 Reading time: 7 min.

The canonisation of Dominic Savio took place under the symbol of the Immaculate Conception. It was the centenary of the declaration of the Immaculate Conception. The banner used in this ceremony, the homily by Pope Pius XII and the speech by the Archbishop of Biella, Gilla Gremigni are all linked to the Immaculate Conception, and not by chance.

Pope Pius IX had declared the dogma of the Immaculate Conception on 8 December 1854 with the bull "*Ineffabilis Deus*". A year and a half later, on 8 June 1856, Dominic, together with other friends, founded the Sodality of the Immaculate Conception. His life was distinguished by his regular reception of the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist and by his devotion to the Immaculate Conception. This led him to holiness, showing that this is not the fruit of mature age, but of God's grace. He was for many years the youngest of the non-martyr saints (he is now the second, after Saint Jacinta Marto, one of the Fatima seers, another devotee of Mary). **With Mary one can be a saint.** We recall Pope Pius XII's homily and the intervention of Novara's Archbishop, Gilla Gremigni.

"While the forces of evil do not cease, over the course of the centuries, their attacks against the work of the Divine Redeemer, God does not fail to respond to the anguished supplications of his children in danger, raising up souls rich in the gifts of nature and grace, who are a comfort and a help for their brothers. When the knowledge of salutary truths wanes in men's conscience, obscured by the allurements of earthly goods, when the spirit of rebellion and pride arouses subtle or violent persecutions against the Church, in the midst of the ever-present miseries of souls and bodies Divine Providence calls forth heroes of holiness under the banner of the Cross of Christ, radiating splendours of virginal purity and fraternal charity, to attend to all the needs of souls and maintain in its integrity the fervour of Christian virtue. […]
While the three heroes whom we have commemorated [Peter Chanel, Gaspar del Bufalo, Joseph Pignatelli, and Mary Crucified of Rose] had lavished all their virile energies in the hard fight against the forces of evil, there appears before our eyes the image of Dominic Savio, a frail adolescent with a weak body, but with a soul stretched in a pure oblation of self to the sovereignly delicate and demanding love of Christ. At such a tender age we would expect to find rather good and amiable

dispositions of spirit, but instead we find in him, amazingly, the marvellous ways of the inspirations of grace, a constant and unreserved adherence to the things of heaven, which his faith perceived with rare intensity. At the school of his spiritual Master, the great saint, Don Bosco, he learnt how the joy of serving God and making others love him can become a powerful means of apostolate. 8 December 1854 saw him lifted up in an ecstasy of love for the Virgin Mary, and shortly afterwards he gathered some of his friends into the “Sodality of the Immaculate Conception” with the aim of advancing with great strides along the path of holiness and avoiding even the slightest sin. He urged his companions to piety, good conduct, receiving the Sacraments, saying the Holy Rosary, and avoiding wrongdoing and temptation. Undaunted by poor reception and insolent responses, he would intervene firmly but charitably to call the unwise and perverse to duty. Filled already in this life with the familiarity and gifts of the sweet Guest of the soul, he soon left earth to receive, through the intercession of the heavenly Queen, the reward of his filial love.”
(Homily of Pope Pius XII at the canonisation of Dominic Savio)

“On the centenary of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, Dominic Savio becomes a saint in the heaven.

In 1854 Dominic, shy and timid, had entered, as Don Bosco wrote, “the house of the Oratory”; in 1954 he entered gloriously into the ranks of the saints.

St John Bosco had seen and foreseen saints among his boys: Dominic was the first and he would not be the last. With him, the youngest, the springtime of the Salesian Oratory was in full bloom.

And it is supremely beautiful that after his holy Father (Don Bosco), comes the fifteen-year-old boy to be the first link in a stupendous chain which will only close in Heaven on the great day of the Last Judgement.

In the year of Our Lady

The feast of the Immaculate Conception that 8 December 1854, had put everyone at the Oratory “in a kind of spiritual turmoil”. It was to be expected, because Don Bosco had always aimed for the sanctification of his children through two devotions: to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary Immaculate. He could not have been happier in his choice; and all the facts have shown this sowonderfully.

Imagine how Dominic, in the warm nest at Valdocco, must have gone out of his way to please Our Lady, he who had Marian devotion, so to speak, in his blood.

There is a memory, preserved for us by Don Bosco, twenty-two years after Savio's holy death. Here it is.

"I still remember" he told his Oratory boys in one of his goodnights, "as if it were now, that cheerful, angelic face of Dominic Savio, so docile, so good! He came to me the day before the novena of the Immaculate Conception, and held a conversation with me that is written down in his *Life*, but more briefly. That conversation was quite long. He said to me:

"I know that Our Lady grants great graces to those who make her novenas well."

"And what do you want to do for Our Lady in this novena?"

"I would like to do many things."

"And what would they be?"

"First of all I want to make a general confession of my life, to keep my soul well prepared. Then I want to make sure that I carry out exactly the *fioretti* [little acts of penance] that will be given from night to night for each day of the novena. Also, I would like to regulate myself so that I can receive Communion every morning."

'Do you have anything else?'

'Yes, I still have a few things.'

'And what are these?'

'I want to wage a deadly war on mortal sin.'

'And what else?'

'I want to pray so much to Mary Most Holy and to the Lord to let me die rather than let me fall into a venial sin against modesty…'

"He then gave me a note", Don Bosco concluded, "in which these intentions of his were written. And he kept his promise, because Mary Most Holy was helping him."

"When Dominic spoke like this, he was twelve years old, just twelve I say, and he was already a saint, because anyone who has a pure soul, who serves Our Lady, who receives communion every morning, who makes war on mortal sin and prefers death to committing a venial sin, is already so united with the Lord God that he deserves to be transplanted at any moment into Paradise.

And I think: where are more young people today of such delicacy of conscience?… *Rari nantes in gurgite vasto*… Truly, they are rare, rarer than the poor castaways of the Latin poet, among an endless number of others who stand suspended over the abyss, if they have not already unhappily fallen into it."

So let the gentle figure of the young man cultivated by St John Bosco as a delicate white flower, come as a reminder and a salvation for so much youth in danger or lost; let him bring wings of hope back to this desperate world, let him mark a revival of Christian life, so that holy love and the holy fear of God may return to honour in our families.

Dominic Savio gives a new gentle confirmation of Christ's great words: " Thank you Father, for you have hidden these things from the proud and have revealed them to mere children."

When will men people understand that the peace of soul and the harmony of peoples is conditional on a constant effort of purity of heart, because only to the pure in heart is God revealed? And, at the same time, why do they not remember, these great ones, that the true wealth of life is to keep oneself in God's grace; why do they not reawaken in hearts the resolution of this holy youth, who at the age of seven, among the resolutions for his First Communion, wrote resolutely and courageously: "Death but not sin"?

Here lies the whole secret of this great youthful holiness, here is the anchor of salvation thrown to our distracted and corrupt world, in the year of Our Lady.

If, then, that intention, young and old alike will support with frequent and even daily Communion – as the new and purest saint Pius X wanted, said and exhorted – how will we not open our souls to the advent of a decisive and stable Christian renewal of families and society?

It seems to me that from Heaven Pius X presents today, with the kindness of his great luminous eyes, little Dominic Savio in the stupendous glory of a living monstrance of Christ."

(† Gilla Vincenzo Gremigni, Archbishop of Novara, 1958-1963)