 Reading time: 5 min.

The dreamlike tale that follows, recounted by Don Bosco on the evening of 24 October 1878, is far more than just simple evening entertainment for the young people of the Oratory. Through the delicate image of lambs caught in a violent summer storm, the saintly educator paints a vivid allegory of school holidays: a seemingly carefree time, but one fraught with spiritual dangers. The inviting meadow represents the outside world, the hailstones symbolise temptations, while the protected garden alludes to the safety offered by a life of grace, the sacraments, and the educational community. In this dream, which becomes a catechism, Don Bosco reminds his boys – and us – of the urgency to be vigilant, to seek divine help, and to support each other in order to return to daily life unscathed.

No information has been left us about the boys' leaving for their fall vacation and their return, save for a dream which Don Bosco had concerning the effects of vacation. He narrated it after night prayers on October 24 to an audience which became excited the moment he mentioned it.

I am glad to see that my army of soldiers *contra diabolum* [against the devil] has returned-he began. This is Latin, but even Cottino 12 understands it! I have lots of things to tell you since this is the first chance I've had to talk to you after your vacation, but let me just tell you a dream. You know that dreams come in sleep and don't have to be believed. However, just as there is nothing wrong in disbelieving them, sometimes there is no harm in believing them, and they can teach things. So, too, this dream.

I was at Lanzo during the first spiritual retreat, when I dreamed one night that I was in some unknown region, but near a village which had a fine garden and an adjacent huge meadow. Some friend I was with told me to go into the garden. I did so and there I saw a numerous flock of lambs cavorting and prancing about. The sheepgate leading into the meadow was open, and the lambs scampered out to graze.

Many, however, remained inside browsing here and there, though the pasture was nowhere as abundant as in the meadow where most of the lambs had gone. "Let me see what those lambs are up to over there," I said. We went and saw that they were all quietly grazing. Suddenly the sky darkened, flashed with lightning and rolled with thunder.

“What will happen to all those poor little things if they are caught in the storm?” I asked. “Let’s get them under a shelter.” We all spread out and tried to herd them together toward the sheepgate, but they kept dodging us and their legs were a lot swifter than ours. Meanwhile, rain began to fall in heavy drops, and soon came a downpour. I could not herd the lambs together. One or two did find their way into the garden, but the rest, the greater number, remained in the meadow. “Well,” I said, “if they won’t come back, all the worse for them! Let’s go.” And we returned to the garden.

There stood a fountain bearing an inscription in black capitals: FONS SIGNATUS [Sealed Fountain]. It was covered, but now it opened, and as the water shot high into the air, it sprayed out and formed a rainbow vault over us, something like this arch.

Meanwhile, the lightning and thunder grew worse, and hailstones began to pelt us. With the young lambs that had come into the garden, we took shelter beneath that arching vault which shielded us from rain and hail.

“What’s this all about?” I kept asking my friends. “What will become of those poor little lambs out there?”

“You will see!” they answered. “Look at the foreheads of these lambs.” I did so and read on each the name of an Oratory boy.

“What does it mean?”

“You shall see!”

Too impatient to wait, I decided to dash out and find out what had happened to the lambs outside. I will gather those that were killed and send them back to the Oratory, I thought to myself. As soon as I left the rainbow shelter I was deluged with rain. There, on the ground, were those poor lambs struggling in vain to raise themselves and limp toward the garden. I opened the gate and shouted to them, but they were too weak. Rain and hail kept pelting them so hard that they were truly a pitiful sight, wounded in the head or eyes or legs and other parts of their bodies.

The storm gradually spent itself.

“Look at their foreheads,” someone at my side told me.

I did. Again, each forehead bore the name of an Oratory boy. “Why,” I cried, “know these boys but they do not look like lambs.”

“You will see,” was the reply I got. Then he handed me a golden jar covered with a silver lid.

“Apply this ointment to the wounds of these lambs,” he told me, “and they will instantly be healed.”

I called out to them, but none of them stirred. Again and again I called,

but they would not budge. I stepped toward one of them, but it dragged itself away. “Well, so much the worse for you,” I exclaimed and turned to another, but that too dragged itself away. And so it was with every lamb I tried to reach. Finally, I managed to get close to one lamb whose badly battered eyes were protruding from their sockets. It was a pitiful sight. I touched it, and the lamb, instantly healed, skipped off into the garden.

On seeing that, many other lambs allowed me to heal them, and they too scampered back into the garden. Still, many stayed outside, the most battered of them all, but I could not get near them.

“If they do not want to be healed, they can only blame themselves,” I said, “but how can I heard them back into the garden?”

“Leave them alone,” a friend told me. “They will come back.”

“Let’s wait and see,” I replied and, returning the gold jar, I went back to the garden. It was completely changed. Over the gate I read the word “Oratory.” As soon as I stepped in, the lambs that had formerly avoided me now inched forward and entered the garden stealthily, quickly squatting anywhere. But even then I couldn’t get close to them. A few reluctantly let me rub the ointment on them, but it turned into poison on them and reopened their wounds.

At this point one of my friends said, “Do you see that banner?”

I turned around to where he was pointing and saw a large banner in the air, blazoned with the word “VACATION” in tall letters.

“Yes,” I answered.

“ll this happened during vacation,” one of my friends told me, as I bewailed the destruction, beside myself with grief. “Your boys leave the Oratory honestly intent upon avoiding sin and being good, but no sooner come storm and rain-signs of the devil’s temptations and assaults and the pelting hail than the poor little wretches fall into sin. Some recover through a good confession. Others receive the sacrament carelessly or avoid it altogether. Bear this in mind: never tire of reminding your boys that a vacation is a devastating tempest for their souls.”

Gazing at those lambs again, I noticed that some were dying of their wounds. Just as I sought ways to heal them, Father Scappini, who was then getting out of bed next door, made some noise and I too awoke.

And this was my dream. Even though it is only a dream, it carries a message which will not harm those who accept it. I can also say that, as I matched the names of the lambs’ foreheads with the boys being identified, I could agree that they were really behaving as did the lambs of my dream. Be that as it may, however, let us accept God’s mercy and heal our wounds by a good

confession during this novena in honour of All Saints. We are all to be determined to wage war against the devil. With God’s help, we shall win and will one day receive the heavenly crown of victory.

Doubtless this dream effectively helped give the new school year a good start. Everything was moving along so smoothly during the novena of the Immaculate Conception that Don Bosco remarked with warm satisfaction, “The boys have already reached a point which they would have barely attained in February in past years. “On the feast of the Immaculate Conception they once more witnessed the inspiring farewell ceremony of the fourth missionary expedition.
(MB XIII 761-764 / BM XIII 584-587)