 Reading time: 6 min.

Among Don Bosco's dreams, one of the best known is the one known as the "Dream of the two columns". He recounted it on the evening of 30 May 1862.

"A few nights ago I had a dream. True, dreams are nothing but dreams, but still I'll tell it to you for your spiritual benefit, just as I would tell you even my sins-only I'm afraid I'd send you scurrying away before the roof fell in. Try to picture yourselves with me on the seashore, or, better still, on an outlying cliff with no other land in sight. The vast expanse of water is covered with a formidable array of ships in battle formation, prows fitted with sharp, spearlike beaks capable of breaking through any defense. All are heavily armed with cannons, incendiary bombs, and firearms of all sorts-even books-and are heading toward one stately ship, mightier than them all. As they close in, they try to ram it, set it afire, and cripple it as much as possible.

This stately vessel is shielded by a flotilla escort. Winds and waves are with the enemy. In the midst of this endless sea, two solid columns, a short distance apart, soar high into the sky: one is surmounted by a statue of the Immaculate Virgin at whose feet a large inscription reads: *Auxilium Christianorum* [Help of Christians]; the other, far loftier and sturdier, supports a Host of proportionate size and bears beneath it the inscription *Salus credentium* [Salvation of believers].

The flagship commander-the Roman Pontiff-seeing the enemy's fury and his auxiliary ships' very grave predicament, summons his captains to a conference. However, as they discuss their strategy, a furious storm breaks out and they must return to their ships.

When the storm abates, the Pope again summons his captains as the flagship keeps on its course. But the storm rages again. Standing at the helm, the Pope strains every muscle to steer his ship between the two columns from whose summits hang many anchors and strong hooks linked to chains.

The entire enemy fleet closes in to intercept and sink the flagship at all costs. They bombard it with everything they have: books and pamphlets, incendiary bombs, firearms, cannons. The battle rages ever more furious. Beaked prows ram the flagship again and again, but to no avail, as, unscathed and undaunted, it keeps on

its course. At times a formidable ram splinters a gaping hole into its hull, but, immediately, a breeze from the two columns instantly seals the gash.

Meanwhile, enemy cannons blow up, firearms and beaks fall to pieces, ships crack up and sink to the bottom. In blind fury the enemy takes to hand-to-hand combat, cursing and blaspheming. Suddenly the Pope falls, seriously wounded. He is instantly helped up but, struck down a second time, dies. A shout of victory rises from the enemy and wild rejoicing sweeps their ships. But no sooner is the Pope dead than another takes his place. The captains of the auxiliary ships elected him so quickly that the news of the Pope's death coincides with that of his successor's election. The enemy's self-assurance wanes.

Breaking through all resistance, the new Pope steers his ship safely between the two columns and moors it to the two columns; first, to the one surmounted by the Host, and then to the other, topped by the statue of the Virgin. At this point, something unexpected happens. The enemy ships panic and disperse, colliding with and scuttling each other.

Some auxiliary ships which had gallantly fought alongside their flag-ship are the first to tie up at the two columns. Many others, which had fearfully kept far away from the fight, stand still, cautiously waiting until the wrecked enemy ships vanish under the waves. Then, they too head for the two columns, tie up at the swinging hooks, and ride safe and tranquil beside their flagship. A great calm now covers the sea.

"And so," Don Bosco at this point asked Father Rua, "what do you make of this?"

"I think," he answered, "that the flagship symbolizes the Church commanded by the Pope; the ships represent mankind; the sea is an image of the world. The flagship's defenders are the laity loyal to the Church; the attackers are her enemies who strive with every weapon to destroy her. The two columns, I'd say, symbolize devotion to Mary and the Blessed Sacrament."

Father Rua did not mention the Pope who fell and died. Don Bosco, too, kept silent on this point, simply adding: "Very well, Father, except for one thing: the enemy ships symbolize persecutions. Very grave trials await the Church. What we suffered so far is almost nothing compared to what is going to happen. The enemies of the Church are symbolized by the ships which strive their utmost to sink the flagship.

Only two things can save us in such a grave hour: devotion to Mary and frequent Communion. Let's do our very best to use these two means and have others use them everywhere. Good night!"
(BM VII, 107-109).

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The Servant of God Cardinal Schuster, Archbishop of Milan, gave so much importance to this vision that in 1953, when he was in Turin as Papal Legate to the National Eucharistic Congress, on the night of 13 September, during the solemn closing Pontifical, on the Piazza Vittorio, packed with people, he gave this dream a relevant part of his Homily.

He said among other things: "At this solemn hour, in the Eucharistic Turin of Cottolengo and Don Bosco, I am reminded of a prophetic vision that the Founder of the Church of Mary Help of Christians narrated to his community in May 1862. He seemed to see the Church's fleet being beaten here and there by the waves of a horrible storm; so much so that, at a certain moment, the supreme commander of the captain ship – Pius IX – summoned the commanders of the smaller ships to council.

Unfortunately the storm, which roared ever more menacingly, interrupted the Vatican Council halfway through (it should be noted that Don Bosco announced these events eight years before they took place). In the ups and downs of those years, twice the same Supreme Pontiffs succumbed to their labours. When the third happened, two pillars began to emerge in the midst of the raging ocean, at the top of which triumphed the symbols of the Eucharist and the Immaculate Virgin.

At that apparition, the new Pontiff – Blessed Pius X – took heart and with a firm chain, hooked Peter's capital ship to those two solid pillars, lowering the anchors into the sea.

Then the smaller ships began to row strenuously to gather around the Pope's ship, and thus escaped shipwreck.

History confirmed the prophecy of the Seer. The pontifical beginnings of Pius X with the anchor on his coat of arms coincided precisely with the fiftieth jubilee year of the dogmatic proclamation of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, and was celebrated throughout the Catholic world. All of us remember 8 December 1904, when the Pontiff in St Peter's surrounded the Immaculate Conception's forehead with a precious crown of gems, consecrating the entire family that Jesus Crucified had committed to her to the Mother.

Bringing the innocent and infirm children to the Eucharistic Table also

became part of the programme of the generous Pontiff, who wanted to restore the whole world in Christ. So it was that, as long as Pius X lived, there was no war, and he deserved the title of peaceful Pontiff of the Eucharist.

Since that time the international situation has not really improved; so that the experience of three quarters of a century confirms that the fisherman's ship on the stormy sea can only hope for salvation by hooking up to the two pillars of the Eucharist and Mary Help of Christians, who appeared to Don Bosco in a dream" (*L'Italia*, 13 September 1953).

The same saintly Card. Schuster, once told a Salesian: "I have seen the vision of the two columns reproduced. Tell your Superiors that they should have it reproduced in prints and postcards, and spread it throughout the Catholic world, because this vision of Don Bosco's is very topical: the Church and the Christian people will be saved by these two devotions: the Eucharist and Mary, Help of Christians."

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