

# Crown of the Seven Sorrows of Mary

*The publication "Crown of the Seven Sorrows of Mary" represents a cherished devotion that St. John Bosco instilled in his young followers. Following the structure of the "Way of the Cross," the seven sorrowful scenes are presented with brief reflections and prayers to guide towards a deeper participation in the sufferings of Mary and her Son. Rich in tender imagery and contrite spirituality, the text reflects the desire to unite with the Sorrowful Mother in redemptive compassion. The indulgences granted by various Popes attest to the pastoral value of this text—a small treasury of prayer and reflection to nurture love for the Mother of Sorrows.*

## **Preface**

The primary aim of this booklet is to facilitate remembrance and meditation of the bitterest Sorrows of the tender Heart of Mary, a devotion most pleasing to her, as she has often revealed to her devotees, and a most efficacious means for us to obtain her patronage.

To make this meditation easier, it is first practised with a chaplet indicating Mary's seven principal sorrows, which can then be meditated upon in seven distinct brief reflections, much like the *Way of the Cross*.

May the Lord accompany us with His heavenly grace and blessing so that the desired intention is achieved, so that each soul may be deeply moved by the frequent remembrance of Mary's sorrows for spiritual benefit and the greater glory of God.

## **Chaplet of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary with Seven Brief Reflections Presented in the Form of the Way of the Cross**

### **Preparation**

Dearest brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, we undertake our

usual devotions by meditating devoutly on the bitterest sorrows that the Blessed Virgin Mary endured in the life and death of her beloved Son, our Divine Saviour. Let us imagine ourselves present at Jesus hanging on the Cross, as His afflicted Mother says to each of us, "Come and see if there is any sorrow like mine."

Trusting that this merciful Mother will grant us special protection as we meditate on her sorrows, let us invoke divine aid with the following prayers:

*Antiphon: Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Thy faithful, and kindle in them the fire of Thy love.*

*Send forth Thy Spirit, and they shall be created,  
And Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.  
Remember Thy Congregation,  
Which Thou hast possessed from the beginning.  
O Lord, hear my prayer,  
And let my cry come unto Thee.*

*Let us pray.*

*Enlighten our minds, we beseech Thee, O Lord, with the light of Thy brightness, that we may see what is to be done and have the strength to do what is right. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

### **First Sorrow: The Prophecy of Simeon**

The first sorrow was when the Blessed Virgin Mother of God presented her only Son in the Temple in the arms of the holy elder Simeon, who said to her, "This child shall be a sword that shall pierce thy soul," foretelling the Passion and death of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

*One Our Father and seven Hail Marys.*

### **Prayer`**

O sorrowful Virgin, by that sharp sword with which the holy elder Simeon foretold that thy soul would be pierced in the Passion and death of thy dear Jesus, I beseech thee to obtain

for me the grace always to remember thy wounded heart and the bitterest pains suffered by thy Son for my salvation. Amen.

### **Second Sorrow: The Flight into Egypt**

The second sorrow of the Blessed Virgin was when she had to flee to Egypt due to the persecution of cruel Herod, who wickedly sought to kill her beloved Son.

One *Our Father* and seven *Hail Marys*.

#### **Prayer**

O Mary, most sorrowful sea of tears, by the anguish thou didst endure fleeing to Egypt to protect thy Son from Herod's barbaric cruelty, I implore thee to be my guide, that through thee I may be freed from the persecutions of visible and invisible enemies of my soul. Amen.

### **Third Sorrow: The Loss of Jesus in the Temple**

The third sorrow of the Blessed Virgin was when, after being in Jerusalem with her spouse Joseph and her beloved Son Jesus the Saviour during Passover, she lost Him on the return to her humble home and mourned the loss of her only Beloved for three days.

One *Our Father* and seven *Hail Marys*.

#### **Prayer**

O disconsolate Mother, thou who sought thy Son anxiously for three days after losing His bodily presence, pray that sinners too may seek Him with acts of contrition and find Him. Amen.

### **Fourth Sorrow: Meeting Jesus Carrying the Cross**

The fourth sorrow of the Blessed Virgin was when she met her most sweet Son carrying a heavy Cross on His tender shoulders to Mount Calvary to be crucified for our salvation.

One *Our Father* and seven *Hail Marys*.

#### **Prayer**

O Virgin, more afflicted than any other, by the agony thou didst feel in thy heart upon meeting thy Son as He bore the wood of the Holy Cross to Calvary, grant that I may accompany

Him continually in thought, weep for my sins, the cause of His and thy torment, and grow in love for Him. Amen.

### **Fifth Sorrow: The Crucifixion of Jesus**

The fifth sorrow of the Blessed Virgin was when she saw her Son raised upon the hard wood of the Cross, shedding blood from every part of His Most Sacred Body.

One *Our Father* and seven *Hail Marys*.

#### **Prayer**

O Rose among thorns, by the bitter sorrow that pierced thy heart as thou beheld thy Son wounded and lifted on the Cross, grant that I may seek only Jesus

crucified, remembering always that my sins caused His suffering. Amen.

### **Sixth Sorrow: The Descent from the Cross**

The sixth sorrow of the Blessed Virgin was when her beloved Son, wounded in the side after His death and taken down from the Cross, was placed in thy most holy arms, so pitilessly slain.

One *Our Father* and seven *Hail Marys*.

#### **Prayer**

O afflicted Virgin, thou who received thy dead Son into thy arms, kissing His most sacred wounds and weeping a sea of tears, grant that I too may wash with tears of true contrition the mortal wounds my sins inflicted upon thee. Amen.

### **Seventh Sorrow: The Burial of Jesus**

The seventh sorrow of the Virgin Mary, our Lady and Advocate, was when she accompanied the Most Holy Body of her Son to the tomb.

One *Our Father* and seven *Hail Marys*.

#### **Prayer**

O Martyr of Martyrs, Mary, by the bitter torment thou didst suffer when, after burying thy Son, thou had to depart from

that beloved tomb, obtain for all sinners the grace to recognise the grave harm of being far from their God. Amen.

Three *Hail Marys* shall be recited in profound respect for the tears shed by the Blessed Virgin in all her sorrows, to implore through her a similar sorrow for our sins.

*Hail Mary*, etc.

After finishing the Chaplet, the Lament of the Blessed Virgin is recited—the hymn “*Stabat Mater*,” etc.

### **Hymn – Lament of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

The Supreme Pontiff Innocent XI, grants the indulgence of 100 days each time the *Stabat Mater* is recited. Benedict XIII granted the seven-year indulgence to those who recite the Crown of the Seven Sorrows of Mary. Many other indulgences were granted by other Popes especially to the Brothers and Sisters of the Company of the Sorrowful Mary.

### **The seven sorrows of Mary meditated in the form of the Way of the Cross**

Stabat Mater dolorosa  
 Iuxta crucem lacrymosa,  
 Dum pendebat Filius.  
 Cuius animam gementem  
 Contristatam et dolentem  
 Pertransiuit gladius.  
 O quam tristis et afflicta  
 Fuit illa benedicta  
 Mater unigeniti!  
 Quae moerebat, et dolebat,  
 Pia Mater dum videbat.  
 Nati poenas inclyti.  
 Quis est homo, qui non fleret,  
 Matrem Christi si videret  
 In tanto supplicio?  
 Quis non posset contristari,  
 Christi Matrem contemplari  
 Dolentem cum filio?  
 Pro peccatis suae gentis  
 Vidit Iesum in tormentis  
 Et flagellis subditum.  
 Vidit suum dulcem natura  
 Moriundo desolatum,  
 Dum emisit spiritum.  
 Eia mater fons amoris,  
 Me sentire vim doloris  
 Fac, ut tecum lugeam.  
 Fac ut ardeat cor meum  
 In amando Christum Deum,  
 Ut sibi complaceam.  
 Sancta Mater istud agas,  
 Crucifigi fige plagas  
 Cordi meo valide.  
 Tui nati vulnerati  
 Tam dignati pro me pati  
 Poenas mecum divide.  
 Fac me tecum pie flere,  
 Crucifixo condolere,  
 Donec ego vixero.  
 Iuxta Crucem tecum stare,  
 Et me tibi sociare  
 In planctu desidero.  
 Virgo virginum praeclara,  
 Mihi iam non sia amara,  
 Fac me tecum plangere.  
 Fac ut portem Christi mortem,  
 Passionis fac consortem,  
 Et plagas recolere.  
 Fac me plagis vulnerari,  
 Fac me cruce inebriari,  
 Et cruore Filii.  
 Flammis ne urar succensus,  
 Per te, Virgo, sim defensus  
 In die Iudicii.  
 Christe, cum sit hinc exire,  
 Da per matrem me venire  
 Ad palmam victoriae.  
 Quando corpus morietur,  
 Fac ut animae donetur  
 Paradisi gloria. Amen.

At the cross her station keeping,  
 Stood the mournful Mother weeping,  
 Close to Jesus to the last.  
 Through her heart, His sorrow sharing,  
 All His bitter anguish bearing,  
 Now at length the sword had passed.  
 Oh, how sad and sore distressed  
 Was that Mother highly blest,  
 Of the sole begotten One!  
 Christ above in torment hangs.  
 She beneath beholds the pangs  
 Of her dying glorious Son.  
 Is there one who would not weep,  
 Whelmed in miseries so deep,  
 Christ's dear Mother to behold?  
 Can the human heart refrain  
 From partaking in her pain,  
 In that Mother's pain untold?  
 Bruised, derided, cursed, defiled,  
 She beheld her tender Child,  
 All with bloody scourges rent.  
 For the sins of His own nation,  
 Saw Him hang in desolation  
 Till His spirit forth He sent.  
 O thou Mother, fount of love!  
 Touch my spirit from above,  
 Make my heart with thine accord.  
 Make me feel as thou hast felt;  
 Make my soul to glow and melt  
 With the love of Christ my Lord.  
 Holy Mother, pierce me through;  
 In my heart each wound renew  
 Of my Savior crucified.  
 Let me share with thee His pain,  
 Who for all my sins was slain,  
 Who for me in torment died.  
 Let me mingle tears with thee,  
 Mourning Him who mourned for me,  
 All the days that I may live.  
 By the Cross with thee to stay;  
 There with thee to weep and pray,  
 Is all I ask of thee to give.  
 Virgin of all virgins best,  
 Listen to my fond request:  
 Let me share thy grief divine.  
 Let me to my latest breath,  
 In my body bear the death  
 Of that dying Son of thine.  
 Wounded with His every wound,  
 Steep my soul till it hath swooned  
 In His very blood, away.  
 Be to me, O Virgin, nigh,  
 Lest in flames I burn and die,  
 In His awful Judgment day.  
 Christ, when Thou shalt call me hence,  
 Be Thy Mother my defence,  
 Be Thy Cross my victory.  
 While my body here decays,  
 May my soul Thy goodness praise,  
 Safe in Paradise with Thee. Amen.

**Invoke divine help by saying:**

*We beseech Thee, O Lord, to anticipate our actions by inspiring us, and to continue them by helping us, so that all our prayer and work may always begin with Thee, and, having begun through Thee, may be ended. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.*

**Act of Contrition**

Most Afflicted Virgin, alas! How ungrateful I have been in the past towards my God, with what ingratitude I have responded to His countless benefits! Now I repent, and in the bitterness of my heart and the weeping of my soul, I humbly ask Him for forgiveness for having offended His infinite goodness, firmly resolved in the future with heavenly grace, never to offend Him again. Ah! By all the sorrows you endured in the barbaric passion of your beloved Jesus, I beg you with the deepest sighs to obtain for me from Him, pity and mercy for my sins. Accept this holy exercise I am about to perform and receive it in union with those pains and sorrows you suffered for your son Jesus. Ah, grant me! Yes, grant me that those same swords that pierced your spirit may also pierce mine, and that I may live and die in the friendship of my Lord, to eternally partake of the glory He has acquired for me with His precious Blood. Amen.

**First Sorrow**

In this first sorrow, let us imagine ourselves in the temple of Jerusalem, where the Most Blessed Virgin heard the prophecy of the old Simeon.

**Meditation**

Ah! What anguish the heart of Mary must have felt upon hearing the sorrowful words with which the holy old Simeon foretold the bitter passion and atrocious death of her sweetest Jesus: while at that same moment there came to her mind the insults, abuses, and tortures that the wicked Jews would inflict on the Redeemer of the world. But do you know what was the most

piercing sword that wounded her in this circumstance? It was the consideration of the ingratitude with which her beloved Son would be repaid by men. Now reflecting that, because of your sins, you are miserably among these, ah! Throw yourself at the feet of this Sorrowful Mother and say to her weeping (all kneel): Ah! Most Compassionate Virgin, who experienced such bitter anguish in your spirit seeing the abuse which I, unworthy creature, would make of the blood of your beloved Son, grant, yes grant by your most afflicted Heart, that in the future I may respond to the Divine Mercies, make use of heavenly graces, and not receive in vain so many lights and inspirations which you will deign to obtain for me, so that I may be among those for whom the bitter passion of Jesus is an eternal salvation. Amen. *Hail Mary* etc. *Glory be* etc.

Mary, my sweet love,  
Imprint your sorrows in my heart.

## **Second Sorrow**

In this second sorrow, let us consider the most painful journey the Virgin made towards Egypt to save Jesus from Herod's cruel persecution.

## **Meditation**

Consider the bitter sorrow Mary must have felt when, at night, she had to set out on her journey by the Angel's order to preserve her Son from the massacre ordered by that fierce Prince. Ah! At every animal cry, at every gust of wind, at every rustle of leaves she heard in those deserted roads, she was filled with fear lest some harm befall the child Jesus she carried with her. Now she turned one way, now another, now hastened her steps, now hid herself, thinking she was overtaken by soldiers who might tear her most beloved Son from her arms and subject Him to barbaric treatment before her eyes. Fixing her tearful gaze upon her Jesus and pressing Him tightly to her breast, giving Him a thousand kisses, she sent forth the most anguished sighs from her heart. And here reflect how many times you have renewed this bitter sorrow for



Mary by forcing her Son with your grave sins to flee from your soul. Now that you know the great evil committed, turn repentantly to this merciful Mother and say to her:

Ah, sweetest Mother! Once Herod forced you and your Jesus to flee because of the inhuman persecution he commanded; but I, oh! How many times have I obliged my Redeemer, and consequently you too, to depart quickly from my heart, introducing into it the cursed sin, merciless enemy of you and my God. Ah! Full of sorrow and contrition, I humbly ask your forgiveness.

Yes, mercy, O dear Mother, mercy, and I promise in the future with Divine help to always keep my Saviour and You in full possession of my soul. Amen. *Hail Mary* etc. *Glory be* etc.

Mary, my sweet love,  
Imprint your sorrows in my heart.

### **Third Sorrow**

In this third sorrow, let us consider the most afflicted Virgin who, weeping, searches for her lost Jesus.

### **Meditation**

How great was Mary's sorrow when she realised, she had lost her beloved Son! And how her grief increased when, having diligently searched for Him among friends, relatives, and neighbours, she could find no trace of Him. Not minding discomfort, fatigue, or dangers, she wandered for three continuous days through the regions of Judea, repeating those words of desolation: Has anyone seen Him whom my soul truly loves? Ah! The great anxiety with which she sought Him made her imagine at every moment that she saw Him or heard His voice, but then, finding herself disappointed, oh how she shuddered and felt more keenly the grief of such a deplorable loss! Great confusion for you, O sinner, who, having so often lost your Jesus through grave faults, took no care to seek Him, a clear sign that you make little or no account of the precious treasure of Divine friendship. Weep, then, for your blindness, and turning to this Sorrowful Mother, say to her

sighing thus:

Most Afflicted Virgin, ah, make me learn from you the true way to seek Jesus whom I have lost by following my passions and the wicked suggestions of the devil, so that I may succeed in finding Him, and when I have regained possession of Him, I will continually repeat those words of yours, I have found Him whom my heart truly loves. I will keep Him always with me, and never let Him depart again. Amen. *Hail Mary* etc. *Glory be* etc.

Mary, my sweet love,  
Imprint your sorrows in my heart.

#### **Fourth Sorrow**

In the fourth sorrow, let us consider the meeting of the sorrowful Virgin with her suffering Son.

#### ***Meditation***

Come, then, O hardened hearts, and see if you can endure this most tearful spectacle. It is the most tender, most loving mother meeting her sweetest, most beloved Son; and how does she meet Him? O God! Amidst the most impious mob dragging Him cruelly to death, covered with wounds, dripping with blood, torn by injuries, with a crown of thorns on His head and a heavy beam on His shoulders, weary, gasping, languishing, seeming at every step about to breathe His last.

Ah! Consider, my soul, the mortal shock the Most Holy Virgin felt at the first glance she fixed upon her tormented Jesus. She would want to bid Him a last farewell, but how, when grief prevents her from uttering a word? She would throw herself at His neck, but remains motionless and petrified by the force of inner affliction. She would vent her grief with tears, but her heart feels so constricted and oppressed that she cannot shed a tear. Oh! And who can restrain tears seeing a poor mother plunged in such great anguish? But who is the cause of such bitter sorrow? Ah, I know, yes, it is I with my sins who have made such a barbaric wound in your tender heart, O Sorrowful

Virgin. Yet who would believe it? I remain unmoved, without being touched. But if I was ungrateful in the past, I shall be so no more.

Meanwhile, prostrate at your feet, O Most Holy Virgin, I humbly ask your forgiveness for so much sorrow I have caused you. I know and confess that I do not deserve pity, being the true reason you fell with grief upon meeting your Jesus all covered with wounds; but remember, yes remember that you are the mother of mercy. Ah, show yourself thus to me, and I promise in the future to be more faithful to my Redeemer, and so make up for so much displeasure I have given your most afflicted spirit. Amen. *Hail Mary* etc. *Glory be* etc.

Mary, my sweet love,  
Imprint your sorrows in my heart.

### **Fifth sorrow**

In this fifth sorrow, let us imagine ourselves on Mount Calvary where the most afflicted Virgin saw her beloved Son expire on the Cross.

### ***Meditation***

Here we are at Calvary where two altars of sacrifice are already raised, one in the body of Jesus, the other in the heart of Mary. Oh, tragic spectacle! We behold the Mother drowned in a sea of anguish as she sees her dear and beloved child torn from her by pitiless death. Alas! Every hammer blow, every wound, every laceration that the Savior receives upon His flesh deeply reverberates in the heart of the Virgin. She stands at the foot of the Cross so penetrated by sorrow and pierced by grief that you could not decide who would be the first to expire—Jesus or Mary. She fixes her eyes on the face of her agonizing Son, observes His languishing pupils, His pale face, His livid lips, His laboured breath, and finally realizes that He no longer lives and has already surrendered His spirit into the hands of His eternal Father. Ah, her soul then makes every possible effort to separate from her body and unite with that of Jesus. And who can endure such

a sight?

Oh, most sorrowful Mother, instead of withdrawing from Calvary to avoid feeling such acute anguish, you remain motionless there to drink to the last drop the bitter cup of your afflictions. What confusion this must bring to me, who seek every means to avoid the crosses and small sufferings that the Lord deigns to send for my good? Most sorrowful Virgin, I humble myself before you—ah! Grant that I may once clearly know the preciousness and great value of suffering, that I may become so attached to it that I never tire of exclaiming with St. Francis Xavier: “More, Lord, more, Lord—more suffering, my God.” Ah yes, more suffering, O my God. So be it. *Hail Mary*, etc. *Glory be*, etc.

Mary, my sweet beloved,  
Imprint your sorrows upon my heart.

### **Sixth sorrow**

In this sixth sorrow, let us imagine ourselves seeing the disconsolate but Virgin Mother receiving into her arms her deceased Son taken down from the Cross.

### ***Meditation***

Consider the most bitter pain that pierced Mary’s soul when she saw the lifeless body of her beloved Jesus placed in her lap. Ah! As she fixed her gaze upon His wounds and sores, beholding Him crimson with His own blood, the force of her inner grief was such that her heart was mortally pierced, and had she not died, it was Divine omnipotence that preserved her life. Oh, poor Mother—yes, poor Mother, who leads to the tomb the dear object of your tenderest affections, who from a bouquet of roses has become a bundle of thorns due to the mistreatment and lacerations inflicted by wicked executioners. And who would not pity you? Who would not feel crushed by sorrow seeing you in such a state of affliction as to move even the hardest stone to pity? I see John inconsolable, Magdalene and the other Marys weeping bitterly, Nicodemus unable to bear the grief any longer. And I? I alone shed no

tear amid such sorrow! Ungrateful and thankless wretch that I am!

Ah! Most merciful Mother, here I am at your feet, receive me under your powerful protection and let my heart be pierced by the same sword that passed through your most afflicted spirit, that it may soften at last and truly weep for my grave sins, which brought you such cruel martyrdom. So be it. *Hail Mary*, etc. *Glory be*, etc.

Mary, my sweet beloved,  
Imprint your sorrows upon my heart.

### **Seventh sorrow**

In this seventh sorrow, let us consider the most sorrowful Virgin as she sees her deceased Son enclosed in the tomb.

### ***Meditation***

Consider the mortal sigh that escaped Mary's afflicted heart when she saw her beloved Jesus laid in the tomb! Oh, what pain, what grief her spirit felt when the stone was raised to seal that most sacred monument! It was impossible to detach her from the edge of the sepulchre, for her sorrow rendered her insensible and immobile, never ceasing to gaze upon those wounds and cruel lacerations. And when the tomb was finally sealed—ah, then the force of her inner anguish was such that she would undoubtedly have fallen dead had God not preserved her life. Oh, most tormented Mother! You will now depart from this place with His body, but surely your heart remains here, for here lies your true treasure. Ah, fate—may all our affection, all our love, remain with Him. How can we not be consumed with love for the Savior, who shed all His blood for our salvation? How can we not love you, who suffered so much for our sake?

Now, sorrowful and repentant for having caused so much pain to your Son and such bitterness to you, we prostrate ourselves at your feet. And for all those sorrows you allowed us to meditate upon, grant us this favour, that the memory of them may remain vividly impressed upon our minds, that our hearts

may be consumed with love for our good God and for you, our sweetest Mother, and that the last sigh of our life may be united to those you poured forth from the depths of your soul in the sorrowful Passion of Jesus, to whom be honour, glory, and thanksgiving for all ages. Amen. *Hail Mary*, etc. *Glory be*, etc.

Mary, my sweet beloved,  
Imprint your sorrows upon my heart.

Then the *Stabat Mater* is recited, as above.

Antiphon: "*A sword shall pierce your own soul also*"—Simeon's prophecy to Mary.

*Pray for us, O most sorrowful Virgin.*

*That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.*

*Let us pray*

*O God, in whose Passion, according to the prophecy of Simeon, a sword of sorrow pierced the sweetest soul of the glorious Virgin and Mother Mary, mercifully grant that we who recall her sorrows may attain the blessed fruit of Your Passion. You who live, etc.*

*Praise be to God and to the most sorrowful Virgin.*

With ecclesiastical approval

The Feast of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary, celebrated by the Pious Union and Society, falls on the third Sunday of September in the Church of St. Francis of Assisi.

*Text of the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Turin, Typography of Giulio Speirani and Sons, 1871*

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# Lotteries: real feats

Don Bosco was not only a tireless educator and pastor of souls, but also a man of extraordinary resourcefulness, capable of inventing new and courageous solutions to support his works. The economic needs of the Valdocco Oratory, which was constantly expanding, pushed him to seek increasingly effective means to guarantee food, lodging, schooling, and work for thousands of boys. Among these, lotteries represented one of his most ingenious intuitions: true collective enterprises that involved nobles, priests, benefactors, and ordinary citizens. It was not simple, as Piedmontese legislation rigorously regulated lotteries, allowing private individuals to organise them only in well-defined cases. And it was not just about raising funds, but about creating a network of solidarity that united Turin society around the educational and spiritual project of the Oratory. The first, in 1851, was a memorable adventure, full of unforeseen events and successes.

The sums of money that came into Don Bosco's hands remained there for a short time, because it was immediately used to provide food, accommodation, school and work for tens of thousands of boys or to build colleges, orphanages and churches or to support the South American missions. His accounts, as we know, were always in the red; debts accompanied him throughout his life.

Now among the means intelligently adopted by Don Bosco to finance his works we can certainly place the lotteries: about fifteen were organised by him, both small and large ones. The first, a modest effort, was the one in Turin in 1851 for the church of St Francis de Sales in Valdocco and the last, a very big one in the mid-1880s, was to meet the immense expenses of the church and the Hospice of the Sacred Heart at Termini station in Rome.

A true history of these lotteries has yet to be written,

although there is no lack of sources in this regard. Just with reference to the first one in 1851, have we ourselves recovered a dozen unpublished items. We can use them to reconstruct its eventful history in two episodes.

#### Application for authorisation

According to the law of 24 February 1820 – modified by Royal Patents of January 1835 and by Instructions of the Azienda Generale delle Regie Finanze on 24 August 1835 and later by Royal Patents of 17 July 1845 – prior governmental authorisation was required for any national lottery (Kingdom of Sardinia).

For Don Bosco it was first of all a matter of having the moral certainty of succeeding in the project. This he gained from the economic and moral support of the very first benefactors: the noble Callori and Fassati families and Canon Anglesio of Cottolengo. He therefore launched himself into what would turn out to be a genuine enterprise. In a short time, he succeeded in setting up an organising commission, initially comprising sixteen well-known personalities, later increased to twenty. Among them were numerous officially recognised civil authorities, such as a senator (appointed treasurer), two Deputy Mayors, three municipal councillors; then prestigious priests such as Frs Pietro Baricco, Deputy Mayor and secretary of the Commission, Giovanni Borel, court chaplain, Giuseppe Ortalda, director of the Opera Pia di Propaganda Fide, Roberto Murialdo, co-founder of the Collegio degli Artigianelli and the Charity Association; and finally, experienced men such as an engineer, a respected goldsmith, a wholesale trader, etc., all of whom were mostly landowners and had a wealth of experience. All people known to Don Bosco and “close” to the work at Valdocco.

Having completed the Commission, at the beginning of December 1851 Don Bosco forwarded the formal request to the General Intendant of Finance, Cavalier Alessandro Pernati di Momo (future Senator and Minister of the Interior of the Kingdom) as well as a “friend” of the work at Valdocco.



## The appeal for gifts

He attached a very interesting circular to the request for authorisation, in which, after outlining a moving history of the Oratory – appreciated by the royal family, the government authorities, and the municipal authorities – he pointed out that the constant need to expand the work at Valdocco to accommodate more and more young people was consuming the economic resources of private charity. Therefore, in order to pay the expenses for the completion of the new chapel under construction, the decision was taken to appeal to public charity by means of a lottery of gifts to be offered spontaneously: “This consists of a lottery of items which the undersigned came up with the idea for, undertaking to cover the expenses for the completion of the new chapel, a venture to which your lordship will no doubt want to lend his support, reflecting on the excellence of the work to which it is directed. Whatever item your lordship would like to offer, be it of silk, wool, metal or wood, or the work of a reputable artist, or of a modest worker, or of a hard-working craftsman, or of a charitable gentlewoman, all will be gratefully accepted, because in the matter of charity every little help is a great thing, and because the offerings, even small ones, of many together can suffice to complete the desired work.”

The circular also indicated the names of the promoters, to whom the gifts could be handed over, and the trusted persons who would then collect and guard them. The 46 promoters included various categories of people: professionals, professors, impresarios, students, clerics, shopkeepers, merchants, priests; on the other hand, among the 90 or so promoters, noblewomen (baroness, marquise, countess and their attendants) seemed to prevail.

He did not fail to enclose the ‘lottery plan’ in all its many formal aspects with the application: collection of items, receipt of delivery of items, their valuation, authenticated tickets to be sold in a number proportionate to the number and value of the items, their display to the public, drawing of winners, publication of the numbers drawn, time for collecting

the prizes, etc. A series of demanding tasks that Don Bosco did not shirk. The Pinardi chapel was no longer enough for his youngsters: they needed a bigger church, the planned one of St Francis de Sales (a dozen years later they would need another even bigger one, that of Mary Help of Christians!).

### Positive response

Given the seriousness of the initiative and the high “quality” of the members of the proposing Commission, the response could only be positive and immediate. On 17 December the aforementioned Deputy Mayor Pietro Baricco transmitted to Don Bosco the relative decree, with the invitation to transmit copies of the future formal acts of the lottery to the municipal administration, responsible for the regularity of all legal requirements. At this point before Christmas Don Bosco sent the above circular to the printers, circulated it and began to collect gifts.

He was given two months to do this, as other lotteries were also taking place during the year. However, the gifts arrived slowly, so in mid-January Don Bosco was forced to reprint the above circular and asked for the collaboration of all the young people of Valdocco and friends to write addresses, visit known benefactors, publicise the initiative and collect the gifts.

But ‘the best’ was yet to come.

### The exhibition hall

Valdocco had no space to display the gifts, so Don Bosco asked the Deputy Mayor Baricco, treasurer of the lottery commission, to ask the Ministry of War for three rooms in a part of St Dominic’s Convent that was available to the army. The Dominican Fathers agreed. Minister Alfonso Lamarmora granted them on 16 January. But soon Don Bosco realised that they would not be large enough, so he asked the King, through the almoner, Abbot Stanislao Gazzelli, for a larger room. He was told by the Royal Superintendent Pamparà that the King had no suitable premises and proposed to rent premises used for a

game called Trincotto (or pallacorda: a kind of hand tennis) at his own expense. This room, however, would only be available for the month of March and under certain conditions. Don Bosco refused the proposal but accepted the 200 lire offered by the King for renting the premises. He then went in search of another hall and found a suitable one on the recommendation of the town hall, behind the church of St Dominic, a few hundred metres from Valdocco.

### Arrival of the gifts

In the meantime, Don Bosco had asked the Minister of Finance, the famous Count Camillo Cavour, for a reduction or exemption on the cost of postage for circular letters, tickets and the gifts themselves. Through the Count's brother, the very religious Marquis Gustavo di Cavour, he received approval for various postal reductions.

It was now a matter of finding an expert to assess the amount of the gifts and the consequent number of tickets to be sold. Don Bosco asked the Intendant and also suggested his name: a goldsmith who was a member of the Commission. The Intendant, however, replied through the Mayor asking him for a double copy of the gifts arrived in order to appoint his own expert. Don Bosco immediately carried out the request and so on 19 February the expert valued the 700 items collected at 4124,20 lire. After three months there were 1000 gifts, after four months 2000, until finally there were 3251 gifts, thanks to Don Bosco's continuous "begging" with individuals, priests and bishops and his repeated formal requests to City Hall to extend the time. Don Bosco also did not fail to criticise the estimate made by the municipal assessor of the gifts that continually arrived, which he said was lower than their actual value; and in fact other assessors were added, especially a painter for works of art.

The final figure was such that Don Bosco was authorised to issue 99,999 tickets at the price of 50 cents each. To the catalogue already printed with the gifts numbered with the name of the donor and the promoters a supplement was added

with the latest gifts arrived. Among them were gifts from the Pope, the King, the Queen Mother, the Queen Consort, deputies, senators, municipal authorities, but also many humble people, especially women, who offered household objects and furnishings, even ones of little value (glass, inkwell, candle, carafe, corkscrew, cap, thimble, scissors, lamp, tape measure, pipe, key ring, soap, sharpener, sugar bowl). The most frequently offered gifts were books, 629 of them, and pictures, 265. Even the Valdocco boys competed to offer their own small gift, perhaps a booklet given to them by Don Bosco himself.

A huge job until the numbers were drawn

At this point it was necessary to print the tickets in a progressive series in two forms (small stub and ticket), have them both signed by two members of the commission, send the ticket with a note, document the money collected. Many benefactors were sent dozens of tickets, with an invitation to keep them or to pass them on to friends and acquaintances.

The date of the draw, initially set for 30 April, was postponed to 31 May and then to 30 June, to be held in mid-July. This last postponement was due to the explosion at the Borgo Dora powder magazine that devastated the Valdocco area.

For two afternoons, 12-13 July 1852, tickets were drawn on the balcony of the town hall. Four differently coloured wheel urns contained 10 pellets (0 to 9) identical and of the same colour as the wheel. Inserted one by one by the Deputy Mayor into the urns, and spun, eight young people from the Oratory performed the operation and the number drawn was proclaimed loudly and then published in the press. Many gifts were left at the Oratory, where they were later reused.

Was it worth it?

For the approximately 74,000 tickets sold, after deducting expenses, Don Bosco was left with approximately 26,000 lire, which he then divided equally with the neighbouring Cottolengo work. A small capital of course (half the purchase price of

the Pinardi cottage the previous year), but the greatest result of the gruelling work he underwent to carry out the lottery – documented by dozens of often unpublished letters – was the direct and heartfelt involvement of thousands of people from every social class in his ‘fledgling Valdocco project’: in making it known, appreciated and then supported economically, socially and politically.

Don Bosco resorted many times to lotteries and always with the twofold purpose: to raise funds for his works for poor boys, for the missions, and to offer ways for believers (and non-believers) to practise charity, the most effective means, as he continually repeated, to ‘obtain the forgiveness of sins and secure eternal life’.

“I have always needed everyone” Don Bosco

To Senator Giuseppe Cotta

Giuseppe Cotta, banker, was a great benefactor of Don Bosco. The following declaration on stamp paper dated 5 February 1849 is preserved in the archives: ‘The undersigned priests T. Borrelli Gioanni of Turin and D. Bosco Gio’ di Castelnuovo d’Asti declare themselves to be debtors of three thousand francs to the ill.mo Cavaliere Cotta who lent it to them for a pious work. This sum is to be repaid by the undersigned in one year with legal interest’. Signed D. Giovanni Borel, D. Bosco Gio.

At the bottom of the same page and on the same date Fr Joseph Cafasso writes: “The undersigned renders distinct thanks to Ill. mo Sig. Cav. Cotta for the above and at the same time makes himself guarantor to the same for the sum mentioned.” At the bottom of the page, Cotta signs that he received 2,000 lire on 10 April 1849, another 500 lire on 21 July 1849 and the balance on 4 January 1851.

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# Becoming a sign of hope in eSwatini – Lesotho – South Africa after 130 years

In the heart of Southern Africa, amidst the natural beauty and social challenges of eSwatini, Lesotho, and South Africa, the Salesians celebrate 130 years of missionary presence. In this time of Jubilee, General Chapter, and historical anniversaries, the Southern Africa Province shares its signs of hope: fidelity to Don Bosco's charism, educational and pastoral commitment among young people, and the strength of an international community that bears witness to fraternity and resilience. Despite the difficulties, the enthusiasm of young people, the richness of local cultures, and the spirituality of Ubuntu continue to point towards paths of future and communion.

Fraternal greetings from the Salesians of the smallest Vice-Province and the oldest presence in the Africa-Madagascar Region (since 1896, the first 5 confreres were sent by Fr. Rua). This year we thank the 130 SDBs who have worked in our 3 countries and who now intercede for us from heaven. "Small is beautiful"!

In the AFM territory live 65 million people who communicate in 12 official languages, amidst many natural wonders and great underground resources. We are among the few sub-Saharan African Countries where Catholics are a small minority compared to other Christian Churches, with only 5 million faithful.

What are the signs of hope that our young people and society

are looking for?

Firstly, we are trying to overcome the infamous world records of the growing gap between rich and poor (100,000 millionaires versus 15 million unemployed young people); the lack of security and increasing violence in daily life; the collapse of the educational system, which has produced a new generation of millions of illiterates, struggling with various addictions (alcohol, drugs...). Furthermore, 30 years after the end of the apartheid regime in 1994, society and the Church are still divided among the various communities in terms of economy, opportunities, and many unhealed wounds. Indeed, the "Rainbow Nation" community is struggling with many "gaps" that can only be "filled" with the values of the Gospel.

What are the signs of hope that the Catholic Church in South Africa is looking for?

Participating in the triennial "Joint Witness" meeting of religious superiors and bishops in 2024, we realised many signs of decline: fewer faithful, lack of priestly and religious vocations, aging, and decreasing number of religious, some dioceses bankrupt, continuous loss/decrease of Catholic institutions (medical care, education, social works or media) due to the sharp decline in committed religious and laity. The Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC – which includes Botswana, eSwatini, and South Africa) indicates as a priority, assistance to young people addicted to alcohol and various other substances.

What are the signs of hope that the Salesians of Southern Africa are looking for?

We pray daily for new Salesian vocations, to be able to welcome new missionaries. Indeed, the era of the Anglo-Irish Province (until 1988) has ended, and the Africa Project did not include the southern tip of the continent. After 70 years in eSwatini (Swaziland) and 45 years in Lesotho, we have only 4 local vocations from each Kingdom. Today we have only 5 young confreres and 4 novices in initial formation. However,

the smallest Vice-Province in Africa-Madagascar, through its 7 local communities, is responsible for education and pastoral care in 6 large parishes, 18 primary and secondary schools, 3 vocational training centres (TVET), and various social assistance programmes. Our provincial community, with 18 different nationalities among the 35 SDBs living in the 7 communities, is a great gift and a challenge to embrace.

As a minority and fragile Catholic community in Southern Africa

We believe that the only way forward is to build more bridges and communion between religious and dioceses. The weaker we are, the more we strive to work together. As the entire Catholic Church seeks to focus on young people, Don Bosco has been chosen by the Bishops as the Patron of Youth Ministry, and his Novena is celebrated with fervour in most dioceses and parishes at the beginning of the pastoral year.

As Salesians and Salesian Family, we constantly encourage each other: “work in progress” (constant work)

In the last two years, following the Rector Major’s invitation, we have sought to relaunch our Salesian charism, with the wisdom of a common vision and direction (starting from the annual provincial assembly), with a series of small and simple daily steps in the right direction, and with the wisdom of personal and communal conversion.

We are grateful for the encouragement of Fr. Pascual Chávez for our recent Provincial Chapter of 2024: “You know well that it is more difficult, but not impossible, to ‘re-found’ than to found [the charism], because there are habits, attitudes or behaviours that do not correspond to the spirit of our Holy Founder, Don Bosco, and his Project of Life, and have ‘citizenship rights’ [in the Province]. There is truly a need for a true conversion of every confrere to God, holding the Gospel as the supreme rule of life, and of the entire Province to Don Bosco, assuming the Constitutions as a true project of life.”



Fr. Pascual's advice and commitment were voted on: "To become more passionate about Jesus and dedicated to young people," investing in personal conversion (creating a sacred space in our lives, to let Jesus transform it); in communal conversion (investing in systematic monthly ongoing formation according to a theme); and in provincial conversion (promoting the provincial mentality through "One Heart One Soul" – the fruit of our provincial assembly), and with monthly online meetings of the Directors.

On the souvenir image of our Vice-Province of Blessed Michael Rua, next to the faces of all 46 confreres and 4 novices (35 live in our 7 communities, 7 are in formation abroad, and 5 SDBs are awaiting visas, with one at San Callisto-catacombs and one missionary undergoing chemotherapy in Poland). We are also blessed by a growing number of missionary confreres who are sent by the Rector Major or for a specific period from other African Provinces to help us (AFC, ACC, ANN, ATE, MDG, and ZMB). We are very grateful to each of these young confreres. We believe that, with their help, our hope for charismatic relaunch is becoming tangible. Our Vice-Province – the smallest in Africa-Madagascar, almost 40 years after its foundation, still does not have a proper provincial house. Construction began, with the help of the Rector Major, only last year. Here too we say: "work in progress"...

We also want to share our humble signs of hope with all the other 92 Provinces in this precious period of the General Chapter. The AFM has a unique experience of 31 years of local missionary volunteers (involved in the Youth Ministry of the Bosco Youth Centre in Johannesburg since 1994), the "Love Matters" programme for healthy adolescent sexual development since 2001. Our volunteers, in fact, involved for a whole year in the life of our community, are the most precious members of our Mission and of the new groups of the Salesian Family that are slowly growing (VDB, Salesian Cooperators, and Past Pupils of Don Bosco).

Our mother house in Cape Town will celebrate its one hundred and thirtieth (130th) anniversary next year, and thanks to the one hundred and fiftieth (150th) anniversary of the Salesian Missions, we have created, with the help of the China Province, a special “St. Louis Versiglia Memorial Room,” where our Protomartyr spent a day during his return from Italy to China-Macau in May 1917.

Don Bosco ‘Ubuntu’ – synodal journey

“We are here thanks to you!” – Ubuntu is one of Southern African cultures’ contributions to the global community. The word in the Nguni language means, “I am because you are!” (Other possible translations: “I exist because you exist”). Last year we undertook the “Eco Ubuntu” project (a 3-year environmental awareness project) involving about 15,000 young people from our 7 communities in eSwatini, Lesotho, and South Africa. In addition to the splendid celebration and sharing of the 2024 Youth Synod, our 300 young people [who participated] especially retain Ubuntu in their memories. Their enthusiasm is a source of inspiration. The AFM needs you: We are here thanks to you!

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## **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.

(MB IT VIII 839-845 / MB EN VIII 360-364)

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## Don Bosco with his Salesians

If Don Bosco happily joked with his boys to see them cheerful and serene, he also revealed in jest with his Salesians the esteem he had for them, the desire to see them form one big family with him, poor yes, but trusting in Divine Providence, united in faith and charity.

### Don Bosco's fiefdoms

In 1830 Margaret Occhiena, widow of Francis Bosco, made the division of the property inherited from her husband between her stepson Anthony and her two sons Joseph and John. It consisted, among other things, of eight plots of land comprising meadows, fields and vineyards. We know nothing precise about the criteria followed by Mamma Margaret in dividing her father's inheritance between the three of them. However, among the plots of land there was a vineyard near the Becchi (at Bric dei Pin), a field at Valcapone (or Valcappone) and another at Bacajan (or Bacaiau). In any case, these three lands constitute the "fiefdoms" as Don Bosco jokingly termed his property.

The Becchi, as we all know, is the lowly hamlet where Don Bosco was born; Valcappone (or Valcapone) was a site to the east of the Colle under the Serra di Capriglio but down in the valley in the area known as Sbaruau (= bogeyman), because it was thickly wooded with a few huts hidden among the branches that served as a place of storage for launderers and as a refuge for brigands. Bacajan (or Bacaiau) was a field east of the Colle between the Valcapone and Morialdo plots. Here are

Don Bosco's "fiefdoms"!

The Biographical Memoirs say that for some time Don Bosco had conferred noble titles on his lay collaborators. So there was the Count of the Becchi, the Marquis of Valcappone, the Baron of Bacaiau, the three lands that Don Bosco must have known to be part of his inheritance. "For some time now he had been in the habit of jestingly conferring titles of nobility such as "Count of Becchi" or "Marquis of Valcappone" on his senior lay co-workers, particularly [Joseph] Rossi, [Charles] Gastini, [Peter] Enria, [Andrew] Pelazza, and [Joseph] Buzzetti, not only within the Oratory but also outside, especially when traveling with any of them during the summer months" (BM VIII, 101).

Among these "noble" Salesians, we know for sure, that the Count of the Becchi (or of the Bricco del Pino) was Giuseppe Rossi, the first lay Salesian, or "Coadjutor" who loved Don Bosco like a most affectionate son and was faithful to him for ever.

Once Don Bosco went to the Porta Nuova station with Joseph Rossi, who was carrying Don Bosco's suitcase. As usual, he arrived as the train was about to leave and all the coaches were full. The windows were either closed or had passengers blocking the view to convey the impression that there were no vacant seats in their compartments. Turning to Rossi, Don Bosco rather loudly remarked, "My dear Count, I regret inconveniencing you. You shouldn't be carrying my suitcase." "Forget it. I feel honoured to be of service to you." At hearing this, the passengers closest to them exchanged surprised looks.

"Don Bosco!" they immediately shouted. "We have two seats here. Please come in!"

"But I wouldn't want to trouble you!" Don Bosco replied.

"Never mind! It's a pleasure to have you. We have plenty of room!"

And so the "Count of the Becchi" was able to get on the train with Don Bosco and the suitcase.

The pumps and a shack

Don Bosco lived and died poor. For food he was content with very little. Even a glass of wine was already too much for him, and he systematically watered it down.

"Often he forgot to drink, taken up by quite different thoughts, and his table companions would have to pour wine into his glass. If the wine was good, he then would instantly reach for water to dilute it and 'make it even better,' as he would say. With a smile he would add, 'I've renounced the world and the devil, but not the pumps.' He drank only one glass at each meal." (BM IV, 134).

Even for accommodation we know how he lived. On 12 September 1873 the General Conference of the Salesians was held to re-elect an Economer and three Councillors. On that occasion Don Bosco spoke memorable and prophetic words on the development of the Congregation. Then when he came to speak about the Superior Chapter, which by now seemed to need a suitable residence, he said, amidst universal hilarity: "Were it possible (he went on in a humorous vein) I would like to set up a shed in the middle of the playground for the chapter members so they could be isolated from all other mortals. But since they are still entitled to live on this earth, they may choose to reside in whatever house it may seem best." (BM X, 464).

Otis, botis, pija tutis

Don Bosco also had a mysterious answer for a cleric or a student who asked him how he could know the future and guess so many secrets.

"I'll tell you,' he would reply. "The key to everything is Otis, Batis, Pia, Tutis. Do you know what that means?"

"No, Father!"

"Pay attention. It's Greek." And slowly he would repeat: "O-tis, Bo-tis, Pi-a, Tu-tis. Is it clear now?"

"No!"

"I know those words are hard to understand. That's why I never reveal their meaning. No one knows it and no one ever will

because it would not be wise for me to reveal it. It is the big secret to all my wonders. With this magic formula I can read consciences and solve any mystery. Let's see how smart you are. See if you can make something out of it!" He would then repeat the four words while placing his forefinger successively on the questioner's forehead, nose, chin, and chest, ending with an unexpected little tap on the cheek. The boy or cleric would laugh and, while kissing Don Bosco's hand, still insist, "But, Father, at least translate those words." "I could, but you still wouldn't understand." And then playfully he would add in Piedmontese dialect, "When they give you a beating, take it like a man!" This conclusion would set them all laughing heartily. (BM VI, 236-237). And he meant that in order to become a saint, one must accept all the sufferings that life has in store for us.

#### Protector of tinsmiths

Every year the young boarders went on an outing to Monsieur Olive's villa, the generous cooperator already known to us. On this occasion, the father and mother waited on the superiors while their children waited on their pupils. They also organized a lottery, giving a number to everyone of the superiors and boys so that everyone won something. In this way, the Olive family made a gift of their coach to the Oratory of St. Leo. This outing occurred during Don Bosco's visit to Marseille in 1884, and an amusing incident occurred. While the boys were playing in the gardens, a servant came running up to Madame Olive, greatly agitated.

"Madame, the pot where the soup is cooking for the boys is leaking badly and there is no way to stop it. We will have to go without soup." The mistress of the house, who had immense faith in Don Bosco, had a sudden idea. She summoned all the boys and told them, "Listen, if you want to have some soup, kneel down here and say a Pater, Ave, and Gloria to Don Bosco, so that he may resolder the soup pot."

The boys obeyed and instantly the pot stopped leaking. This is an historical event, and when Don Bosco heard it, he laughed

heartily, saying, "From this day on, people will say that Don Bosco is the patron of tinsmiths." (BM XVII, 36-37).

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## The Seven Joys of the Madonna

At the heart of St. John Bosco's educational and spiritual work, the figure of the Madonna holds a privileged and luminous place. Don Bosco was not only a great educator and founder but also a fervent devotee of the Virgin Mary, whom he venerated with deep affection and to whom he entrusted all his pastoral projects. One of the most distinctive expressions of this devotion is the practice of the "Seven Joys of the Madonna," presented in a simple and accessible way in his publication "The Well-Provided Young Man," one of the most widely circulated texts in his spiritual pedagogy.

### A Work for the Souls of the Young

In 1875, Don Bosco published a new edition of "The Well-Provided Young Man for the Practice of His Duties in the Exercises of Christian Piety," a manual of prayers, spiritual exercises, and rules of Christian conduct designed for boys. This book, written in a sober and fatherly style, aimed to accompany young people in their moral and religious formation, introducing them to a full Christian life. It also included devotion to the "Seven Joys of the Most Holy Mary," a simple yet intense prayer structured in seven points. Unlike the "Seven Sorrows of the Madonna," which is much more well-known and widespread in popular piety, Don Bosco's "Seven Joys" focus on the joys of the Most Holy Virgin in Heaven, the result of an earthly life lived in the fullness of God's grace.

This devotion has ancient origins and was particularly dear to the Franciscans, who spread it from the 13th century onwards,

as the Rosary of the Seven Joys of the Blessed Virgin Mary (or Seraphic Crown). In the traditional Franciscan form, it is a devotional prayer composed of seven decades of Hail Marys, each preceded by a joyful mystery (joy) and introduced by an Our Father. At the end of each decade, a Glory Be is recited. The joys are: 1. The Annunciation by the Angel; 2. The Visitation to St. Elizabeth; 3. The Birth of the Saviour; 4. The Adoration of the Magi; 5. The Finding of Jesus in the Temple; 6. The Resurrection of the Son; 7. The Assumption and Coronation of Mary in Heaven.

Drawing from this tradition, Don Bosco offers a simplified version, suited to the sensibilities of young people.

Each of these joys is meditated upon through the recitation of a Hail Mary and a Glory Be.

### The Pedagogy of Joy

The choice to propose this devotion to young people was not merely a personal preference of Don Bosco but fits entirely within his educational vision. He was convinced that faith should be transmitted through joy, not fear; through the beauty of goodness, not the dread of evil. The "Seven Joys" thus become a school of Christian gladness, an invitation to recognise that, in the life of the Virgin, God's grace manifests as light, hope, and fulfilment.

Don Bosco was well aware of the difficulties and sufferings many of his boys faced daily: poverty, family abandonment, job insecurity. For this reason, he offered them a Marian devotion that was not limited to tears and sorrow but was also a source of consolation and joy. Meditating on Mary's joys meant opening oneself to a positive vision of life, learning to recognise God's presence even in difficult moments, and entrusting oneself with confidence to the tenderness of the heavenly Mother.

In "The Well-Provided Young Man," Don Bosco writes touching words about Mary's role: he presents her as a loving mother, a sure guide, and a model of Christian life. Devotion to her joys is not merely a devotional practice but a means to enter

into a personal relationship with the Madonna, to imitate her virtues, and to receive her maternal help in life's trials. For the saint from Turin, Mary is not distant or inaccessible but close, present, and active in the lives of her children. This Marian vision, strongly relational, permeates all Salesian spirituality and is reflected in the daily life of the oratories: environments where joy, prayer, and familiarity with Mary go hand in hand.

### A Living Legacy

Even today, devotion to the "Seven Joys of the Madonna" retains its spiritual and educational value. In a world marked by uncertainties, fears, and fragility, it offers a simple yet profound way to discover that Christian faith is, above all, an experience of joy and light. Don Bosco, a prophet of joy and hope, teaches us that authentic Christian education involves valuing affections, emotions, and the beauty of the Gospel.

Rediscovering the "Seven Joys" today also means recovering a positive outlook on life, history, and God's presence. The Madonna, with her humility and trust, teaches us to cherish and meditate in our hearts the signs of true joy, the kind that does not fade, because it is founded on God's love.

In a time when even young people seek light and meaning, Don Bosco's words remain relevant: "If you wish to be happy, practice devotion to the Most Holy Mary." The "Seven Joys" are, then, a small ladder to Heaven, a rosary of light that unites earth to the heart of the heavenly Mother.

Here is also the original text taken from "The Well-Provided Young Man for the Practice of His Duties in the Exercises of Christian Piety," 1875 (pp. 141-142), with our own titles.

### The Seven Joys That Mary Enjoys in Heaven

#### 1. Purity Cultivated

Rejoice, O immaculate Spouse of the Holy Spirit, for the

contentment you now enjoy in Paradise, because through your purity and virginity you are exalted above all the Angels and elevated above all the saints.

Hail Mary and Glory Be.

## 2. Wisdom Sought

Rejoice, O Mother of God, for the pleasure you experience in Paradise, because just as the sun here on earth illuminates the whole world, so you, with your splendour, adorn and make all of Paradise shine.

Hail Mary and Glory Be.

## 3. Filial Obedience

Rejoice, O Daughter of God, for the sublime dignity to which you were raised in Paradise, because all the hierarchies of Angels, Archangels, Thrones, Dominions, and all the Blessed Spirits honour, revere, and acknowledge you as the Mother of their Creator, and at your slightest command, they are most obedient.

Hail Mary and Glory Be.

## 4. Continuous Prayer

Rejoice, O Handmaid of the Most Holy Trinity, for the great power you have in Paradise, because all the graces you ask of your Son are immediately granted; indeed, as St. Bernard says, no grace is granted here on earth that does not pass through your most holy hands.

Hail Mary and Glory Be.

## 5. Humility Lived

Rejoice, O most august Queen, because you alone deserved to sit at the right hand of your most holy Son, who sits at the right hand of the Eternal Father.

Hail Mary and Glory Be.

## 6. Mercy Practised

Rejoice, O Hope of sinners, Refuge of the afflicted, for the great pleasure you experience in Paradise in seeing that all



who praise and revere you in this world are rewarded by the Eternal Father with His holy grace on earth and with His immense glory in Heaven.

Hail Mary and Glory Be.

#### 7. Hope Rewarded

Rejoice, O Mother, Daughter, and Spouse of God, because all the graces, all the joys, all the delights, and all the favours you now enjoy in Paradise will never diminish; indeed, they will increase until the day of judgment and last for eternity.

Hail Mary and Glory Be.

#### Prayer to the Most Blessed Virgin

O glorious Virgin Mary, Mother of my Lord, source of all our consolation, through these your joys, which I have recalled with the greatest devotion I could muster, I beg you to obtain for me from God the remission of my sins and the continual help of His holy grace, so that I may never render myself unworthy of your protection but rather have the fortune to receive all those heavenly favours you are accustomed to bestow upon your servants, who devoutly remember these joys that overflow from your beautiful heart, O immortal Queen of Heaven.

Photo: shutterstock.com

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## The festive oratory at Valdocco

In 1935, following the canonisation of Don Bosco in 1934, the Salesians took care to collect testimonies about him. A certain Pietro Pons, who as a boy had attended the festive

oratory in Valdocco for about ten years (from 1871 to 1882), and who had also attended two years of primary school (with classrooms under the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians) on 8 November gave a beautiful testimony of those years. We excerpt some passages from it, almost all unpublished.

### The figure of Don Bosco

He was the centre of attraction for the whole Oratory. This is how our former Oratorian Pietro Pons remembers him at the end of the 1970s: "He no longer had vigour, but he was always calm and smiling. He had two eyes that pierced and penetrated the mind. He would appear among us: he was a joy for everyone. D. Rua, D. Lazzero were at his side as if they had the Lord in their midst. D. Barberis and all the boys were running towards him, surrounding him, some walking beside him, some backwards, facing him. It was a fortune, a coveted privilege to be able to be close to him, to talk to him. He strolled along talking, and looking at everyone with those two eyes that turned every which way, electrifying hearts with joy."

Among the episodes that have stuck in his mind 60 years later, he recalls two in particular: "One day... he appeared alone at the front door of the sanctuary. Then a flock of boys rushed to run him over like a gust of wind. But he held the umbrella in his hand. It had handle and a shaft as thick as that of the peasants. He raised it and, using it like a sword, juggled it to repel that affectionate assault, o the right, to the left, to open up a passage. He pointed it at one, then off to the side, but in the meantime the others approached from the other side. So the game, the joke continued, bringing joy to hearts, eager to see the good Father return from his journey. He looked like a village priest of the good-natured kind."

### Games and teatrino

A Salesian oratory without games is unthinkable. The elderly former pupil recalls: "the courtyard was occupied by a building, the church of Mary Help and at the end of a low wall... a sort of hut rested on the left corner, where there was

always someone to watch over those who entered... As soon as you entered the playground on the right, there was a swing with only one seat, then the parallel bars and the fixed bar for the older children, who enjoyed doing their spins and somersaults, and also the trapeze, and the single flying step, which were, however, near the sacristies beyond St Joseph's chapel. And again: "This courtyard was of a beautiful length and lent itself very well to speed races starting from the side of the church and returning there on the way back. Barra rotta, sack races and a game called pignatte were also played. The latter games were announced on the previous Sunday. So was the greasy pole but the pole was planted with the thin end at the bottom so that it would be more difficult to climb. There were lotteries, and the ticket was paid for with a penny or two. Inside the house was a small library kept in a cupboard."

As well as games there was the famous teatrino "little theatre" where genuine dramas such as "The Crusader's Son" were performed, Don Cagliero's romanze were sung, and musicals such as the Cobbler were presented by the legendary Carlo Gastini [a brilliant past pupil leader]. The play, attended free of charge by the parents, was held in the hall under the nave of the church of Mary Help, but the former oratory boy also recalls that "once it was performed at the Moretta house" [today's parish church near the square]. Poor people lived there in the most squalid poverty. In the cellars that can be seen under the balcony there was a poor mother who would carry her son Charles outside at midday. She had to carry him on her shoulders to sunbathe."

#### Religious services and formation meetings

At the festive oratory there was no lack of religious services on Sunday mornings: Holy Mass with Holy Communion, prayers of the good Christian; followed in the afternoon by recreation, catechism, and Don Giulio Barberis' sermon. By now an old man, "Don Bosco never came to say Mass or to preach, but only to visit and stay with the boys during recreation... The catechists

and assistants had their pupils with them in church during the services and taught them catechism. A little lesson was given to everyone. The lesson was required to be memorised every Sunday and then also an explanation." The solemn feasts ended with a procession and a snack for all: "On leaving church after mass there was breakfast. A young man on the right outside the door would give us a loaf of bread, another on the left would put two slices of salami on it with a fork." Those boys were content with little, but they were delighted. When the boarders joined the oratorians for the singing of vespers, their voices could be heard in Via Milano and Via Corte d'appello!

Formation group meetings were also held at the festive oratory. In the house near the church of St Francis, there was "a small, low room that could hold about twenty people...In the room there was a small table for the lecturer, there were benches for the meetings and conferences for the older boys in general, and a meeting of the St Aloysius sodality, almost every Sunday."

Who were the Oratorians?

Of his 200 or so companions – but their number diminished in the winter due to the return of seasonal workers to their families – our sprightly old man recalled that many were from Biella "almost all 'bic', that is, they carried the wooden bucket full of lime and the wicker basket full of bricks to the bricklayers at the buildings." Others were "apprentice bricklayers, mechanics, tinsmiths." Poor apprentices: they worked from morning to night every day and only on Sundays could they afford a bit of recreation "at Don Bosco's" (as his oratory was called): "We played Asino vola, under the direction of the then Br Milanese [a future priest who was a great missionary in Patagonia]. Br Ponzano, later a priest, was a gym teacher. He made us do free exercises, with sticks, on the equipment."

Pietro Pons' memories are much broader, as rich in distant suggestions as they are pervaded by a shadow of nostalgia;

they wait to be known in full. We hope to do so soon.

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# Don Bosco and the Church of the Holy Shroud

*The Holy Shroud of Turin, one of Christianity's most revered relics, has a thousand-year history intertwined with that of the House of Savoy and the Savoyard city. Arriving in Turin in 1578, it became an object of profound devotion, with solemn exhibitions linked to historical and dynastic events. In the 19th century, figures such as Saint John Bosco and other Turin saints promoted its veneration, contributing to its widespread appeal. Today, preserved in Guarini's Chapel, the Shroud is at the centre of scientific and theological studies. In parallel, the Church of the Holy Shroud in Rome, linked to the House of Savoy and the Piedmontese community, represents another significant place, where Don Bosco attempted to establish a Salesian presence.*

The Holy Shroud of Turin, improperly called the "Santo Sudario" in Italian due to the French custom of calling it "Le Saint Suaire" was owned by the House of Savoy since 1463, and was transferred from Chambery to the new Savoy capital in 1578.

In that same year, the first exposition was held, commissioned by Emanuele Filiberto in homage to Card. Charles Borromeo who came to Turin on pilgrimage to venerate it.

## **Expositions in the 19th century and veneration of the Shroud**

In the 19th century, the Expositions in 1815, 1842, 1868 and 1898 are particularly worthy of note: the first for the return of the Savoy family to their states, the second for

the wedding of Victor Emmanuel II to Maria Adelaide of Habsburg-Lorraine, the third for the wedding of Umberto I to Margaret of Savoy-Genoa, and the fourth for the Universal Exhibition.

The nineteenth-century Turin saints, Cottolengo, Cafasso and Don Bosco, were devotees of the Holy Shroud, emulating the example of Blessed Sebastiano Valfré, the apostle of Turin during the siege of 1706.

The *Biographical Memoirs* assure us that Don Bosco venerated it in particular at the Exposition in 1842 and 1868, when he also brought the boys from the oratory to see it (BM II, 91; IX, 70-71).

Today, the priceless canvas, donated by Umberto II of Savoy to the Holy See, is entrusted to the Archbishop of Turin's "Pontifical Custodian" and kept in the sumptuous Guarini Chapel behind the Cathedral.

In Turin there is also, in Via Piave at the corner of Via San Domenico, the Church of the Holy Shroud, built by the Confraternity of the same name and rebuilt in 1761. Adjacent to the church is the "Sindonological Museum" and the headquarters of the "Cultores Sanctae Sindonis" Sodality, a centre for sindonological studies to which Salesian scholars such as Fr Natale Noguier de Malijay, Fr Antonio Tonelli, Fr Alberto Caviglia, Fr Pietro Scotti and, more recently, Fr Pietro Rinaldi and Fr Luigi Fossati, to name but the main ones, have made valuable contributions.

### **The Church of the Holy Shroud in Rome**

A [Church of the Holy Shroud](#) also exists in Rome along the street of the same name that runs from Largo Argentina parallel to Corso Vittorio. Constructed in 1604 to a design by Carlo di Castellamonte, it was the Church of the Piedmontese, Savoyards and Niçois, built by the Confraternity of the Holy Shroud that had sprung up in Rome at that time. After 1870 it became the special church of the House of Savoy.

During his stays in Rome, Don Bosco celebrated Mass in that church several times and formulated a plan for it

and the adjacent house in line with the purpose of the then extinct Confraternity, dedicated to charitable works for abandoned youth, the sick and prisoners.

The Confraternity had ceased operating at the beginning of the century and the ownership and administration of the church had passed to the Sardinian Legation to the Holy See. By the 1960s, the church was in need of major renovations, so much so that in 1868 it was temporarily closed.

But already in 1867 Don Bosco had come up with the idea of proposing to the Savoy Government to hand over the use and administration of the church to him, offering his collaboration in money to complete the restoration work. Perhaps he foresaw the entry of the Piedmontese troops into Rome not far away and, wishing to open a house there, he thought of doing so before the situation precipitated making it more difficult to obtain the Holy See's approval and the State's respect for agreements (BM IX, 192, 223, 301).

He then presented the request to the government. In 1869, during a stopover in Florence, he prepared a draft agreement which, on reaching Rome, he presented to Pius IX. Having obtained his assent, he moved on to the official request to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but, unfortunately, the occupation of Rome then came to jeopardise the whole affair. Don Bosco himself saw the inappropriateness of insisting. Taking on a Roman church belonging to the Savoy by a religious Congregation with its Mother House in Turin at that time, could have appeared an act of opportunism and servility towards the new Government.

After the breach of Porta Pia, with a minute dated 2 December 1871, the Church of the Most Holy Shroud was annexed to the Royal House and designated as the official seat of the Palatine Chief Chaplain. Following Pius IX's interdict on the Chapels of the former Apostolic Palace of the Quirinal, it was in the Church of the Shroud that all the sacred rites of the Royal Family took place.

In 1874 Don Bosco again tested the ground with the

Government. But, unfortunately, intemperate news leaked from the newspapers definitively put a stop to the project (BM X, 532-533).

With the end of the monarchy on 2 June 1946, the entire Shroud complex passed under the management of the General Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic. In 1984, following the new Concordat which sanctioned the abolition of the Palatine Chapels, the Church of the Shroud was entrusted to the Military Ordinariate and has remained so to this day.

However, we would like to recall the fact that Don Bosco, in seeking a favourable opportunity to open a house in Rome, set his eyes on the Church of the Holy Shroud.

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## 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 comers 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 hills 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 turn 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)

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# Missionary volunteering changes the lives of young people in Mexico

*Missionary volunteering is an experience that profoundly transforms the lives of young people. In Mexico, the Salesian Province of Guadalajara has for decades developed an organic path of Salesian Missionary Volunteering (SMV) that continues to have a lasting impact on the hearts of many young men and women. Thanks to the reflections of Margarita Aguilar, coordinator of missionary volunteering in Guadalajara, we will share the journey regarding the origins, evolution, formation phases, and motivations that drive young people to get involved in serving communities in Mexico.*

## **Origins**

Volunteering, understood as a commitment to others born from the need to help one's neighbour both socially and spiritually, strengthened over time with the contribution of governments and NGOs to raise awareness on issues of health, education, religion, the environment, and more. In the Salesian Congregation, the voluntary spirit has been present since its origins. Mamma Margherita, alongside Don Bosco, was among the first "volunteers" in the Oratory, committing herself to assisting young people to fulfil God's will and contribute to the salvation of their souls. Already the XXII General Chapter (1984) began to speak explicitly of volunteering, and subsequent chapters insisted on this commitment as an inseparable dimension of the Salesian mission.

In Mexico, the Salesians are divided into two Provinces: Mexico City (MEM) and Guadalajara (MEG). It is precisely in the latter that, starting from the mid-1980s, a youth volunteer project was structured. The Province of Guadalajara,

founded 62 years ago, has for almost 40 years offered young people eager to experience the Salesian charism the opportunity to dedicate a period of their lives to serving communities, especially in border areas.

On 24 October 1987, the Provincial sent a group of four young people together with Salesians to the city of Tijuana, in a rapidly expanding Salesian border area. This marked the beginning of Salesian Youth Volunteering (SYV), which gradually developed and became increasingly structured.

The initial objective was proposed to young people around 20 years old, available to dedicate one to two years to build the first oratories in the communities of Tijuana, Ciudad Juárez, Los Mochis, and other locations in the north. Many remember the early days: shovel and hammer in hand, living together in simple houses with other volunteers, afternoons spent with children, adolescents, and young people from the neighbourhood playing on the land where the oratory would be built. Sometimes the roof was missing, but there was no lack of joy, a sense of family, and encounter with the Eucharist.

Those first communities of Salesians and volunteers brought in their hearts love for God, for Mary Help of Christians, and for Don Bosco, demonstrating a pioneering spirit, missionary ardour, and total care for others.

## **Evolution**

As the Province and Youth Ministry grew, the need for clear formation itineraries for volunteers emerged. The organisation was strengthened through:

*Application questionnaire:* each aspiring volunteer filled out a form and answered a questionnaire that outlined their human, spiritual, and Salesian characteristics, initiating the personal growth process.

*Initial formation course:* theatre workshops, games and group dynamics, catechesis and practical tools for field activities.

Before leaving, volunteers met to conclude their formation and receive their assignment to Salesian communities.

*Spiritual accompaniment:* the candidate was invited to be accompanied by a Salesian in their community of origin. For a period, the preparation was carried out together with Salesian Aspirants, strengthening the vocational aspect, although this practice later underwent changes based on the vocational animation of the Province.

*Annual provincial meeting:* every December, near International Volunteer Day (5 December), volunteers meet to evaluate the experience, reflect on each person's journey, and consolidate the accompaniment processes.

*Visits to the communities:* the coordination team regularly visits the communities where volunteers work, to support not only the young people themselves, but also Salesians and lay people of the educational-pastoral community, strengthening support networks.

*Personal life project:* each candidate develops, with the help of the spiritual guide, a life project that helps to integrate the human, Christian, Salesian, vocational, and missionary dimensions. A minimum preparation period of six months is foreseen, with online moments dedicated to the various dimensions.

*Family involvement:* informative meetings with parents on the SYV processes, to help them understand the path and strengthen family support.

*Continuous formation during the experience:* each month a dimension (human, spiritual, apostolic, etc.) is addressed through reading materials, reflection, and in-depth work in progress.

*Post-volunteering:* after the conclusion of the experience, a closing meeting is organised to evaluate the experience, plan



the next steps, and accompany the volunteer in reintegration into their community of origin and family, with in-person and online phases.

### **New stages and renewals**

Recently, the experience has taken the name of Salesian Missionary Volunteering (SMV), in line with the Congregation's emphasis on the spiritual and missionary dimension. Some new features introduced:

*Short pre-volunteering:* during school holidays (December-January, Holy Week and Easter, and especially summer) young people can experience community life and service commitment for short periods, to get a first "taste" of the experience.

*Formation for international experience:* a specific process has been established to prepare volunteers to live the experience outside national borders.

*Greater emphasis on spiritual accompaniment:* no longer just "sending to work", but placing the encounter with God at the centre, so that the volunteer discovers their vocation and mission.

As Margarita Aguilar, SMV coordinator in Guadalajara, points out, "A volunteer needs to have empty hands to be able to embrace their mission with faith and hope in God."

### **Motivations of young people**

At the heart of the SMV experience is always the question, "What is your motivation to become a volunteer?" Three main groups can be identified:

*Operative/practical motivation:* those who believe they will carry out concrete activities related to their skills (teaching in a school, serving in a canteen, animating an oratory). They often discover that volunteering is not just manual or didactic work and may be disappointed if they

expected a merely instrumental experience.

*Motivation related to the Salesian charism:* former beneficiaries of Salesian work who wish to deepen and live the charism more fully, imagining an intense experience like a long festive meeting of the Salesian Youth Movement, but for a prolonged period.

*Spiritual motivation:* those who intend to share their experience of God and discover Him in others. Sometimes, however, this “fidelity” is conditioned by expectations (e.g. “yes, but only in this community” or “yes, but if I can return for a family event”), and it is necessary to help the volunteer mature their “yes” freely and generously.

### **Three key elements of SMV**

The Salesian Missionary Volunteering experience is based on three fundamental dimensions:

*Spiritual life:* God is the centre. Without prayer, sacraments, and listening to the Spirit, the experience risks being reduced to a simple operational commitment, tiring the volunteer to the point of abandonment.

*Community life:* communion with the Salesians and with other members of the community strengthens the volunteer’s presence among children, adolescents, and young people. Without community, there is no support in times of difficulty nor context to grow together.

*Apostolic life:* joyful witness and affectionate presence among young people evangelises more than any formal activity. It is not just about “doing”, but about “being” salt and light in everyday life.

To fully live these three dimensions, an integral formation path is needed that accompanies the volunteer from beginning to end, embracing every aspect of the person (human, spiritual, vocational) according to Salesian pedagogy and the

missionary mandate.

### **The role of the host community**

The volunteer, to be an authentic instrument of evangelisation, needs a community that supports them, be an example and guide. Likewise, the community welcomes the volunteer to integrate them, supporting them in moments of fragility and helping them to free themselves from ties that hinder total dedication. As Margarita highlights, "God has called us to be salt and light of the Earth and many of our volunteers have found the courage to take a plane leaving behind family, friends, culture, their way of life to choose this lifestyle focused on being missionaries."

The community offers spaces for discussion, common prayer, practical and emotional accompaniment, so that the volunteer can remain firm in their choice and bear fruit in service.

The history of Salesian missionary volunteering in Guadalajara is an example of how an experience can grow, structure, and renew itself by learning from mistakes and successes. By always placing the young person's deep motivation, the spiritual and community dimension at the centre, a path capable of transforming, not only the realities served, but also the lives of the volunteers themselves, is offered.

Margarita Aguilar tells us, "A volunteer needs to have empty hands to be able to embrace their mission with faith and hope in God."

We thank Margarita for her valuable reflections. Her testimony reminds us that missionary volunteering is not a mere service, but a journey of faith and growth that touches the lives of young people and communities, renewing hope and the desire to give oneself for the love of God and neighbour.