 Reading time: 5 min.

It has been a tradition since the centenary of Don Bosco's death in 1988, that an International Congress dedicated to Mary Help of Christians is held every four years. So far they have been held in Valdocco, Turin Italy in 1988, in Cochabamba, Bolivia in 1995, in Seville, Spain in 1999, in Valdocco, Turin Italy in 2003 (on the centenary of the coronation of Mary Help of Christians), in Mexico City, Mexico in 2007, in Czestochowa, Poland in 2011, in Valdocco / Colle Don Bosco, Italy in 2015 (on the bicentenary of Don Bosco's birth) and in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 2019.

This year, the 9th International Congress of Mary Help of Christians will be held in Fatima, from 29 August to 1 September 2024, and the theme will be: "I will give you a teacher", in line with the Strenna of the Rector Major and celebrating the 200th anniversary of Don Bosco's dream at nine years of age.

The importance of Mary as a teacher in Salesian spirituality is manifested in a very special way in the story of St John Bosco's childhood dream, which marked him deeply and guided him on his spiritual and pastoral path throughout his life. This dream-prophecy also sheds light on this journey of preparation for the Fatima Congress.

It is undoubtedly appropriate to recall a part of the story in which Jesus presents Mary as "the teacher", because it is from these words that the reflections will be made.

"Who are you, ordering me to do the impossible?"
"Precisely because it seems impossible to you, you must make it possible through obedience and the acquisition of knowledge."
"Where, by what means can I acquire knowledge?"
"I will give you a teacher,. Under her guidance you can become wise. Without her, all wisdom is foolishness."
"But who are you that speak so?"
"I am the son of the woman whom your mother taught you to greet three times a day."
"My mother tells me not to mix with people I don't know, unless I have her permission. So tell me your name."
"Ask my mother what my name is."
At that moment I saw a lady of stately appearance standing beside him. She was

wearing a mantle that sparkled all over as if covered by bright stars. Seeing from my questions and answers that I was more confused than ever, she beckoned me to approach her. She took me kindly by the hand and said,
“Look.”
Glancing round I saw that the youngsters had apparently all run away. A large number of dogs, goats, cats bears and other animals had taken their place.
“Here is the field of your work. Make yourself humble, strong and energetic: and what you will see happening to these animals in a moment is what you must do for my children.”

The meeting begins with a challenging question: “Who are you, ordering me to do the impossible?” This question serves as the gateway to a journey into wisdom, where the figure of Mary is revealed as the key to unlocking the seemingly impossible. From the perspective of this revelatory dialogue, we will explore the depth and relevance of Mary as a teacher.

The first indication comes from Jesus, Shepherd and guide: ‘Precisely because it seems impossible to you, you must make it possible through obedience and the acquisition of knowledge.” All teaching flows “from the Teacher”. Obedience is presented as the key that opens the door to knowledge, manifesting the importance of the intimate link between humility and knowledge, suggesting that effective learning requires not only the active pursuit of knowledge, but also the willingness to submit to the guidance of a teacher. Mary is presented in this context not only as the Teacher who teaches, but also shows the way to understanding through humility, of which she is also an example.

“Where, by what means can I acquire knowledge?” is a question that reveals in John Bosco a thirst for knowledge that resonates in his heart. The answer, enigmatic and divine, points to Mary as the dispenser under whose guidance wisdom will be attained. Mary thus becomes the link between little John and the very source of knowledge that is Jesus, a knowledge guided by Mary, much deeper than ordinary knowledge, since the ultimate goal will be to attain wisdom, the gift of the Spirit.

The intrigue intensifies when John seeks to know the identity of the one who speaks to him so enigmatically. “Ask my mother what my name is” he replies. This beautiful revelation adds a further layer to Mary’s importance as a teacher, as she is also presented as a “Mother” with a connection to the divine, thus offering her teaching as sacred and transcendental. The secret of this man’s name undoubtedly invites little John to explore the relationship with the transcendental, to recognise that wisdom is not just intellectual knowledge, but a spiritual connection with the

very source of being, and it is here that Mary-Mother plays a very important role.

The description of Mary as a stately lady clothed in a shining robe adds a heavenly dimension to her importance as a teacher. The mantle shining like stars suggests that her teaching illuminates minds just as the stars illuminate the darkness of the night sky. Mary is not just the teacher who provides information; she is the source of a wisdom that illuminates the path, dispelling the darkness of ignorance.

John Bosco is led to a particular moment of revelation when Mary invites him to “look”. This act of looking reveals a profound transformation. The aggressive children disappear, making way for a multitude of tame and tranquil animals. This change symbolises a metamorphosis, indicating that, under Mary’s tutelage, his worldview is transformed. The field becomes the stage for John to work on, indicating that Mary’s teaching is not just an abstraction, but an instruction to be transformed into reality. “Here is the field of your work. Make yourself humble, strong, energetic…” Mary’s words indicate a call to action. Mary not only guides in the intellectual sphere, but also instructs in the practice of wisdom. The instruction to become humble, strong and robust indicates that her teaching is a process, a path of inner transformation, a life project for the good of oneself and others.

Thus, in preparation for, and during this Congress, an invitation is made to let oneself be enveloped by the words and guidance of Mary, our Mother and Teacher. From unravelling the impossible to highlighting the link between humility and knowledge, Mary emerges as a guide who not only imparts information, but leads those who allow themselves to be taught by her to a deeper connection with the divine. Ultimately, the importance of Mary, the Teacher, lies in her ability to illuminate the path to spiritual realisation, inviting us not only to seek wisdom, but to live it. Mary, the divine teacher, becomes the compass that directs us towards the good, revealing what seems impossible and guiding us towards a deeper understanding of the purpose of existence.

To prepare us for this important moment, a formation course is being organised, and the proposed materials can be found on the ADMA website.

Information about the event can be found on the Congress website.

As Mary guided and taught the three shepherd children of Fatima the horror of sin and the beauty of virtue, as she guided John Bosco throughout his life on a path of obedience and humility, may she also guide the Salesian Family to this Congress which is already imminent. Under her protection and guided by her hand, we too want to realise Godìs dream in our lives.

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