 Reading time: 9 min.

Part I

At the “Good Night” on August 20, 1862, Don Bosco, after giving some disciplinary reminders, addressed them as follows:

I want to tell you a dream I had some nights ago, most probably on the eve of the Assumption. I dreamed that I was at my brother’s home at Castelnuovo d’Asti with all my boys. While they were at play, a total stranger came up to me and asked me to go with him. He took me to a meadow alongside the playground and pointed to a huge, ugly snake, over twenty feet long, coiled in the grass. Frightened, I wanted to run off, but the stranger held me back. “Get closer and take a good look,” he said.
“What?” I gasped. “Don’t you realize that monster could spring on me and gobble me up in no time?”
“Don’t be afraid! Nothing of the sort will happen. Just come with me.”
“Nothing doing! I’m not crazy!”
“Then stay where you are,” the stranger replied. And he went to fetch a rope.
“Take this end,” he said on his return, “and grip it tightly with both hands. I’ll hold the other, and we’ll let it dangle over the snake.”
“And then?”
“Then we’ll snap it across its back.”
“You must be crazy! The snake will leap up and tear us to pieces.”
“No, it won’t. Leave that to me.”
“Count me out! I have no intention to risk my life for a thrill of this kind!”
Again I tried to run away, but the stranger once more assured me that I had nothing to fear because the snake would do me no harm. He talked so persuasively that I stayed on and agreed to his plan. He went around to the other side of the monster. We stretched the rope and then snapped it across the snake’s back. The monster immediately sprang up and struck at the rope, but, as it did so, it ensnared itself as in a noose.
“Hold on!” the stranger shouted. “Don’t let go!” He ran to a nearby pear tree and tied his end of the rope to it. Then he came to me and tied my end to the iron grating of a window in the house. The snake kept furiously struggling to free itself, writhing, thrashing, and flailing about. In its fury it tore itself to pieces, scattering its flesh over the area, till it was slashed to a mere skeleton.
The stranger then untied the rope and coiled it up. “Now watch very carefully!” he said as he put it into a box and closed it. By this time the boys had swarmed about

me. Within a few moments he opened the box. We looked in and were astounded to see the rope shaped into the words *Ave Maria*. “How did that happen?” I asked. “The snake,” the man replied, “is a symbol of the devil, whereas the rope stands for *Ave, Maria* or, rather, the rosary, a succession of Hail Marys with which we can strike, conquer, and destroy all of hell’s demons.”
What I’ve told you so far – Don Bosco concluded – is the first part of the dream. What followed is even stranger and m re amazing, but it’s too late to tell you now. I’ll leave it for tomorrow. In the meantime let us give thought to what that stranger said about the Hail Mary and the rosary. Let us devoutly say a Hail Mary whenever we are tempted, and we’ll be sure to win. Good night.

Since Don Bosco gave no interpretation of this dream, we shall volunteer a few comments.

The pear tree is the same one to which Don Bosco, as a boy, often used to tie one end of a tightrope as he got ready for the acrobatic performances with which he enticed his peers to a catechism lesson. Seemingly, we may see this tree as an image of the tree in Chapter 2, verse 3 of the Canticle of Canticles: “As an apple tree among the trees of the words, so is my lover among men.” Tirino and other famous biblical commentators hold that this apple tree stands for any fruit tree. Hence, the fruit tree, with its delightful, refreshing shade, is a symbol of Jesus and His cross, the source of effective prayer and certain victory. Possibly this may be the reason why one end of the rope, so fatal to the snake, was tied to the pear tree. The other end, secured to the iron grating of a window, can mean that the mission of spreading devotion to the rosary was entrusted to the one that dwelt in that home and to his [spiritual] sons.

Don Bosco had promptly understood that.

He first began the annual celebration of Our Lady of the Rosary at Becchi. Then he directed that in all his schools pupils should daily recite five decades of the rosary. Finally, in his sermons and writings he strove to restore this ancient practice in families. He looked upon the rosary as a weapon which would bring victory not only to individuals but to the Church as well. That is why his [spiritual] sons published all the encyclicals of Leo XIII on this prayer so beloved by Mary and, through the *Bollettino Salesiano,* warmly promoted the desires of the Vicar of Jesus Christ [concerning the establishment of the Confraternity of the Rosary in all parishes].

Most Reverend Father (Don Rua),

Having returned to Rome from the Eucharistic Congress in Naples, I learn with much pleasure that the exhortation directed to the Parish Priests in the Salesian Bulletin is beginning to bear fruit. I therefore offer my best thanks to Your Excellency, and I assure you that you have done a work well pleasing to the Holy Father, who so much desires that his Encyclicals on the Rosary be kept alive, through the erection of the Confraternity under the same title.

To the sentiments of gratitude I add one more prayer; and that is that from time to time I renew the memory with a few lines to the parish priests and Rectors of Churches, so that forgetfulness may not cause them to lose sight of the foundation of the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary.

And may God always prosper Your Venerable Mother, of whom I remain

Most Venerable Servant in G. Maria

Rome, Palazzo S. Uffizio, 27 November 1891.
† Fr. VINCENZO LEONE SALLUA, Gle. Comm.
Archbishop of Chalcedon.

Part II

The following day, August 22, we again pestered him to tell us, at least privately, the part of the dream he had not revealed. He did not want to change his mind, but after much insistence on our part, he finally relented and promised that he would tell us more that evening.
At the “Good Night” he spoke as follows:

Yielding to your repeated entreaties, I shall tell you the second part of the dream or at least what little I can. First, I must make it clear that no one is to write or talk about it outside this house. Discuss it among yourselves, laugh at it, do as you wish, but only among yourselves.
Now, while talking with that stranger about the rope, the snake, and what they symbolized, I turned around and saw boys picking up scraps of snake meat and eating them. “What are you doing?” I shouted. “Are you mad? That meat is poisonous!”
“It’s delicious!” they replied.
And yet, no sooner had they swallowed it than they would crumple to the ground and their bodies would swell and harden like stone. I was helpless because, despite this, more and more boys kept eating that meat. I shouted and yelled at them, and

even slapped and punched them to keep them from eating, but in vain. For every one who crumpled to the ground, another took his place. Then I called the clerics and told them to go among the boys and do all they could to make them stop eating that meat. My order was ineffective; worse yet, some clerics themselves began to eat it and they too fell to the ground.
Nearly out of my mind at seeing so many boys lying about me in such a pitiful state, I turned to the stranger. “What does this mean?” I asked. “These boys know that this meat will kill them, yet they eat it. Why?”
“Because ‘the sensual man does not perceive the things that are of God.’ That’s why!” he answered.
“But isn’t there some way of saving these boys?”
“Yes, there is.”
“What?”
“Anvil and hammer.”
“Anvil and hammer? What for?”
“To put the boys back in shape!”
“You mean I am to put them on an anvil and strike them with a hammer?”
“Look,” the stranger said “this whole thing is a symbol. The hammer symbolizes confession, and the anvil symbolizes Holy Communion. These are the remedies you must use.” I went to work and found the treatment very effective, but not for all. While most boys were restored to life and recovered, a few did not because their confessions were bad.

After the boys had retired to their dormitories, I (Provera) asked Don Bosco privately why his order to the clerics had proved ineffective. “Because not all obeyed,”he replied. “Worse yet, some even ate that meat.”

On the whole, these dreams represent real life. Along with Don Bosco’s words and deeds, they reveal the state of things in any average community where the most outstanding virtues are matched by deplorable weaknesses. This comes as no surprise, because evil unfortunately tends to spread far more readily than virtue. Consequently, constant vigilance is necessary. It may be said that it would have been better to play down or even eliminate more disgusting details, but we disagree. If history must properly fulfill its noble mission and teach life, it must describe the past as it happened, so that future generations may not only draw inspiration and courage from the noble examples of preceding ages, but also learn through their failings and errors how they must act themselves. A one-sided report of historic facts can lead only to distorted views. When suppressed and

unacknowledged, mistakes and failings will repeat themselves, while a misguided apologia will neither help the favorably disposed nor make the hostile change their views. Only uninhibited frankness will generate belief and trust.
To speak our mind fully, we shall add that, while giving explanations which better met the boys' intellectual level, Don Bosco let it be known that he passed over other details of no less account because they probably did not concern them. In fact, in his dream he outlined not only the present but the future, as in the dream The Wheel of Eternity 1 and in others we shall later narrate.
The poisonous meat of that monstrous snake might well symbolize scandal which destroys one's faith, or immoral, irreligious readings. Likewise, what else might disobedience, collapsing, swelling up, and hardening signify but pride, obstinacy, and love of sin?
These are the evil effects of the deadly poison fed them by that accursed food, by that dragon described by Job and identified by the Fathers of the Church as a figure of Lucifer. "His heart shall be as hard as stone." (Job 41, 15) Indeed, the hearts of those poisoned wretches become rebellious and obstinate in sin. What cure is there for such hardness? Don Bosco used a somewhat obscure symbolism which basically pointed to supernatural aid.
We are inclined to explain it thus: The prayers and sacrifices of the just must first ask that God's grace warm hardened hearts and soften them so that the sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist-the hammer and the anvil on which the metal is shaped into lasting art before it is tempered-may exercise their divine efficacy. Thus the hammer's blows and the anvil's support will both bring about the cure of an ulcer-ridden but now docile heart. As the sparks fly, the heart is reconditioned.

We now resume our narrative. Certain that with Mary's protection he could withstand and overcome hell's attacks, Don Bosco prepared his pupils to celebrate the feast of Our Lady's Nativity.

On August 29 he gave the first nosegay for the novena. He also personally gave the next five on successive evenings. Bonetti recorded them in his chronicle:

1. Let us all strive to commit no sin whatever during this novena.
2. Let us give a friend some good advice.
(On the following evening he set an example himself by suggesting that we make necessary sacrifices to overcome bad habits while we are still young and urging us to have the greatest confidence in our superiors in both spiritual and material

matters.)
3. Those who have never made a general confession should consider doing so; those who have should recite an act of contrition for all the sins of their past life.
4. He told us of Father Cafasso's reply to a menial laborer who had asked him what would most please Our Lady. "What pleases mothers most?" he questioned the man in turn.
"When we show our love for their children."
"Good," Father Cafasso went on. "You are right. Therefore, if you want to please the Madonna, love Her Divine Son first by receiving Him in Holy Communion, and then by keeping your heart free of all sin, even venial." This was Father Cafasso's reply, and now I pass it on to you.
5. Tomorrow do your best in church not to sit back on your heels or on the pew behind you or anything like that. I say this to those who have this habit. To all I suggest this nosegay: Speak Italian [instead of your dialect] and remind those who forget.
6. Show perfect obedience in everything. Tomorrow let's see to it that we don't have to be reminded about house rules and our chores.
If you're told to do something special, obey promptly and readily.
I assure you that this will be the most welcome flower we can offer Our Heavenly Mother. In this way we shall deserve to be called Her children. As a loving Mother, She will teach us the holy fear of God, as She Herself promises through Holy Scripture: "Come, children, hear Me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord."[Ps. 33, 12]
(BM VII, 143-1493)