

# 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,  
 Crucifixi 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.

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# Saint Monica, mother of Saint Augustine, witness of hope

*A woman of unshakeable faith, of fruitful tears, answered by God after seventeen long years. A model of a Christian wife and mother for the whole Church. A witness of hope who transformed herself into a powerful intercessor in Heaven. Don Bosco himself recommended to mothers afflicted by the unchristian lives of their children, to entrust themselves to her in prayer.*

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

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

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

## Her origins in Tagaste

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

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

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

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

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

Monica's testimony shows how holiness is not necessarily



expressed in sensational gestures, but in daily fidelity, in the love that slowly transforms difficult situations. In this sense, she is a model for many wives and mothers who live marriages marked by tensions or differences in faith.

### **Monica as a mother**

From the marriage, three children were born: Augustine, Navigius, and a daughter whose name we do not know. Monica poured all her love upon them, but above all her faith. Navigius and her daughter followed a straightforward Christian path; Navigius became a priest; her daughter embarked on the path of consecrated virginity. Augustine, however, soon became the centre of her worries and tears.

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

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

The question naturally arises, why did Monica not have

Augustine baptised immediately after birth?

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

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

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

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

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

### **A mother’s tenacity**

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

In Milan, Ambrose’s preaching opened new perspectives for Augustine. He gradually abandoned Manichaeism and began to

look at Christianity with new eyes. Monica silently accompanied this process. She did not force the timing; she did not demand immediate conversions, but she prayed and supported him and remained by his side until his conversion.

### **Augustine's conversion**

God seemed not to hear her, but Monica never stopped praying and offering sacrifices for her son. After seventeen years, her pleas were finally answered – and how! Augustine not only became a Christian, but became a priest, bishop, doctor, and father of the Church.

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

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

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

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

### **Ostia: ecstasy and death**

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

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

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

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

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

### **Monica's spiritual profile**

Augustine describes his mother with well-measured words:

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

And again:

*"[...] a chaste and sober widow, assiduous in almsgiving, devout and submissive to Your saints; who did not let a day pass*

*without bringing an offering to Your altar; who twice a day, morning and evening, without fail visited Your church, and not to confabulate vainly and gossip like other old women, but to hear Your words and to make You hear her prayers? Could You have disdained the tears of such a woman, who with them asked You not for gold or silver, nor for fleeting or fickle goods, but for the salvation of her son's soul, You who had made her so by Your grace, refusing her Your help? Certainly not, Lord. Indeed, You were beside her and heard her, working according to the order by which You had predestined to work." (Confessions V, 9,17).*

From this Augustinian testimony, a surprisingly contemporary figure emerges.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It is no coincidence that many associations and movements have chosen Monica as the patroness of Christian mothers and women

who pray for children far from faith.

### **A simple and extraordinary woman**

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

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

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

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

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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 Education of Conscience with St. Francis de Sales**

It was most likely the advent of the Protestant Reformation that brought the issue of conscience—and more precisely, "freedom of conscience"—to the forefront. In a 1597 letter to Clement VIII, the Provost of Sales lamented the "tyranny" that the "state of Geneva" imposed "on the consciences of Catholics." He asked the Holy See to intervene with the King of France to ensure that the Genevans would be granted "what

they call freedom of conscience." Opposed to military solutions for the Protestant crisis, he glimpsed in *libertas conscientiae* a possible way out of violent confrontation, provided reciprocity was respected. Claimed by Geneva for the Reformation and by Francis de Sales for Catholicism, freedom of conscience was about to become a pillar of modern thought.

### The Dignity of the Human Person

The dignity of the individual lies in conscience, and conscience is first and foremost synonymous with sincerity, honesty, frankness, and conviction. The Provost of Sales acknowledged, for example, "to ease his conscience," that the project of the Controversies had been somewhat imposed on him by others. When presenting his reasons in favour of Catholic doctrine and practice, he took care to specify that he did so "in conscience." "Tell me in conscience," he asked his opponents. A "good conscience" ensures one avoids certain acts that contradict oneself.

However, individual subjective conscience cannot always be taken as a guarantee of objective truth. One is not always obliged to believe what someone says in conscience. "Show me clearly," the Provost said to the lords of Thonon, "that you are not lying at all, that you are not deceiving me when you say that in conscience you had this or that inspiration." Conscience can fall victim to illusion, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. "Hardened misers not only do not confess their greed but do not even think in conscience that they are greedy."

The formation of the conscience is an essential task because freedom of conscience carries the risk of "doing good and evil," but "choosing evil is not using, but rather, abusing our freedom." It is a difficult task because conscience sometimes appears as an adversary that "always fights against us and for us." It "steadily resists our bad inclinations," but does so "for our salvation." When one sins, "inner remorse moves against our conscience with a drawn sword," but only to "pierce it with holy fear."

A means to exercise responsible freedom is the practice of the "examination of conscience." Examining one's conscience is like following the example of doves that look at each other "with clear and pure eyes," "groom themselves carefully, and adorn themselves as best they can." Philothea is invited to perform this examination every evening before bed, asking oneself, "how one behaved at various times of the day. To make it easier, one should reflect on where, with whom, and in what occupations one was engaged."

Once a year, we must conduct a thorough examination of the "state of our soul" before God, our neighbour, and ourselves, not forgetting an "examination of our soul's affections." The examination—Francis de Sales tells the Visitandines—will lead you to "probe your conscience deeply."

How to lighten the conscience when burdened by error or fault? Some do so poorly, judging and accusing others "of vices they themselves succumb to," thinking this will "soften their conscience's remorse." This multiplies the risk of rash judgments. Conversely, "those who properly care for their conscience are not at all prone to rash judgments." The case of parents, educators, and public officials deserves special consideration, for "a good part of their conscience consists in carefully watching over the conscience of others."

### Self-Respect

From the affirmation of each person's dignity and responsibility must arise self-respect. Socrates and all ancient pagan and Christian thought had already shown the way:

It is a saying of the philosophers, yet held valid by Christian doctors: "Know thyself"—that is, know the excellence of your soul so as not to debase or despise it.

Certain acts offend not only God but also human dignity and reason. Their consequences are deplorable:

The likeness and image of God we bear within us is stained and disfigured, the dignity of our spirit dishonoured, and we are

made similar to irrational animals [...], enslaving ourselves to our passions and overturning the order of reason.

There are ecstasies that elevate us above our natural state and others that debase us. "O men, how long will you be so senseless," writes the author of *Theotimus*, "as to trample your natural dignity, voluntarily descending and plunging yourselves into the condition of beasts?"

Self-respect helps avoid two opposite dangers: pride and contempt for one's gifts. In a century where honour was highly exalted, Francis de Sales had to denounce crimes, particularly duelling, which made his "hair stand on end," and even more, the senseless pride behind it. "I am scandalised," he wrote to the wife of a duelling husband; "truly, I cannot fathom how one could have such unbridled courage even over trifles." Fighting a duel is like "becoming each other's executioner." Others, conversely, dare not acknowledge their gifts and thus sin against gratitude. Francis de Sales condemns "a certain false and foolish humility that prevents them from seeing the good in themselves." They are wrong, for "the goods God has placed in us must be acknowledged, valued, and sincerely honoured."

The first neighbour I must respect and love, the Bishop of Geneva seems to say, is myself. True self-love and due respect demand that I strive for perfection and correct myself if needed, but gently, reasonably, and "following the path of compassion" rather than anger and fury.

There exists a self-love that is not only legitimate but beneficial and commanded, "Charity well-ordered begins with oneself," says the proverb, reflecting Francis de Sales' thought—provided one does not confuse self-love with self-centredness. Self-love is good, and Philothea is asked to examine how she loves herself:

Keep good order in loving yourself? For only disordered self-love can ruin us. Ordered love requires that we love the soul more than the body and seek virtue above all else.

Conversely, self-centredness is selfish, “narcissistic” love, fixated on itself, jealous of its beauty, and concerned only with self-interest. “Narcissus, say the profane, was a youth so scornful he would offer his love to none; finally, gazing at his reflection in a clear fountain, he was utterly captivated by his beauty.”

### The “Respect Due to Persons”

If one respects oneself, one is better prepared to respect others. Being “the image and likeness of God” implies that “all human beings share the same dignity.” Francis de Sales, though living in a deeply unequal society marked by the ancient regime, promoted thought and practice marked by “respect due to persons.”

Start with children. St. Bernard’s mother—says the author of *Philothea*—loved her newborns “with respect as something sacred God had entrusted to her.” A grave rebuke from the Bishop of Geneva to pagans concerned their contempt for defenceless lives. Respect for a baby about to be born emerges in a letter written according to the Baroque rhetoric of the time to a pregnant woman. He encourages her by explaining to her that the child forming in her womb is not only “a living image of the Divine Majesty”, but also an image of its mother. He advises another woman:

Offer often to the eternal glory of your Creator the little creature whose formation He has wanted to take you as His cooperator.

Another aspect of respect for others concerns the theme of freedom. The discovery of new lands had as a disastrous consequence, the re-emergence of slavery, that recalled the practice of the ancient romans at the time of paganism. The sale of human beings degraded them to the level of animals.

One day, Marc Antony bought two youths from a merchant; back then, as still happens in some lands, children were sold—men procured and traded them like horses in our countries.

Respect for others is subtly threatened by gossip and slander. Francis de Sales insists heavily on "sins of the tongue." A chapter in *Philothea* which deals explicitly with this subject, is titled *Honesty in Words and Respect Due to Persons* states that ruining someone's reputation is "spiritual murder," robbing them of "civil life." When condemning vice, one should spare the person involved as much as possible.

Certain groups are easily scorned. Francis de Sales defends the dignity of common people, citing the Gospel. He comments that "St. Peter was rough, coarse, an old fisherman of low station; a trader of low condition. Saint John, on the contrary, was a gentleman, sweet, lovable, wise; saint Peter, instead, was ignorant." Well, it was St Peter who was chosen to guide others and to be the "universal superior".

He proclaims the dignity of the sick, saying that, "the souls who are on the cross are declared queens." Denouncing "cruelty towards the poor" and exalting the "dignity of the poor", he justifies and specifies the attitude to be taken towards them, explaining "how we must honour them and, therefore, visit them as representatives of our Lord." No one is useless; no one is insignificant. "There is no object in the world that cannot be useful for something; but you must know how to find its use and place."

### The "one-different" Salesian"

The eternal human that has always tormented human society is reconciling individual dignity and freedom with that of the others. Francis de Sales offered an original solution by coining a term. In fact, assuming that the universe is made up of "all things created, visible and invisible" and that "their diversity is brought back into unity", the Bishop of Geneva proposed to call it "one-diverse", that is, "unique and diverse, unique with diversity and diverse with unity."

For him, every being is unique. People are like Pliny's pearls, "so unique in quality that no two are perfectly equal." His two major works, *Introduction to the Devout Life*

and Treatise on the Love of God—are addressed to individuals, Philothea and Theotimus. What variety and diversity among beings! “Without doubt, as we see that two men are never perfectly equal as to the gifts of nature, so they are never perfectly equal as to the supernatural gifts.” The variety also enchanted him from a purely aesthetic point of view, but he feared an indiscreet curiosity about its causes:

If someone asked why God made melons larger than strawberries, or lilies bigger than violets; why rosemary isn't a rose or a carnation a marigold; why peacocks are prettier than bats, or figs sweet and lemons sour—we'd laugh and say: poor man, the world's beauty requires variety, it is necessary that in things there are diverse and differentiated perfections and that the one is not the other. This is why some are small, others large; some harsh, others sweet; some more beautiful, others less. [...] All have their value, their grace, their splendour, and all, seen in the totality of their varieties, constitute a wonderful spectacle of beauty.

Diversity does not hinder unity; on the contrary, it makes it richer and more beautiful. Each flower has its characteristics that distinguish it from all the others. “It is not exactly of the roses to be white, it seems to me, because those vermilions are more beautiful and have a better scent, which however is proper to the lily.” Of course, Francis de Sales does not tolerate confusion and disorder, but he is equally an enemy of uniformity. The diversity of beings can lead to dispersion and rupture of communion, but if there is love, “bond of perfection”, nothing is lost, on the contrary, diversity is exalted by the union.

In Francis de Sales there is certainly a real culture of the individual, but this is never a closure to the group, the community or society. He spontaneously sees each person marked by their “state of life,” which marks the identity and belonging of each one. It will not be possible to establish an equal programme or project for all, simply because it will be



applied and implemented in a different way “for the gentleman, the artisan, the servant, the prince, the widow, the maiden, the married.” It must also be adapted “to the strengths and duties of each individual. The bishop of Geneva sees society divided into vital spaces characterized by social belonging and group solidarity, as when he deals with “the company of soldiers, the workshop of craftsmen, the court of princes, the family of married people.”

Love personalizes and, therefore, individualizes. The affection that binds one person to another is unique, as demonstrated by Francis de Sales in his relationship with Chantal’s wife, “Every affection has a peculiarity that differentiates it from the others. What I feel for you possesses a certain particularity that comforts me infinitely, and, to say everything, is very fruitful for me.” The sun illuminates each and every one, “illuminating a corner of the earth, it does not illuminate it less than what it would do if it did not shine elsewhere, but only in that corner.”

The human being is in a state of becoming

A Christian humanist, Francis de Sales ultimately believed in the human person’s capacity for self-improvement. Erasmus had coined the phrase: *Homines non nascuntur sed finguntur* (Men are not born but made). While animals are predetermined beings driven by instinct, humans, in contrast, are in perpetual evolution. Not only do they change, but they can also change themselves, for better or for worse.

What entirely preoccupied the author of *Theotimus* was perfecting himself and helping others to perfect themselves, not only in religious matters but in all things. From birth to the grave, man is in a state of apprenticeship. Let us imitate the crocodile, which “never stops growing as long as it lives.” Indeed, “remaining in the same state for long is impossible. in this traffic, whoever does not advance falls behind; on this ladder, whoever does not climb, descends; in this battle, whoever does not conquer is conquered.” He quotes St. Bernard, who said, “It is written especially for man that

he will never be found in the same state: he must either advance or regress." Let us move forward:

Do you not know that you are on a journey and that the path is not made for sitting but for moving forward? He is so made for progress, that moving forward is called walking.

This also means that the human person is educable, capable of learning, correcting themselves, and improving themselves. And this holds true at all levels. Age sometimes has nothing to do with it. Look at these choirboys of the cathedral, who far surpass their bishop's abilities in this domain. "I admire these children," he said, "who can barely speak yet already sing their parts; they understand all musical signs and rules, while I, a grown man who might pass for a great figure, would not know how to manage." No one in this world is perfect:

There are people naturally frivolous, others rude, others still reluctant to listen to others' opinions, and others prone to indignation, others to anger, and others to love. In short, few are free people are free from one or another of these imperfections.

Should we despair of improving our temperament, correcting some of our natural inclinations? Not at all.

For though these traits may be innate and natural in each of us, if they can be corrected and regulated through disciplined effort, or even eradicated, then, I tell you, Philothea, it must be done. Bitter almonds have been made sweet by piercing them at the base to drain their juice; why should we not drain our own perverse inclinations to become better?

Hence, the optimistic yet demanding conclusion. "There is no good nature that cannot be corrupted by vicious habits, nor any nature so perverse that it cannot, first by God's grace and then through diligent effort, be tamed and overcome." If man is educable, we must never despair of anyone and guard ourselves well against prejudice in regard to people:

Do not say: That man is a drunkard, even if you have seen him drunk; 'an adulterer,' for having witnessed his sin; 'incestuous,' for catching him in that disgrace, because one action is not enough to define a thing. [...] And even if a man were long steeped in vice, you'd risk falsehood by calling him vicious.

The human person has never finished tending their garden. This was the lesson the founder of the Visitation nuns instilled when urging them to "cultivate the soil and garden" of their hearts and minds, for no one is "so perfect as to need no effort to grow in perfection or preserve it."

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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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# Joseph Augustus Arribat: Righteous Among the Nations

## 1. Biographical Profile

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

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

At the end of his third year, he was sent to Morges, in the canton of Vaud, Switzerland. He then received three successive mandates of six years each, first in Millau, then in Villemur and finally in Thonon in the diocese of Annecy. His most dangerous and grace-filled period was probably his assignment in Villemur during the Second World War. Returning to La Navarre in 1953, Fr Arribat remained there until his death on 19 March 1963.

## 2. Profoundly a man of God

A man of daily duty, nothing was secondary for



him, and everyone knew that he got up very early to clean the pupils' toilets and the courtyard. Having become rector of the Salesian house, and wanting to do his duty to the end and to perfection, out of respect and love for others, he often finished his days very late, shortening his hours of rest. On the other hand, he was always available, welcoming to all, knowing how to adapt to everyone, be it benefactors and large landowners, or house servants, maintaining a permanent concern for the novices and confreres, and especially for the young people entrusted to him.

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

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

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

When celebrating Mass or when praying, a kind of fervour emanated from him that could not go unnoticed. One confrere declared that: "seeing him make his great sign of the cross, everyone felt a timely reminder of God's presence. His recollection at the altar was impressive." Another Salesian recalls that "he made his genuflections to perfection with a courage, an expression of adoration that led to devotion." The same person said that "He strengthened my faith."

His vision of faith shone through in the

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

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

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

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

Fr Arribat lived over thirty years at Navarre, in the house that Don Bosco himself wanted to place under the protection of St Joseph, head and servant of the Holy Family, a model of faith in hiddenness and discretion. In his solicitude for the material needs of the house and through his closeness to all the people dedicated to manual labour, peasants, gardeners, workers, handymen, kitchen or laundry

people, this priest made people think of St Joseph, whose name he also bore. And did he not die on 19 March, the feast of St Joseph?

#### **4. An authentic Salesian educator**

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

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

Particularly authoritative is the testimony of Fr Peter Ricaldone, Don Bosco’s future successor, who wrote after his canonical visit in 1923-1924: “Fr Augustus Arribat is a catechist, confessor and reads the conduct marks! He is a holy confrere. Only his kindness can make his various duties less incompatible’. Then he repeats his praise: “He is an excellent confrere, not too healthy. Because of his good manners he enjoys the confidence of the older young men who almost all go to him.”.

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

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

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

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

## **5. Fr Arribat an ecologist?**

Here is an original trait to complete the picture of this seemingly ordinary figure. He was regarded almost as an ecologist before this term was widespread. A small farmer, he had learnt to deeply love and respect nature. His youthful compositions are full of freshness and very fine observations, with a touch of poetry. He spontaneously shared the work of this rural world, where he lived much of his long life.

Speaking of his love for animals, how many times was he seen as "the good father, with a box under his arm, full of breadcrumbs, laboriously making the path from the

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

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

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## **Venerable      Ottavio      Ortiz Arrieta Coya, Bishop**

*Octavio Ortiz Arrieta Coya, born in Lima, Peru, on 19 April 1878, was the first Peruvian Salesian. As a young man, he trained as a carpenter, but the Lord called him to a higher mission. He made his first Salesian profession on 29 January 1900 and was ordained a priest in 1908. In 1922, he was consecrated bishop of the diocese of Chachapoyas, a role he held with dedication until his death on 1 March 1958. Twice he refused appointment to the more prestigious see of Lima, preferring to remain close to his people. A tireless shepherd, he travelled throughout the diocese to personally know the*

*faithful and promoted numerous pastoral initiatives for evangelisation. On 12 November 1990, under the pontificate of St John Paul II, his cause for canonisation was opened, and he was granted the title of Servant of God. On 27 February 2017, Pope Francis recognised his heroic virtues, declaring him Venerable.*

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

He lived the second part of his life, from the beginning of the 1920s, as bishop of Chachapoyas, an immense diocese, vacant for years, where the prohibitive conditions of the territory added up to a certain closure, especially in the most remote villages. Here the field and the challenges of the apostolate were immense. Ortiz Arrieta was of a lively temperament, accustomed to community life; moreover, he was delicate of spirit, to the point of being called “pecadito” in his younger years, for his exactitude in detecting shortcomings and helping himself and others to amend themselves. He also possessed an innate sense of rigour and moral duty. The conditions under which he had to carry out his episcopal ministry, however, were diametrically opposed to him: loneliness and the substantial impossibility of sharing a Salesian and priestly life, despite repeated and almost pleading requests to his own Congregation; the need to

reconcile his own moral rigour with an increasingly docile and almost disarmed firmness; a fine moral conscience continually put to the test by coarseness of choices and lukewarmness in following, on the part of some collaborators less heroic than himself, and of a people of God that knew how to oppose the bishop when his word became a denunciation of injustice and a diagnosis of spiritual evils. The Venerable's path towards the fullness of holiness, in the exercise of the virtues, was therefore marked by hardships, difficulties and the continual need to convert his gaze and heart, under the action of the Spirit.

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

Although he lived before the Second Vatican Council, the way in which he planned and carried out the pastoral tasks entrusted to him is still relevant today: from the pastoral care of vocations to the concrete support of his seminarians and priests; from the catechetical and human formation of the youngest to the pastoral care of families

through which he met married couples in crisis or cohabiting couples reluctant to regularise their union. Bishop Ortiz Arrieta, on the other hand, did not only educate by his concrete pastoral action, but by his very behaviour: by his ability to discern for himself, first of all, what it means and what it entails to renew fidelity to the path taken. He truly persevered in heroic poverty, in fortitude through the many trials of life, and in radical fidelity to the diocese to which he had been assigned. Humble, simple, always serene; between the serious and the gentle; the gentleness of his gaze let all the tranquillity of his spirit shine through: this was the path of holiness he travelled.

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



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# Don Bosco's devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

*Don Bosco's devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus originated from the revelations to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque in the monastery of Paray-le-Monial: Christ, showing his pierced Heart crowned with thorns, asked for a feast of reparation on the Friday after the Octave of Corpus Christi. Despite opposition, the cult spread because that Heart, the seat of divine love, recalls the charity manifested on the cross and in the Eucharist. Don Bosco invites young people to honour it constantly, especially in the month of June, by reciting the Crown and performing acts of reparation that obtain copious indulgences and the twelve promises of peace, mercy, and holiness.*

Devotion to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, which is growing every day, listen dear young people, to how it originated. There lived in France, in the monastery of the Visitation in Paray-le-Monial, a humble virgin named Margaret Alacoque, dear to God for her great purity. One day, while she was standing before the Blessed Sacrament to adore the blessed Jesus, she saw her Heavenly Spouse in the act of uncovering his breast and showing her his Most Sacred Heart, radiant with flames, surrounded by thorns, pierced by a wound, and surmounted by a cross. At the same time, she heard Him complain of the monstrous ingratitude of men and ordered her to work to ensure that on the Friday after the Octave of *Corpus Christi*, special worship would be given to His Divine Heart in reparation for the offences He receives in the Most Holy Eucharist. The pious virgin, filled with confusion, explained to Jesus how unfit she was for such a great undertaking, but she was comforted by the Lord to continue her

work, and the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was established despite the fierce opposition of her adversaries.

There are many reasons for this devotion: 1) Because Jesus Christ offered us His Sacred Heart as the seat of His affections; 2) Because it is a symbol of the immense charity He showed especially by allowing His Most Sacred Heart to be wounded by a lance; 3) Because from this Heart the faithful are moved to meditate on the sufferings of Jesus Christ and to profess their gratitude to Him.

Let us therefore constantly honour this Divine Heart, which, for the many and great benefits it has already bestowed upon us and will bestow upon us, well deserves all our most humble and loving veneration.

### **Month of June**

Those who consecrate the entire month of June to the honour of the Sacred Heart of Jesus with some daily prayer or devout act will gain seven years of indulgence for each day and a Plenary indulgence at the end of the month.

### **Chaplet to the Sacred Heart of Jesus**

Intend to recite this Crown to the Divine Heart of Jesus Christ to make reparation for the outrages He receives in the Most Holy Eucharist from infidels, heretics, and bad Christians. Say it alone or with other people gathered together, if possible before an image of the Divine Heart or before the Blessed Sacrament:

*V. Deus, in adiutorium meum intende* (O God, come to my aid).

*R. Domine ad adjuvandum me festina* (Lord, make haste to help me).

*Glory be to the Father, etc.*

1. O most lovable Heart of my Jesus, I humbly adore your sweet kindness, which you show in a special way in the Divine Sacrament to souls who are still sinners. I am sorry to see you so ungratefully repaid, and I intend to make up for the many offences you receive in the Most Holy

Eucharist from heretics, infidels, and bad Christians.

*Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be.*

2. O most humble Heart of my Sacramental Jesus, I adore your profound humility in the Divine Eucharist, hiding yourself for our love under the species of bread and wine. I beg you, my Jesus, to instil this beautiful virtue in my heart; meanwhile, I will endeavour to make reparation for the many offences you receive in the Most Holy Sacrament from heretics, infidels, and bad Christians.

*Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be.*

3. O Heart of my Jesus, so eager to suffer, I adore those desires so ardent to encounter your most painful Passion and to subject yourself to those wrongs foreseen by you in the Blessed Sacrament. Ah, my Jesus! I truly intend to make reparation with my very life; I would like to prevent those offences which you unfortunately receive in the Most Holy Eucharist from heretics, infidels, and bad Christians.

*Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be.*

4. O most patient Heart of my Jesus, I humbly venerate your invincible patience in enduring so many pains on the Cross and so many abuses in the Divine Eucharist for love of me. O my dear Jesus! Since I cannot wash with my blood those places where you were so mistreated in both Mysteries, I promise you, O my Supreme Good, to use every means to make reparation to your Divine Heart for the many outrages you receive in the Most Holy Eucharist from heretics, infidels, and bad Christians.

*Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be.*

5. O Heart of my Jesus, most loving of our souls in the admirable institution of the Most Holy Eucharist, I humbly adore that immense love which you bear us in giving us your Divine Body and Divine Blood as our nourishment. What heart is there that should not be consumed at the sight of such immense charity? O my good Jesus, give me abundant tears

to weep and make reparation for the many offences you receive in the Most Holy Sacrament from heretics, infidels, and bad Christians.

*Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be.*

6. O Heart of my Jesus, thirsting for our salvation, I humbly venerate that most ardent love which prompted you to perform the ineffable Sacrifice of the Cross, renewing it every day on the Altars in the Holy Mass. Is it possible that the human heart, filled with gratitude, should not burn with such love? Yes, alas, my God; but for the future I promise to do all I can to make reparation for the many outrages you receive in this Mystery of love from heretics, infidels and bad Christians.

*Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be.*

Whoever recites even the above 6 *Our Fathers, Hail Marys, and Glory's* before the Blessed Sacrament, the last *Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be*, being said according to the intention of the Supreme Pontiff, will gain 300 days of Indulgence each time.

**Promises made by Jesus Christ  
to Blessed Margaret Alacoque for the devotees of his Divine Heart**

I will give them all the graces necessary in their state of life.

I will make peace reign in their families.

I will console them in all their afflictions.

I will be their safe refuge in life, but especially at the hour of death.

I will fill every undertaking with blessings.

Sinners will find in my Heart the source and infinite ocean of mercy.

Lukewarm souls will become fervent.

Fervent souls will quickly rise to great perfection.

I will bless the house where the image of my Sacred Heart is exposed and honoured.

I will give priests the gift of moving the most hardened hearts.

The names of those who propagate this devotion will be written in my Heart and will never be erased.

**Act of reparation against blasphemies.**

God be blessed.

Blessed be His Holy Name.

Blessed be Jesus Christ, true God and true Man.

Blessed be the Name of Jesus.

Blessed be Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.

Blessed be His Most Loving Heart.

Blessed be the great Mother of God, Mary Most Holy.

Blessed be the Name of Mary, Virgin and Mother.

Blessed be her Holy and Immaculate Conception.

Blessed be God in His Angels and in His Saints.

An indulgence of *one year* is granted for each time: and *Plenary* to those who recite it for a month, on the day they make Holy Confession and Communion.

**Offered to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus before His Holy Image**

I, NN., to be grateful to You and to make reparation for my infidelities, I give You my heart and consecrate myself entirely to You, my beloved Jesus, and with your help I resolve never to sin again.

Pope Pius VII granted one hundred days of indulgence once a day, reciting it with a contrite heart, and a plenary indulgence once a month to those who recite it every

day.

### **Prayer to the Most Sacred Heart of Mary**

God save you, Most August Queen of Peace, Mother of God; through the Most Sacred Heart of your Son Jesus, Prince of Peace, may His wrath be appeased and may He reign over us in peace. Remember, O Most Pious Virgin Mary, that it has never been heard in the world that anyone who implores your favours has been rejected or abandoned by you. Encouraged by this confidence, I present myself to you: do not despise my prayers, O Mother of the Eternal Word, but hear them favourably and grant them, O Clement, O Pious, O Sweet Virgin Mary.

Pius IX granted an indulgence of 300 days each time this prayer is recited devoutly, and a plenary indulgence once a month to those who recite it every day.

O Jesus, burning with love,  
I never wanted to offend You;  
O my sweet and good Jesus,  
I never want to offend You again.

Sacred Heart of Mary,  
Save my soul.  
Sacred Heart of my Jesus,  
Make me love you more and more.

To you I give my heart,  
Mother of my Jesus – Mother of love.

*(Source: 'Il Giovane Provveduto' (The Young Provided for') the practice of his duties in the exercises of Christian piety for the recitation of the Office of the b. Virgin of vespers all year round and the office of the dead with the addition of a choice of sacred lauds, per Priest John Bosco, 101a edition, Turin, 1885, Salesian Printing and Bookstore, S. Benigno Canavese – S. Per d'Arena – Lucca – Nizza Marittima – Marsiglia – Montevideo – Buenos-Aires', pp.*

*Photo: Gilded bronze statue of the Sacred Heart on the bell tower of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Rome, a gift from former Salesian students of Argentina. Erected in 1931, it was crafted in Milan by Riccardo Politi based on a design by sculptor Enrico Cattaneo of Turin.*

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## **Don Bosco attends a devils meeting (1884)**

*The following pages take us into the heart of Saint John Bosco's mystical experience, through two vivid dreams he had between September and December 1884. In the first, the Saint crosses the plain towards Castelnuovo with a mysterious person and reflects on the scarcity of priests, warning that only tireless work, humility, and morality can make authentic vocations flourish. In the second dream cycle, Bosco witnesses an infernal council: monstrous demons plot to annihilate the nascent Salesian Congregation, spreading gluttony, greed for riches, freedom without obedience, and intellectual pride. Amidst omens of death, internal threats, and signs of Providence, these dreams become a dramatic mirror of the spiritual struggles that await every educator and the entire Church, offering both severe warnings and bright hopes.*

Two dreams he had in September and December provide a precious teaching. The first, which he had the night of September 29th, was a lesson to priests. He had found himself walking through a plain on his way to Castelnuovo. An old priest, whose name he did not recall, was

walking beside him. Their conversation was about priests. "Work, work, work" they both said. "That should be the purpose and the glory of a priest! Never grow weary of working. How many souls might thereby be saved! How much one could accomplish for the glory of God! If only the missionary were truly a missionary, the pastor a pastor. How many miracles of holiness would be shown forth everywhere! But unfortunately, many are work-shy and prefer their own comforts."

As they were talking on this subject, they came to a place known as Filippelli. Here, Don Bosco deplored the current scarcity of priests.

"It is true that priests are few," the other said, "but if all priests would only act as priests, there would be enough of them. Yet how many priests there are who do nothing for the ministry, whereas if they were to be active in their ministry, if they would pass their examinations as confessors, they would fill an immense void within the church. God gives us vocations in keeping with our needs. When clerics were subjected to military draft, everyone was scared, as if no one would ever become a priest.

But when these fantastic ideas subsided, we saw that instead of diminishing, the number of vocations were increasing."

"What can be done now to increase the number of vocations among boys?" Don Bosco asked.

"Nothing more than to safeguard their morality jealously," his companion said. "Morals represent the nursery garden of vocations."

*"Presbyter discat domum regere et sanctificare.* No greediness, no excessive preoccupation with temporal things. Let a priest first become a model in his own home, and then he will be the first model outside of it."

At a certain moment as they were walking, the other priest asked Don Bosco where he was going. Don Bosco pointed toward Castelnovo.

Then, he let the other priest go ahead of him, lingering behind with a group of people who walked on ahead. After walking only a few steps, Don Bosco woke up. In the dream, we



see a recollection of his former walks in that area.

### **Predicting the death of Salesians**

The second dream concerned the Congregation, and forewarned against threats that might undermine its existence. More than a dream, this was a theme that recurred in a series of dreams.

The night of December 1st, the cleric Viglietti was abruptly awakened by piercing screams coming from Don Bosco's room. He leapt out of bed immediately and listened.

In a voice choked by sobs, Don Bosco was calling, "Ah! Oh, help! Help!"

Viglietti entered his room at once and asked, "Are you sick, Don Bosco?"

"Oh, Viglietti!" he said as he woke up. "No I am not sick, but I was unable to breathe, you know. That is enough, now. Go back to bed and sleep peacefully."

Next morning when Viglietti brought him his usual cup of coffee after Mass, Don Bosco confessed, "Oh, Viglietti, I cannot take it anymore. My whole chest is sore from having screamed so much last night. I have been dreaming now for four consecutive nights. These dreams force me to scream out and they tire me out. Four nights ago I saw a long line of Salesians walking one after the other, every one of them carrying a flagstaff with placards with a printed number on them. On one I saw 73, on another 30, 62 on a third, and so on. When many of them had gone by, the moon appeared in the sky, and as soon as a Salesian appeared you could have spotted a number, which was never higher than 12, and behind it there were many little black dots. All the Salesians that I saw went by and sat down beside an empty grave."

This is the explanation of his dream as it was given him: the number on the placards represented the number of years that each of them was to live; the appearance of the moon in different shapes and phases indicated the last month of their existence; the black dots represented the days of the month in which they were to die. He kept on seeing more and more of

them, at times standing in groups; these were Salesians who were to die all together, on the same day. He said that if he were to mention all the accessory details and circumstances minutely, it would take him at least ten full days.

### **He witnesses a devils council**

"I dreamed again three nights ago," he continued. "I will tell you about it in brief. I thought I was in a big hall where many great devils were gathered as though for a convention. They were discussing how they could destroy the Salesian Congregation. They looked like lions, tigers, serpents and other animals, though their appearance was somewhat muddled, looking somewhat like human beings. They also looked like shadows, now higher, now lower; now smaller and now taller – just like bodies would look behind a lamp if one were to move it this way or that way. Now lowered to ground level and then raised up again. The whole fantastic vision was terrifying.

"One of the devils stepped forward to open the session. He proposed one way by which the pious Society might be destroyed: gluttony. He expounded on the consequences of this vice: sluggishness in doing good, corruption of morals, scandal, no spirit of sacrifice, and no concern for the boys.

"But another devil responded, 'Your suggestion is neither general nor effective, nor can all members of the Society be undermined by it collectively, for the dining table of religious is always frugal, the wine measured, their regular meals are set by their rules, their superiors are alert so as to prevent disorder. Instead of causing scandal, anyone who was to eat or drink to excess would sooner arouse disgust. No, this is not a weapon to use against the Salesians. I will find some other way that is more effective, and more likely to help us in our intent: love of riches. When the love of riches enters a religious Congregation, the love for comforts will also enter with it and the members will attempt everything to secure money (peculium) for themselves, the bond of love will be shattered. Since everyone will think only about his own

needs, the poor will be neglected in order to dedicate themselves only to those who have means, and there will be stealing from the Congregation.'

"This devil would have continued speaking, but a third stood up and said, 'Gluttony? Get lost! Riches? Get lost! The love of riches will affect only a few among the Salesians! The Salesians are all poor; they have but a few opportunities of making money for themselves. On the whole, their structure is so designed, their needs so immense with all the boys and the houses they have, that no matter how big any sum of money may be, it will soon be used up. It is impossible that they hoard anything. But I do have one infallible means by which we can conquer the Salesian Society for ourselves, and this is freedom. So let us teach the Salesians to disregard their rules, refuse certain assignments because they are burdensome and less glamorous, create division from their superiors by proposing conflicting opinions, and go home on the pretext they have been invited, and so on.'

"While the devils were discussing among themselves, Don Bosco was thinking I am all ears to hear what you are saying. I want to know. Go ahead – talk! By all means, talk because this will enable me to upset your conspiracy.

"Just then a fourth devil leapt to his feet, shouting, 'Rubbish! You are only proposing broken weapons! The superiors will know how to check such a freedom, and will expel from their houses anyone who ventures to rebel against the rules. Maybe a few will be led astray by their craving for freedom, but the vast majority will remain steadfast in their duty. Now I have a weapon that will surely undermine the whole Congregation down to its foundations. It is a weapon against which the Salesians will hardly be able to defend themselves. It will carry the rot to their very roots. Now listen to me carefully – convince them that their main glory should consist in their learning! This means inducing them to study for the sake of study, learning for the sake of attaining fame and not for the sake of practicing what they preach and not for using their learning for the benefit of their neighbor. They will

become arrogant in their attitude toward the poor, ignorant and lazy as far as their sacred ministry. No more Festive Oratories, no more catechism classes for the boys, no more humble classrooms where they could teach poor, abandoned boys, no more long hours in the confessional. They will hold onto only preaching, but only occasionally, in a form well measured and sterile because it will only be an outlet for their own vanity, aimed at being praised by their listeners, not at saving souls.'

"This devil's suggestion was hailed by applause. Don Bosco foresaw the day when the Salesians might really be led to believe that the interests of the Congregation and its honor lay solely in learning, and he grew afraid that not only would they act accordingly, but they would also preach that such a belief should be shared far and wide.

"Don Bosco was again standing in a corner of the room, watching everything and listening to all that was said. One of the devils discovered him, and shouted, pointing him out to the others. At his scream, all the devils rushed at him and yelled, 'We will put an end to this!'

"A whirl of infernal ghosts pushed and seized him by his arms, and at this point, he began to yell, 'Let me go! Help!'

"At last he woke up, his chest all sore from so much screaming."

### **Lions, tigers and monsters dressed as lambs**

The following evening, he saw that the devil had begun working on the Salesians in their most essential core, urging them to neglect their rules. He was able to see them all distinctly, some were keeping the rules and others were breaking them.

The last night, the dream became more fearful than ever. Don Bosco saw a big flock of sheep and lambs representing so many Salesians. He approached them, trying to caress the lambs, but as he drew nearer, he saw that their wool was not real. It was not a lamb's wool, for hidden under it there were lions, tigers, pigs, panthers, and bears. Every one of them had a

hideous, ferocious monster at their sides.

Some were standing in a huddle talking in the midst of the flock. Unnoticed, Don Bosco approached the group to hear what they were saying. They were discussing what to do in order to destroy the Salesian Congregation.

One was saying, "We must cut the Salesians' throats."

Another chuckled and said, "We should strangle them."

But just then, someone saw that Don Bosco was standing by listening. This demon sounded the alarm and they all shrieked together that they should start by killing Don Bosco. At that, they all rushed at him to choke him. It was then that he uttered the terrible cry that had awakened Viglietti.

Don Bosco had a heavy heart, not only because of the diabolical violence with which he had been attacked, but also because he had seen a great banner floating over the heads of the flock, and on it was written "*BESTIIS COMPARATI SUNT*" [They are like beasts]. As he said this, he bowed his head and wept.

Viglietti took his hand and pressed it against his own heart. He said, "Ah, Don Bosco! With the help of God, all of us will always be faithful, devoted sons, will we not?"

"Dear Viglietti, be good and get ready to see what is going to happen. I have barely outlined these dreams to you. It would have taken me much longer were I to have told you everything in detail. How many things did I see! Some of the confreres of our houses will not live to see another Christmas Novena.

"Oh, if I could only talk to the boys. If I only had the strength to be among them, if I could only make a tour of all our houses, do all that I used to do, revealing the secrets of individual consciences to everyone as I saw them in the dream. If I could only say to some, 'Break the ice, make a good confession for once!' They would answer, 'But I do make a good confession!' Then I could reply by telling them all that they concealed, and that would stop them from opening their lips again. If I could only say a word to some of our Salesians, as well, to show them how much they need to put their own conscience in order by repeating their confessions.

I saw how some kept their rules and others didn't. I saw many youths who would go to San Benigno and become Salesians, but then leave us again.

Even some, who are now already Salesians, will defect. There will be those who will seek only knowledge, the brand of knowledge that inflates the ego and craves praise. This will have them disregard the advice of those whom they consider less learned as they are."

These sorry thoughts were interwoven with providential consolations that filled Don Bosco's heart with joy.

The evening of December 3rd, the bishop of Para (that is the focal point of his dream about the missions) arrived at the Oratory. The following day, he said to Viglietti, "How mighty Divine Providence is! Listen and then tell me if God does not protect us. Father Paul Albera wrote to tell me that he could no longer go on, but needed one thousand francs immediately. That same day, a religious lady in Marseille, who was looking to see her brother in Paris, gave Father Paul Albera a thousand francs, delighted for having obtained from our Lady the grace of seeing him again. Father Joseph Ronchail is in a serious predicament, and has urgent need of four thousand francs. Today, a lady wrote to Don Bosco and told him that she is holding four thousand francs at his disposal. Father Francis Dalmazzo does not know where to turn for money. Today, a lady donated a substantial sum of money for the Church of the Sacred Heart."

Then on December 7th, he experienced a great joy for Bishop John Cagliero's consecration. All of these things were even more encouraging because they were manifest signs of God's hand over the work of His servant.

(BM XVII 352-358)

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# Don Bosco and the Sacred Heart. Protect, atone, love

*In 1886, on the eve of the consecration of the new Basilica of the Sacred Heart in the centre of Rome, the 'Salesian Bulletin' wanted to prepare its readers – co-workers, benefactors, young people, families – for a vital encounter with 'the pierced Heart that continues to love'. For a whole year, the magazine presented the Salesian world with a veritable 'rosary' of meditations: each issue linked an aspect of devotion to a pastoral, educational or social urgency that Don Bosco – already exhausted but still lucid – considered strategic for the future of the Church and Italian society. Almost 140 years later, that series remains a small treatise on the spirituality of the heart, written in simple but ardent tones, capable of combining contemplation and practice. Here we present a unified reading of that monthly journey, showing how Salesian intuition still speaks to us today.*

## **February – The guard of honour: in vigil over wounded Love**

The new liturgical year opens in the *Bulletin* with a surprising invitation: not only to adore Jesus, present in the tabernacle, but to 'keep watch over Him' – a freely chosen hour in which every Christian, without interrupting their daily activities, becomes a loving sentinel who consoles the Heart pierced by the indifference of the carnal. The idea, which originated in Paray-le-Monial and flourished in many dioceses, became an educational programme: to transform time into a space for reparation; to teach young people that fidelity comes from small, constant acts; to make the day a widespread liturgy. The related vow – to donate the proceeds from the *Manual of the Guard of Honour* to the construction of the Roman Basilica – reveals the Salesian logic: contemplation

that immediately translates into bricks and mortar, because true prayer (literally) builds the house of God.

### **March – Creative charity: the Salesian stamp**

In his great conference on 8 May 1884, Cardinal Parocchi summarised the Salesian mission in one word: 'charity'. The *Bulletin* takes up that discourse to remind us that the Church conquers the world more with gestures of love than with theoretical disputes. Don Bosco did not establish elite schools but simple hospices. He did not take children out of their environment just to protect them, but to return them to society as solid citizens. It is charity 'according to the needs of the century': a response to materialism not with controversy, but with works that show the power of the Gospel. Hence the urgency of a large sanctuary dedicated to the Heart of Jesus, to make an outstanding visible sign of the love that educates and transforms in the heart of Rome.

### **April – Eucharist: 'masterpiece of the Heart of Jesus'**

Nothing, for Don Bosco, is more urgent than bringing Christians back to frequent Communion. The *Bulletin* reminds us that 'there is no Catholicism without Our Lady and without the Eucharist'. The Eucharistic table is the 'genesis of Christian society': from there fraternity, justice, and purity are born. If faith languishes, the desire for the living Bread must be rekindled. It is no coincidence that St. Francis de Sales entrusted the Visitation Sisters with the mission of guarding the Eucharistic Heart. Devotion to the Sacred Heart is not an abstract sentiment, but a concrete path that leads to the tabernacle and from there pours out into the streets. And it is once again the Roman construction site that serves as a test. Every lira offered for the basilica becomes a 'spiritual brick' that consecrates Italy to the Heart that gives itself.

### **May – The Heart of Jesus shines in the Heart of Mary**

The Marian month leads the *Bulletin* to intertwine the two great devotions. There is a profound communion between the two Hearts, symbolised by the biblical image of the 'mirror'. The



Immaculate Heart of Mary reflects the light of the Divine Heart, making it bearable to human eyes. Those who dare not look at the Sun, look at its light reflected in the Mother. Latria for the Heart of Jesus, 'hyperdulia' for that of Mary: a distinction that avoids the misunderstandings of the Jansenist polemicists of yesterday and today. The *Bulletin* refutes the accusations of idolatry and invites the faithful to a balanced love, where contemplation and mission feed each other. Mary introduces us to her Son and her Son leads us to His Mother. In view of the consecration of the new temple, it asks that the two invocations that stand out on the hills of Rome and Turin be united: Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary Help of Christians.

### **June – Supernatural consolations: love at work in history**

Two hundred years after the first public consecration to the Sacred Heart (Paray-le-Monial, 1686), the *Bulletin* affirms that the devotion responds to the illness of the times: 'the cooling of charity due to an excess of iniquity'. The Heart of Jesus – Creator, Redeemer, Glorifier – is presented as the centre of all history: from creation to the Church; from the Eucharist to eschatology. Those who adore that Heart, enter into a dynamism that transforms culture and politics. This is why Pope Leo XIII asked everyone to contribute to the Roman shrine: a monument of reparation but also a 'bulwark' against the 'impure flood' of modern error. It is an appeal that sounds timely: without ardent charity, society falls apart.

### **July – Humility: the physiognomy of Christ and of Christians**

The summer meditation chooses the most neglected virtue: humility, 'a gem transplanted by the hand of God into the garden of the Church.' Don Bosco, spiritual son of St. Francis de Sales, knows that humility is the door to other virtues and the seal of every true apostolate. Those who serve young people without seeking visibility make present, 'Jesus' hidden life for thirty years.' The *Bulletin* unmask pride disguised as false modesty and invites us to cultivate a double

humility: of the intellect, which opens itself to mystery; and of the will, which obeys recognised truth. Devotion to the Sacred Heart is not sentimentality. It is a school of humble thinking and concrete action, capable of building social peace because it removes the poison of pride from the heart.

### **August – Meekness: the strength that disarms**

After humility comes meekness: a virtue that is not weakness but self-control, ‘the lion that produces honey’, says the text, referring to the enigma of Samson. The Heart of Jesus appears meek in welcoming sinners, firm in defending the temple. Readers are invited to imitate this twofold movement: gentleness towards people, firmness against error. St. Francis de Sales returns as a model. With a calm tone, he poured out rivers of charity in turbulent Geneva, converting more hearts than harsh polemics would have won over. In a century that ‘sins by being heartless,’ building the sanctuary of the Sacred Heart means erecting a training ground for social meekness—an evangelical response to the contempt and verbal violence that already poisoned public debate at that time.

### **September – Poverty and the social question: the Heart that reconciles rich and poor**

The rumblings of social conflict, warns the *Bulletin*, threaten to ‘smash the civil edifice to pieces.’ We are in the midst of the ‘labour question’. Socialists are stirring up the masses, capital is concentrated. Don Bosco does not deny the legitimacy of honest wealth, but he reminds us that true revolution begins in the heart. The Heart of Jesus proclaimed the poor blessed and He experienced poverty firsthand. The remedy lies in evangelical solidarity nourished by prayer and generosity. Until the Roman Basilica is completed, writes the newspaper, the visible sign of reconciliation will be missing. In the following decades, the social doctrine of the Church will develop these insights, but the seed is already here. Charity is not almsgiving; it is justice that comes from a transformed heart.

### **October – Childhood: sacrament of hope**

‘Woe to those who scandalise one of these little ones.’ On the lips of Jesus, the invitation becomes a warning. The *Bulletin* recalls the horrors of the pagan world against children and shows how Christianity changed history by entrusting a central place to children. For Don Bosco, education is a religious act; the treasure of the future Church is preserved in schools and oratories. Jesus’ blessing of the children, reproduced on the front pages of the newspaper, is a manifestation of the Heart that “closes itself like a father’s” and announces the Salesian vocation: to make youth a “sacrament” that makes God present in the city. Schools, colleges, and workshops are not optional: they are the concrete way of honouring the Heart of Jesus alive in young people.

### **November – Triumphs of the Church: humility conquers death**

The liturgy commemorates the saints and the dead. The *Bulletin* meditates on the ‘gentle triumph’ of Jesus entering Jerusalem. The image becomes the key to understanding Church history. Successes and persecutions alternate, but the Church, like the Master, always rises again. Readers are invited not to let themselves be paralysed by pessimism. The shadows of the moment (anticlerical laws, reduction of orders, Masonic propaganda) do not cancel out the dynamism of the Gospel. The Basilica of the Sacred Heart, built amid hostility and poverty, will be the tangible sign that, ‘the stone with the seals has been turned over’. Collaborating in its construction means betting on God’s future.

### **December – Beatitude of sorrow: the Cross welcomed by the heart**

The year ends with the most paradoxical of the beatitudes: ‘Blessed are those who mourn’. Pain, scandalous to pagan reason, becomes in the Heart of Jesus a path to redemption and fruitfulness. The *Bulletin* sees in this logic, the key to understanding the contemporary crisis. Societies based on

entertainment at all costs produce injustice and despair. Accepted in union with Christ, however, pain transforms hearts, strengthens character, stimulates solidarity, and frees us from fear. Even the stones of the sanctuary are 'tears transformed into hope'; small offerings, sometimes the fruit of hidden sacrifices, which will build a place from which, the newspaper promises, 'torrents of chaste delights will rain down.

### **A prophetic legacy**

In the monthly montage of the *Salesian Bulletin* of 1886, the pedagogy of crescendo is striking. It starts with the little hour of watch and ends with the consecration of pain; from the individual faithful to the national building site; from the turreted tabernacle of the oratory to the ramparts of the Esquiline Hill. It is a journey that intertwines three main axes:

*Contemplation* – The Heart of Jesus is first and foremost a mystery to be adored: vigil, Eucharist, reparation.

*Formation* – Every virtue (humility, meekness, poverty) is proposed as a social medicine, capable of healing collective wounds.

*Construction* – Spirituality becomes architecture: the basilica is not an ornament, but a laboratory of Christian citizenship. Without forcing it, we can recognise here the pre-announcement of themes that the Church would develop throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the apostolate of the laity, social doctrine, the centrality of the Eucharist in the mission, the protection of minors, and the pastoral care of those who suffer. Don Bosco and his collaborators recognised the signs of the times and responded with the language of the heart.

On 14 May 1887, when Leo XIII consecrated the Basilica of the Sacred Heart through his vicar Cardinal Lucido Maria Parocchi, Don Bosco—too weak to ascend the altar—watched hidden among the faithful. At that moment, all the words of the 1886 *Bulletin* became living stone: the guard of honour,

educative charity, the Eucharist as the centre of the world, the tenderness of Mary, reconciling poverty, the blessedness of suffering. Today, those pages call for new breath. It is up to us, consecrated or lay, young or old, to continue the vigil, to build sites of hope, to learn the geography of the heart. The programme remains the same, simple and bold: **to guard, to atone, to love.**

*In the photo: Painting of the Sacred Heart, located on the main altar of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Rome. The work was commissioned by Don Bosco and entrusted to the painter Francesco de Rohden (Rome, 15 February 1817 – 28 December 1903).*