

The Venerable Monsignor Stefano Ferrando

Monsignor Stefano Ferrando was an extraordinary example of missionary dedication and episcopal service, combining the Salesian charism with a profound vocation to serve the poorest. Born in Piedmont in 1895, he entered the Salesian Congregation at a young age and, after serving in the military during the First World War, for which he was awarded the Silver Medal for Valour, he dedicated himself to apostolate in India. As Bishop of Krishnagar and then Shillong for over thirty years, he tirelessly walked among the people, promoting evangelisation with humility and profound pastoral love. He founded institutions, supported lay catechists, and embodied the motto "Apostle of Christ" in his life. His life was an example of faith, surrender to God, and total self-giving, leaving a spiritual legacy that continues to inspire the Salesian mission worldwide.

Venerable Bishop Stephen Ferrando knew how to combine his Salesian vocation with his missionary charism and episcopal ministry. Born on 28 September 1895 in Rossiglione (Genoa, diocese of Acqui) to Agostino and Giuseppina Salvi, he was distinguished by an ardent love of God and a tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. In 1904 he entered Salesian schools, first at Fossano and then at Valdocco in Turin where he got to know Don Bosco's successors and the first generation of Salesians, and undertook his priestly studies; in the meantime he nurtured the desire to leave as a missionary. On 13 September 1912, he made his first religious profession in the Salesian Congregation at Foglizzo. Called to arms in 1915, he took part in the First World War. For his courage he was awarded the silver medal for valour. Returning home in 1918, he took his perpetual vows on 26 December 1920. He was ordained a priest in Borgo San Martino (Alessandria) on

18 March 1923. On 2 December of the same year, with nine companions, he embarked in Venice as a missionary to India. On 18 December, after 16 days of travel, the group arrived in Bombay and on 23 December in Shillong, the place of his new apostolate. As novice master, he educated the young Salesians in the love of Jesus and Mary and had a great spirit of apostolate.

On 9 August 1934, Pope Pius XI appointed him Bishop of Krishnagar. His motto was "Apostle of Christ". In 1935, on 26 November, he was transferred to Shillong where he remained bishop for 34 years. While working in a difficult situation of cultural, religious and social impact, Bishop Ferrando worked tirelessly to be close to the people entrusted to him, working zealously in the vast diocese that encompassed the entire region of North East India. He preferred to travel on foot rather than by car, which he would have had at his disposal: this allowed him to meet the people, to stop and talk to them, to be involved in their lives. This live contact with people's lives was one of the main reasons for the fruitfulness of his evangelical proclamation: humility, simplicity, love for the poor led many to convert and request Baptism. He established a seminary for the formation of young Indian Salesians, built a hospital, erected a shrine dedicated to Mary Help of Christians and founded the first Congregation of indigenous sisters, the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (1942).

A man of strong character, he was not discouraged in the face of countless difficulties, which he faced with a smile and meekness. Perseverance in the face of obstacles was one of his main characteristics. He sought to unite the Gospel message with the local culture in which it was to be embedded. He was intrepid in his pastoral visits, which he made to the most remote places in the diocese, in order to recover the last lost sheep. He showed particular sensitivity and promotion for lay catechists, whom he considered complementary to the bishop's mission and on whom depended much of the fruitfulness

of the proclamation of the Gospel and its penetration into the territory. His attention to family pastoral work was also immense. Despite his numerous commitments, the Venerable was a man with a rich interior life, nourished by prayer and recollection. As a pastor, he was appreciated by his sisters, priests, Salesian brothers and in the episcopate, as well as by the people, who felt him deeply close to them. He gave himself creatively to his flock, caring for the poor, defending the untouchables, caring for the cholera patients.

The cornerstones of his spirituality were his filial bond with the Virgin Mary, his missionary zeal, his continuous reference to Don Bosco, as emerges from his writings and in all his missionary activity. The most luminous and heroic moment of his virtuous life was his departure from the diocese of Shillong. Archbishop Ferrando had to submit his resignation to the Holy Father when he was still in the fullness of his physical and intellectual faculties, to allow the appointment of his successor, who was to be chosen, according to his superiors' instructions, from among the indigenous priests he had formed. It was a particularly painful moment, experienced by the great bishop with humility and obedience. He understood that it was time to retire in prayer according to the Lord's will.

He returned to Genoa in 1969 and continued his pastoral activity, presiding over the ceremonies for the conferral of Confirmation and dedicating himself to the sacrament of Penance.

He was faithful to the Salesian religious life to the last, deciding to live in community and renouncing the privileges that his position as bishop might have reserved for him. He continued to be "a missionary" in Italy. Not "a missionary who moves, but [...] a missionary who is". His life in this last stage of life became a "radiating" one. He became a "missionary of prayer" who said: "I am glad I came away so that others could take over to do such wonderful works."

From Genoa Quarto, he continued to animate the mission in Assam, raising awareness and sending financial aid. He lived

this hour of purification with a spirit of faith, of abandonment to God's will and obedience, touching with his own hand the full meaning of the evangelical expression "we are only useless servants", and confirming with his life the *caetera tolle*, the sacrificial aspect of the Salesian vocation. He died on 20 June 1978 and was buried in Rossiglione, his native land. In 1987 his mortal remains were brought back to India.

In docility to the Spirit he carried out a fruitful pastoral action, which manifested itself in great love for the poor, in humility of spirit and fraternal charity, in the joy and optimism of the Salesian spirit.

Together with many missionaries who shared the adventure of the Spirit with him in the land of India, including Servants of God Francis Convertini, Costantine Vendrame and Orestes Marengo, Bishop Ferrando gave rise to a new missionary method: to be an itinerant missionary. Such an example is a providential warning, especially for religious congregations tempted by a process of institutionalisation and closure, not to lose the passion to go out to meet people and situations of the greatest material and spiritual poverty and destitution, going where no one wants to go and entrusting themselves as he did. "I look to the future with confidence, trusting in Mary Help of Christians... I will entrust myself to Mary Help of Christians who already saved me from so many dangers."

Saint Monica, mother of Saint Augustine, witness of hope

A woman of unshakeable faith, of fruitful tears, answered by God after seventeen long years. A model of a Christian wife

and mother for the whole Church. A witness of hope who transformed herself into a powerful intercessor in Heaven. Don Bosco himself recommended to mothers afflicted by the unchristian lives of their children, to entrust themselves to her in prayer.

In the great gallery of saints who have marked the history of the Church, Saint Monica (331-387) occupies a unique place. Not for spectacular miracles, not for the founding of religious communities, not for significant social or political undertakings. Monica is remembered and venerated primarily as a mother, the mother of Augustine, the restless young man who, thanks to her prayers, her tears, and her testimony of faith, became one of the greatest Fathers of the Church and Doctors of the Catholic faith.

But to limit her figure to the maternal role would be unfair and reductive. Monica is a woman who knew how to live her ordinary life – wife, mother, believer – in an extraordinary way, transfiguring daily life through the power of faith. She is an example of perseverance in prayer, of patience in marriage, of unshakeable hope in the face of her son's deviations.

News of her life comes to us almost exclusively from Augustine's Confessions, a text that is not a chronicle, but a theological and spiritual reading of existence. Yet, in those pages, Augustine draws an unforgettable portrait of his mother; not only a good and pious woman, but an authentic model of Christian faith, a "mother of tears" that become a source of grace.

Her origins in Tagaste

Monica was born in 331 in Tagaste, a city in Numidia, [Souk Ahras](#) in present-day Algeria. It was a lively centre, marked by the Roman presence and an already rooted Christian community. She came from a well-to-do Christian family; faith was already part of her cultural and spiritual horizon.

Her upbringing was marked by the influence of an austere

nurse, who educated her in sobriety and temperance. Saint Augustine would write of her, *"I will not therefore speak of her gifts, but of Your gifts to her, who had not made herself alone, nor educated herself alone. You created her without even her father and mother knowing what daughter they would have; and the rod of your Christ, that is, the discipline of your Only Begotten, in a house of believers, a healthy member of your Church, instructed her in your fear."* (Confessions IX, 8, 17).

In the same *Confessions*, Augustine also recounts a significant episode. Young Monica had developed the habit of drinking small sips of wine from the cellar, until a servant reprimanded her, calling her "drunkard". That reprimand was enough for her to correct herself definitively. This apparently minor anecdote shows her honesty in recognising her sins, allowing herself to be corrected, and growing in virtue.

At the age of 23, Monica was given in marriage to Patricius, a pagan municipal official, known for his choleric character and marital infidelity. Married life was not easy. Living with an impulsive man distant from the Christian faith severely tested her patience.

Yet, Monica never fell into discouragement. With an attitude of meekness and respect, she gradually won her husband's heart. She did not respond harshly to outbursts of anger, nor did she fuel unnecessary conflicts. In time, her constancy bore fruit. Patricius converted and received baptism shortly before he died.

Monica's testimony shows how holiness is not necessarily expressed in sensational gestures, but in daily fidelity, in the love that slowly transforms difficult situations. In this sense, she is a model for many wives and mothers who live marriages marked by tensions or differences in faith.

Monica as a mother

From the marriage, three children were born: Augustine, Navigius, and a daughter whose name we do not know. Monica

poured all her love upon them, but above all her faith. Navigius and her daughter followed a straightforward Christian path; Navigius became a priest; her daughter embarked on the path of consecrated virginity. Augustine, however, soon became the centre of her worries and tears.

Even as a boy, Augustine showed extraordinary intelligence. Monica sent him to study rhetoric in [Carthage](#), eager to ensure him a brilliant future. But along with intellectual progress came temptations: sensuality, worldliness, bad company. Augustine embraced the Manichaean doctrine, convinced he would find rational answers to the problem of evil. Furthermore, he began to live with a woman without marrying her, with whom he had a son, Adeodatus. Her son's deviations led Monica to deny him hospitality in her home. But she did not stop praying for him and offering sacrifices, *"from the bleeding heart of my mother, the sacrifice of her tears was offered to You for me night and day"* (Confessions V, 7,13) and *"she shed more tears than mothers ever shed at the physical death of their children"* (Confessions III, 11,19).

For Monica, it was a deep wound. Her son, whom she had consecrated to Christ in the womb, was going astray. The pain was unspeakable, but she never stopped hoping. Augustine himself would write, *"My mother's heart, struck by such a wound, would never heal, for I cannot adequately express her feelings towards me and how much greater her travail in giving birth to me in spirit was that with which she had given birth to me in the flesh."* (Confessions V, 9,16).

The question naturally arises, why did Monica not have Augustine baptised immediately after birth?

In reality, although infant baptism was already known and practised, it was not yet a universal practice. Many parents preferred to postpone it until adulthood, considering it a "definitive washing". They feared that if the baptised person sinned gravely, salvation would be compromised. Furthermore, Patricius still a pagan, had no interest in educating his son

in the Christian faith.

Today we clearly see that it was an unfortunate choice, since baptism not only makes us children of God, but also gives us the grace to overcome temptations and sin.

One thing, however, is certain, if he had been baptised as a child, Monica would have spared herself and her son much suffering.

The strongest image of Monica is that of a mother who prays and weeps. The *Confessions* describe her as a tireless woman in interceding with God for her son.

One day, a bishop of Tagaste – according to some, Ambrose himself – reassured her with words that have remained famous, “*Go, the son of so many tears cannot be lost.*” That phrase became Monica’s guiding star, the confirmation that her maternal sorrow was not in vain, but part of a mysterious design of grace.

A mother’s tenacity

Monica’s life was also a pilgrimage in Augustine’s footsteps. When her son decided to secretly leave for Rome, Monica spared no effort. She did not give up the cause as lost, but followed him and sought him until she found him. She reached him in Milan, where Augustine had obtained a chair of rhetoric. Here she found a spiritual guide in Saint Ambrose, Bishop of the city. A deep harmony developed between Monica and Ambrose. She recognised in him the pastor capable of guiding her son, while Ambrose admired her unshakeable faith.

In Milan, Ambrose’s preaching opened new perspectives for Augustine. He gradually abandoned Manichaeism and began to look at Christianity with new eyes. Monica silently accompanied this process. She did not force the timing; she did not demand immediate conversions, but she prayed and supported him and remained by his side until his conversion.

Augustine’s conversion

God seemed not to hear her, but Monica never stopped praying

and offering sacrifices for her son. After seventeen years, her pleas were finally answered – and how! Augustine not only became a Christian, but became a priest, bishop, doctor, and father of the Church.

He himself acknowledges it: *“But you, in the depth of Your designs, answered the vital point of her desire, without caring about the momentary object of her request, but taking care to make of me what she always asked You to do.”* (Confessions V, 8,15).

The decisive moment came in 386. Augustine, inwardly tormented, struggled against the passions and resistances of his will. In the famous episode in the garden of Milan, hearing the voice of a child saying *“Tolle, lege”* (“Take up and read”), he opened the Letter to the Romans and read the words that changed his life. “Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh” (Romans 13:14).

It was the beginning of his conversion. Together with his son Adeodatus and some friends, he retired to Cassiciaco to prepare for baptism. Monica was with them, sharing the joy of finally seeing the prayers of so many years answered.

On Easter night in 387, in Milan Cathedral, Ambrose baptised Augustine, Adeodatus, and the other catechumens. Monica’s tears of sorrow turned into tears of joy. She continued to serve him, so much so that in Cassiciaco Augustine would say, *“She cared as if she had been mother to all and served us as if she had been daughter to all.”*

Ostia: ecstasy and death

After the baptism, Monica and Augustine prepared to return to Africa. Stopping in [Ostia](#), while waiting for the ship, they experienced a moment of intense spirituality. The *Confessions* narrate the ecstasy of Ostia: mother and son, looking out of a window, contemplated together the beauty of creation and ascended towards God, anticipating the beatitude of heaven.

Monica would say: *"Son, as for me, I no longer find any attraction for this life. I do not know what I am still doing here and why I am here. This world is no longer an object of desire for me. There was only one reason why I wished to remain a little longer in this life, to see you a Catholic Christian before I died. God has answered me beyond all my expectations. He has granted me to see you in His service and freed from earthly aspirations for happiness. What am I doing here?"* (Confessions IX, 10,11). She had reached her earthly goal.

A few days later, Monica fell seriously ill. Feeling the end near, she said to her children: *"My children, bury your mother here; do not worry about where. Only this I ask of you, remember me at the Lord's altar, wherever you may be."* It was the synthesis of her life: the place of burial did not matter to her, but the bond in prayer and the Eucharist.

She died at 56, on 12 November 387, and was buried in Ostia.

In the 6th century, her relics were transferred to a hidden crypt in the same [church of Saint Aurea](#). In 1425, the relics were translated to Rome, to the [Basilica of Saint Agostino in Campo Marzio](#), where they are still venerated today.

Monica's spiritual profile

Augustine describes his mother with well-measured words:

"[...] womanly in appearance, manly in faith, aged in serenity, maternal in love, Christian in piety [...]". (Confessions IX, 4, 8).

And again:

"[...] a chaste and sober widow, assiduous in almsgiving, devout and submissive to Your saints; who did not let a day pass without bringing an offering to Your altar; who twice a day, morning and evening, without fail visited Your church, and not to confabulate vainly and gossip like other old women, but to hear Your words and to make You hear her prayers? Could You have disdained the tears of such a woman, who with them asked You not for gold or silver, nor for fleeting or fickle goods, but for the salvation of her son's soul, You who had made her

so by Your grace, refusing her Your help? Certainly not, Lord. Indeed, You were beside her and heard her, working according to the order by which You had predestined to work.” (Confessions V, 9,17).

From this Augustinian testimony, a surprisingly contemporary figure emerges.

She was a woman of prayer; she never ceased to invoke God for the salvation of her loved ones. Her tears become a model of persevering intercession.

She was a faithful wife; in a difficult marriage, she never responded with resentment to her husband's harshness. Her patience and meekness were instruments of evangelisation.

She was a courageous mother. She did not abandon her son in his deviations, but accompanied him with tenacious love, capable of trusting in God's timing.

She was a witness of hope; her life shows that no situation is desperate, if lived in faith.

Monica's message does not belong only to the 4th century. It still speaks today, in a context where many families experience tensions, children stray from faith, parents experience the fatigue of waiting.

To parents, she teaches not to give up, to believe that grace works in mysterious ways.

To Christian women, she shows how meekness and fidelity can transform difficult relationships.

To anyone who feels discouraged in prayer, she testifies that God listens, even if the timing does not coincide with ours.

It is no coincidence that many associations and movements have chosen Monica as the patroness of Christian mothers and women who pray for children far from faith.

A simple and extraordinary woman

The life of Saint Monica is the story of a woman both simple and extraordinary. Simple because lived in the daily life of a family; extraordinary because transfigured by faith. Her tears and prayers shaped a saint and, through him, profoundly

influenced the history of the Church.

Her memory, celebrated on 27 August, on the eve of the feast of Saint Augustine, reminds us that holiness often passes through hidden perseverance, silent sacrifice, and hope that does not disappoint.

In Augustine's words, addressed to God for his mother, we find the synthesis of her spiritual legacy: *"I cannot say enough how much my soul owes to her, my God; but you know everything. Repay her with your mercy what she asked of You with so many tears for me"* (Conf., IX, 13).

Saint Monica, through the events of her life, achieved the eternal happiness that she herself defined: *"Happiness undoubtedly consists in reaching the goal and one must have confidence that we can be led to it by a firm faith, a living hope, an ardent charity."* (On Happiness 4,35).

The shepherdess, the sheep and lambs (1867)

In the following passage, Don Bosco, founder of the Valdocco Oratory, recounts a dream he had between 29 and 30 May 1867 to his young people, which he narrated on the evening of Holy Trinity Sunday. In a boundless plain, flocks and lambs become an allegory for the world and the boys: lush meadows or arid deserts represent grace and sin; horns and wounds denounce scandal and dishonour; the number "3" foretells three famines – spiritual, moral, material – that threaten those who stray from God. From the account flows the saint's urgent appeal: to preserve innocence, to return to grace through penance, so that every young person can be clothed in the flowers of purity and partake in the joy promised by the good Shepherd.

On Trinity Sunday, June 16 [1867]—the feast on which twenty-six years before Don Bosco had celebrated his first Mass – the Oratory boys eagerly awaited the narration of the dream he had promised them on the 13th. He took to heart the good of his spiritual flock and always abided by the exhortations of Holy Scripture: “Take good care of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds.” [Prov. 27, 23] He constantly prayed for an intimate knowledge of his little lambs, for the grace of carefully watching over them and providing for their well-being after his death, and for their daily spiritual and bodily nourishment. On that Sunday, therefore, after night prayers, he thus addressed the Oratory community:

The night of the 29th or 30th of May, as I was lying in bed unable to fall asleep, I began thinking of my dear boys. I wish I could dream up something good for them, I said to myself. After mulling over this for a short while, I made up my mind to have a dream. Lo and behold, I fell asleep and found myself in an immense plain packed tight with huge sheep. Divided into flocks, they were grazing on meadows which stretched as far as the eye could see. Wanting to get closer to them and marveling that anyone could own so many flocks, I looked for the shepherd. I soon spotted him leaning on a staff and went up to him.

“Whose flock is this?” I asked him.

He did not answer. I repeated my question.

“Is that any of your business?” he replied.

“That’s no answer!” I countered.

“All right! They belong to their owner!”

“Thanks, but who is he?”

“Don’t be so impatient. We’ll come to that.”

I then followed him for a close look at the flocks and the land. In places the meadows were luscious and dotted with shade trees. Here the sheep were healthy and gorgeous. In other places the plain was barren and forbidding, bristling with thorns and yellow thistles, and with not a blade of grass in sight. Here a large flock was grazing, but it looked

miserable. I kept asking questions about the sheep, but my guide ignored them and simply told me, "You need not concern yourself with the sheep. I'll show you the flock you must shepherd."

"Who are you?"

"I am the owner. Follow me."

He took me to another area where I saw thousands of little lambs so weak that they could hardly move. The land was parched and grassless. Short, withered tufts and brush were the only vegetation because the countless lambs had devoured everything else. It was obvious that the soreplagued little things had suffered and were still suffering a great deal. Strangely, all sported thick, long horns like those of old rams, tipped with an appendage in the shape of an S.

Puzzled and perplexed at this sight, I could not believe that such little lambs could have so quickly consumed their feed and could already sport such thick, long horns.

"How is it," I asked the shepherd, "that these little lambs have such horns?"

"Take a close look," he replied.

I did and was surprised to see the figure 3 all over their bodies: back, neck, head, snout, ears, legs, hoofs.

"What's this?" I exclaimed. "I don't understand."

"I'll tell you! This great plain is the world. The lush meadows symbolize the Word of God and His grace. The parched and barren areas are the places where people don't listen to the Word of God and only aim at pleasing the world. The sheep are the adults; the lambs are the youngsters. For these God has sent Don Bosco. This area of the plain is the Oratory; the lambs are your boys. The parched soil represents the state of sin; horns symbolize dishonor; the letter S stands for scandal. Scandal-giving is the cause of these boys' perdition. Those with broken horns once gave scandal but do not do so now. The figure 3 stands for their triple punishment—spiritual, moral and material famine: spiritual famine by the lack of spiritual aid they will seek in vain; moral famine by being deprived of God's Word; material famine by the lack of

food. Having devoured all their pasture, the lambs have nothing left but dishonor and the three famines. This scene also shows the present pitiful state of so many boys in the world; at the Oratory, at least, even the unworthy have something to eat."

While I listened and in bewilderment observed everything that was pointed out to me, a new wonder took place. All the lambs reared up on their hind legs, grew tall, and turned into boys. I got closer to see if I knew any of them. All were Oratory boys. Very many I had never before seen, but all claimed to be Oratory pupils. Among those I did not know were also a few who are now here. They never let themselves be seen by Don Bosco, never ask his advice, always dodge him. They are the boys Don Bosco does not know. But the greatest majority by far comprised boys who will come to the Oratory in the future.

As I sadly eyed that multitude, my guide took my hand and said, "Come, I'll show you something else." He led me to a far corner of the valley where hillocks and a thick hedge of dense foliage enclosed a vast, luxuriant meadow covered by patches of aromatic herbs of all kinds and dotted with wild flowers and shady groves through which limpid streamlets made their way.

Here I found a multitude of very happy youngsters. Using the meadow's flowers, they had fashioned or were still making themselves very beautiful robes.

"At least you have these boys to console you," my guide remarked.

"Who are they?"

"Boys in the state of grace."

I can truthfully say that never had I seen anything or anyone so beautiful beyond compare! Never could I have imagined such splendor. I will not try to describe what I saw. It defies description. But a more wonderful sight was in store for me. As I was enjoying the vision of those happy boys and noting that many were yet unknown to me, my guide said, "Let's go. I want to show you something that will bring you greater pleasure and comfort."

He took me to another meadow carpeted with flowers prettier and sweeter-scented than those I had just seen. It looked like a royal garden. There were but few lads here, yet they were so extraordinarily handsome and brilliant as to outshine and eclipse those I had shortly before admired. Some of those boys are here now; others are still to come.

"These boys have preserved untainted the lily of purity," my guide explained. "They still wear the spotless robe of innocence."

I stood entranced. Nearly all wore floral wreaths of indescribable beauty. Each flower was a cluster of thousands of tiny, brightly-hued disk florets of unbelievable charm, each with more than a thousand colors. The boys wore an ankle-length garment of dazzling white, embroidered with flowers like those of the crowns. Sparkling light radiated from these flowers to swathe the boys' bodies and reflect its comeliness upon them. In turn, the flowers reflected each other's beauty, those in the crowns mirroring those of the garments, and each throwing back the rays emanating from the others. As the rays of one color hit others of a different color, new rays and new colors were generated in an endless array of splendor. Never could I imagine such a fascinating, bewildering spectacle in heaven itself!

Yet that is not all. The sparkling flowers of the boys' crowns and dazzling garments were mirrored in the flowers and garments of their companions. Let me add that the brilliant countenance of each boy blended with those of his companions and, in reflection, increased its own intensity a hundredfold, so that those beautiful faces of innocence were clothed in blinding light, each boy mirroring the loveliness of his companions in unspeakable splendor. We call this the "external" glory of the saints. There is no way to describe even faintly each boy's beauty in that ocean of light! I recognized some boys who are now here at the Oratory. Could they see but one-tenth of their present beauty, I am sure that they would endure fire and torture or the cruelest martyrdom rather than lose it.

Once I could tear myself away from this heavenly vision, I asked my guide, "Are these the only ones who never lost God's grace?"

"Well," he replied, "don't you think that their number is quite large? Furthermore, lads who have lost their baptismal innocence can still follow their companions along the way of penance. Look at that meadow; it still boasts of many flowers. They too can be woven into most beautiful crowns and garments, and the boys can join their companions in the glory of heaven."

"What other suggestion can you give my boys?" I asked.

would make every sacrifice to preserve it. Tell them to be brave and to practice this fair virtue, which overrides all others in beauty and splendor. The chaste are lilies growing in God's sight.

I walked toward the boys to mingle among them, but I stumbled against something and awoke to find myself in bed.

My dear sons, are you all innocent? Perhaps a few of you are. To them I say: for heaven's sake, never lose such a priceless gem! It is a treasure worth God Himself. If you could only have seen how beautiful those boys were with their crowns! I would have given anything in the world to prolong the enjoyment of that spectacle. If I were a painter, I would consider it a rare privilege to be able to paint what I saw.

Could you but know how beautiful innocence is in a lad, you would undergo the most painful ordeal and death itself in order to safeguard that treasure. Though I was profoundly comforted by the number of those who had returned to the state of grace, I still wished that it might have been greater. I was also very much surprised to see that some boys who here appear to be good wore long, thick horns.

Don Bosco ended his narrative with a warm exhortation to those who had lost their innocence to strive earnestly to regain it by penance. Two days later, on June 18, after night prayers, Don Bosco gave more explanations of his dream:

There should be no further need of explaining, but I will repeat some things I have said. The great plain is the world,

particularly the places and states of life from which you were called to come here. The area where the lambs grazed symbolizes the Oratory, and they are its past, present, and future pupils. The arid, the fertile, and the flowery meadows represent the state of sin, of grace, and of innocence. Horns stand for scandal; broken horns symbolize an end to scandal-giving. The figure 3 on every lamb stands for the three punishments that God will inflict upon those boys: famine of spiritual aid, famine of religious instruction and of God's Word, and famine of material food. The boys radiating light are those in the state of grace, particularly those still retaining their baptismal innocence. What glory awaits them! Let us then, dear boys, bravely practice virtue. Those lads in the state of sin must do their utmost to start a new life and, with God's help, persevere till death. If we cannot all join the innocent ones around the Immaculate Lamb, let us at least follow along after them.

One boy asked me if he was among the innocent ones. I told him no, but that his horns were broken off. He also asked if he had any sores, and I said yes.

"What do you mean?" he insisted.

"Don't worry," I replied. "They are dried up and will disappear. They are no longer a dishonor. They are like the scars of a soldier who, regardless of his many wounds, was still able to overcome his enemy. They are marks of glory. But, yet, it is more glorious to come away from the combat unscathed. To achieve this is truly admirable!"

In the course of his explanation, Don Bosco also said that before long there would be an epidemic, a famine, and a lack of means to do good to ourselves. He predicted that within three months something would happen. This dream was as impressive and effective as others in the past.

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Prophets of Forgiveness and Gratitude

In these times, where day after day the news communicates experiences of conflict, war, and hatred, how great is the risk that we as believers end up being drawn into a reading of events reduced merely to a political level, or limit ourselves to taking sides for one faction or another with arguments tied to our own way of seeing things, our own interpretation of reality.

In Jesus' discourse following the Beatitudes, there is a series of "small/great lessons" that the Lord offers. They always begin with the verse "you have heard that it was said". In one of these, the Lord recalls the ancient saying "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (Mt 5:38).

Outside the logic of the Gospel, this law is not only uncontested but may even be taken as a rule expressing how to settle scores with those who have offended us. Obtaining revenge is perceived as a right, even a duty.

Jesus presents himself before this logic with a completely different, wholly opposite proposal. To what we have heard, Jesus says, "But I say to you" (Mt 5:39). And here as Christians, we must be very careful. The words of Jesus that follow are important not only in themselves but because they express in a very concise way His entire message. Jesus does not come to tell us there is another way to interpret reality. He does not approach us to broaden the spectrum of opinions about earthly matters, particularly those touching our lives. Jesus is not just another opinion – He himself embodies the alternative to the law of revenge.

The phrase, "but I say to you," is fundamentally important because now it is no longer just the spoken word, but Jesus

himself. What Jesus communicates to us, He lives. When Jesus says, "do not resist an evil person; if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also" (Mt 5:39), He lived these very words himself. Certainly, we cannot say of Jesus that He preaches well but acts poorly in His message.

Returning to our times, these words of Jesus risk being perceived as the words of a weak person, reactions of someone no longer capable of responding but only of enduring. Indeed, when we look at Jesus offering Himself completely on the wood of the Cross, this may be the impression we get. Yet we know perfectly well that the sacrifice on the cross is the fruit of a life that begins with the phrase "but I say to you". Because everything Jesus told us, he ultimately took upon Himself fully. And by taking it fully, He managed to pass from the cross to victory. Jesus' logic apparently communicates a losing personality. But we know well that the message Jesus left us, which He lived fully, is the medicine this world desperately needs today.

Being prophets of forgiveness means embracing good as a response to evil. It means having the determination that the power of evil will not condition my way of seeing and interpreting reality. Forgiveness is not the response of the weak. Forgiveness is the most eloquent sign of that freedom which can recognise the wounds evil leaves behind, but those same wounds will never become a powder keg fuelling revenge and hatred.

Responding to evil with evil only widens and deepens humanity's wounds. Peace and harmony do not grow on the soil of hatred and revenge.

Being prophets of gratuity requires from us the ability to look upon the poor and the needy, not with the logic of profit, but with the logic of charity. The poor do not choose to be poor, but those who are well-off have the possibility to choose generosity, kindness, and compassion. How different the world would be if our political leaders in this scenario of

growing conflicts and wars had the wisdom to look at those who pay the price in these divisions – the poor, the marginalised, those who cannot escape because they cannot manage so do so.

If we start from a purely horizontal reading, there is cause for despair. We have no choice but to remain closed in our grumbling and criticisms. And yet, no! We are educators of the young. We know well that these young people in our world are seeking reference points of a healthy humanity, of political leaders capable of interpreting reality with criteria of justice and peace. But when our young people look around, we know well they perceive only the emptiness of a poor vision of life.

We who are committed to the education of the young have a great responsibility. It is not enough to comment on the darkness left by an almost complete absence of leadership. It is not enough to remark that there are no proposals capable of igniting young people's memory. It falls to each of us to light that candle of hope in this darkness, to offer examples of humanity fulfilled in daily life.

Truly, it is worth being prophets of forgiveness and gratuity today.

Cardinal Augustus Hlond

The second of 11 children, his father was a railway worker. Having received a simple but strong faith from his parents, at the age of 12, attracted by Don Bosco' reputation, he followed his brother Ignatius to Italy to dedicate himself to the Lord in the Salesian Society, and soon attracted two other brothers there: Antonio, who was to become a Salesian and a renowned musician, and Clement, who was to become a missionary. The college at Valsalice accepted him for his secondary studies. He was then admitted to the novitiate and received the cassock

from Blessed Michael Rua (1896). Having made his religious profession in 1897, his superiors sent him to Rome to the Gregorian University for the philosophy course which he graduated in. From Rome he returned to Poland to do his practical training in the college at Oświęcim. His fidelity to Don Bosco's system of education, his commitment to assistance and to the school, his dedication to the young and the amiability of his manner won him great acclaim. He also quickly made a name for himself for his musical talent.

Having completed his theology studies, he was ordained a priest on 23 September 1905 in Cracow by Bishop Nowak. In 1905-09 he attended the Faculty of Arts at the Universities of Krakow and Lvov. In 1907 he was placed in charge of the new house in Przemyśl (1907-09), from where he went on to direct the house in Vienna (1909-19). Here his valour and personal ability had an even greater scope due to the particular difficulties the institute faced in the imperial capital. Fr Augustus Hlond, with his virtue and tact, succeeded in a short time not only in sorting out the financial situation, but also in bringing about a flowering of youth work that attracted the admiration of all classes of people. Caring for the poor, the workers, the children of the people attracted him the affection of the humblest classes. Dear to the bishops and apostolic nuncios, he enjoyed the esteem of the authorities and the imperial family itself. In recognition of this social and educational work, he received some of the most prestigious honours three times.

In 1919, the development of the Austro-Hungarian Province advised a division in proportion to the number of houses, and the superiors appointed Fr Hlond as provincial of the German-Hungarian Province based in Vienna (1919-22), entrusting him with the care of the Austrian, German and Hungarian confreres. In less than three years, the young provincial opened a dozen new Salesian presences, and formed them in the most genuine Salesian spirit, raising numerous vocations.

He was in the full fervour of his Salesian activity when, in 1922, the Holy See having to provide religious accommodation

for Polish Silesia still bleeding from political and national strife, the Holy Father Pius XI entrusted him with the delicate mission, appointing him as Apostolic Administrator. His mediation between Germans and Poles gave birth in 1925 to the diocese of Katowice, of which he became bishop. In 1926 he was Archbishop of Gniezno and Poznań and Primate of Poland. The following year the Pope created him Cardinal. In 1932 he founded the Society of Christ for Polish emigrants, aimed at assisting the many compatriots who had left the country.

In March 1939 he took part in the Conclave that elected Pius XII. On 1 September of the same year the Nazis invaded Poland: the Second World War began. The cardinal raised his voice against Hitler's violations of human rights and religious freedom. Forced into exile, he took refuge in France, at Hautecombe Abbey, denouncing the persecution of the Jews in Poland. The Gestapo penetrated the Abbey and arrested him, deporting him to Paris. The cardinal categorically refuses to support the formation of a pro-Nazi Polish government. He was interned first in Lorraine and then in Westphalia. Freed by allied troops, he returned to his homeland in 1945.

In the new Poland liberated from Nazism, he finds communism. He courageously defended the Poles against atheistic Marxist oppression, even escaping several assassination attempts. He died on 22 October 1948 of pneumonia, at the age of 67. Thousands of people flocked to the funeral.

Cardinal Hlond was a virtuous man, a shining example of a Salesian religious and a generous, austere pastor, capable of prophetic vision. Obedient to the Church and firm in the exercise of authority, he showed heroic humility and unequivocal constancy in times of greatest trial. He cultivated poverty and practised justice to the poor and needy. The two pillars of his spiritual life, in the school of St John Bosco, were the Eucharist and Mary Help of Christians. In the history of the Church of Poland, Cardinal Augustus Hlond was one of the most eminent figures for the religious witness of his life, for the greatness, variety and originality of his pastoral ministry, for the sufferings he

faced with an intrepid Christian spirit for the Kingdom of God. The apostolic ardour distinguished the pastoral work and spiritual physiognomy of the Venerable Augustus Hlond, who took *Da mihi animas coetera tolle* as his episcopal motto. As a true son of St John Bosco he confirmed it with his life as a consecrated man and bishop, bearing witness to tireless pastoral charity.

We must remember his great love for Our Lady, learnt in his family and the great devotion of the Polish people to the Mother of God, venerated in the shrine of Częstochowa. Moreover, from Turin, where he began his journey as a Salesian, he spread the cult of Mary Help of Christians in Poland and consecrated Poland to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. His entrustment to Mary always sustained him in adversity and in the hour of his final encounter with the Lord. He died with the Rosary beads in his hands, telling those present that the victory, when it came, would be the victory of Mary Immaculate.

Venerable Cardinal Augustus Hlond is an outstanding witness of how we must accept the way of the Gospel every day despite the fact that it brings us problems, difficulties, even persecution: this is holiness. "Jesus himself warns us that the path he proposes goes against the flow, even making us challenge society by the way we live and, as a result, becoming a nuisance. He reminds us how many people have been, and still are, persecuted simply because they struggle for justice, because they take seriously their commitment to God and to others. Unless we wish to sink into an obscure mediocrity, let us not long for an easy life, for 'whoever would save his life will lose it' (Mt 16:25). (Mt 16:25). In living the Gospel, we cannot expect that everything will be easy, for the thirst for power and worldly interests often stands in our way... the cross remains the source of our growth and sanctification." (Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, nos. 90-92).

Don Jose-Luis Carreno, Salesian missionary

Fr. José Luis Carreño (1905-1986) was described by historian Joseph Thekkedath as “the most beloved Salesian of South India” in the first half of the twentieth century. In every place he lived, whether in British India, the Portuguese colony of Goa, the Philippines, or Spain, we find Salesians who cherish his memory with affection. Strangely, however, we still lack an adequate biography of this great Salesian, except for the lengthy obituary letter written by Fr. José Antonio Rico: “José Luis Carreño Etxeandía, God’s labourer.” We hope this gap will soon be filled. Fr. Carreño was one of the architects of the South Asia region, and we cannot afford to forget him.

José-Luis Carreño Etxeandía was born in Bilbao, Spain, on 23 October 1905. Orphaned of his mother at the tender age of eight, he was welcomed into the Salesian house in Santander. In 1917, at the age of twelve, he entered the Aspirantate at Campello. He recalled that in those days, “we didn’t speak much about Don Bosco... But for us, a Fr. Binelli was a Don Bosco, not to mention Fr. Rinaldi, then General Prefect, whose visits left us with a supernatural sensation, like when Yahweh’s messengers visited Abraham’s tent.”

After novitiate and post-novitiate, he did his practical training as an assistant to the novices. He must have been a brilliant cleric, because Fr. Pedro Escursell wrote about him to the Rector Major, “I am speaking at this very moment with one of the model clerics of this house. He is an assistant in the formation of personnel in this Province. He tells me that for some time he has been asking to be sent to the missions and says he has given up asking because he receives no

response. He is a young man of great intellectual and moral worth."

On the eve of his priestly ordination in 1932, the young José-Luis wrote directly to the Rector Major, offering himself for the missions. The offer was accepted, and he was sent to India, where he landed in Mumbai in 1933. Just a year later, when the South India Province was established, he was appointed novice master at Tirupattur; he was only 28 years old. With his extraordinary qualities of mind and heart, he quickly became the soul of the house and left a deep impression on his novices. "He won us over with his fatherly heart," wrote one of them, Archbishop Hubert D'Rosario of Shillong.

Fr. Joseph Vaz, another novice, often recounted how Carreño noticed him shivering with cold during a conference. "Wait a moment, hombre," said the novice master, and he went out. Shortly after, he returned with a blue jumper which he handed to Joe. Joe noticed that the jumper was strangely warm. Then he remembered that under his cassock, his master was wearing something blue... which was now missing. Carreño had given him his own jumper.

In 1942, when the British government in India interned all foreigners from countries at war with Britain, Carreño, being a citizen of a neutral country, was left undisturbed. In 1943, he received a message via Vatican Radio: he was to take the place of Fr. Eligio Cinato, Provincial of the South India Province, who had also been interned. Around the same time, Salesian Archbishop Louis Mathias of Madras-Mylapore invited him to be his vicar general.

In 1945, he was officially appointed Provincial, a position he held from 1945 to 1951. One of his very first acts was to consecrate the Province to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Many Salesians were convinced that the extraordinary growth of the South Province was due precisely to this gesture. Under Fr. Carreño's leadership, Salesian works doubled. One of his most far-sighted acts was the establishment of a university college in the remote and poor village of Tirupattur. Sacred Heart

College would eventually transform the entire district.

Carreño was also the main architect of the "Indianisation" of the Salesian face in India, seeking local vocations from the outset, rather than relying solely on foreign missionaries. A choice that proved providential, first, because the flow of foreign missionaries ceased during the War; then, because independent India decided to no longer grant visas to new foreign missionaries. "If today there are more than two thousand Salesians in India, the credit for this growth must be attributed to the policies initiated by Fr. Carreño," wrote Fr. Thekkedath in his history of the Salesians in India.

Fr. Carreño, as we have said, was not only Provincial but also vicar to Bishop Mathias. These two great men, who deeply respected each other, were nevertheless very different in temperament. The archbishop favoured severe disciplinary measures for confreres in difficulty, while Fr. Carreño preferred milder procedures. The extraordinary visitor, Fr. Albino Fedrigotti, seems to have sided with the archbishop, describing Fr. Carreño as "an excellent religious, a man with a big heart," but also "a bit too much of a poet."

There was also the accusation of being a poor administrator, but it is significant that a figure like Fr. Aurelio Maschio, great procurator and architect of Salesian works in Mumbai, firmly rejected this accusation. In reality, Fr. Carreño was an innovator and a visionary. Some of his ideas, such as involving non-Salesian volunteers for a few years of service, were viewed with suspicion at the time but are now widely accepted and actively promoted.

In 1951, at the end of his official term as Provincial, Carreño was asked to return to Spain to work with the Salesian Cooperators. This was not the real reason for his departure after eighteen years in India, but Carreño accepted serenely, though not without suffering.

In 1952, however, he was asked to go to Goa, where he remained until 1960. "Goa was love at first sight," he wrote in *Urdimbre en el telar*. Goa, for its part, welcomed him into its heart. He continued the tradition of Salesians serving as

spiritual directors and confessors to diocesan clergy and was even patron of the Konkani writers' association. Above all, he governed the Don Bosco Panjim community with love, cared with extraordinary fatherliness for the many poor boys, and once again actively sought vocations to Salesian life. The first Salesians of Goa, people like Thomas Fernandes, Elias Diaz, and Romulo Noronha recounted with tears in their eyes how Carreño and others would go to the Goa Medical College, right next to the Salesian house, to donate blood and thus earn a few rupees to buy food and other necessities for the boys.

In 1961, the Indian military action and annexation of Goa took place. At that time, Fr. Carreño was in Spain and could no longer return to his beloved land. In 1962, he was sent to the Philippines as novice master. He accompanied only three groups of novices because in 1965, he asked to return to Spain. His decision stemmed from a serious divergence of vision between him and the Salesian missionaries from China, especially with Fr. Carlo Braga, superior of the Preprovince. Carreño strongly opposed the policy of sending young Filipino Salesians who had just professed to Hong Kong for philosophy studies. As it happened, in the end, the superiors accepted the proposal to keep the young Salesians in the Philippines, but by then, Carreño's request to return home had already been granted.

Don Carreño spent only four years in the Philippines, but here too, as in India, he left an indelible mark, "an immeasurable and crucial contribution to the Salesian presence in the Philippines," in the words of Salesian historian Nestor Impelido.

Back in Spain, he collaborated with the Missionary Procures of Madrid and of New Rochelle and in the animation of the Iberian Provinces. Many in Spain still remember the old missionary who visited Salesian houses, infecting the young with his missionary enthusiasm, his songs, and his music.

But in his creative imagination, a new project was taking shape. Carreño devoted himself wholeheartedly to the dream of founding a Pueblo Misionero with two objectives: preparing

young missionaries – mostly from Eastern Europe – for Latin America; and offering a refuge for ‘retired’ missionaries like himself, who could also serve as formators. After long and painful correspondence with his superiors, the project finally took shape in the Hogar del Misionero in Alzuza, a few kilometres from Pamplona. The missionary vocational component never took off, and very few elderly missionaries actually joined Carreño. His main apostolate in these last years remained that of the pen. He left more than thirty books, five of which were dedicated to the Holy Shroud, to which he was particularly devoted.

Fr. José-Luis Carreño died in 1986, in Pamplona at the age of 81. Despite the ups and downs of his life, this great lover of the Sacred Heart of Jesus could affirm, on the golden jubilee of his priestly ordination, “If fifty years ago my motto as a young priest was ‘Christ is everything,’ today, old and overwhelmed by His love, I would write it in golden letters, because in reality CHRIST IS EVERYTHING.”

Fr. Ivo COELHO, SDB

The Tenth Hill (1864)

Don Bosco's dream of the “Tenth Hill”, recounted in October 1864, is one of the most evocative passages in Salesian tradition. In it, the saint finds himself in a vast valley filled with young people: some already at the Oratory, others yet to be met. Guided by a mysterious voice, he must lead them over a steep embankment and then through ten hills, symbolising the Ten Commandments, towards a light that prefigures Paradise. The chariot of Innocence, the penitential ranks, and the celestial music paint an educational fresco:

they show the effort of preserving purity, the value of repentance, and the irreplaceable role of educators. With this prophetic vision, Don Bosco anticipates the worldwide expansion of his work and the commitment to accompany every young person on the path to salvation.

It came to him the night of October 21, and he narrated it the following night. [Surprisingly] C ...E... a boy from Casale Monferrato, had the same dream, during which he seemed to be with Don Bosco, talking to him. In the morning the boy was so deeply impressed that he went to tell it all to his teacher, who urged him to report to Don Bosco. The youngster met Don Bosco as he was coming down the stairs to look for the boy and tell him the very same dream. [Here is the dream]:

Don Bosco seemed to be in a vast valley swarming with thousands and thousands of boys-so many, in fact, that their number surpassed belief. Among them he could see all past and present pupils; the rest, perhaps, were yet to come. Scattered among them were priests and clerics then at the Oratory.

A lofty bank blocked one end of the valley. As Don Bosco wondered what to do with all those boys, a voice said to him: "Do you see that bank? Well, both you and the boys must reach its summit."

At Don Bosco's word, all those youngsters dashed toward the bank. The priests too ran up the slope, pushing boys ahead, lifting up those who fell, and hoisting on their shoulders those who were too tired to climb further. Father Rua, his sleeves rolled up, kept working hardest of all, gripping two boys at a time and literally hurling them up to the top of the bank where they landed on their feet and merrily scampered about. Meanwhile Father Cagliero and Father Francesia ran back and forth encouraging the youngsters to climb.

It didn't take long for all of them to make it to the top. "Now what shall we do?" Don Bosco asked.

"You must all climb each of the ten bills before you," the voice replied.

"Impossible! So many young, frail boys will never make it!"

"Those who can't will be carried," the voice countered. At this very moment, at the far end of the bank, appeared a gorgeous, triangular-shaped wagon, too beautiful for words. Its three wheels swiveled in all directions. Three shafts rose from its corners and joined to support a richly embroidered banner, carrying in large letters the inscription *Innocentia* [Innocence]. A wide band of rich material was draped about the wagon, bearing the legend: *Adiutorio Dei Altissimi, Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti*. [With the help of the Most High, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.]

Glittering with gold and gems, the wagon came to a stop in the boys' midst. At a given order, five hundred of the smaller ones climbed into it. Among the untold thousands, only these few hundred were still innocent.

As Don Bosco kept wondering which way to go, a wide, level road strewn with thorns opened before him. Suddenly there also appeared six white-clad former pupils who had died at the Oratory. Holding aloft another splendid banner with the inscription *Poenitentia* [Penance], they placed themselves at the head of the multitude which was to walk the whole way. As the signal to move was given, many priests seized the wagon's prow and led the way, followed by the six white-clad boys and the rest of the multitude.

The lads in the wagon began singing *Laudate pueri Dominum* [Praise the Lord, you children – Ps. 112, 1] with indescribable sweetness.

Don Bosco kept going forward, enthralled by their heavenly melody, but, on an impulse, he turned to find out if the boys were following. To his deep regret he noticed that many had stayed behind in the valley, while many others had turned back. Heartbroken, he wanted to retrace his steps to persuade those boys to follow him and to help them along, but he was absolutely forbidden to do so. "Those poor boys will be lost!" he protested.

"So much the worse for them," he was told. "They too received

the call but refused to follow you. They saw the road they had to travel. They had their chance."

Don Bosco insisted, pleaded, and begged, but in vain.

"You too must obey," he was told. He had to walk on.

He was still smarting with this pain when he became aware of another sad fact: a large number of those riding in the wagon had gradually fallen off, so that a mere hundred and fifty still stood under the banner of innocence. His heart was aching with unbearable grief. He hoped that it was only a dream and made every effort to awake, but unfortunately it was all too real. He clapped his hands and heard their sound; he groaned and heard his sighs resound through the room; he wanted to banish this horrible vision and could not.

"My dear boys," he exclaimed at this point of his narration, "I recognized those of you who stayed behind in the valley and those who turned back or fell from the wagon. I saw you all. You can be sure that I will do my utmost to save you. Many of you whom I urged to go to confession did not accept my invitation. For heaven's sake, save your souls."

Many of those who had fallen off the wagon joined those who were walking. Meanwhile the singing in the wagon continued, and it was so sweet that it gradually abated Don Bosco's sorrow. Seven ills had already been climbed. As the boys reached the eighth, they found themselves in a wonderful village where they stopped for a brief rest. The houses were indescribably beautiful and luxurious.

In telling the boys of this village, Don Bosco remarked, "I could repeat what St. Teresa said about heavenly things-to speak of them is to belittle them. They are just too beautiful for words. I shall only say that the doorposts of these houses seemed to be made of gold, crystal, and diamonds all at once. They were a most wonderful, satisfying, pleasing sight. The fields were dotted with trees laden simultaneously with blossoms, buds, and fruit. It was out of this world!" The boys scattered all over, eager to see everything and to taste the fruit.

(It was in this village that the boy from Casale met Don Bosco

and talked at length with him. Both of them remembered quite vividly the details of their conversation. The two dreams had been a singular coincidence.)

Here another surprise awaited Don Bosco. His boys suddenly looked like old men: toothless, wrinkled, white-haired, bent over, lame, leaning on canes. He was stunned, but the voice said, "Don't be surprised. It's been years and years since you left that valley. The music made your trip seem so short. If you want proof, look at yourself in the mirror and you will see that I am telling the truth." Don Bosco was handed a mirror. He himself had grown old, with his face deeply lined and his few remaining teeth decayed.

The march resumed. Now and then the boys asked to be allowed to stop and look at the novelties around them, but he kept urging them on. "We are neither hungry nor thirsty," he said. "We have no need to stop. Let's keep going!"

Far away, on the tenth hill, arose a light which grew increasingly larger and brighter, as though pouring from a gigantic doorway. Singing resumed, so enchanting that its like may possibly be heard and enjoyed only in paradise. It is simply indescribable because it did not come from instruments or human throats. Don Bosco was so over

joyed that he awoke, only to find himself in bed.

He then explained his dream thus: "The valley is this world; the bank symbolizes the obstacles we have to surmount in detaching ourselves from it; the wagon is self-evident. The young sters on foot were those who lost their innocence but repented of their sins." He also added that the ten hills symbolized the Ten Commandments whose observance leads to eternal life. He concluded by saying that he was ready to tell some boys confidentially what they had been doing in the dream: whether they had remained in the valley or fallen off the wagon.

When he came down from the stand, a pupil, Anthony Ferraris, approached him and told him within our hearing that, the night before, he had dreamed that he was with his mother and that

when the latter had asked him whether he would be coming home next Easter, he had replied that by then he would be in paradise. He then whispered something else in Don Bosco's ear. Anthony Ferraris died on March 16, 1865.

We jotted down Don Bosco's dream that very evening, October 22, 1864, and added this note: "We are sure that in explaining the dream Don Bosco tried to cover up what is most mystifying, at least in some instances. The explanation that the ten hills symbolized the Ten Commandments does not convince us. We rather believe that the eighth hill on which Don Bosco called a halt and saw himself as an old man symbolizes the end of his life in the seventies. The future will tell."

The future is now past; facts have borne out our belief. The dream revealed Don Bosco's life-span. For comparative purposes, let us match this dream with that of The Wheel of Eternity, which we came to learn only years later. In that dream each tum of the wheel symbolized a decade, and this also seems to be the case in the trek from hill to hill. Each hill stands for a decade, and the ten hills represent a century, man's maximum life-span. In his life's first decade, Don Bosco, as a young boy, begins his mission among his companions at Becchi and starts on his journey; he climbs seven hills-seven decades-and reaches the age of seventy; he climbs the eighth hill and goes no farther. He sees beautiful buildings and meadows, symbols of the Salesian Society which, through God's infinite goodness, has grown and borne fruit. He has still a long way to go on the eighth hill and therefore sets out again, but he does not reach the ninth because he wakes up. Thus he did not live out his eighth decade; he died at the age of seventy-two years and five months.

What do our readers think of this interpretation? On the following evening, Don Bosco asked us our opinion of the dream. We replied that it did not concern only the boys, but showed also the worldwide spread of the Salesian Society.

"What do you mean?" a confrere countered. "We already have schools at Mirabella and Lanzo, and we'll have a few more in Piedmont. What else do you want?"

"No," we insisted. "This dream portends far greater things."
Don Bosco smiled and nodded approval.
(1864, BM VII, 467-471)

Joseph Augustus Arribat: Righteous Among the Nations

1. Biographical Profile

The Venerable Joseph Augustus Arribat was born on 17 December 1879 in Trédou (Rouergue – France). The poverty of his family forced the young Augustus to begin secondary school at the Salesian oratory in Marseilles only at the age of 18. Due to the political situation at the turn of the century, he began Salesian life in Italy and received the cassock from the hands of Blessed Michael Rua. Back in France he began, like all his confreres, Salesian life in a semi-clandestine state, first in Marseilles and then in La Navarre, founded by Don Bosco in 1878.

Ordained a priest in 1912, he was called to arms during the First World War and worked as a stretcher-bearer nurse. After the war Fr Arribat continued to work intensively at La Navarre until 1926, after which he went to Nice where he stayed until 1931. He returned to La Navarre as rector and at the same time was in charge of the parish of St Isidore in the valley of Sauvebonne. His parishioners called him "the saint of the valley".

At the end of his third year, he was sent to Morges, in the canton of Vaud, Switzerland. He then received three successive mandates of six years each, first in Millau, then in Villemur and finally in Thonon in the diocese of Annecy. His most dangerous and grace-filled period was probably his assignment in Villemur during the Second World

War. Returning to La Navarre in 1953, Fr Arribat remained there until his death on 19 March 1963.

2. Profoundly a man of God

A man of daily duty, nothing was secondary for him, and everyone knew that he got up very early to clean the pupils' toilets and the courtyard. Having become rector of the Salesian house, and wanting to do his duty to the end and to perfection, out of respect and love for others, he often finished his days very late, shortening his hours of rest. On the other hand, he was always available, welcoming to all, knowing how to adapt to everyone, be it benefactors and large landowners, or house servants, maintaining a permanent concern for the novices and confreres, and especially for the young people entrusted to him.

This total gift of self manifested itself to the point of heroism. During the Second World War he did not hesitate to host Jewish families and young people, exposing himself to the grave risk of indiscretion or denunciation. Thirty-three years after his death, those who had directly witnessed his heroism recognised the value of his courage and the sacrifice of his life. His name is inscribed in Jerusalem, where he was officially recognised as a "Righteous Among the Nations".

He was recognised by everyone as a true man of God, who did "everything out of love, and nothing by constraint" as St Francis de Sales used to say. Here is the secret of his affect on people, the full extent of which he himself perhaps did not realise.

All witnesses noted the living faith of this servant of God, a man of prayer, without ostentation. His faith was the radiant faith of a man always united with God, a true man of God, and in particular a man of the Eucharist.

When celebrating Mass or when praying, a kind of fervour emanated from him that could not go unnoticed. One confrere declared that: "seeing him make his great sign of the cross, everyone felt a timely reminder of God's presence. His

recollection at the altar was impressive." Another Salesian recalls that "he made his genuflections to perfection with a courage, an expression of adoration that led to devotion." The same person said that "He strengthened my faith."

His vision of faith shone through in the confessional and in spiritual conversations. He communicated his faith. A man of hope, he relied on God and his Providence at all times, keeping calm in the storm and spreading a sense of peace everywhere.

This deep faith was further refined in him during the last ten years of his life. He no longer had any responsibilities and could no longer read easily. He lived only on the essentials and testified to this with simplicity by welcoming all those who knew well that his semi-blindness did not prevent him from seeing clearly into their hearts. At the back of the chapel, his confessional was a place besieged by young people and neighbours from the valley.

3. "I did not come to be served..."

The image that witnesses have preserved of Fr Augustus is that of the servant of the Gospel, but in the most humble sense. Sweeping the courtyard, cleaning the pupils' toilets, washing the dishes, caring for and watching over the sick, spading the garden, raking the park, decorating the chapel, tying the children's shoes, combing their hair, nothing repulsed him and it was impossible to divert him from these humble exercises of charity. The "good father" Arribat, was more generous with concrete actions than with words: he willingly gave his room to the occasional visitor, who risked being less comfortably accommodated than him. His availability was permanent, of all times. His concern for cleanliness and dignified poverty did not leave him alone, because the house had to be cosy. As a man who made friends easily, he took advantage of his long trips to greet everyone and engage in conversation, even with people who hated priests.

Fr Arribat lived over thirty years at Navarre, in the house that Don Bosco himself wanted to place under the

protection of St Joseph, head and servant of the Holy Family, a model of faith in hiddenness and discretion. In his solicitude for the material needs of the house and through his closeness to all the people dedicated to manual labour, peasants, gardeners, workers, handymen, kitchen or laundry people, this priest made people think of St Joseph, whose name he also bore. And did he not die on 19 March, the feast of St Joseph?

4. An authentic Salesian educator

“Providence has entrusted me in a special way with the care of children,” he said to sum up his specific vocation as a Salesian, a disciple of Don Bosco, at the service of the young, especially the most needy.

Fr Arribat had none of the particular qualities that easily impress young people outwardly. He was not a great sportsman, nor a brilliant intellectual, nor a talker who drew crowds, nor a musician, nor a man of the theatre or cinema, none of this! How to explain the influence he exerted on young people? His secret was none other than what he had learned from Don Bosco, who conquered his small world with three things considered fundamental in the education of youth: reason, religion and loving-kindness. As the “father and teacher of youth” he knew how to speak the language of reason with the young, to motivate, explain, persuade, convince his pupils, avoiding the impulses of passion and anger. He placed religion at the centre of his life and action, not in the sense of forced imposition, but in the luminous testimony of his relationship with God, Jesus and Mary. As for loving kindness, with which he won the hearts of young people, it is worth recalling about the servant of God what St Francis de Sales said: “You catch more flies with a spoonful of honey than with a barrel of vinegar.”

Particularly authoritative is the testimony of Fr Peter Ricaldone, Don Bosco’s future successor, who wrote after his canonical visit in 1923-1924: “Fr Augustus Arribat is a catechist, confessor and reads the conduct marks! He is a holy

confrere. Only his kindness can make his various duties less incompatible'. Then he repeats his praise: "He is an excellent confrere, not too healthy. Because of his good manners he enjoys the confidence of the older young men who almost all go to him."

One thing that was striking was the almost ceremonious respect he showed to everyone, but especially to the children. He would call a little eight-year-old "Monsieur". One lady testified: "He respected the other so much that the other was almost forced to elevate himself to the dignity that was bestowed on him as a child of God, and all this without even talking about religion."

Open-faced and smiling, this son of St Francis de Sales and Don Bosco bothered no one. While his thin body and asceticism recalled the holy curé of Ars and Fr Rua, his smile and gentleness were typically Salesian. As one witness put it: "He was the most natural man in the world, full of humour, spontaneous in his reactions, young at heart."

His words, which were not those of a great orator, were effective because they emanated from the simplicity and fervour of his soul.

One of his former students testified: "In our children's heads, in our childhood conversations, after hearing the stories of the life of John Mary Vianney, we used to think of Fr Arribat as if he were the Holy Curé of Ars to us. The hours of catechism, presented in simple but true language, were followed with great attention. During Mass, the pews at the back of the chapel were always full. We had the impression that we were meeting God in his goodness and this marked our youth."

5. Fr Arribat an ecologist?

Here is an original trait to complete the picture of this seemingly ordinary figure. He was regarded almost as an ecologist before this term was widespread. A small farmer, he had learnt to deeply love and respect nature. His youthful compositions are full of freshness and very fine observations,

with a touch of poetry. He spontaneously shared the work of this rural world, where he lived much of his long life.

Speaking of his love for animals, how many times was he seen as “the good father, with a box under his arm, full of breadcrumbs, laboriously making the path from the refectory to his doves with very painful little steps.” An incredible fact for those who did not see it, says the person who witnessed the scene, were the doves – as soon as they saw him, they came forward as if to welcome him. He opened the cage and immediately they came to him, some of them standing on his shoulders. “He spoke to them with words I cannot remember, but it was as if he knew them all. When a young boy brought him a baby sparrow that he had taken from the nest, he told him: “You must give it freedom”. A story is also told of a rather ferocious wolfhound which only he was able to tame, and which came to lie next to his coffin after his death.

Fr Augustus Arribat’s brief spiritual profile has shown us some of the spiritual features of the faces of saints he felt close to: the loving kindness of Don Bosco, the asceticism of Fr Rua, the gentleness of St Francis de Sales, the priestly piety of the holy curé of Ars, the love of nature of St Francis of Assisi and the constant and faithful work of St Joseph.

Venerable Ottavio Ortiz Arrieta Coya, Bishop

Octavio Ortiz Arrieta Coya, born in Lima, Peru, on 19 April 1878, was the first Peruvian Salesian. As a young man, he trained as a carpenter, but the Lord called him to a higher mission. He made his first Salesian profession on 29 January 1900 and was ordained a priest in 1908. In 1922, he was

consecrated bishop of the diocese of Chachapoyas, a role he held with dedication until his death on 1 March 1958. Twice he refused appointment to the more prestigious see of Lima, preferring to remain close to his people. A tireless shepherd, he travelled throughout the diocese to personally know the faithful and promoted numerous pastoral initiatives for evangelisation. On 12 November 1990, under the pontificate of St John Paul II, his cause for canonisation was opened, and he was granted the title of Servant of God. On 27 February 2017, Pope Francis recognised his heroic virtues, declaring him Venerable.

The Venerable Bishop Ottavio Ortiz Arrieta Coya spent the first part of his life as an Oratory boy, a student and then became a Salesian himself, engaged in the works of the Sons of Don Bosco in Peru. He was the first Salesian formed in the first Salesian house in Peru, founded in Rimac, a poor neighbourhood, where he learned to live an austere life of sacrifice. Among the first Salesians to arrive in Peru in 1891, he got to know the spirit of Don Bosco and the Preventive System. As a Salesian of the first generation he learnt that service and the gift of self would be the horizon of his life; that is why as a young Salesian he took on important responsibilities, such as opening new works and directing others, with simplicity, sacrifice and total dedication to the poor.

He lived the second part of his life, from the beginning of the 1920s, as bishop of Chachapoyas, an immense diocese, vacant for years, where the prohibitive conditions of the territory added up to a certain closure, especially in the most remote villages. Here the field and the challenges of the apostolate were immense. Ortiz Arrieta was of a lively temperament, accustomed to community life; moreover, he was delicate of spirit, to the point of being called “pecadito” in his younger years, for his exactitude in detecting shortcomings and helping himself and others to amend themselves. He also possessed an innate sense of rigour and

moral duty. The conditions under which he had to carry out his episcopal ministry, however, were diametrically opposed to him: loneliness and the substantial impossibility of sharing a Salesian and priestly life, despite repeated and almost pleading requests to his own Congregation; the need to reconcile his own moral rigour with an increasingly docile and almost disarmed firmness; a fine moral conscience continually put to the test by coarseness of choices and lukewarmness in following, on the part of some collaborators less heroic than himself, and of a people of God that knew how to oppose the bishop when his word became a denunciation of injustice and a diagnosis of spiritual evils. The Venerable's path towards the fullness of holiness, in the exercise of the virtues, was therefore marked by hardships, difficulties and the continual need to convert his gaze and heart, under the action of the Spirit.

While we certainly find episodes in his life that can be defined as heroic in the strict sense, we must also, and perhaps above all, highlight those moments in his virtuous journey when he could have acted differently, but did not; giving in to human despair, while renewing hope; being content with great charity, but not fully willing to exercise that heroic charity that he practised with exemplary fidelity for several decades. When, twice, he was offered a change of See, and in the second case he was offered the primatial See of Lima, he decided to remain among his poor, those whom no one wanted, truly on the periphery of the world, remaining in the diocese he had always espoused and loved as it was, committing himself wholeheartedly to making it even a little better. He was a 'modern' pastor in his style of presence and in his use of means of action such as associationism and the press. A man of decisive temperament and firm convictions of faith, Bishop Ortiz Arrieta certainly made use of this "don de gobierno" (gift of leadership) in his leadership, always combined, however, with respect and charity, expressed with extraordinary consistency.

Although he lived before the Second Vatican

Council, the way in which he planned and carried out the pastoral tasks entrusted to him is still relevant today: from the pastoral care of vocations to the concrete support of his seminarians and priests; from the catechetical and human formation of the youngest to the pastoral care of families through which he met married couples in crisis or cohabiting couples reluctant to regularise their union. Bishop Ortiz Arrieta, on the other hand, did not only educate by his concrete pastoral action, but by his very behaviour: by his ability to discern for himself, first of all, what it means and what it entails to renew fidelity to the path taken. He truly persevered in heroic poverty, in fortitude through the many trials of life, and in radical fidelity to the diocese to which he had been assigned. Humble, simple, always serene; between the serious and the gentle; the gentleness of his gaze let all the tranquillity of his spirit shine through: this was the path of holiness he travelled.

The beautiful characteristics that his Salesian superiors found in him before his ordination to the priesthood – when they described him as a ‘Salesian pearl’ and praised his spirit of sacrifice – returned as a constant throughout his life, including as a bishop. Indeed, Ortiz Arrieta can be said to have “made himself all things to all people, in order to save someone at any cost” (1 Cor 9:22): authoritative with the authorities, simple with children, poor among the poor; meek with those who insulted him or tried to delegitimise him out of resentment; always ready not to return evil for evil, but to overcome evil with good (cf. Rom 12:21). His whole life was dominated by the primacy of the salvation of souls: a salvation to which he would also like to actively dedicate his priests, whose temptation to retreat into easy security or entrench themselves behind more prestigious positions, to commit them instead to pastoral service, he tried to fight. He can truly be said to have placed himself in that “high” measure of Christian life which makes him a pastor who embodied pastoral charity in an original way, seeking communion among the people of God, reaching out to those most

in need and witnessing a poor evangelical life.

The Syndrome of Philip and the Syndrome of Andrew

In the Gospel account of John, chapter 6, verses 4-14, which recounts the multiplication of the loaves, there are certain details that I dwell on at length whenever I meditate on or comment on this passage.

It all begins when, faced with the 'large' hungry crowd, Jesus invites His disciples to take responsibility for feeding them. The details I refer to are, first, when Philip says it is impossible to answer this call due to the sheer number of people present. Andrew, on the other hand, points out that "there is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish," only to dismiss the possibility with a simple remark, "but what are these for so many?" (v.9).

I simply wish to share with you, dear readers, how we Christians—who are called to share the joy of our faith—can sometimes, unknowingly, be affected by either Philip's syndrome or Andrew's syndrome. At times, perhaps, even by both!

In the life of the Church, as well as in the life of the Salesian Congregation and Family, challenges are never lacking and never will be. Ours is not a call to form a group where people merely seek to be comfortable, without disturbing, and without being disturbed. It is not an experience of pre-packaged certainties. Belonging to the body of Christ must not distract us or remove us from the reality of the world as it is. On the contrary, it urges us to be fully engaged in the

events of human history. This means first and foremost, looking at reality not only with human eyes but also, and above all, with the eyes of Jesus. We are called to respond guided by love, which finds its source in the heart of Jesus—that is, to live for others as Jesus teaches us and shows us.

Philip's Syndrome

Philip's syndrome is subtle, and for this reason, it is also very dangerous. His analysis is correct and accurate. His response to Jesus' invitation is not wrong. His reasoning follows a very straightforward and flawless human logic. He looked at reality with his human eyes, with a rational mind, and concluded that it was unfeasible. Faced with this "calculated" approach, the hungry person ceases to concern me—the problem is theirs, not mine. To be more precise in light of our daily experiences, the refugee could have stayed home; they shouldn't bother me. The poor and the sick must deal with their own issues, and it's not my place to be part of their problem, much less to find them a solution. This is Philip's syndrome. He is a follower of Jesus, yet his way of seeing and interpreting reality remains stagnant, unchallenged, light-years away from that of his Master.

Andrew's Syndrome

Then there is Andrew's syndrome. I wouldn't say it's worse than Philip's, but it comes close to being more tragic. It is a subtle and cynical syndrome; it sees some possible opportunity but doesn't go further. There is a tiny glimmer of hope, but humanly speaking, it's unworkable. So, both the gift and the giver are disqualified. And the giver, who in this case has the 'misfortune' of being a boy, is simply willing to share what he has!

These two syndromes are still with us today, in the Church and even among us pastors and educators. Crushing a small hope is easier than making room for God's surprise—a surprise that can make even the smallest hope blossom. Allowing ourselves to be

conditioned by dominant clichés, avoiding opportunities that challenge reductive interpretations, is a constant temptation. If we're not careful, we become prophets and executors of our own downfall. By stubbornly clinging to a human logic—'academically' refined and 'intellectually' qualified—the space for an evangelical reading becomes increasingly limited and eventually disappears.

When this human and horizontal logic is challenged, one of the defensive reactions it provokes is that of 'ridicule.' Those who dare to defy human logic by letting in the fresh air of the Gospel will be mocked, attacked, and ridiculed. When this happens, strangely enough, we can say we are on a prophetic path. The waters are stirring.

Jesus and the Two Syndromes

Jesus overcomes both syndromes by "taking" the loaves, which were considered too few and therefore irrelevant. He opens the door to that prophetic and faithful space we are called to inhabit. Faced with the crowd, we cannot settle for self-referential readings and interpretations. Following Jesus means going beyond human reasoning. We are called to look at challenges through His eyes. When Jesus calls us, He does not ask for solutions but for the gift of our whole selves—with all that we are and all that we have. Yet, the risk is that, faced with His call, we remain stuck, enslaved by our own thinking and clinging to what we believe we possess.

Only in generosity, grounded in abandonment to His Word, do we come to gather the abundance of Jesus' providential action. "So, they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten" (v.13). The boy's small gift bears astonishing fruit only because the two syndromes did not have the final word.

Pope Benedict XVI commented on the boy's gesture, "In the scene of the multiplication, the presence of a boy is also noted, who, faced with the difficulty of feeding so many people, shares the little he has: five loaves and two fish.

The miracle does not come from nothing, but from an initial modest sharing of what a simple boy had with him. Jesus does not ask for what we do not have, but shows us that if each one offers the little they have, the miracle can always happen anew. God can multiply our small gesture of love and make us sharers in His gift" (*Angelus*, 29 July 2012).

Faced with the pastoral challenges before us, faced with the deep thirst and hunger for spirituality that young people express, let us not be afraid, let us not cling to our own things or ways of thinking. Let us offer the little we have to Him, trusting in the light of His Word—and may this, and only this, be the enduring criterion of our choices and the guiding light of our actions.

Photo: Evangelical miracle of the multiplication of loaves and fishes, stained glass window at Tewkesbury Abbey in Gloucestershire (United Kingdom), an 1888 work created by Hardman & Co