

St Francis de Sales instructs him. Future of vocations (1879)

In the prophetic dream Don Bosco recounted on 9 May 1879, Saint Francis de Sales appeared as a caring teacher and gave the Founder a booklet full of warnings for novices, professed members, directors, and superiors. The vision was dominated by two epic battles: first young men and warriors, then armed men and monsters, while the banner of "Mary Help of Christians" guaranteed victory to those who followed it. The survivors set off for the East, North, and South, foreshadowing the Salesian missionary expansion. The Saint's words emphasised obedience, chastity, educational charity, love of work, and temperance, indispensable pillars for the Congregation to grow, withstand trials, and leave its children a legacy of active holiness. It concluded with a coffin, a stern reminder to be vigilant and prayerful.

Think as we may of this particular dream, Don Bosco had another dream which he narrated on May 9. In it he saw the fierce battles which faced the men called to his Congregation, and he was given several valuable instructions for all his sons and sound advice for the future.

[I saw] a hard-fought, long-drawn-out battle between youngsters and a varied array of warriors who were armed with strange weapons. Survivors were few.

A second fiercer and more terrifying battle was being waged by gigantic monsters fully armed, well-trained tall men who unfurled a huge banner, the center of which bore an inscription in gold, *Maria Auxilium Christianorum*. The combat was long and bloody, but the soldiers fighting under the banner were protected against hurt and conquered a vast plain. The boys who had survived the previous battle linked forces

with them, each combatant holding a crucifix in his right hand and a miniature of the banner in his left. After engaging together in several sallies over that vast plain, they split, some heading eastward, a few to the north, and many for the south. Once they all left, the same skirmishes, maneuvers and leave-takings were repeated by others.

I recognized some boys who fought in the first skirmishes, but none of the others, who nevertheless seemed to know me and asked me many questions.

Shortly afterward I witnessed a shower of flashing, fiery tongues of many colors, followed by thunder and then clear skies. Then I found myself in a charming garden. A man who looked like Saint Francis de Sales silently handed me a booklet. I asked him who he was. "Read the book," was the reply.

I opened it, but had trouble reading, managing only to make out these precise words:

"For the Novices: Obedience in all things. Through obedience they will deserve God's blessings and the good will of men. Through diligence they will fight and overcome the snares set by the enemies of their souls.

"For the Confreres: Jealously safeguard the virtue of chastity. Love your confreres' good name, promote the honor of the Congregation.

"For the Directors: Take every care, make every effort to observe and promote observance of the rules through which everyone's life is consecrated to God.

"For the Superior: Total self-sacrifice, so as to draw himself and his charges to God."

The book said many other things, but I couldn't read any further, for the paper turned as blue as the ink.

"Who are you?" I again asked the man who serenely gazed at me.

"Good people everywhere know me. I have been sent to tell you of future events."

"What are they?"

"Those you have already seen and those which you will ask about."

"How can I foster vocations?"

"The Salesians will harvest many vocations by their good example, by being endlessly kind toward their pupils, and by urging them constantly to receive Holy Communion often."

"What should we bear in mind when admitting novices?"

"Reject idlers and gluttons."

"And when admitting to vows?"

"Make sure that they are well grounded in chastity."

"How are we to maintain the right spirit in our houses?"

"Let superiors very often write, visit and welcome the confreres, dealing kindly with them."

"What of our foreign missions?"

"Send men of sound morality and recall any who give you serious reason to doubt; look for and foster native vocations."

"Is our Congregation on the right path?"

"Let those who do good keep doing good. [Rev. 22, 11] Not to go forward is to go backward. [St. Gregory the Great] The man who stands firm to the end will be saved." [Mt. 10, 22]

"Will the Congregation grow?"

"It will reach out so that no one will be able to check its growth, as long as the superiors meet their obligations."

"Will it have a long life?"

"Yes, but only as long as its members love work and temperance.

Should either of these two pillars fall, your entire edifice will collapse and crush superiors, subjects and followers beneath it."

Just then four men showed up bearing a coffin and approaching me.

"Whom is that for?" I asked.

"For you."

"How soon?"

"Do not ask. Just remember that you are mortal."

"What are you trying to tell me with this coffin?"

"That while you are still living you must see to it that your sons practice what they must continue to practice after your

death. This is the heritage, the testament you must bequeath to them; but you must work on it and leave it [to your sons] as a well-studied and well-tested legacy."

"Can we expect roses or thorns?"

"Many roses and joys are in store, but very sharp thorns also threaten.

They will cause all of you acute distress and sorrow. You must pray much."

"Should we open houses in Rome?"

"Yes, but not hurriedly; proceed with extreme prudence and caution."

"Is the end of my mortal life near at hand?"

"Don't be concerned. You have the rules and other books. Practice what you preach and be vigilant."

I wanted to ask more questions, but muffled thunder rumbled through the air with flashes of lightning. Several men, rather horrid monsters, dashed toward me as if to tear me to pieces. But then a deep darkness enveloped me, shutting everything out. I felt that I must be dead and started to scream frenziedly. I awoke and found I was still alive. It was a quarter to five in the morning.

If we can draw some good from this dream, let us do so. In all things let honor and glory be given to God forever and ever.

(*BM XIV, 88-90*)

Photo on the title page. Saint Francis de Sales. Anonymous. Sacristy of Chieri Cathedral