 Reading time: 19 min.

We shall now narrate another inspiring dream of Don Bosco which occurred on the nights of April 3, 4, and 5, 1861. "Its striking details," Father Bonetti remarks, "will aptly convince our readers that this is such a dream as God now and then graciously sends to His faithful servants." We shall report it here as detailed in Bonetti's and Ruffino's chronicles.

"After night prayers on April 7," they wrote, "Don Bosco mounted the little rostrum to give the 'Good Night'and spoke as follows:

I have something very strange to tell you tonight – a dream. It's only a dream, so do not give it more importance than it merits. Let me first tell you, though, that I am quite honest with you, as I would like you to be honest with me. I keep no secrets from you, but what is said within the family should be kept in the family. I don't mean to imply that it would be a sin to tell others, but even so I'd rather you didn't. Talk about it all you want, and laugh and joke to your heart's content among yourselves, or even with those few who may – in your opinion – benefit spiritually from it.

This dream has three parts because it lasted three nights. This evening I'll tell you only the first part, leaving the rest for other nights. Surprisingly, on the second and third night I resumed the dream at the very point I had left off when I awoke.

PART ONE

Since dreams come while sleeping, I too was asleep. A few days ago, having to go out of town, I passed by the green-clad hills of Moncalieri.1 I was deeply impressed. Possibly this charming scene came back to my mind, stirring a desire to go hiking. As a matter of fact, that's what I decided to do in my dream.

I seemed to be with my boys in a vast plain which stretched out to a massively high hill. As we were all standing there, I suddenly proposed a hike.

"Yes, yes!" they all cheerfully shouted. "Let's go!"

“Where to?” we asked one another undecidedly. While we looked hopefully at each other for suggestions, someone abruptly blurted out, “Let’s hike to heaven.”

“Yes, yes, to heaven!” the cry arose on all sides.

We started off, and after a while we reached the foot of the hill and began climbing. A magnificent view soon unfolded before our eyes. As far as we could see, the hillside was dotted with trees and saplings of all kinds – some small and tender, others tall and vigorous, none thicker than a man’s arm. There were pears, apples, cherries, plums, vines, and other fruit trees. Amazingly, each tree had some flowers just blossoming and others in full bloom, some fruits just forming and others lusciously ripe. In other words, each tree showed the best of each season at one and the same time. The fruit was so plentiful that the branches sagged under its weight. Surprised at this phenomenon, the boys kept asking me for explanations. To satisfy their curiosity somewhat, I remember saying, “Well, it’s like this. Heaven is not like our earth with its seasons. Its climate is always the same, embodying the best of every season. It is very mild and suitable for every tree and plant.”

We stood entranced by the beauty surrounding us. The gentle breeze, the calm, and the fragrant air about us left no doubt that this climate was ideally suited to all kinds of fruits. Here and there, the boys were plucking apples, pears, cherries, or grapes while slowly climbing. When we finally reached the top of the hill, we thought we were in heaven, but in reality we were quite far from it.

From this vantage point we could see, beyond a vast plain, an extensive plateau and, in its center, a very lofty mountain soaring straight up to the clouds. Many people were determinedly struggling up its steep sides, while on its summit stood One inviting and encouraging them to go up. We also spotted some persons descending from the top to help those who were too exhausted to continue the steep climb. Those reaching the top were greeted with vibrant cheers and jubilation. We understood that paradise was at that peak, and so we started downhill toward the plateau and mountain.

After covering a good part of the way – many boys were running far ahead of the crowd – we were in for quite a surprise. Some distance from the foot of the mountain the plateau held a big lake full of blood. Its length would extend from the Oratory to Piazza Castello. Its shore was littered with human limbs, fractured skulls, and remnants of corpses. It was a gruesome sight, a veritable carnage! The boys

who had run on ahead stopped in their tracks terrified. Being far behind and having no inkling of what was ahead, I was surprised to see them stop with horrified looks on their faces.

“What’s wrong?” I shouted. “Why don’t you keep going?”
“Come and see!” they replied. I hurried over and gazed upon the grim spectacle. As the others came up, they too took in the scene and immediately became silent and dispirited. Standing on the banks of that mysterious lake, I sought a way across, but in vain. Just in front of me, on the opposite bank, I could read a large inscription: *Per sanguinem!* [Through blood!]

Puzzled, the boys kept asking one another: “What does all this mean?”

Then I asked someone (who he was I can’t remember) for an explanation, and he replied, “This is the blood shed by the very many who have already reached the mountain’s summit and are now in heaven. It is the blood of martyrs. Here, also, is the blood of Jesus Christ. In it were bathed the bodies of those who were martyred in testimony of the faith. No one may enter heaven without passing through this blood and being sprinkled by it. It guards the Holy Mountain – the Catholic Church. Whoever attempts to attack her shall drown in it. The torn limbs, mangled bodies, and broken skulls dotting the shore are the gruesome remains of those who chose to fight the Church. All have been crushed to bits; all have perished in this lake.”

In the course of his explanation, the mysterious youth named many martyrs, including the papal soldiers who died defending the Pope’s temporal power.
Then, pointing eastward to our right, he showed us an immense valley four or five times the size of the lake. “Do you see that valley?” he asked. “Into it shall flow the blood of those who will pass this way to scale this mountain – the blood of the just, of those who will die for the faith in days to come.” Seeing that the boys were terrified by all they saw and heard, I tried to encourage them by saying that, if we were to die martyrs, our blood would flow into that valley, but our limbs would not be tossed about like those of the persecutors.

We then hastened to resume our march, skirting the shore of the lake. At our left stood the hill we had come down from; at our right were the lake and mountain. Where the lake ended, we saw a strip of land dotted with oaks, laurels, palms, and other trees. We went through it in search of a trail to the mountain, but only came across another vast lake. Floating in its waters were dismembered human limbs. On

the shore stood an inscription: *Per aquam*! [Through water!]

“What does all this mean?” the boys again asked, mystified.

“This lake,” someone replied, “holds the water which flowed from Christ’s side. Small in quantity then, it has increased, is still increasing, and will keep increasing in the future. This is the baptismal water which washed and purified those who climbed this mountain. In this same water all who must still climb will have to be baptized and purified. In it must be cleansed all those who want to go to heaven. There is no other way to paradise than through innocence or penance. No one can be saved without being cleansed in this water.” Then, pointing to the dismembered limbs, he added, “These are the remains of those who have recently attacked the Church.”

Meanwhile, a number of people and some of our own boys, too, were swiftly darting across the lake, skimming over the waters without wetting the soles of their feet. We were astonished at this, but were told, “These are the just. When the souls of the saints are freed from their bodily prison or when their bodies are glorified, they not only can tread lightly and swiftly over water, but they can also fly through the air.”

Hearing this, all the boys, eager to cross the lake like the other people, looked at me inquiringly. No one, however, dared attempt it.

“For my part, I don’t dare,” I replied. “It would be rash to believe ourselves so just as to be able to cross the lake without sinking.”

“If you don’t dare, we dare even less,” they all exclaimed.

Continuing on our way, always skirting the mountain, we reached a third lake as large as the first, full of flames and more torn human limbs.

On the opposite shore an inscription proclaimed: *Per ignem*! [Through fire!]
While we were observing that fiery lake, that same mysterious person spoke again and said, “This is the fire of the charity of God and His saints. These are the flames of love and desire through which all must pass if they have not gone through blood and water. This is also the fire with which tyrants tortured and consumed so many martyrs. Many are they who had to go through it before climbing the mountain. But

these flames will also serve to reduce their enemies to ashes."

Thus for the third time we were seeing God's enemies crushed and defeated. Wasting no time, we advanced past the lake and came upon a fourth one, even more frightening, shaped like a huge amphitheatre. It was full of dogs, cats, wolves, bears, tigers, lions, panthers, snakes, and other fierce monsters eager to pounce upon anyone within their reach.

We saw people stepping over the heads of these raging beasts. We also saw boys fearlessly following them and suffering no injury.

I tried to call them back, shouting as loudly as I could: "Stop! Can't you see that those beasts are just waiting to devour you?" It was useless.

They didn't hear me and kept treading upon the monsters' heads as if they were on firm, safe ground. My usual guide then said to me: "Those beasts symbolize the devils, the dangers and snares of the world. Those who step over them unharmed are the just, the innocent. Don't you know what Holy Scripture says? 'They shall tread upon the asp and the viper; they shall trample down the lion and the dragon.' [Cf. Ps. 90, 131 It was of such souls that David spoke. And doesn't the Gospel say: 'Behold, I have given you power to tread upon serpents and scorpions and upon all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you'"? [Luke 10, 19]

We still kept asking one another: "How shall we cross over? Do we have to step over these wild beasts too?"

"Yes, let's go!" someone told me.

"I don't dare!" I replied. "It would be rash to believe ourselves so good as to be able to tread safely over these fierce beasts. Do as you wish, but not I."

"Then we won't try it either," the boys concluded.

We left that place and came upon a vast plain crowded with noseless, earless, or headless people. Some, moreover, had no limbs, others had no hands or feet, and still others had no tongue or eyes. The boys were simply struck dumb at such an odd sight. A mysterious person explained: "These are God's friends. To save their souls, they have mortified their senses and performed good works. Many lost parts

of their bodies in carrying out harsh penances or in working for God or their fellow men. The headless ones are those who in a special manner consecrated themselves to God."

While we were pondering these things, we could see that many people, having crossed the lake, were now ascending the mountain.

We also saw others, already at the top, helping and encouraging those who were going up, giving them joyous, hearty cheers of welcome as they reached the top. The handclapping and cheering woke me, and I found myself in bed. This ended the first part of the dream.

The following night, April 8, Don Bosco again spoke to the boys, who couldn't wait to hear the continuation of the dream. He began by repeating his prohibition to put their hands on one another or move around the study hall, and added, "If one has to leave the study hall, he must ask his monitor's permission." By now the boys were becoming restless. Smiling upon their upturned faces, Don Bosco briefly paused and then went on thus:

PART TWO

You will remember that at the bottom of a deep valley, near the first lake, stood another lake yet to be filled with blood. Well, after seeing all I have already described and going around that plateau, we found a passage taking us into another valley, which in turn opened into a large, wedge-shaped plaza. We entered it. Wide at the entrance, it gradually tapered into a trail at its other end near the mountain. At this point the trail was wedged between two huge boulders so close together that only one person at a time could squeeze through. The plaza was filled with cheerful, happy people, all heading for the narrow mountain trail.
"Could that be the trail to heaven?" we asked one another. As the people reached it and squeezed through single-file, they had to pull their clothes tight, hold their breath, and discard whatever they carried. This sufficed to convince me that surely this was the way to heaven, for I remembered that, to get there, one must not only rid himself of sin, but also give up all worldly ties and desires. "There shall not enter into it anything defiled," says the Apostle John. [Apoc. 21, 27] We stood briefly watching that scene. Then we did a very foolish thing. Instead of trying to squeeze through the trail, we turned back to see what was happening in the valley past the

entrance of the plaza. We had noticed a great crowd of people far off, and we were curious to know what went on there.

We started off on a boundless stretch of land and were faced by the odd sight of people and many of our boys yoked to various kinds of animals. “What can this mean?” I mused. Then it flashed across my mind that the ox is a symbol of laziness, and I understood that those boys were lazy. I clearly recognized them. They were habitually indolent, sluggish in their work. So I said to myself, “It serves you right! Stay where you are! If you don’t want to work, that’s just where you belong!”

I saw others yoked to donkeys, carrying loads or grazing. These were the stubborn boys who obstinately resist suggestions and orders. Other lads were paired with mules and horses, reminding me of what Holy Scripture says: “He has become like the horse and the mule which have no understanding.” [Ps. 31, 9] These were the boys who never give a thought to their souls. Such empty heads!
Still others were feeding with pigs. Like them, they grunted and wallowed in the mire. These were the boys who feed on earthly pleasures by gratifying their lower passions. They are far from their heavenly Father. What a sad spectacle! They reminded me of what the Gospel says about the prodigal son being reduced to that sad state “by loose living.” [Luke 15, 13]

Finally, I saw a multitude of people – and some of our boys too – cavorting with cats, dogs, cocks, rabbits – animals symbolizing thieves, scandal-givers, braggards, and spineless individuals who don’t have the courage to stand up for their religious beliefs. We now realized that this valley represented the world. I took a good look at each of the boys, and then we moved on to another very large area of that boundless plain. The ground sloped so gently that we did not even notice it at first. A little way off there seemed to be a flower garden, and we decided to look at it. We first came across most beautiful red roses. “How gorgeous!” the boys shouted, running to pluck a few. But they were disappointed! Though full-blown and colourful, those roses were rotten inside and gave off an extremely foul stench. Fresh-looking violets were there too, but when we picked a few we saw that they also were blighted and smelly.

We kept going and came to several charming groves of trees laden with luscious fruit. They were truly enticing orchards. A boy ran up to a tree and plucked a large pear. A more beautiful one would be hard to find. Yet, as soon as he bit into it, he flung it away in disgust. It was stuffed with clay and sand and tasted awful.

“How can this be?” we asked.

One of our boys, whose name I well remember, replied, “Is this all the world can give us? It’s a worthless sham!”

While we wondered where we were headed for, we became aware that the road was sloping, though ever so slightly. One boy remarked, “We’re going downhill. It’s no good!”

“Let’s take a look, anyway!” I replied.

Meanwhile, a vast multitude of people overtook us and kept going down the road in coaches, on horseback, or on foot. The last-named group kept jumping and running about, singing and dancing or marching along to the beat of drums. The merrymaking was beyond description.

“Let’s wait a while and see before going along with them,” we decided.

Presently a couple of boys noticed some individuals in the crowd who seemed to be directing various groups. They were handsome, well dressed, and quite gracious in manner, but it was obvious that their hats covered horns. That vast plain, then, symbolized our wicked, corrupt world so well described by the Holy Spirit: “Sometimes a way seems right to a man, but the end of it leads to death.”[Prov. 16, 25]

Then and there a mysterious person said to us: “See how men almost unknowingly fall into hell.” At this I immediately called back the boys who had gone ahead. They ran to me, crying, “We don’t want to go down there!” Still shouting, they kept running back to where we had come from, leaving me alone. When I finally caught up with them, l said, “You’re right. Let’s get out of here, or we too shall fall into he11 before we realize it!”

We wanted to return to the plaza from which we had set out and finally get started on the trail to the mountain. Imagine our surprise when, after a long walk, we saw no trace of the valley leading to heaven, but only a meadow. We turned this way and that, but could not find our bearings.

“We have taken the wrong road!” someone cried.

“No, we haven’t,” replied another.

While the boys were arguing, I woke up. Thus ended the dream on the second night.

Before sending you to bed, though, I must tell you one more thing. I do not want you to give any importance to this dream; just remember that pleasures which lead to perdition are deceitful; they are not pleasures at all! Remember also to be on guard against bad habits which make us so similar to beasts and deserving of being yoked with them.

Guard especially against sins that tum us into unclean animals. It is, indeed, most unbecoming for a man to be brought down to the level of beasts, but it is far more unbecoming for a creature made to God’s image and likeness, an heir to heaven, to wallow in the mire like swine through those sins which Holy Scripture labels “loose living.”

I told you only the highlights of my dream – and briefly too – because to narrate it as it was would take too much time. As a matter of fact, last night too I gave you but a hint of what I saw. Tomorrow night I will tell you the rest.

On Saturday 2 night, April 9, Don Bosco continued the narration of his dream:

PART THREE

I would rather not tell you my dreams. In fact, the night before last I had no sooner started my narration than I regretted my promise. I truly wished I had never said a word at all. However, I must confess that if I kept these things to myself I would feel very uneasy. Narrating them, in fact, is a great relief. I will therefore continue with the last part of the dream. Let me first say, though, that the past two nights I had to cut short many things which were better left unsaid, and I left out others which could be seen but not described.

After taking in all the scenes I mentioned, after seeing various places and ways through which one may fall into hell, we were determined to get to heaven at all costs, but try as we might, we always strayed off and came upon new sights. Finally we hit upon the right road and reached the plaza; it was still crowded with people striving to go up the mountain. If you remember, it gradually tapered into a very

narrow trail wedged between two lofty boulders. Just beyond them was a rather long, very narrow, rayless bridge spanning a frightful gorge. As soon as we saw the trail, we all shouted, “There it is! Let’s go.”” And so we did.

Some boys immediately began running, leaving their companions behind. I wanted them to wait for me, but they had got it into their heads to arrive there first. On reaching the bridge, however, they became frightened and stopped. I tried to urge them to advance bravely, but they refused.

“Go ahead,” they replied. “You try it first, Father! The bridge is too narrow. If we miss one step, we’re through!” Finally one boy mustered enough courage to attempt the crossing; another followed him and then the rest. Thus we reached the foot of the mountain.

We looked for a trail but found none. We walked around looking for one, but our search was hindered on all sides by boulders, crags, ravines, and briers. The climb looked steep. We knew we were in for a hard time. Nevertheless, we did not lose heart and eagerly began to work our way up. After a short but very exhausting climb with hands and feet, occasionally helping one another, the obstacles began to decrease until we finally found a trail and were able to climb more comfortably.

Eventually we reached a spot on the mountainside where a great many people were suffering such horrible and strange pains that we were filled with compassion and horror. I cannot tell you what I saw because it’s too distressing and you could not bear it. I leave this out entirely.

We saw also very many people climbing the mountain on all sides.

As they reached the summit they were greeted with loud cheers and applause by those who were already there. We could also hear a truly heavenly music, a most melodious singing, which encouraged us all the more to keep climbing. While we ascended, a thought struck me, and I said to the boys near me, “Isn’t this funny? Here we are on our way to heaven, but are we alive or dead? What about the judgment? Or have we already been judged?”

“No,” they replied laughingly. “We are still alive.”

“Well,” I concluded, “alive or dead, let’s get to the top and see what’s there!” And

we quickened our step.

By dint of perseverance we finally got close to the summit. Those already there were getting ready to greet us, but, as I looked behind to see if the boys were following, I found to my great sorrow that I was almost alone. Only three or four boys had kept up with me.

“Where are the others?” I asked, somewhat upset.

“They stopped here and there,” was the answer. “Perhaps they will come up later!”

I looked down and saw them scattered about the mountain trail, hunting for snails, picking scentless wild flowers, plucking wild berries, chasing butterflies and crickets, or just resting on some green patch under a shady tree. I shouted as loud as I could, waved to them, and called them by name, urging them to hurry up and telling them that this was no time to rest. A few heeded me, so that now I had about eight boys around me. All the others turned a deaf ear, busy with silly trifles. I had no intention at all of going to heaven with only a few boys, and therefore I decided to go down and get after those lazy fellows. I told the boys near me to wait and then I started down.

As many boys as I met, I sent up the mountain. I urged, exhorted, reprimanded, even jabbed and shoved, as needed.

“For heaven’s sake, go up,” I kept saying. “Don’t waste time on trifles!”

In the end, after reaching nearly every one of them, I found myself almost at the scarp of the mountain which we had climbed with so much effort. Here I stopped some boys who, exhausted and discouraged, had given up the ascent and were on their way down. As I turned to resume the climb with them, I stumbled against a stone and woke up. Now that you have heard the whole dream, I ask two things of you.

First, don’t tell it to outsiders, because they would only make fun of it.

I tell you these things just to please you. Talk about this dream among yourselves all you want, but remember that it is only a dream. Secondly, please don’t come to ask me if you were there or not, who was or wasn’t there, what you were or weren’t

doing, if you were among the few or the many, where I saw you, or similar questions, because then we would have a repetition of last winter's commotion. For some this could be more harmful than useful, and I don't want to disturb your consciences.

I only tell you that, if this had not been a dream but reality and we had died then, of the seven or eight hundred boys we have here, very few would have made it to heaven – perhaps only three or four.

Now, lest you get me wrong, let me explain this rash statement.

What I mean is that only three or four would make it straight to heaven without having to go through purgatory. Some might have to spend only a minute there; others, perhaps a day; still others, several days or weeks; nearly all, at least a short time. Now would you like to know how to avoid that? Strive to gain as many indulgences as you possibly can. If you rightly carry out these practices of piety to which indulgences are attached and gain a plenary indulgence, you will go straight to heaven.

Don Bosco gave no private explanation of this dream to any of the pupils and said very little otherwise on the various meanings of the things he had seen. It would not have been easy. This dream, as we shall show, portrayed a variety of tableaux: the Oratory as it was and as it would be; all the boys who were there now or would come later – each with his moral traits and his future; the Salesian Society – its growth, vicissitudes, and destinies; the Catholic Church – her persecutions and triumphs; and other events of general or particular interest.

With tableaux so bewildering in their vastness and interaction, Don Bosco simply could not thoroughly describe everything he had so vividly seen in his dream. Besides, discretion dictated – and duty required – that some things be kept secret or disclosed only to prudent persons to whom such a revelation might be comforting or serve as a warning.

In narrating to his boys the various dreams of which we shall have occasion to speak in due time, Don Bosco only told them what was best for them, since this was the intent of Him who gave these mysterious revelations. Occasionally, however, because of the deep impression he had received, in an effort to choose his subject matter, Don Bosco hinted vaguely at other incidents, things, or ideas. Occasionally

these seemed incoherent and unrelated to his narrative, but strongly suggested that he was holding back much more than he told. Such is the case in his narration of the hike to heaven. We shall attempt to throw some light upon it both by quoting a few words we heard from Don Bosco and also by making a few comments of our own. However, we submit them to the readers' judgment.

1. Seemingly, the hill Don Bosco met at the start of his hike is the Oratory. Its verdure suggests youth. There are no old trees there, large and lofty; rather, youth's blossoms are ever flowering, and flowers and fruit blossom and ripen in every season. Such is the Oratory, or such it should be. Like all of Don Bosco's works it is sustained by charity, which Holy Scripture describes as a garden blessed by God, yielding precious fruits of immortality, similar to Eden's garden, where stood also the tree of life.

2. The mountain climbers are prefigured in the man described in Psalm 8 3, whose strength comes from the Lord. In this valley of tears he – and many others too – resolved to climb steadily to the summit of the mountain, to the tabernacle of the Most High, that is, to heaven. [Cf. Ps. 83, 6] Our Lord, the lawgiver, will bless them, fill them with His grace, and help them to grow in all virtues until they see God in the heavenly Jerusalem and are eternally happy with Him.

3. The lakes seemingly sum up the history of the Church. The countless severed limbs scattered about the shores are the remnants of persecutors, heretics, schismatics, and rebellious Christians.

From certain expressions of Don Bosco in his dream we gather that he saw events both present and future. The chronicle remarks:

"Speaking privately to a few about the vast valley near the lake of blood, Don Bosco said, 'That deep valley is to be filled especially with the blood of priests, perhaps very soon.'"

The chronicle continues: "During the last few days Don Bosco paid a visit to Cardinal De Angelis who said to him: 'Tell me something to cheer me up.'

" 'Very well, I will tell you a dream.'

"Don Bosco then began to narrate his dream, but with more details and remarks.

When he came to the lake of blood, the cardinal became serious and sad. Don Bosco cut his account short, saying, ‘That will be all for now!’

“ ‘Go on,’ said the cardinal.

“ ‘Not now,’ Don Bosco repeated, and then passed on to more cheerful topics.

4. The straight, narrow pass between the two boulders, the narrow wooden bridge (Our Lord’s Cross), the self-assurance of a man of faith that he can cross it, the peril to which a man exposes himself in so doing if he does not have the right intention, the various obstacles before the mountain trail becomes passable – all this, if we are not mistaken, may refer to religious vocations. The people in the plaza may be boys called by God to serve Him in the Salesian Society. In fact, all those waiting to start on the trail to heaven looked happy and content and enjoyed themselves. This would indicate mostly young people. As for the climbers who had stopped in their ascent or were turning back, could this not suggest a cooling in following one’s vocation? Don Bosco’s own interpretation of this incident could indirectly allude to vocations, but he did not deem it wise to elaborate.

5. On the slope of the mountain, just past the initial obstacles, Don Bosco saw people in pain. Father Bonetti’s chronicle offers this explanation: “Several asked him about this privately, and he replied, ‘This place symbolized purgatory. If I had to preach on this subject, I’d just describe what I saw. It was simply frightful.
There were all kinds of torments. I will only say that I saw people crushed under presses, hands, feet and heads sticking out all around, eyes bursting from their sockets. These people were so badly squashed and crushed that the sight was truly bloodcurdling.’”

We shall conclude with an important observation which can apply to this and other dreams which we shall narrate. In these dreams or visions, as they may be called, there nearly always appears a personage who acts as Don Bosco’s guide or interpreter.

Who can he be? This is the most amazing and consoling part of these dreams, but Don Bosco kept it in his heart.
(MB IT VI, 864-882 / MB EN VI, 508-520)