 Reading time: 5 min.

(continuation from previous article)

Always in action
But Providence must also be “sought”. And in August Don Bosco wrote again to Count Cibrario, Secretary of the Order of St Maurcie, to remind him that the time had come to honour the second part of the financial commitment he had made two years earlier. From Genoa, fortunately, he received substantial offers from Count Pallavicini and Counts Viancino di Viancino; other offers reached him in September from Countess Callori di Vignale and likewise from other cities, Rome and Florence in particular.
However, a very cold winter soon arrived, with the consequent increase in consumer prices, including bread. Don Bosco went into a liquidity crisis. Between feeding hundreds of mouths and suspending building work, the choice was forced on him. Work on the church therefore stagnated, while debts grew. So, on 4 December, Don Bosco took pen and paper and wrote to Cavalier Oreglia in Rome: “Collect lots of money, then come back, because we don’t know where to get any more. It is true that Our Lady always does her part, but at the end of the year, all the providers ask for money.” Great!

9 June 1868: solemn consecration of the Church of Mary Help of Christians
In January 1868 Don Bosco set about completing the interior decoration of the Church of Mary Help of Christians.

At Valdocco the situation was still quite serious. Don Bosco wrote to Cav. Oreglia in Rome: “Here we continue with very intense cold: today it reached 18 degrees below zero; despite the fire in the stove, the ice in my room would not melt. We have delayed rising time for the boys, and as most are still dressed for summer, each puts on two shirts, a jacket, two pairs of breeches, military coats; others keep the blankets over their shoulders throughout the day and look like carnival masquerades.”
Fortunately, a week later the cold diminished and the metre of snow began to melt. Meanwhile, the commemorative medal was being prepared in Rome. Don Bosco, once he had it in hand, had corrections made to the inscription and the thickness halved in order to save money. Even so, the amount of money collected was always less than what was needed. So, the collection for the chapel of St. Anne promoted

by the Florentine noblewomen, in particular Countess Virginia Cambray Digny, wife of the Minister of Agriculture, Finance and Commerce, in mid-February, was still one sixth of the total (6000 lira). However, Don Bosco did not despair and invited the Countess to Turin: “I hope that on some occasion you will be able to visit us and see with your own eyes this majestic building, of which it can be said that every brick is an offering made by those now near and now far but always for grace received.” And so it really was. At the beginning of spring, he told the Cavlier as usual (and he would print it shortly afterwards in the commemorative booklet (*The wonders of the Mother of God invoked under the title of Mary Help of Christians*): “I am swamped with expenses, many things to be settled, all the work to be resumed; do what you can but pray with faith. I think the time is right for those who want grace from Mary! We see one every day.”



Initial altar of the Church of Mary Help of Christians

Preparations for the feast

In mid-March, Archbishop Riccardi fixed the date for consecration of the church for the first fortnight in June. Everything was ready by then: the two bell towers on the façade surmounted by two archangels, the large golden statue on the dome already blessed by the archbishop, the five marble altars with their respective paintings, including the marvellous one of Mary Help of Christians with the child in her arms, surrounded by angels, apostles, evangelists, in a blaze of light and colour.

An exceptional plan for the preparation was then set in motion. First of all, it was a matter of finding the consecrating bishop; then contacting various bishops for the solemn celebrations in the morning and evening of each day of the Octave; then issuing personal invitations to dozens of distinguished benefactors, priests and lay people from all over Italy, many of whom were to be hosted in the house in a worthy manner; finally, it was a matter of preparing hundreds of children both to solemnise the pontifical and liturgical ceremonies with songs, and to participate in academies, games, parades, moments of joy and merriment.

Finally the big day

Three days before 9 June, the boys from the Lanzo boarding school arrived in Valdocco. On Sunday 7 June, *L'Unità Cattolica* published the programme for the celebrations, and on Monday 8 June the first guests arrived and the arrival of the Duke of Aosta representing the Royal Family was announced. The boys from the Mirabello boarding school also arrived. The singers spent hours rehearsing the new Mass by Maestro De Vecchi and Fr Cagliero's new *Tantum Ergo*, as well as the solemn antiphon *Maria Succurre Miseris* also by Cagliero, which had been inspired by the polyphonic *Tu es Petrus* from the Vatican basilica.

The following morning, 9 June, at 5.30 a.m., passing between a double line of 1,200 festive and singing boys, the archbishop made the triple tour around the church and then with the clergy entered the church to perform the planned consecration ceremonies of the altars behind closed doors. It was only at 10.30 that the church was thrown open to the public, who attended the archbishop's Mass and Don Bosco's following Mass.

The archbishop returned in the afternoon for the pontifical vespers, solemnized by the triple choir of singers: 150 tenors and basses at the foot of St Joseph's altar, 200 sopranos and contraltos on the dome, another 100 tenors and basses in the orchestra. Fr Cagliero conducted them, even without seeing them all, through an

electric contraption designed for the occasion.



The old sacristy of the Church of Mary Help of Christians

It was a triumph of sacred music, an enchantment, something heavenly. Indescribable was the emotion of those present, who on leaving the church were

also able to admire the external illumination of the façade and the dome surmounted by the illuminated statue of Mary Help of Christians.
And Don Bosco? All day surrounded by a crowd of benefactors and friends, moved beyond words, he did nothing but praise Our Lady. An “impossible” dream had come true.

An equally solemn octave
Solemn celebrations alternated morning and evening throughout the octave. They were unforgettable days, the most solemn Valdocco had ever seen. Don Bosco immediately made them widely known through a solid publication “Remembrance of a solemnity in honour of Mary Help of Christians”.
On 17 June some peace returned to Valdocco, the young guests went back to their schools, the devotees to their homes; the church still lacked interior finishing touches, ornaments, furnishings… But the devotion to Mary Help of Christians, which by then had become “Don Bosco’s Madonna” quickly spread throughout Piedmont, Italy, Europe and Latin America. Today in the world there are hundreds of churches dedicated to her, thousands of altars, millions of pictures and little images. Don Bosco repeats to everyone today, as he did to Fr Cagliero as he left for the missions in November 1875: “Place all your trust in Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament and in Mary Help of Christians and you will see what miracles are.”