. “This is no time to laugh,” Gastini muttered. We walked over to the horse. Even with their help I had great difficulty mounting, but finally I was in the saddle. How tall that horse seemed to be then! It was as if I were perched on top of a high mound from where I could survey the entire valley from end to end.

Then the horse started to move. Strangely, while this was happening I seemed to be in my own room. I asked myself, “Where are we?” Coming toward me I saw priests, clerics, and others; all looked frightened and breathless.

After a long ride the horse stopped. Then I saw all the priests of the Oratory together with many of the clerics approaching. They gathered around the horse. I recognized Father Rua, Father Cagliero, and Father Bologna among them. When they reached me, they stopped and silently stared at my horse. I noticed that all seemed worried. Their disquiet was such as I have never seen before. I beckoned to Father Bologna. “Father Bologna,” I said, “you are in charge at the main entrance; can you tell me what happened? Why do you all look so upset?”

“I don’t know where I am or what I’m doing,” he said. “I’m all confused . . . Some people came in, talked and left . . . There is such a hubbub of people coming and going at the main entrance that I don’t know what’s going on.”

“Is it possible,” I wondered, “that something very unusual might happen today?”

Just then someone handed me a trumpet, saying I should hold on to it because I would need it. “Where are we now?” I asked. “Blow the trumpet.”

I did and heard these words: *We are in the land of trial*.

Then I saw a multitude of boys—I think over 100 thousand coming down the hills.

There was absolute silence. Carrying pitchforks, they were hastening toward the valley. I recognized among them all the Oratory boys, and those of our other schools; but there were many more unknown to me. Just then on one side of the valley the sky darkened, and hordes of animals resembling lions and tigers appeared. These ferocious beasts had big bodies, strong legs, and long necks, but their heads were quite small. They were terrifying. With blood-shot eyes bulging from their sockets, they hurled themselves at the boys who immediately stood ready to defend themselves. As the animals attacked, the boys stood firm and beat them off with their pronged pitchforks, which they lowered or raised as needed.

Unable to overpower them by this first attack, the beasts snapped at the fork prongs only to break their teeth and vanish. Some of the boys, however, had forks with only one prong and these were wounded. Others had pitchforks with broken or worm-eaten handles, and still others threw themselves at the beasts barehanded and fell victims; quite a few of these were killed. Many had pitchforks with two prongs and new handles.

While this was going on, from the very start swarms of serpents slithered about my horse. Kicking and stamping, the horse crushed and drove them off: at the same time it kept growing ever taller and taller.

I asked someone what the two-pronged forks symbolized. I was handed a fork and on the prongs I read these two words: *Confession*, on one; *Communion*, on the other.

“But what do the prongs mean?”

“Blow the trumpet!”

I did and heard these words: *Good confession and good Communion*.

I blew the trumpet again and heard these words: *Broken handle: sacrilegious confessions and communions. Worm-eaten handle: Faulty confessions.*

Now that the first attack was over, I rode over the battlefield and saw many dead and wounded. I saw that some of the dead had been strangled and their necks were swollen and deformed. The faces of the others were horribly disfigured; still others had starved to death, while enticing food was within their reach. The boys who were strangled are those who unfortunately committed some sins in their early years and

never confessed them: those with disfigured faces are gluttons: and the boys who died of hunger, those who go to confession but never follow the advice or admonitions of their confessor.

Next to each boy whose pitchfork had a worm-eaten handle a word stood out. For some it was Pride; for others, Sloth; for others still, Immodesty, etc. I must also add that in their march the boys had to walk over a bed of roses. They liked it, but after a few steps they would utter a cry and fall to the ground either dead or wounded because of the thorns hidden underneath. Others instead bravely trampled on those roses and encouraging one another marched on to victory.

Then the sky darkened again. Instantly even greater hordes of the same animals or monsters appeared. All this happened in less than three or four seconds. My horse was surrounded. The monsters increased beyond count and I, too, began to be frightened. I could feel them clawing at me! Then someone handed me a pitchfork, and I also began to fight them, and the monsters were forced to retreat. Beaten in their first attack, they all vanished.

Then I blew the trumpet again, and these words echoed through the valley: *Victory / Victory!*

“Victory?!” I wondered, “how is it possible with so many dead and wounded?”

I blew the trumpet once more and we heard the words: *Truce for the vanquished*. The sky brightened and a rainbow became visible. It was so lovely and so colorful that I cannot describe it. It was immense, as though one end rested on top of Superga and its arch stretched and stretched until it reached the top of Moncenisio. I should also add that all the boys who had been victorious wore crowns so brilliant and so bright and varied in color that it was an awe-inspiring sight. Their faces, too, were resplendently handsome. At the far end of the valley, on one side under the center of the rainbow, there was a sort of balcony holding people full of joy and of such varied beauty as to surpass my imagination. A very noble lady royally arrayed came to the railing of this balcony and called out: “Come my children and take shelter under my mantle.” As she spoke, an immense mantle spread out and all the boys ran to take cover under it. Some actually flew; these had the word *Innocence* on their forehead. Others just walked; and some crawled.

I also started to run, and in that split second, it couldn't have been more than that, I said to myself, "This had better end or we'll die." I had just said this and was still running when I woke up.

For reasons later explained, he returned to this subject on May 6, the feast of the Ascension. He had the students and the artisans assembled together for night prayers, and then spoke as follows:

The other night I was not able to say everything because we had visitors in our midst. These things must be kept among us, and no one should write to friends or relatives about them. I confide everything in you, even my sins. That valley, that land of trial, is this world. The semi-darkness is the place of perdition; the two hills are the commandments of God and the Church; the serpents are the devils; the monsters, evil temptations; the horse, I think, is the same as the one that struck Heliodorus and represents our trust in God. The boys who walked over the roses and fell dead are those who give in to this world's pleasures that deal death to the soul; those who trampled the roses underfoot are those who spurn worldly pleasures and are therefore victorious. The boys who flew under the mantle are those who have preserved their baptismal innocence.

For the sake of those who might wish to know, little by little I shall tell those concerned the kind of weapon they carried and whether they were victorious or not, dead or wounded. I did not know all the boys, but I recognized those of the Oratory. And if the others were ever to come here I would recognize them immediately the moment I saw them.

Father Berto, his secretary who took down this dream, wrote that he could not remember many things that Don Bosco narrated and explainted at length. The next morning, May 7, when he was with Don Bosco, he asked him, "How can you possibly remember all the boys you saw in your dream, and tell each one the state he was in and pinpoint his faults?"

"Oh," Don Bosco answered, "by means of *Otis Botis Pia Tutis*." This was a

meaningless phrase that he often used to evade embarrassing questions.

When Father Barberis also broached the same subject, Don Bosco answered gravely, “It was a great deal more than a dream”; and cutting the talk short he passed on to other things.

Father Berto ends his report with these words: “I, too, the writer of this report, asked him about my part in this dream. His answer was so much to the point that I burst into tears and said, ‘An angel from Heaven could not have hit the truth better.”

Once again this dream was the theme of another *Good Night* on June 4. The community was present at this dialogue between Father Barberis and Don Bosco.

Father Barberis: With your permission, Don Bosco, this evening I would like to ask a few questions. I didn’t dare to, these last few evenings because we had visitors. I’d like some clarification on your last dream.

Don Bosco: Go ahead. It is some time since I last mentioned it, but it doesn’t matter.

Father Barberis: You said at the end of your dream that some flew to Mary’s mantle, some ran, others walked slowly and a few sloshed through mud, were bespattered with it, and were hardly able to take cover under the mantle. You already told us that those who flew were the pure. We can easily understand those who ran, but what is meant by those who got stuck in the mud?

Don Bosco: Those who got stuck in the mud and who, for the most part, could not reach our Lady’s mantle symbolize those attached to the things of this world. Being selfish they think only of themselves; and because of this, they bespatter themselves with mud and are no longer able to get off the ground and aspire to the things of Heaven. They see the Blessed Virgin calling to them and would like to go to her. They take a few steps but the mud holds them down. It always happens like that. The Lord says: “Where thy treasure is, there also will your heart be” [Matt. 6, 21]. Those who do not raise themselves up to the treasures of grace set their hearts on the things of this world. Pleasures, riches, success in business, vainglory are all they think of. Heaven is just ignored.

Father Barberis: There is something else you did not tell us about, Don Bosco. You mentioned it to some privately, and I wish you would let us know, too. It is this: Someone asked you wether he was among those who ran or those who walked slowly, and if he had taken cover under the mantle of Mary and if the handle of his pitchfork was wormeaten or broken. You replied that you had been unable to see clearly because there was a cloud between you and him.

Don Bosco: You are a theologian and you should know. Well, there were indeed some boys, though not very many, whom I could not see clearly. I saw each of them well enough to recognize them, but that was about all. Those are the boys who are tight-lipped with their Superiors; they do not open their hearts to them; they are not sincere. Whenever they see a Superior coming their way, rather than meet him, they go off in the opposite direction. Some of them came to ask me in what state I had seen them in the dream. But what could I tell them? I could have said: You have no confidence in your Superiors, you never open your heart to them. Now all of you remember this: There is nothing that can be of greater help to you than opening your hearts to your Superiors, having great trust in them, and being utterly sincere.

Father Barberis: There's something else I'd like to ask but I'm afraid you might say I'm too curious.

Don Bosco: Isn't that fairly well-known? (General laughter) Yet, you know, there is a certain kind of curiosity which is healthy, as for example, when a boy anxious to learn, keeps asking questions about serious things from persons who might know. There are others instead who just stand around like fools. They never have any questions to ask. This is not a good reflection on them.

Father Barberis: Well, I won't be like that. For a long time I have wanted to ask you this question about the dream. Did you see only each boy's past, or did you also see his future, that is, his vocation and his possible success?

Don Bosco: I saw more than the past; I also saw the future that was to be theirs. Each boy had several paths stretching out ahead of him. Some were narrow and thorny; others were strewn with sharp nails, but God's blessings had also been strewn on these paths. All these paths led to a garden of rare beauty filled with every delight.

Father Barberis: Then this means that you can tell which path each one should take, that is, you know the vocation of each one of us, how we shall end up, and which

path we shall follow.

Don Bosco: No. It would not be wise to tell each one which path he will follow or how he will end up. No good will result from telling a boy: “You will take the path of wickedness.” This would only frighten him. What I can say is this: “If one follows a certain path he may be sure that he is on the road to Heaven, on the road, namely, to which he has been called; and, if one does not follow that road, he will not be on the right path.” Some roads are narrow, uneven and strewn with thorns; yet, take heart, my dear children, with the thorns there is also the grace of God, and so much happiness is in store for us at the end of our journey, that we shall soon forget all our pain. Honestly, I would like all of you to remember this: This was a dream and no one is obliged to believe it. I have noticed, however, that those who have asked me for explanations have accepted my suggestions in good part. Nevertheless, do as St. Paul says: *Probate spiritus et quod bonum est tenete*. [Test all things; hold fast that which is good. 1 Thess. 5, 21]. Another thing that I would not want you to forget is to pray for your poor Don Bosco lest the words of St. Paul: *Cum aliis praedicaverim, ego reprobus efficiar*. [After preaching to others, I myself should be rejected. 1 Cor. 9, 27] may apply to me. That is, after preaching to you I may end up with the damned. I am doing my best to warn you, I worry about you and give you advice, but I fear I may be acting like a brooding hen that hunts for crickets, worms, seeds, and other food for her chicks while she herself may die of hunger unless she gets some good nourishment. Therefore, pray to God for me that this may not happen, but that instead, I may adorn my heart with many virtues and be pleasing to God, so that one day all of us may go to Heaven to enjoy Him and glorify Him. Good night.
(MB IT XI, 257-264 / MB EN XI, 239-246)