

□ Reading time: 8 min.

*The following dream, recounted by Don Bosco to his young people in 1867, begins with a sleepless night during which the Saint reflects on the mystery of the soul. Guided by a luminous presence, he is transported to a suspended palace where he meets a friendly bishop, already deceased, who gives him glimpses into the destiny beyond death. Warnings emerge from their dialogue: the illusory nature of worldly pleasures, the need to dispel the worldly “fog”, the safeguarding of purity, obedience, the avoidance of idleness, prayer, and frequent confession and communion. The vision, both realistic and symbolic, illuminates divine justice and the urgency of preparing for Paradise in the daily Salesian educational journey, making the message of hope and responsibility relevant to every reader.*

After night prayers that same evening, Don Bosco spoke also to the whole community as follows:

When I went to bed last night I could not fall asleep directly, and so I began thinking about the soul: its nature, mode of existence, structure, activities after its separation from the body, and mobility. I wondered too how we might be able to recognize others after death, since we would all be pure spirits. The more I thought about it, the less I knew.

Finally I fell asleep and dreamed that I was on my way to ... (*and he named the city*). After passing through several unknown towns, I suddenly heard someone calling me. He was standing on the shoulder of the road. “Come with me,” he said, “and your wish will be fulfilled.” I obeyed. We moved through space as swiftly as thought, never touching the ground until we got to some place totally unknown to me. High above us stood a magnificent palace. I can’t really say whether it stood on a mountain or on a cloud, but it certainly was inaccessible. No roads led to it and it was far beyond reach.

“Go up to that palace,” my guide said.

“How?” I replied. “I have no wings!”

“Go up!” he repeated imperiously. Seeing that I did not stir, he added, “Do as I do. Lift your arms as high as you can.” He showed me how, and at once I felt myself lifted into the air like a thin cloud. In no time we reached the palace gates.

“Who lives here?” I asked.

“Go in and you’ll know. At the end of the hall someone will give you information.” He disappeared. Left to myself, I went in, walked along a portico, went up a stairway, and entered a truly regal apartment. I passed through spacious halls,

richly decorated rooms, and endless corridors at such unearthly speed that I could not even count them. Each glittered with priceless treasures. But what astonished me most was that, although I was going as swiftly as the wind, I never even moved my feet. I was gliding along over what seemed to be a crystal floor without ever touching it. Finally I came to a door at the end of a corridor that opened into another hall even more magnificent than all the others. At the far end, a bishop sat majestically in an imposing armchair, apparently awaiting somebody. I approached respectfully and was extremely surprised to recognize him as a dear friend of mine — Bishop . . . of. . . (*Don Bosco mentioned his name*) who died two years ago. He did not seem to be in pain. He looked healthy and friendly and was indescribably handsome.

“Your Excellency!” I exclaimed with great joy. “Is it really you?”

“Can’t you see?” the bishop replied.

“But how? Are you still living? I thought you were dead.”

“I *am* dead.”

“How can it be? You look wonderful! If you are still alive, please say so or we’ll have a problem. At [Cuneo] another bishop 3 has already taken your place. How are we going to settle this?”

“Don’t worry! I *am* dead.”

“That’s good! It would hardly do to have two bishops on the same chair.”

“I understand. And how about you, Don Bosco? Are you dead or alive?”

“I am alive. Can’t you see I am here in body and soul?”

“Bodies aren’t allowed here.”

“But I *am* here in my body.

“You *think* you are. ...”

At this point I fired off a lot of questions which went unanswered. “How can it be that I, still living, am here with you who are dead?” I kept asking. Fearing that the bishop might vanish, I begged him, “Please, Your Excellency, do not leave me. There are many things I want to ask you.”

“Relax,” he said. “I won’t run away. What do you want to know?”

“Are you saved?”

“Look at me! See how vigorous, ruddy, and radiant I am.” Indeed his whole appearance gave a well-founded hope that he was saved. Nonetheless, I insisted:

“Please give me a straight answer. Are you saved or not?”

“Yes, I am in a place of salvation.”

“Are you in heaven or in purgatory?”

“I am in a place of salvation, but I have not yet seen God. I still need your prayers.”

“How long must you yet stay in purgatory?”

"This will tell you," he said, handing me a paper. I examined it attentively but found nothing on it.

"There is no writing at all on it," I replied.

"Look carefully," he insisted.

"I am looking," I countered, "but I still can't see any writing."

"Look again."

"I only see multicolored floral designs but no writing whatever."

"There are numerals."

"I don't see any!"

The bishop peered at the paper I was holding. "No wonder you don't see any. Turn the paper upside down." I complied and examined the paper even more closely from all angles, but to no avail. The only thing I could make out were floral twists and whorls resembling the figure.

"Do you know why you must turn the paper upside down in order to read it? It is because God's judgments are different from the world's. What men hold as wisdom is foolishness in God's sight."

Not daring to press for a clearer explanation, I just said, "Please, Bishop, do not leave me yet. I have more questions."

"Go on. I'm listening."

"Will I be saved?"

"You must hope."

"Please don't keep me in suspense. Tell me straight."

"I don't know."

"At least tell me if I am in the state of grace."

"I don't know."

"Will my boys be saved?"

"I don't know."

"Tell me, please, I beg you."

"You have studied theology and you can answer that question yourself."

"I can't believe it. Here you are in a place of salvation and you don't know these things?"

"It's like this: God reveals these things to whomsoever He wishes. If He wants this knowledge to be imparted to anyone, He gives the necessary command or permission. Otherwise, no one can reveal these things to the living."

Endless questions kept popping up in my mind and I quickly voiced them, fearing that the bishop might disappear.

"Will you now give me a message for my boys?"

"You know as well as I what they must do. The Church, the Gospel, and the rest of

the Scriptures are clear enough. Tell your boys to save their souls because that's all that matters. The rest counts for nothing."

"We know we must save our souls. But how shall we go about it? Tell me something special that may remind us of you. I shall repeat it to my boys in your name."

"Tell them to be good and obedient."

"They know that."

"Tell them to be modest and to pray."

"Please be more specific!"

"Tell them to go to confession often and to make worthy Communions."

"Something more specific yet."

"Well, then, tell them this. Tell them that there is fog before their eyes. If they are aware of it, it's a good sign. Let them dispel it."

"What does this fog symbolize?"

"The things of the world which prevent them from seeing the things of heaven as they really are."

"And what must they do to dispel this fog?"

"They must see the world as it really is. 'The whole world is under the evil one.' [1 John 5, 19] Only then will they save their souls. They should not let themselves be deceived by appearances. Believing that worldly pleasures, amusements, and friendships will make them happy, the young long for them, while they should rather keep in mind that all is vanity and affliction of spirit. Let them form the habit to judge matters of the world not by their appearances, but as they really are."

"And what mainly causes this fog?"

"Immodesty and impurity, a sin which, like a murky cloud, prevents youngsters from seeing the abyss toward which they are heading. Tell them to guard jealously the virtue of purity. It is the virtue that shines brightest in heaven. 'The pure shall flourish like the lily.' " [Is. 35, 1]

"How is it to be safeguarded? Tell me and I'll repeat it to my dear boys in your name."

"Four things: flight from worldly things, obedience, avoiding idleness, and prayer."

"What else?"

"Prayer, avoiding idleness, obedience, and flight from worldly things."

"Anything else?"

"Obedience, flight from worldly things, prayer, and avoiding idleness. Insist on these things. They are enough."

I wanted to ask other questions, but I couldn't think of any at the moment. Besides, being in such a hurry to tell you these things, I dashed out and with the speed of wind found myself at the Oratory gate. There I suddenly felt a sense of regret,

thinking: *Why did I not stay longer with the bishop? I could have learned many more things. I really blundered in letting such a good chance slip by.* I immediately dashed back with my former speed but with a nagging fear of no longer finding the bishop. Luckily he was still there—but what a change! He was lying in bed, as white as a ghost, with tears welling in his eyes. He was dying. A slight heaving of his chest was the only sign of life.

I stooped over him in utter shock. “Your Excellency, what happened?”

“Leave me alone,” he moaned.

“I have many more things to ask you.”

“Leave me alone! I am in terrible pain.”

“Can I help you?”

“Pray for me and let me go.”

“Go where?”

“Where God is leading me.”

“But where? Please tell me.”

“I am in too much pain! Leave me alone!”

“At least tell me what I can do for you,” I repeated.

“Pray!”

“Have you any messages? Anything you want me to tell your successor?”

“Tell him this and this. . . .” However, since the things he told me are not for you, my dear boys, I will leave them out. The bishop then gave me other confidential messages. (*Don Bosco did not reveal them. They seem to have been admonitions or measures to be taken for the good of that diocese.*)

“Anything else?” I asked.

“Tell your boys that they have always been very dear to me. I prayed for them during my life and still do. Let them now pray for me.”

“I will surely tell them,” I replied, “and we will begin at once to offer suffrages for you. Please remember us as soon as you reach heaven.”

The bishop meanwhile seemed to be suffering even more. It was heartrending to see him in such painful agony.

“Leave me,” he repeated. “Let me go where God calls me.”

“Bishop! Bishop!” I kept repeating, filled with inexpressible pity.

“Let me be, let me be!” He seemed to be breathing his last while an invisible force pulled him out of sight into an inner part of the palace.

Frightened and deeply moved, I turned to get back to the Oratory, but in so doing I bumped my knee into something and woke up in bed. ‘

As you see, my dears boys, this is a dream like many others. What concerns you needs no explanation. It has taught me a lot about the soul and purgatory. Things I

had never before been able to grasp became so clear that I shall never forget them. Perhaps in this two-part dream Don Bosco meant to depict the state of grace of the souls in purgatory and their expiatory sufferings. He did not comment on the state of that good bishop.

Some time later, relying on his trust in us, we asked him if he had delivered the bishop's messages. "Yes," he replied. "I did!"

We will further remark that the dream, as recorded above, omits a detail that we remember but perhaps seemed unclear or unimportant at that time. At a certain point in the dream Don Bosco asked how much longer he would live. In reply the bishop handed him a paper full of scribbles and whorls interwoven into the figure 8, but he offered no explanations. Did these figures point to 1888 [the year of Don Bosco's death]?

*(MB ITVIII, 853-859 / MB EN VIII, 368-373)*