

Monsignor Giuseppe Malandrino and the Servant of God Nino Baglieri

Monsignor Giuseppe Malandrino, the ninth Bishop of the Noto diocese, returned to the House of the Father on 3 August 2025, the day on which the feast of the Patron Saint of the Diocese of Noto, Mary Ladder of Paradise, is celebrated. 94 years of age, 70 years of priesthood and 45 years of episcopal consecration are respectable numbers for a man who served the Church as a Shepherd with “the smell of the sheep” as Pope Francis often emphasised.

Lightning rod of humanity

During his experience as pastor of the Diocese of Noto (1906.1998 – 1507.2007), he had the opportunity to cultivate his friendship with the Servant of God Nino Baglieri. He almost never missed a “stop” at Nino’s house when pastoral reasons took him to Modica. In one of his testimonies, Monsignor Malandrino says: “...finding myself at Nino’s bedside, I had the vivid perception that this beloved sick brother of ours was truly a “lightning rod of humanity”, according to a concept of sufferers so dear to me and which I also wanted to propose in the Pastoral Letter on the permanent mission *You will be my witnesses*” (2003). Monsignor Malandrino writes: “It is necessary to recognise in the sick and suffering, the face of the suffering Christ and to assist them with the same care and with the same love of Jesus in His passion, lived in a spirit of obedience to the Father and in solidarity with his brothers”. This was fully embodied by Nino’s dearest mother, Mrs. Peppina. She, a typical Sicilian woman, with a strong character and great determination. She replies to the doctor who proposes euthanasia for her son (given his serious health conditions and the prospect of a life as a paralytic), “if the Lord wants him, he will take him, but if he leaves him to me

like this, I am happy to look after him for life.” Was Nino’s mother aware of what she was going to face at that moment? Was Mary, the mother of Jesus, aware of how much pain she would have to suffer for the Son of God? The answer, when read with human eyes, does not seem easy, especially in our 21st century society where everything is unstable, fluctuating, consumed in an “instant”. Mamma Peppina’s Fiat became, like Mary’s, a Yes of Faith and adherence to that will of God which finds fulfilment in knowing how to carry the Cross, in knowing how to give “soul and body” to the realisation of God’s Plan.

From suffering to joy

The friendship between Nino and Monsignor Malandrino was already underway when the latter was still bishop of Acireale. In fact, as early as 1993, through Father Attilio Balbinot, a Camillian very close to Nino, he presented him with his first book, “From suffering to joy”. In Nino’s experience, the relationship with the Bishop of his diocese was one of total filiation. From the moment he accepted God’s Plan for him, he made his “active” presence felt by offering his sufferings for the Church, the Pope, and the Bishops (as well as priests and missionaries). This relationship of filiation was renewed annually on 6 May, the day of his fall, later seen as the mysterious beginning of a rebirth. On 8 May 2004, a few days after Nino celebrated the 36th anniversary of the Cross, Monsignor Malandrino went to his house. In memory of that meeting, he writes in his memoirs, “it is always a great joy every time I see him and I receive so much energy and strength to carry my Cross and offer it with so much Love for the needs of the Holy Church and in particular for my Bishop and for our Diocese. May the Lord always give him more holiness to guide us for many years always with more ardour and love...”. Again: “... the Cross is heavy but the Lord gives me so many Graces that make suffering less bitter and it becomes light and sweet; the Cross becomes a Gift, offered to the Lord with so much Love for the salvation of souls and the Conversion of

Sinners...". Finally, it should be emphasised how, on these occasions of grace, the pressing and constant request for "help to become a Saint with the daily Cross" was never lacking. Nino, in fact, absolutely wanted to become a saint.

An anticipated beatification

Moments of great significance in this sense were the funeral of the Servant of God on 3 March 2007, when Monsignor Malandrino himself, at the beginning of the Eucharistic Celebration, devoutly bent down, albeit with difficulty, to kiss the coffin containing Nino's mortal remains. It was an homage to a man who had lived 39 years of his existence in a body that "did not feel" but which radiated joy of life in every way. Monsignor Malandrino emphasised that the celebration of the Mass, in the Salesian courtyard which had become an open-air "cathedral" for the occasion, had been an authentic apotheosis (thousands of people participated in tears) and it was clearly and communally perceived that they were not in front of a funeral, but a true "beatification". Nino, with his testimony of life, had in fact become a point of reference for many, young and old, lay people and consecrated persons, mothers and fathers of families, who, thanks to his precious testimony, were able to read their own existence and find answers that they could not find elsewhere. Monsignor Malandrino also repeatedly emphasised this aspect: "in fact, every encounter with the dearest Nino was for me, as for everyone, a strong and vivid experience of edification and a powerful – in its sweetness – spur to patient and generous giving. The presence of the Bishop gave him immense joy every time because, in addition to the affection of the friend who came to visit him, he perceived the ecclesial communion. It is obvious that what I received from him was always much more than the little I could give him." Nino's fixed "obsession" was to "become a saint"; having fully lived and embodied the Gospel of Joy in Suffering, with his physical ailments and his total gift for the beloved Church, ensured that everything did not end with his departure to the Heavenly Jerusalem, but

continued, as Monsignor Malandrino emphasised at the funeral. “... Nino’s mission now also continues through his writings as he himself had announced it in his spiritual Testament.” “... my writings will continue my testimony. I will continue to give Joy to everyone and to speak of the Great Love of God and the Wonders he has done in my life.” This is still coming true because “a city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house” (Matthew 5:14-16). Metaphorically, it is intended to emphasise that “light” (understood in a broad sense) must be visible, sooner or later; what is important will come to light and will be recognised.

To revisit these days – marked by the death of Monsignor Malandrino, by his funerals in Acireale (5 August, Our Lady of the Snow) and in Noto (7 August) with subsequent burial in the cathedral which he himself strongly wanted to be renovated after the collapse of 13 March 1996 and which was reopened in March 2007 (the month in which Nino Baglieri died) – means retracing this bond between two great figures of the Netine Church, strongly intertwined and both capable of leaving an indelible mark on it.

Roberto Chiaramonte

Apparition of the Blessed Virgin on the Mountain of La Salette

Don Bosco presents a detailed account of the “Apparition of the Blessed Virgin on the mountain of La Salette,” which

occurred on 19 September 1846, based on official documents and the testimonies of the visionaries. He reconstructs the historical and geographical context – two young shepherds, Maximin and Mélanie, in the heights of the Alps – the miraculous encounter with the Virgin, her warning message against sin, and the promise of graces and providences, as well as the supernatural signs that accompanied these demonstrations. He recounts the spread of the devotion, its spiritual influence on the inhabitants and the whole world, and the secret revealed only to Pius IX to strengthen the faith of Christians and testify to the perpetual presence of miracles in the Church.

Author's Protest

In obedience to the decrees of Urban VIII, I protest that regarding what is said in this book about miracles, revelations, or other events, I do not intend to attribute any authority other than human; and in bestowing the title of Saint or Blessed upon anyone, I do so only according to opinion, excepting those things and persons already approved by the Holy Apostolic See.

To the Reader

A certain and marvellous fact, attested by thousands of people and which all may still verify today, is the apparition of the Blessed Virgin, which occurred on 19 September 1846. (On this extraordinary event, many pamphlets and several newspapers printed at the time may be consulted, notably: "Account of the Apparition of Mary Most Holy," Turin, 1847; "Official Decree on the Apparition," etc., 1848; the booklet printed under the care of Fr. Giuseppe Gonfalonieri, Novara, Enrico Grotti.)

Our merciful Mother appeared in the form and figure of a great Lady to two shepherds – a boy of 11 years and a peasant girl of 15 – on a mountain in the Alps situated in the parish of La Salette in France. She appeared not only for the good of France, as the Bishop of Grenoble states, but for the good of

the whole world, to warn us of the great wrath of her Divine Son, kindled especially by three sins: **blasphemy, the profanation of Sundays, and eating meat on forbidden days.**

Other miraculous events follow, gathered from public documents or attested by persons whose faith excludes all doubt about what they report.

May these facts confirm the good in religion and refute those who, perhaps out of ignorance, would limit the power and mercy of the Lord by saying: "It is no longer the time of miracles." Jesus said that greater miracles would be performed in His Church than those He Himself worked, and He set neither time nor number. Therefore, as long as the Church exists, we shall always see the hand of the Lord manifesting His power through wondrous events, because yesterday, today, and always, Christ will be the one who governs and assists His Church until the end of time.

But these visible signs of Divine Omnipotence are always harbingers of grave events that reveal the mercy and goodness of the Lord or His justice and indignation, yet in such a way as to bring greater glory to Him and greater benefit to souls. Let us ensure they are for us a source of graces and blessings, an encouragement to a living faith, active faith, faith that moves us to do good and flee evil, making us worthy of His infinite mercy in time and eternity.

Apparition of the Blessed Virgin on the Mountains of La Salette

Maximin, son of Pierre Giraud, a carpenter from the village of Corps, was an 11-year-old boy. Françoise Mélanie, daughter of poor parents, also from Corps, was a 15-year-old girl. There was nothing remarkable about them: both were ignorant and rough, both tending cattle in the mountains. Maximin knew only the Our Father and Hail Mary; Mélanie knew little more, so much so that, due to her ignorance, she had not yet been admitted to Holy Communion.

Sent by their parents to tend cattle in the pastures, it was purely by chance that on 18 September, the eve of the great

event, they met on the mountain while watering their cows at a spring.

That evening, returning home with the cattle, Mélanie said to Maximin: "Who will be the first to reach the mountain tomorrow?" And the next day, 19 September, a Saturday, they ascended together, each leading four cows and a goat. The day was fine and clear, the sun bright. Around noon, hearing the *Angelus* bell, they made a short prayer with the sign of the Cross; then they took their provisions and ate by a small spring to the left of a stream. After eating, they crossed the stream, left their bags by a dry fountain, descended a little further, and fell asleep some distance apart, which was not usual for them.

Now let us hear the account from the shepherds themselves, as they gave it that evening to the owners and later thousands of times to thousands of people.

"We had fallen asleep..." recounts Mélanie. "I woke first and, not seeing my cows, woke Maximin, saying, 'Come, let's find our cows.' We crossed the stream, climbed a little, and saw them lying on the opposite side. They were not far. Then I went back down, and five or six steps before reaching the stream, I saw a brightness like the sun but more brilliant, though not the same colour, and said to Maximin, 'Come, come quickly and see this light below.' (It was between two and three in the afternoon.)

Maximin came down at once, asking: 'Where is this light?' I pointed to the small spring with my finger, and he stopped when he saw it. Then we saw a Lady in the midst of the light; she was seated on a pile of stones, her face in her hands. In fear, I dropped my stick. Maximin said: 'Hold your stick; if she does anything to us, I'll give her a good beating.'

Then the Lady rose, crossed her arms, and said, 'Come near, my children. Do not be afraid; I am here to give you great news.' We crossed the stream, and she advanced to where we had slept. She stood between us, weeping all the while she spoke (I saw her tears clearly). 'If my people will not submit, I am forced

to let go of the hand of my Son. It is so strong, so heavy, I can no longer restrain it.'

'How long I have suffered for you! If I wish my Son not to abandon you, I must pray to Him unceasingly; yet you take no heed. However much you pray or do, you can never repay the care I have taken for you.'

'I gave you six days to work; I reserved the seventh, and you will not grant it to me. This is what makes my Son's hand so heavy.'

'If the potatoes spoil, it is all your fault. I showed you last year (1845), yet you paid no heed, and finding spoiled potatoes, you blasphemed, mingling my Son's name with it.'

'They will continue to spoil, and by Christmas this year (1846), you will have none left.'

'If you have wheat, do not sow it; what you sow will be eaten by worms, and what grows will turn to dust when you thresh it.'

'A great famine will come.' (Indeed, a great famine occurred in France, with crowds of starving beggars flocking to cities by the thousands. While grain prices rose in Italy in early 1847, France suffered severe hunger throughout the winter of 1846–47. But the true scarcity of food, the real famine, was felt during the disasters of the 1870–71 war. In Paris, a grand personage hosted a lavish meal of meat on Good Friday. Months later, even the wealthiest citizens were reduced to eating vile food and the flesh of unclean animals. Many died of hunger.)

'Before the famine, children under seven will tremble and die in the arms of those holding them. Others will do penance for the famine.'

'The walnuts will spoil, and the grapes will rot...' (In 1849, walnuts spoiled everywhere, and grapes were ruined for over twenty years across Europe due to cryptogamic disease from 1849 to 1869.)

'If they convert, stones and rocks will turn into heaps of grain, and potatoes will spring from the earth.'

Then she said:

'Do you say your prayers well, my children?'

We both replied: 'Not very well, Lady.'

'Ah, my children, you must say them well morning and evening. When you have no time, say at least an Our Father and Hail Mary; when you have time, say more.'

'Only a few old women go to Mass; the others work all summer on Sundays. In winter, the young, when idle, go to Mass only to mock religion. In Lent, they go to the butchers like dogs.'

Then she asked: 'Have you seen spoiled wheat, my boy?'

Maximin answered: 'Oh no, Lady.' Unsure whom she addressed, I whispered,

'No, Lady, I have not seen any yet.'

'You must have seen some, my boy' (turning to Maximin). 'Once near the Coin area with your father. The field's owner told your father to see his spoiled wheat; you both went. You took some ears in your hands, and rubbing them, they turned to dust, and you returned. Half an hour from Corps, your father gave you bread, saying: 'Take, my son, eat bread this year; I know not who will eat it next if the wheat keeps spoiling.'

Maximin replied: 'Oh yes, Lady, now I remember; I had forgotten.'

Then the Lady said: 'Well, my children, you will make this known to all my people.'

She crossed the stream and, without turning, repeated: 'Well, my children, you will make this known to all my people.'

She then climbed about fifteen steps to where we had gone to find our cows, walking on the grass without touching it, her feet barely grazing the tips. We followed; I passed before her, Maximin slightly on the side. The beautiful Lady rose (Mélanie gestured, raising her hand a metre or more), hovering momentarily. She looked to Heaven, then earth; then we saw her no more—no head, arms, or feet—as if melting away, leaving only a light in the air, which then vanished.

I said to Maximin: 'Perhaps she is a great saint?' He replied:

‘Had we known, we’d have asked her to take us.’ I said: ‘What if she were still here?’ Maximin reached for the light, but it was gone. We looked carefully but saw nothing.

I said: ‘She does not wish us to see where she goes.’ Then we returned to our cows.”

This is Mélanie’s account. Asked how the Lady was dressed, she replied,

“She wore white shoes with roses around them—of all colours; yellow stockings, a yellow apron, a white dress covered in pearls, a white neckerchief edged with roses, a high cap slightly tilted with a crown of roses. She had a chain with a crucifix: on the right, pincers; on the left, a hammer; at the cross’s end, another large chain hung, like the roses around her neckerchief. Her face was white, elongated; I could not look long, for she dazzled us.”

Questioned separately, Maximin gave the same account without variation in substance or form, which we refrain from repeating here.

Innumerable and crafty questions were put to them, especially for two years, under interrogations lasting 5, 6, or 7 hours, aiming to confuse or trap them in contradictions. Surely no accused was ever so rigorously examined by courts of justice regarding an alleged crime.

Secret of the two little shepherds

Immediately after the apparition, Maximin and Melanie, on their way home, questioned each other about why the great Lady, after saying “the grapes will rot,” had paused briefly before speaking and merely moved her lips without making audible what she was saying?

As they discussed this between themselves, Maximin said to Melanie: “She told me something, but forbade me to tell you.” They both realised they had each separately received a secret from the Lady, with the prohibition not to reveal it to others. Now consider, dear reader, whether children can keep silent.

It is incredible to recount how much was done and attempted to

extract this secret from them in any way possible. It is astonishing to read of the thousands upon thousands of attempts made for this purpose by hundreds upon hundreds of people over twenty years. Prayers, surprises, threats, insults, gifts, and seductions of every kind—all came to nothing; they remained impenetrable.

The Bishop of Grenoble, an octogenarian, felt it his duty to command the two privileged children to at least convey their secret to the Holy Father, Pius IX. At the name of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the two little shepherds promptly obeyed and resolved to reveal a secret that until then nothing had been able to wrest from them. They therefore wrote it themselves (from the day of the apparition onwards, they had been sent to school, each separately); then they folded and sealed their letter—all this in the presence of distinguished persons chosen by the bishop himself to serve as witnesses. The bishop then sent two priests to deliver this mysterious dispatch to Rome.

On 18 July 1851, they presented to His Holiness Pius IX three letters: one from Monsignor Bishop of Grenoble, accrediting these two envoys; the other two contained the secret of the two young children of La Salette. Each had written and sealed the letter containing their secret in the presence of witnesses who had attested to their authenticity on the envelope.

His Holiness opened the letters and began reading Maximin's. "There is truly," he said, "the candour and simplicity of a child." During this reading, a certain emotion manifested on the Holy Father's face; his lips tightened, his cheeks swelled. "It concerns," the Pope said to the two priests, "it concerns scourges with which France is threatened. She is not alone in guilt—Germany, Italy, all of Europe are guilty too, and deserve punishment. I greatly fear religious indifference and human respect."

Pilgrimage to La Salette

The fountain near which the Lady—that is, the

Virgin Mary—had rested was, as we said, dry; and according to all the shepherds and villagers of those parts, it only gave water after heavy rains and the melting of snow. Now this fountain, dry on the very day of the apparition, began to gush the following day, and from that time the water has flowed clear and uninterrupted.

That barren, rugged, deserted mountain, inhabited by shepherds for barely four months a year, has become the stage for an immense gathering of people. Entire populations flock from all sides to this privileged mountain. Weeping with tenderness and singing hymns, they bow their foreheads to this blessed ground where Mary's voice resounded. They are seen kissing reverently the spot sanctified by Mary's feet, and they descend filled with joy, trust, and gratitude.

Every day, an immense number of faithful devoutly visit the site of the miracle. On the first anniversary of the apparition (19 September 1847), over seventy thousand pilgrims of every age, sex, condition, and even nation covered the surface of that land...

But what makes the power of that voice from Heaven felt even more is the remarkable change in morals among the inhabitants of Corps, La Salette, the entire canton, and all the surrounding areas—and it spreads still further afield... They have ceased working on Sundays; they have abandoned blasphemy... They attend church, heed their pastors' voices, receive the sacraments, and fulfil the Easter duty with edification—until then generally neglected. I omit the many striking conversions and extraordinary graces in the spiritual order.

On the site of the apparition now stands a majestic church with extensive buildings, where travellers, after satisfying their devotion, can comfortably refresh themselves and even spend the night if they wish.

After the event of La Salette, Melanie was sent to school, making marvellous progress in knowledge and virtue. But she always felt so inflamed with devotion to the Blessed Virgin

Mary that she resolved to consecrate herself entirely to Her. She entered the Discalced Carmelites, among whom, according to the journal *Echo de Fourvière* (22 October 1870), she was called to Heaven by the Holy Virgin. Shortly before her death, she wrote the following letter to her mother.

11 September 1870.

Dearest and most beloved mother,

May Jesus be loved by all hearts. This letter is not only for you but for all the inhabitants of my dear village of Corps. A family father, most loving towards his children, seeing that they forgot their duties, despised the law imposed on them by God, and became ungrateful, resolved to punish them severely. The spouse of the Father of the family begged for mercy and at the same time went to the two youngest children of the Father—the weakest and most ignorant. The spouse, who cannot weep in her spouse's house (Heaven), finds abundant tears in the fields of these wretched children. She expresses her fears and threats if they do not turn back, if they do not observe the Master's law. A very small number embrace the reform of the heart and set themselves to observe the holy law of the Father; but alas! The majority remain in sin and sink deeper into it. Then the Father sends punishments to chastise them and draw them from this state of hardness. These wretched children think to escape punishment—they seize and break the rods that strike them instead of falling to their knees, begging for mercy, and above all promising to change their lives. Finally, the Father, further angered, takes up a stronger rod and strikes—and will strike—until He is acknowledged, until they humble themselves and beg mercy from Him who reigns on earth and in Heaven.

You understand me, dear mother and beloved inhabitants of Corps: this Father is God. We are all His children; neither you nor I have loved Him as we ought; we have not kept His commandments as we should, now God chastises us. A great

number of our soldier brothers die; families and entire cities are reduced to misery; and if we do not turn to God, it is not over. Paris is very guilty for rewarding a wicked man who wrote against the divinity of Jesus Christ. Men have but one time to sin; but God is eternal and punishes sinners. God is angered by the multitude of sins and because He is almost unknown and forgotten. Now who can stop the war that does so much harm in France and will soon recommence in Italy? etc., etc. Who can halt this scourge?

We must: 1) recognise that in this war there is solely the hand of God; 2) humble ourselves and ask with mind and heart forgiveness for our sins; sincerely promise to serve God with mind and heart and obey His commandments without human respect. Some pray, asking God for the triumph of us French. No—this is not what the good God wants. He wants the conversion of the French. The Blessed Virgin came to France, and France did not convert. She is thus more guilty than other nations; if she does not humble herself, she will be greatly humbled. Paris, this hearth of vanity and pride—who can save her if fervent prayers do not rise to the heart of the good Master?

I remember, dear mother and beloved inhabitants, my dear village—I remember those devout processions you made to the sacred mountain of La Salette so God's wrath would not strike your land! The Holy Virgin heard your fervent prayers, your penances, and all you did for love of God. I think and hope you must now do even more—beautiful processions for France's salvation; that is, for France to return to God, for God waits only for this to withdraw the rod with which He scourges His rebellious people. Let us pray much—yes, pray; hold your processions as you did in 1846 and '47: believe that God always hears the sincere prayers of humble hearts. Let us pray much, pray always. I never loved Napoleon, for I remember his whole life. May the divine Saviour forgive him all the evil he has done—and still does!

Let us remember we were created to love and serve God, and

that outside this there is no true happiness. Mothers must raise their children Christianly, for the time of tribulations is not over. If I revealed their number and nature, you would be horrified. But I do not wish to frighten you; trust in God, who loves us infinitely more than we can love Him. Let us pray, pray—and the good, divine, tender Virgin Mary will always be with us: prayer disarms God's wrath; prayer is the key to Heaven.

Let us pray for our poor soldiers, for so many grieving mothers who have lost their children; let us consecrate ourselves to our good Heavenly Mother; pray for the blind who do not see it is God's hand now striking France. Pray much and do penance. Hold fast to the Holy Church and our Holy Father, her visible head and the Vicar of Our Lord Jesus Christ on earth. In your processions and penances, pray much for him. Lastly, remain at peace, love one another as brothers, promising God to keep His commandments—and truly keep them. And by God's mercy, you will be happy and die a good and holy death, which I desire for all, placing you under the protection of the august Virgin Mary. I embrace you heartily (relatives). My health is in the Cross. The Heart of Jesus watches over me.

Maria of the Cross, *victim of Jesus*

First part of the publication, "Apparition of the Blessed Virgin on the Mountain of La Salette with Other Miraculous Events, Collected from Public Documents by the Priest John Bosco," Turin, Oratory of St. Francis de Sales Printing Press, 1871

Saint Monica, mother of Saint Augustine, witness of hope

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

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

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

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

Her origins in Tagaste

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

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

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

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

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

Monica's testimony shows how holiness is not necessarily

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

Monica as a mother

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

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

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

The question naturally arises, why did Monica not have

Augustine baptised immediately after birth?

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

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

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

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

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

A mother’s tenacity

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

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

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

Augustine's conversion

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

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

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

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

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

Ostia: ecstasy and death

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

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

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

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

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

Monica's spiritual profile

Augustine describes his mother with well-measured words:

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

And again:

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

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

From this Augustinian testimony, a surprisingly contemporary figure emerges.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

who pray for children far from faith.

A simple and extraordinary woman

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

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

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

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

The shepherdess, the sheep and lambs (1867)

In the following passage, Don Bosco, founder of the Valdocco Oratory, recounts a dream he had between 29 and 30 May 1867 to his young people, which he narrated on the evening of Holy Trinity Sunday. In a boundless plain, flocks and lambs become an allegory for the world and the boys: lush meadows or arid

deserts represent grace and sin; horns and wounds denounce scandal and dishonour; the number "3" foretells three famines – spiritual, moral, material – that threaten those who stray from God. From the account flows the saint's urgent appeal: to preserve innocence, to return to grace through penance, so that every young person can be clothed in the flowers of purity and partake in the joy promised by the good Shepherd.

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

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

"Whose flock is this?" I asked him.

He did not answer. I repeated my question.

"Is that any of your business?" he replied.

"That's no answer!" I countered.

"All right! They belong to their owner!"

"Thanks, but who is he?"

"Don't be so impatient. We'll come to that."

I then followed him for a close look at the flocks and the land. In places the meadows were luscious and dotted with shade trees. Here the sheep were healthy and gorgeous. In other places the plain was barren and forbidding, bristling with thorns and yellow thistles, and with not a blade of grass in sight. Here a large flock was grazing, but it looked miserable. I kept asking questions about the sheep, but my guide ignored them and simply told me, "You need not concern yourself with the sheep. I'll show you the flock you must shepherd."

"Who are you?"

"I am the owner. Follow me."

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

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

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

"Take a close look," he replied.

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

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

"I'll tell you! This great plain is the world. The lush meadows symbolize the Word of God and His grace. The parched and barren areas are the places where people don't listen to the Word of God and only aim at pleasing the world. The sheep are the adults; the lambs are the youngsters. For these God has sent Don Bosco. This area of the plain is the Oratory; the

lambs are your boys. The parched soil represents the state of sin; horns symbolize dishonor; the letter S stands for scandal. Scandal-giving is the cause of these boys' perdition. Those with broken horns once gave scandal but do not do so now. The figure 3 stands for their triple punishment—spiritual, moral and material famine: spiritual famine by the lack of spiritual aid they will seek in vain; moral famine by being deprived of God's Word; material famine by the lack of food. Having devoured all their pasture, the lambs have nothing left but dishonor and the three famines. This scene also shows the present pitiful state of so many boys in the world; at the Oratory, at least, even the unworthy have something to eat."

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

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

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

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

"Who are they?"

"Boys in the state of grace."

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

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

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

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

Yet that is not all. The sparkling flowers of the boys' crowns and dazzling garments were mirrored in the flowers and garments of their companions. Let me add that the brilliant countenance of each boy blended with those of his companions and, in reflection, increased its own intensity a hundredfold, so that those beautiful faces of innocence were clothed in

blinding light, each boy mirroring the loveliness of his companions in unspeakable splendor. We call this the "external" glory of the saints. There is no way to describe even faintly each boy's beauty in that ocean of light! I recognized some boys who are now here at the Oratory. Could they see but one-tenth of their present beauty, I am sure that they would endure fire and torture or the cruelest martyrdom rather than lose it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Could you but know how beautiful innocence is in a lad, you would undergo the most painful ordeal and death itself in order to safeguard that treasure. Though I was profoundly comforted by the number of those who had returned to the state of grace, I still wished that it might have been greater. I

was also very much surprised to see that some boys who here appear to be good wore long, thick horns.

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

There should be no further need of explaining, but I will repeat some things I have said. The great plain is the world, particularly the places and states of life from which you were called to come here. The area where the lambs grazed symbolizes the Oratory, and they are its past, present, and future pupils. The arid, the fertile, and the flowery meadows represent the state of sin, of grace, and of innocence. Horns stand for scandal; broken horns symbolize an end to scandal-giving. The figure 3 on every lamb stands for the three punishments that God will inflict upon those boys: famine of spiritual aid, famine of religious instruction and of God's Word, and famine of material food. The boys radiating light are those in the state of grace, particularly those still retaining their baptismal innocence. What glory awaits them!

Let us then, dear boys, bravely practice virtue. Those lads in the state of sin must do their utmost to start a new life and, with God's help, persevere till death. If we cannot all join the innocent ones around the Immaculate Lamb, let us at least follow along after them.

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

"What do you mean?" he insisted.

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

In the course of his explanation, Don Bosco also said that

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

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

The Tenth Hill (1864)

Don Bosco's dream of the "Tenth Hill", recounted in October 1864, is one of the most evocative passages in Salesian tradition. In it, the saint finds himself in a vast valley filled with young people: some already at the Oratory, others yet to be met. Guided by a mysterious voice, he must lead them over a steep embankment and then through ten hills, symbolising the Ten Commandments, towards a light that prefigures Paradise. The chariot of Innocence, the penitential ranks, and the celestial music paint an educational fresco: they show the effort of preserving purity, the value of repentance, and the irreplaceable role of educators. With this prophetic vision, Don Bosco anticipates the worldwide expansion of his work and the commitment to accompany every young person on the path to salvation.

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

Don Bosco seemed to be in a vast valley swarming with

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"So much the worse for them," he was told. "They too received the call but refused to follow you. They saw the road they had to travel. They had their chance."

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

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

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

"My dear boys," he exclaimed at this point of his narration, "I recognized those of you who stayed behind in the valley and those who turned back or fell from the wagon. I saw you all.

You can be sure that I will do my utmost to save you. Many of you whom I urged to go to confession did not accept my invitation. For heaven's sake, save your souls."

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

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

(It was in this village that the boy from Casale met Don Bosco and talked at length with him. Both of them remembered quite vividly the details of their conversation. The two dreams had been a singular coincidence.)

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

The march resumed. Now and then the boys asked to be allowed to stop and look at the novelties around them, but he kept urging them on. "We are neither hungry nor thirsty," he said.

"We have no need to stop. Let's keep going!"

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

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

When he came down from the stand, a pupil, Anthony Ferraris, approached him and told him within our hearing that, the night before, he had dreamed that he was with his mother and that when the latter had asked him whether he would be coming home next Easter, he had replied that by then he would be in paradise. He then whispered something else in Don Bosco's ear. Anthony Ferraris died on March 16, 1865.

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

The future is now past; facts have borne out our belief. The dream revealed Don Bosco's life-span. For comparative purposes, let us match this dream with that of The Wheel of Eternity, which we came to learn only years later. In that

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

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

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

"No," we insisted. "This dream portends far greater things."

Don Bosco smiled and nodded approval.

(1864, BM VII, 467-471)

Visiting Rome with Don Bosco. Chronicle of his first trip to Rome

The first time Don Bosco went to Rome was in 1858, from February 18 to April 16, accompanied by the twenty-one-year-

old cleric Michele Rua. Four years earlier, the Church had celebrated an extraordinary six-month Jubilee, called on the occasion of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception (December 8, 1854). Don Bosco seized the opportunity of this great spiritual feast to publish the volume "The Jubilee and Devotional Practices for Visiting Churches".

During what would be his first of twenty visits to the Eternal City, Don Bosco behaved like a true Jubilee pilgrim, fervently dedicating himself to the visits and devotions planned, even participating in the solemn Easter rites officiated by the Pope. It was an intense experience that he did not keep to himself but shared with his young people with the enthusiasm and educational passion that characterised him.

In giving a detailed description of his journey, the stages, and the sacred places, Don Bosco had a clear apostolic and educational intent: to make those who listened to or read him relive the same profound experience of faith, transmitting to them love for the Church and for the Christian tradition.

We now invite you, readers, to spiritually join Don Bosco, ideally retracing the paths of Christian Rome, to let yourselves be captivated by his zeal and enthusiasm and, together, renew your faith.

To Genoa by train

The departure for Rome was set for the 18th of February 1858. That night, almost a foot of snow fell on top of the two that already covered the ground. At half past eight, while it was still snowing, with the emotions of a father leaving his children, I said goodbye to the young people to begin my journey to Rome. Although we were somewhat in a hurry to arrive on time for the train, we lingered a bit longer to write up a will. I did not want to leave any pending matters at the Oratory in case Providence wanted to give us up to the fish of the Mediterranean [...] Then we hurried to the train station and, together with Fr. Mentasti [...], we left by train at ten in the morning.

An unpleasant incident occurred here: the carriages were almost full, so I had to leave Rua and Fr. Mentasti in one compartment and find a place in another [...]

The Jewish boy

I happened to be near a ten-year-old boy. Noticing his simple appearance and kind face, I started talking to him and [...] I realised he was Jewish. The father, who was sitting next to him, assured me that his son was in the fourth grade, but his education seemed to me to be second grade at the most. However, he was quick-witted. The father was pleased that I questioned him. Indeed, he invited me to have him talk about the Bible. So, I began to ask him about the creation of the world and man, about the Garden of Eden, about the fall of the ancestors. He answered quite well, but I was amazed when I realised that he had no idea of original sin and the promise of a Redeemer.

– *Isn't there the promise of God to Adam when He cast him out of Paradise in your Bible?*

– *No, you tell me, he replied.*

– *Right away. God said to the serpent: since you have deceived the woman, you will be cursed among all animals, and One, who will be born of a woman, will crush your head.*

– *Who is this One being spoken of?*

– *He is the Saviour who would free mankind from the slavery of the devil.*

– *When will he come?*

– *He has already come, and He is the One we call... Here the father interrupted us, saying:*

– *We do not study these things because they do not concern our law.*

– *You would do well to study them, because they are in the books of Moses and the prophets whom you believe.*

– *Alright, said the other, I will think about it. Now ask him something about arithmetic.*

Seeing that he did not want me to talk to him about religion, we conversed about pleasant things, so that the father, the

son, and even the other travellers began to enjoy themselves and laugh heartily. At the Asti station, the boy had to get off, but he couldn't bring himself to leave me. He had tears in his eyes, held my hand, and, moved, could only say to me:

– *My name is Priest Leone of Moncalvo; remember me. When I come to Turin, I hope to be able to visit you.* The father, to ease the emotion, said that he had searched for the “**History of Italy**” [written by me] in Turin. Not having found it, he asked me to send him a copy. I promised to send the one printed especially for the youth, then I also got off to look for my companions to see if there was room in their compartment. I found Rua, whose jaws were tired from yawning, as he had been very bored from Turin to Asti, not knowing with whom to strike up a conversation: his travel companions spoke only of dances, theatre, and other trivial matters [...]

Towards Genoa

We arrived at the Apennines. They rose before us, very high and steep. Since the train was travelling at high speed, we had the impression we were going to crash against the rocks, until suddenly it became dark in the train. We had entered the tunnels. These are “holes” that, passing under the mountains, save several tens of miles [...] Without tunnels, it would be impossible to cross them, and since there are many mountains, there are several tunnels. One of them is as long as the distance between Turin and Moncalieri. Here the train remained in the dark for eight minutes: the time necessary to travel the stretch of the tunnel.

We were surprised to find that the snow decreased as we approached the Riviera of Genoa. However, what truly amazed us was when we saw the countryside without a trace of white, the greenish shores, the gardens full of colours, the blooming almond trees, and the peach trees with buds ready to open to the sun! Then, comparing Turin and Genoa, we said that in this season, Genoa is spring and Turin the harshest winter.

The two mountaineers

I forgot to mention two mountaineers who got into our compartment at the Busalla station. One was pale and sickly to the point of pity, while the other had a healthy and lively appearance, and although he was nearly seventy, he showed the vigour of a twenty-five-year-old. He wore short trousers and his gaiters were almost unbuttoned, so much so that he showed his bare legs up to the knee, whipped by the cold. He was in a shirt with just a sweater and a coarse cloth jacket thrown over his shoulders. After getting him to talk about various topics, I said to him:

– *Why don't you adjust these clothes to protect yourselves from the cold?* He replied:

– *You see, dear sir, we are mountaineers, and we are used to the wind, rain, snow, and ice. We hardly even notice the winter season. Our boys walk barefoot in the snow. In fact, they have fun without minding the cold.* From this, I understood that man lives by habits, and the body is capable of enduring either cold or heat depending on the circumstances, and those who want to shield themselves from every little discomfort, risk weakening their condition instead of strengthening it.

The Genoese stop

So, here is Genoa, here is the sea! Rua is restless to see it, stretching his neck. He notices a ship here, and there some boats, further down the lantern which is a very tall lighthouse. In the meantime, we arrive at the station and get off the train. Abbot Montebruno's brother-in-law was waiting for us with some young people, and as soon as we got on the ground, they welcomed us joyfully. Carrying our luggage, they took us to the work of the *Artigianelli*, which is a house similar to our Oratory. The conversation was brief since we were all very hungry. It was half-past three in the afternoon, and I had only had a cup of coffee. At the table, it seemed that nothing could satisfy us, yet by force of swallowing, the sack filled up.

Right after, we visited the house: schools, dormitories, workshops. It seemed to me like the Oratory of ten years ago. There were twenty boarders, while another twenty, although eating and working here, slept elsewhere. What was their food? For lunch, a good plate of soup, then... nothing else. For dinner, a small loaf that was eaten standing up, then off to bed!

At the end, we went out for a walk in the city which, to be honest, was not very attractive, although it had magnificent palaces and large shops. The streets were narrow, winding, and steep. But the most annoying thing was a bothersome wind that, blowing almost without interruption, took away the pleasure of admiring anything, even what was most beautiful [...]

In short, our expectations in Genoa were not met. As if that were not enough, the headwinds prevented the docking of the ship on which we were to embark, so, much to our disappointment, we had to wait until the next day [...] In the morning, I said Mass in the church of the Dominican Fathers at the altar of **Blessed Sebastiano Maggi**, a friar who lived about three hundred years ago. His body is a continued miracle, as it remains whole, flexible, and with a colour that makes you think he died just a few days ago [...] Then we went to validate, that is, sign our passports. The papal consul welcomed us very courteously [...] He also tried to get us a discount on the boat, but it was not possible.

To Civitavecchia by sea. Boarding

At six-thirty in the evening, before heading to the steamboat called Aventino, we said goodbye to several clergy, who had come from the *Artigianelli* to wish us a good trip. Even the boys, attracted by the noble words, but above all by some extra courses at that day's lunch, had also become our friends and seemed to feel sorry to see us leave. Several of them accompanied us to the sea, then, nimbly jumping onto a small boat, wanted to escort us to the steamboat. The wind was very strong: unaccustomed to traveling by sea, with every movement

of the boat, we feared capsizing and sinking, and our escorts laughed heartily. After twenty minutes, we finally arrived at the ship.

At first glance, it seemed to us like a palace surrounded by waves. We boarded, and after bringing our luggage to a rather spacious accommodation, we sat down to rest and think. Each of us felt particular sensations that we did not know how to express. Rua observed everything and everyone in silence. Then the first hitch occurred: having arrived at lunchtime, we did not go to eat right away. When we did request it, everything was finished. Rua had to have dinner with an apple, a small loaf, and a glass of Bordeaux wine, while I settled for a piece of bread and a bit of that excellent wine. It is worth noting that when traveling by ship, meals are included in the ticket, so whether you eat or not, you pay all the same.

Afterwards, we went up on deck to see what this "Aventino" was like. We learned that ships are named after the most famous places of the areas they head to. One is called Vatican, another Quirinal, another Aventino, like ours, to remember the famous seven hills of Rome. This ship of ours departs from Marseille, touches Genoa, Livorno, Civitavecchia, then continues to Naples, Messina, and Malta. On the way back, it repeats the same route back to Marseille. It is also called a *postal boat* because it carries letters, packages, etc. Regardless of whether the weather is good or bad, it departs anyway.

Seasickness

They had assigned us a bunk, which is a kind of shelf where passengers lie down on a mattress in each compartment. At ten o'clock, the anchors were raised, and the boat, propelled by steam and favourable winds, began to speed towards Livorno. When we were at sea, I was overcome by seasickness that tormented me for two days. This discomfort consists of frequent vomiting, and when there is nothing left to expel, the vomiting becomes more violent, so much so that the person

becomes so exhausted that they refuse any food. The only thing that can provide some relief is to lie down and, when the vomiting allows it, to stay with the body fully stretched out.

Livorno

The night of February 20 was bad. We were not in danger from the rough sea, but seasickness had prostrated me so much that I could not lie down or stand. I threw myself down from the bunk and went to see if Rua was dead or alive. However, he only suffered a bit of fatigue, nothing else. He immediately got up and made himself available to alleviate my discomfort during the crossing. When God willed, we arrived at the port of Livorno. By port, we mean a bay of the sea sheltered from the fury of the winds by natural barriers or man-made bastions. Here ships are safe from all danger. Here they unload their goods and load others for different destinations. Here they do their restocking. Passengers who wish can also go ashore for a stroll in the city as long as they return on time [...]

Although I wanted to go ashore to visit the city, say Mass, and greet some friends, I could not do so. In fact, I was forced to return to my bunk and stay there quietly, without food. A waiter named Charles looked at me with pity and every now and then came close to offer me his services. Seeing him so kind and courteous, I began to converse with him, and among other things, I asked him if he was not afraid of being ridiculed for assisting a priest under the gaze of so many people.

– *No*, he told me in French, *as you see, no one is amazed, on the contrary, everyone looks at you kindly, showing a desire to help you. Moreover, my mother taught me to have great respect for priests to earn the blessing of the Lord.* Charles then went to call a doctor: every ship has its doctor and the main remedies for any need. The doctor came, and his pleasant manners lifted my spirits somewhat.

– *Do you understand French?* He asked me. I replied:

– I understand all the languages of the world, even those that are not written, even the language of the deaf-mutes. I joked to wake myself from the drowsiness that had taken hold of me. He understood and began to laugh.

– *Peut être, perhaps!* he said while examining me. In the end, he announced that the seasickness had been associated by a fever and that a cup of tea would do me good. I thanked him and asked for his name.

– *My name, he said, is Jobert from Marseille, doctor of medicine and surgery.* Charles, attentive to the doctor's orders, quickly prepared a cup of tea for me, then shortly after another, then another again. And it did me good, so much so that I managed to fall asleep.

At five o'clock [in the afternoon], the boat raised its anchor. When we were back at sea, I had even more violent bouts of nausea, remaining agitated for about four hours, then given my exhaustion – I had nothing left in my stomach – and assisted by the rolling of the ship, I fell asleep and rested peacefully until we arrived in Civitavecchia.

Paying, paying, paying

The night's rest restored my strength. Although exhausted from the long fast, I got up and prepared my luggage. We were about to disembark when we were informed of a debt we did not know we had incurred. Coffee was not included with the meals but had to be paid separately, and we, who had taken four cups, paid an extra two francs, that is, fifty cents per cup.

Once out passports had been stamped, the captain handed us the disembarkation permit. This is when the theory of tips kicked in: one franc each for the boatmen, half a franc for the luggage (which we carried), half a franc for customs, half a franc for whoever invited us into a carriage, half for the porter who arranged the luggage, two francs for the visa on the passport, one and a half francs for the papal consul. As soon as we opened our mouths, we had to pay. With the addition that, since the name and value of the coins varied, we had to trust those who exchanged them for us [...] At customs, they

respected a package addressed to Cardinal Antonelli with the papal seal, in which we had placed the most important things [...]

After the procedures were completed, I went to the barber to shave off a ten-day beard. Everything went well, but in the shop, I could not take my eyes off two horns on a small table. They were about a meter long and adorned with shiny rings and ribbons. I thought they were destined for some special use, but they told me they were from a heifer, which we call ox, placed there only for decoration [...]

Towards Rome by carriage

Meanwhile, Don Mentasti was in a fury because he did not see us arrive, while the carriage was already waiting for us. We started to run to arrive on time. Once in the carriage, we set off for Rome. The distance to cover was 47 Italian miles, which corresponds to 36 Piedmontese miles, and the road was very beautiful. We had taken a seat in the coupe from where we could contemplate the green meadows and flowering hedges. A curiosity amused us quite a bit. We noticed that everything was in threes: the horses of our carriage were harnessed in threes. We encountered patrols of soldiers going in threes. Even some farmers walked in threes, as did some cows and donkeys grazing in threes. We laughed at these strange coincidences [...]

A pause for the horses

At Palo, the coachman granted the travellers an hour of freedom to have the time to refresh the horses. We used it to run to the nearby inn to satisfy our hunger. The affairs had almost made us forget to eat. Since noon on Friday, I had only had a cup of coffee with milk. We gathered around the sandwiches and ate, or rather, devoured everything. Upon seeing the waiter all exhausted and pale, I asked him what was wrong.

– *I have a fever that has been afflicting me for many months*, he replied. I then played the good doctor:

– *Leave it to me, I will prescribe a remedy that will chase the fever away forever. Just have faith in God and Saint Louis.* Taking a piece of paper with a pencil, I wrote my prescription, recommending him to take it to a pharmacist. He was beside himself with joy, and not knowing how to better show his gratitude, he kept kissing my hand, and he also wanted to kiss Rua's, who, out of modesty, did not allow him to.

The encounter with a papal police officer was also pleasant. He thought he knew me, and I believed I knew him, so we both greeted each other with great joy. When we realised the misunderstanding, the friendship and expressions of goodwill and respect continued. To please him, I had to allow him to pay for a cup of coffee, and I offered him a small glass of rum. Then, having asked me to leave him some memento, I gave him the medal of Saint Louis Gonzaga. The name of that good officer was Pedrocchi.

In the city of the popes

Back again in the carriage and moving faster due to desire rather than from the horses' legs, every moment it seemed to us that we were in Rome. As night fell, every time we spotted a bush or a plant in the distance, Rua would immediately exclaim:

– *There is the dome of St. Peter's.* However, to arrive we had to travel until ten-thirty in the evening, and being the middle of the night, we could no longer see any details. However, we got a certain thrill at the thought that we were entering the holy city. [...] Finally arriving at the stopping point, not having any knowledge of the place, we sought a guide, who for twelve *baiocchi*, accompanied us to De Maistre's house, on Via del Quirinale 49, at the Four Fountains. It was already eleven o'clock. We were kindly welcomed by the Count and Countess. The others were already in bed. After taking a bit of refreshment, we said goodnight and went to sleep.

Saint Carlino

The part of the Quirinal where we lived is called [Four Fountains](#) because four perennial fountains spring from four corners of four districts that meet here. In front of the house where we had taken residence there was the church of the Carmelites. Being all Spaniards, they belonged to the order called the *Redemption of Captives*. The church was built in 1640 and dedicated to [St. Carlino](#), but to distinguish it from others dedicated to the same saint, it was called St. Charles. Going to the sacristy, we showed the *Celebret* (the document to celebrate, *editor's note*) and thus we were able to say mass. [...] We spent the day almost entirely organising our papers, running errands, delivering letters [...]

The Pantheon

Taking advantage of an hour that remained before nightfall, we went to the [Pantheon](#), which is one of the oldest and most famous monuments in Rome. It was commissioned by Marcus Agrippa, the son-in-law of Caesar Augustus, twenty-five years before the common era (from the birth of Christ, *editor's note*). It is believed that this building was called Pantheon, which means *all the gods*, because it was in fact dedicated to all the deities. The façade is truly superb. Eight large columns support an elegant cornice. Just after it, there is a portico formed by sixteen columns made from a single block of granite, then the pronaos, or entrance, consisting of four fluted pillars, within which are niches that were once occupied by the statues of Augustus and Agrippa.

Inside, there is a high dome with an opening in the centre, through which light enters, but also wind, rain, and snow when it falls in this area. Here, the most precious marble serve as flooring or as decoration all around. The diameter is one hundred thirty-three feet, corresponding to eighteen *trabucchi* (approximately 55 metres). This temple served the worship of the gods until 608 AD, when Pope Boniface IV, so as to prevent the disorder that occurred during sacrifices, dedicated it to the worship of the true God, that is, to all the saints.

This church was subject to many events. When Boniface IV obtained this place from Emperor Phocas and dedicated it to the worship of God and the Madonna, he had twenty-eight carts of relics transported from various cemeteries, which he placed under the main altar. From then on, it began to be called *Santa Maria ad Martyres*. Among the things we greatly appreciated there was the visit to the tomb of the great Raphael [...] Now this church is also called the *Rotunda*, from the shape of its construction. In front, there is a square whose centre is occupied by a large marble fountain, topped by four dolphins from which water continuously springs.

Saint Peter in Chains

On February 23rd [...] we were very pleased with the visit to [St. Peter in Chains](#), a church south of Rome on the city's border. It was a memorable day because it coincided with one of the rare occasions when the [chains of St. Peter](#) were displayed, the keys of which are kept by the Holy Father himself.

Tradition holds that it was St. Peter himself who erected the first church here, dedicating it to the Saviour. Destroyed in the fire of Nero, it was rebuilt by St. Leo the Great in 442 and dedicated to the first Pope. It was called St. Peter in Chains because that is where the Pope placed the chain with which the Prince of the Apostles had been chained in Jerusalem by order of Herod. The Patriarch Juvenal had given it to the Empress Aelia Eudocia, who in turn sent it to Rome to her daughter Eudoxia, wife of Valentinian III. In Rome, the chain to which St. Peter was chained in the Mamertine prison was also kept. When St. Leo wanted to compare this chain with that of Jerusalem, the two chains miraculously joined together, so that today they form one single chain, which is kept in a special altar beside the sacristy. We had the consolation of touching those chains with our hands, kissing them, putting them around our necks, and bringing them to our foreheads. We also carefully checked to see if we could discern the point of union of the two, but it was not possible. We could only

ascertain that the chain of Rome is smaller than that of Jerusalem.

At St. Peter in Chains there is the magnificent **tomb of Julius II** [...] It is one of the masterpieces of the famous Michelangelo Buonarroti, who is considered one of the greatest artists of marble, especially for the [statue of Moses](#) placed near the urn. The patriarch is depicted with the tablets of the law held under his right arm, in the act of speaking to the people whom he looks at fiercely, because they had rebelled. The church has three naves, separated by twenty columns of Parian marble, and two of well-preserved granite.

St. Louis of the French

Around nine o'clock we went to [Santa Maria sopra Minerva](#), where we were received in a private audience by Cardinal Gaude for about an hour and a half. He spoke to us in the Piedmontese dialect, showing interest in our oratories [...] After noon we went to visit Marquis Giovanni Patrizi [...] In front of his palace is the [church of St. Louis of the French](#), which gives its name to the square and the nearby district. It is a well-kept church enriched with many precious marble objects. Its uniqueness lies in the tombs of illustrious Frenchmen who died in Rome. In fact, the floor and the walls are covered with epitaphs and plaques. [...]

St. Mary Major at the Esquiline Hill

From the Quirinal, a road leads to the Esquiline Hill, named for the many elms that once covered it. At the highest point stands [St. Mary Major](#), whose origin is narrated by all sacred historians. A certain Giovanni, a Roman patrician, having no children, wished to use his wealth for some work of piety [...] On the night of August 4, 352, the Madonna appeared to him in a dream and commanded him to raise a temple in the place where he would find fresh snow the next morning. The same vision was experienced by the Pope at that time, Liberius. The following day, word spread that abundant snow had fallen on the Esquiline Hill, so Liberius and Giovanni went there, and upon

confirming the miracle, they set to work to carry out the command received in the vision. The Pope marked out the layout of the new temple, which was soon completed with Giovanni's funds. A few years later, Liberius was able to proceed with its consecration [...]

A vast square spreads out in front of the church, at the centre of which stands the ancient white marble column taken from the Temple of Peace. In 1614 Pope Paul V provided it with a base and a capital, on which he placed [the statue of the Madonna with Child](#). The architecture of the facade is majestic and is supported by large marble columns that form a spacious vestibule. At the back of it is the statue of Philip IV, King of Spain, who made many donations in favour of this church and wished to be inscribed among the canons. The floor is made of precious mosaic worked with various types of marble, all of incalculable value.

The chapel to the right of the main altar houses the **tomb of St. Jerome**, the [cradle of the Saviour](#), and the **altar of Pope Liberius**. The papal altar is covered with precious porphyry marble and supported by four gilded bronze putti. Below it opens the **Confession**, which is a chapel dedicated to St. Matthias. We went to visit it on the day of the Lenten station, so we were fortunate to find the **head of St. Matthias** displayed above a rich altar. We observed it closely and noticed the skin attached to the head, in fact there is still some hair still attached to the venerated skull.

The Virgin and the Plague

In the chapel to the left of the altar it is possible to observe [a painting of the Virgin attributed to Saint Luke](#), highly venerated by the people. The image was highly esteemed by the popes. Saint Gregory the Great brought it in procession to the Vatican during the terrible plague of 590. It was April 25. When the procession reached the vicinity of Hadrian's mole, an angel was seen sheathing his sword, thus indicating the end of the plague. In memory of this miracle, Hadrian's

mole was named [Castel Sant'Angelo](#), and since then the procession has been repeated every year on the feast day of Saint Mark the Evangelist. In Saint Mary Major everything is majestic and grand, however speaking or writing about it are not enough to describe it truthfully. Those who see it with their own eyes gaze in wonder in every corner.

Today, here in Rome every Ash Wednesday fasting is observed, which means that not only meat is prohibited, but also any soup or dish made with eggs, butter, or milk. Oil, water, and salt are the condiments used on these Wednesdays. The practice is strictly observed by all classes of people, so much so that in the markets and shops, one cannot find meat, eggs, or butter on that day.

The Legend of Saint Galgano

In the evening, Mrs. De Maistre told us a story worth remembering. She said:

Last year, the general vicar of Siena came to visit us. Among the many things he was accustomed to telling us, he narrated the story of Saint Galgano, the soldier. This saint died centuries ago, and his head remains intact. However, the greatest wonder is that every year his hair is cut, and it imperceptibly grows back to the same length the following year. A Protestant, after hearing this miracle, began to laugh, saying: let me seal the urn where the head is kept, and if the hair grows back, I will recognise the miracle and become Catholic. The matter was reported to the bishop, who replied: I will place the episcopal seals for the authenticity of the relic, and he can place his own to ensure this fact. So this was done. But that gentleman, impatient to see if the miracle began to take place, after a few months asked to open the urn. Imagine his astonishment when he saw that Saint Galgano's hair had already grown as it would have if he were alive! Then it is true! He exclaimed. I will become Catholic. Indeed, the following year on the feast day of the Saint, he and his family renounced Lutheranism and embraced the Catholic

religion, which he now professes exemplarily.

St. Pudenziana at the Viminal Hill

From the Four Fountains, one ascends to the Viminal Hill, named so for the many reeds, that is, the rushes, that once covered it. At the foot of this hill, in the house of Pudens, a Roman senator, Saint Peter stayed when he came to Rome. The holy apostle converted his host to the faith and transformed his house into a church. Around 160, Saint Pius I, at the request of the virgins *Pudenziana* and *Prassede*, daughters of the senator Pudens' nephew, consecrated this church, which [...] was later dedicated to Saint Pudenziana because she had lived and died there. Many popes took part in restructuring this place, which contains precious Christian testimonies. The [well of Saint Pudenziana](#) deserves special attention. It is believed that she buried the bodies of the martyrs in it. At the bottom, one can notice a large number of relics. History has it that it contains the relics of three thousand martyrs.

Next to the main altar, there is an oblong chapel whose altar features a marble group of Jesus handing the keys to Saint Peter. It is believed that this altar is the same one on which Saint Peter celebrated Mass, and on which I myself was able to celebrate with great consolation. Various pieces of sponge are preserved there, the same ones that Pudenziana used to collect the blood from the wounds of the martyrs, or from the earth that was soaked with it.

Continuing towards the left, one arrives at **a chapel where the testimony of a great miracle is preserved**. While celebrating Mass, a priest fell into doubt about the possibility of the true presence of Jesus in the holy host. After the consecration, the host slipped from his hands and fell to the floor, bouncing first on one step and then on another. Where it first struck the marble, it remained almost perforated, while even on the second step, a very deep cavity in the shape of a host was formed. These two marble steps are preserved in that same place, guarded by special gates.

Saint Prassede

From *Saint Pudenziana*, ascending towards the *Esquiline Hill*, not far from Saint Mary Major, there is the [Church of Saint Prassede](#). Around the year 162 AD, on the site where the baths of Novatus were, Saint Pius I erected a church in honour of this virgin, the sister of Novatus, Pudenziana, and Theophilus. The place served as a refuge for early Christians during times of persecution. The Saint, who worked to provide what was needed for the persecuted Christians, also took care to collect the bodies of the martyrs, which she then buried, pouring their blood into the well that stands in the middle of the church. It is richly adorned with precious marble and objects, as are almost all the churches in Rome.

There is also the **chapel of the martyrs Zenon and Valentine**, whose bodies, transported by Saint Paschal I in the year 899, rest beneath the altar. Here, there is also a column of jasper, about three palms high, which a cardinal named Colonna had transported from the Holy Land in the year 1223. It is believed to be the one to which the Saviour was tied during the flagellation.

The Caelian Hill

From the Esquiline Hill looking west, you can see the Caelian Hill. In ancient times, it was called *Querquetulanus* due to the oaks that covered it. Later, it was named Celio after Cele Vilenna, a captain of the Etruscans, who came to aid Rome, and whom Tarquinius Priscus had housed on that hill. The first thing that stands out *is the largest obelisk known to man*. Ramses, the Pharaoh of Egypt, had it erected in Thebes, dedicating it to the sun. Constantine the Great had it transported across the Nile to Alexandria, but, when struck by death, it fell to his son Constantius to bring it to Rome. A vessel with three hundred oars was used for the journey, and it was brought to the city via the Tiber and placed in a location called the Circus Maximus. Here it fell, breaking into three parts. Pope Sixtus V had it restored and raised in

the Lateran square in the year 1588. The obelisk reaches a height of 153 Roman feet. It is entirely adorned with hieroglyphics and topped with a tall cross.

To the right of the square is the Baptistery of Constantine with the [Church of St. John in Font](#). It is said to have been built by Constantine on the occasion of the Baptism he received from Pope St. Sylvester in the year 324. From the two attached chapels, one dedicated to St. John the Baptist and the other to St. John the Evangelist, it took the name of the church of St. John in Font. The baptistery, which is a large basin lined with precious marble, is in the middle. The small chapel dedicated to St. John the Baptist is believed to be a chamber of Constantine's, converted into an oratory and dedicated to the holy Precursor by Pope St. Hilarius.

St. John Lateran

Exiting the baptistery and crossing the vast square, one encounters the [Basilica of St. John Lateran](#). This famous building is the first principal church of the Catholic world. On the façade is written: *Ecclesiarum Urbis et Orbis Mater et Caput* (mother and head of all the churches of Rome and the world). It is the seat of the Supreme Pontiff as Bishop of Rome. After his coronation, he solemnly takes possession of it. It was also called the *Constantinian Basilica* because it was founded by Constantine the Great. It was later called the *Lateran Basilica* because it was erected where the palace of a certain Plautius Lateranus stood, who was killed by Nero. It was also called the *Basilica of the Saviour*, following an apparition of the Saviour that occurred during its construction. It is still called the *Golden Basilica* for the precious gifts with which it has been enriched, and *Basilica of St. John* because it is dedicated to Saints John the Baptist and Evangelist.

It was Constantine the Great who had it built near his palace around the year 324. Later expanded with new structures, it was relinquished to the Holy Pontiff. Here the Popes lived

until the time of Gregory XI. When he brought the Holy See back from Avignon to Rome, he moved his residence to the Vatican.

In the year 1308, a terrible fire broke out that destroyed it, but Clement V, who was then in Avignon, immediately sent his agents with large sums of money, and it was quickly rebuilt. The portico is supported by twenty-four large pillars. At the back is the statue of Constantine found in his baths at the Quirinal. The large bronze door is of extraordinary height. It was taken from the church of *St. Adrian in the Campo Vaccino* and transported here. It constitutes a rare example of ancient doors called *Quadrifores*, meaning constructed so that they could open in four parts, one at a time without any of them endangering the stability of the other. On the right, there is a bricked-up door that is opened only in the year of the jubilee and is therefore called the **Holy Door**.

The interior has five naves. The length, height, exquisiteness of the floors, sculptures and paintings are enchanting to see. It would require large volumes to speak of them worthily. **The most significant relics of this church are the heads of the two princes of the Apostles, Peter and Paul.** They are kept under the main altar and encased in another golden encasing. There is also a **significant relic of St. Pancras the martyr**, and **a table** is kept there that is thought to be the same one on which Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with his Apostles.

Exiting the church through the main door and crossing the square, one finds the [Holy Stairs](#), a building that Pope Sixtus V had erected to house the staircase, which was previously in pieces in the old papal palace of the Lateran. It consists of twenty-eight steps of white marble from the praetorium of Pilate in Jerusalem that Jesus ascended and descended several times during His Passion. St. Helena, mother of Constantine, sent them to Rome along with many other things sanctified by the blood of Jesus Christ. This famous staircase is held in great reverence and therefore it is ascended on one's knees,

while descending via one of the four side stairs. These steps have been worn down by the great influx of Christians who have ascended them, so they have been covered with wooden planks. Sixtus V himself also had the famous private chapel of the popes placed at the top of the stairs, which is full of the most significant relics, and is therefore called the **Sancta Sanctorum**.

Vatican City. The construction

The [Vatican hill](#) contains the most excellent pieces in the arts, and most memorable objects in religion. Therefore, we will provide a somewhat more detailed account. It was called Vatican from *Vagitanus*, a deity thought to oversee the *cries* of infants. In fact, the first syllable *Uà* (*waah, editor's note*) of which the word is composed is also the first cry of children. The hill became renowned when Caligula built the circus that was later named after Nero. Caligula built the Vatican bridge, also called the Triumphal, to cross from the left to the right bank of the Tiber, which no longer exists. Nero's circus began where the church of *St. Martha* is today and extended to the steps of the ancient Vatican basilica. In this circus, [the body of the Prince of the Apostles](#) was buried [...]

The bones of other popes were also buried there including Linus, Cletus, Anacletus, Evaristus, and others. The *Memory of St. Peter*, that is, the small temple built over his tomb, lasted until the time of Constantine, who, at the request of St. Sylvester, around 319, began the construction of a church in honour of the Apostle. It was erected right around that small temple, using material taken from public buildings. The construction was called the *Constantinian Basilica*, and at that time it was considered among the most famous in Christendom. In the middle of that church, shaped like a Latin cross, there was the altar dedicated to St. Peter, under which his body was buried, protected by gates. That space has been called the **Confession of St. Peter** since then. Once the temple

was completed and endowed with rich furnishings, Pope Sylvester consecrated it on November 18, 324 [...] The popes that followed adorned and expanded it. For eleven centuries, it was the object of devotion and admiration of Christians who travelled to Rome.

In the 15th century, it began to fall into ruin, so Nicholas V thought to renew it, but he only had the merit of starting the work, as his death caused everything to be suspended. Julius II resumed the construction, changing its name from **Constantinian Basilica** to **St. Peter's in the Vatican**, and laid the first stone on April 18, 1506. The architects were Bramante, later Fra Giocondo Domenico and Raphael Sanzio. After them, the most famous architects and the most sublime minds of the time worked on it.

The great square

[...] In front of the Basilica a vast square, whose length exceeds half a kilometre, opens up. It is formed by 284 columns and 64 pillars that, arranged in a semicircle on both sides in four rows, form three paths of which the widest, the central one, can allow the passage of two carriages. Above the colonnade there are 96 statues of saints, in marble, about 10 feet tall. In the centre, instead, stands an Egyptian obelisk. It is made from a single piece and is the only one that remains intact. It measures 126 feet in height, including the cross and the pedestal. It has no hieroglyphics. Nuncoreus, King of Egypt, had it erected in Heliopolis, from where it was taken and transported to Rome by Caligula in the 3rd year of his reign. It was placed in the circus built at the foot of the Vatican hill, as evidenced by the inscriptions that can be read there. This circus was called *Nero's* because he frequented it often. Here that cruel emperor slaughtered Christians, accusing them of being the authors of the fire of Rome that he himself had started.

In 1818, a sundial was built in the square. The twelve signs of the zodiac were drawn on the ground. The obelisk served as

a gnomon (staff), and with its shadow indicated the stations of the sun. All around, the names of the winds were written in the direction in which each of them blows. On the sides, two identical fountains perpetually spout water from a group of jets that rise even up to sixty feet. The Queen of Scotland, welcomed pompously in this place, looked in wonder at the two fountains thinking they had been made especially for her reception. No, said a gentleman who was beside her, these jets are perennial.

A visit to St. Peter's

Walking towards the facade of the Basilica, one arrives at a magnificent staircase flanked by two statues, one of St. Peter and the other of St. Paul, placed there by the reigning Pius IX. Having climbed the stairs, one stands before the facade which has this inscription: *In honour of the Prince of the Apostles Paul V Supreme Pontiff in the year 1612, the 7th of his pontificate.* Above the portico extends the great **Loggia of Blessings**. The facade is majestic and imposing. The portico is entirely adorned with marble, mosaic paintings, and other elegant works. At the back of the vestibule on the right, one can observe the beautiful equestrian statue of Constantine in the act of gazing at the miraculous cross that appeared to him in the sky before the final battle with Maxentius.

From the portico, one enters the Basilica through four doors, of which the last on the right is opened only for the Holy Year. The main door is made of bronze, very tall, and it takes many strong arms to open it. The interior presents five naves in addition to the transept that ends with the apse. Curiosity and surprise led us to the middle of the main nave. Here we stopped to admire and reflect without saying a word. It seemed to us to see the celestial Jerusalem. The length of the Basilica is 837 palms; its width is 607. It is the largest temple in all of Christendom. After St. Peter's, the largest is that of St. Paul in London. If we add the Church of St. Paul to that of our Oratory, it forms the exact length of St.

Peter.

After being still for some time, we sought the basin of holy water. We spotted two putti, very small at first glance, holding a kind of shell in the first pillar of the Basilica. We were amazed that such a vast church had such a small holy water font. But the amazement turned into surprise when we saw the putti growing larger as we approached. The shell became a vase of about six feet in circumference, and the putti on the sides showed us their hands with fingers as large as our arms. This demonstrates that the proportions of this marvellous building are so well-regulated as to make its vastness less perceptible, which, however, becomes more noticeable when examining each detail. Around the pillars of the main nave, one can see statues of the founders of religious orders carved in marble.

In the last pillar on the right is the bronze statue of St. Peter, held in great reverence. It was cast by St. Leo the Great from the bronze of that of Jupiter Capitolinus. It recalls the peace that that Pontiff obtained from Attila, who was raging against Italy. The right foot, which protrudes from the pedestal, is worn down by the lips of the faithful who never pass by without kissing it with respect. While we were admiring the statue, the Austrian ambassador in Rome passed by, bowed before the Prince of the Apostles, and kissed his foot.

Naves and chapels

Now let's say something about the minor naves and the chapels found there. In the right one, the first chapel encountered is the Chapel of the **Pietà**. In addition to magnificent mosaics and the statues that adorn it, one admires above the altar the celebrated group sculpted by Michelangelo Buonarroti in white marble when he was only twenty-four years old. It is perhaps the most beautiful sculpture in the world. The same Buonarroti was so pleased with it that he signed it on the belt of Mary's chest.

To the left of the Chapel of the Pietà is the inner chapel dedicated to the **Crucifix** and **St. Nicholas**. From here, one enters the so-called **Chapel of the Holy Column**, where one of the twisted columns that once stood in front of the altar of the **Confession of St. Peter** is preserved, protected by an iron gate. This is the column to which Jesus Christ leaned when he preached in the temple of Solomon. One is marvelled to note that the part touched by the sacred shoulders of the Saviour is never covered in dust, and therefore does not need to be dusted like the rest.

After the Chapel of the Pietà, one encounters the tomb monument of *Leo XII*, erected by Gregory XVI. The Pope is depicted as he blesses the people from the Loggia above the porch. Around him are the heads of the cardinals assisting at the ceremony. Opposite this tomb is the cenotaph of *Christina Alexandra*, Queen of Sweden, who died in Rome on April 19, 1689. This woman, a Protestant, convinced of the little substance of her religion, had herself instructed in Catholicism and made a solemn abjuration in *Innsbruck* on November 3, 1655. Various bas-reliefs adorning the tomb represent the event.

Next is the **Chapel of St. Sebastian**, also rich in paintings and marble. Exiting to the right, one finds the burial point of *Innocent XII* of the Pignatelli family from Naples. Opposite is the tomb of the famous Countess *Matilda*, a distinguished benefactor of the Church and supporter of papal authority. Urban VIII had her ashes transferred here from the monastery of St. Benedict in Mantua. She was the first of the illustrious women who earned a tomb in the Vatican Basilica. The countess is depicted standing. The tomb is adorned with a bas-relief depicting the absolution granted by Gregory VII to Henry IV, Emperor of Germany, at the request of Matilda and other figures, on January 25, 1077, in the fortress of Canossa.

This brings us to the Chapel of the Sacrament, rich in marble

and mosaics. Next to the altar, there is a staircase that leads to the papal palace. This altar is dedicated to *St. Maurice* and his fellow martyrs, the principal patrons of Piedmont. The two twisted columns made from a single piece that adorn the altar are two of the twelve believed to have been brought to Rome from the ancient temple of Solomon. On the floor in front of the altar, the bronze tomb of *Sixtus IV Della Rovere* can be admired. It was executed by order of his nephew *Julius II* and represents the virtues and knowledge of the deceased. It contains the ashes of the two popes.

When exiting the chapel, to the right is the tomb of *Gregory XIII Buoncompagni*. It is adorned with two statues: *Religion* and *Fortitude*, while in the centre a large bas-relief represents the reform of the calendar, hence called *Gregorian*. Here are depicted a number of illustrious figures who played a part in that work, all in the act of venerating the Pope. Opposite, within a stucco urn, rest the bones of *Gregory XIV* of the *Sfrondato* family. This is where the minor nave ends, and one enters the Greek cross according to *Buonarroti's* design.

Exiting the nave, to the right is the **Gregorian Chapel**. Above the altar an ancient image of the Madonna from the time of *Paschal II* is venerated. Below rests the **body of St. Gregory Nazianzen**, transferred by order of *Gregory XIII* from the church of the nuns of *Campo Marzio*. Continuing along, one arrives at the tomb monument of *Benedict XIV Lambertini*, erected by the cardinals he created. On either side of the tomb rise two magnificent statues representing *Disinterest* and *Wisdom*, the two most luminous virtues of this pope. The statue of the Pontiff, standing, blesses the people with a majestic gesture. This work is so well executed that merely gazing at the Pope makes one recognise the greatness and elevation of his spirit. Opposite, one recognises the altar of *St. Basil the Great*, with a precious mosaic above it depicting *Emperor Valens*, who fainted

in the presence of the Saint, while watching him celebrate Mass.

Then one reaches the tribune. The first altar on the right is dedicated to *St. Wenceslaus the Martyr*, King of Bohemia. The middle one is consecrated to *Saints Processus and Martinian*, guards of the Mamertine prison, converted to the faith by St. Peter when the Apostle was imprisoned there. The structure takes its name from these saints, and their bodies rest beneath the altar. Three precious bas-reliefs represent St. Peter in prison being freed by the Angel (the middle one), St. Paul preaching in the Areopagus (the one on the right), and the third depicts Saints Paul and Barnabas being mistaken for gods by the inhabitants of Lystra.

Next is the tomb of *Clement XIII Rezzonico*, a sculpture by Antonio Canova. It is a masterpiece. The painting of the altar facing the monument depicts St. Peter in danger of drowning, supported by the Redeemer. Further on is the altar of *St. Michael*, then that of *St. Petronilla*, daughter of St. Peter. This saint is represented in a mosaic that narrates the exhumation of her corpse to show it to Flaccus, a noble Roman, who had asked for her hand in marriage. In the upper part, her soul is depicted praying to die a virgin and her being welcomed by Jesus Christ. Further on, one sees the sarcophagus of *Clement X*, Altieri: the bas-relief represents the opening of the holy door for the Jubilee of 1675. Above the altar is the painting of St. Peter, who at the prayers of a crowd of beggars, raises the widow Tabitha from the dead.

Crossing over two steps of porphyry that were part of the main altar of the ancient basilica, one ascends to the **Altar of the Chair**. A stunning group of four metal statues supports the papal seat. The two in front represent two Latin Fathers, Ambrose and Augustine. The two behind represent the Greek Fathers, Athanasius and John Chrysostom. The weight of these groups amounts to 219,161 pounds of metal. The bronze chair covers, as a precious relic, the wooden one inlaid with

various ivory bas-reliefs. This chair belonged to the senator Pudens, who served the Apostle Peter and many other popes after him.

Above the *Altar of the Chair*, as a backdrop, the *Holy Spirit* is depicted on canvas in the middle of coloured and radiant glass, so that to the viewer, it seems there is a shining golden star. Instead, below, to the viewer's left is the magnificent tomb of *Paul III* Farnese, a highly valued monument for its sculptures. The statue of the Pope seated on the urn is made of bronze, while the other two statues, made of marble, represent *Prudence* and *Justice*. Opposite is the tomb of Pope Urban VIII, whose statue is made of bronze. *Justice* and *Charity* are on either side of him, sculpted in white marble. On the urn, one can see the image of death in the act of writing the Pope's name in a book. Here we interrupted the visit. We were tired. The visit had lasted from eleven in the morning until five in the afternoon.

Rome. St. Mary of Victory

Towards noon looking from the Quirinal, one sees the road of [Porta Pia](#), so named after Pope Pius IV, who carried out several works to beautify it. Along this road, near the fountain of *Acqua Felice*, the [Church of St. Mary of Victory](#) rises to the left, built by Paul V in 1605, and named so for a miraculous image of the Madonna brought there by Father Domenico of the Discalced Carmelites. To this image, or rather to the protection of Mary, Maximilian, Duke of Bavaria, owed the great victory achieved in a few days against the Protestants, who with a very large army had turned the Kingdom of Austria upside down. The miraculous image is preserved on the main altar. Banners taken from the enemies hang from the cornices: a glorious monument to the protection of Mary.

In memory of the liberation of Vienna, the feast of the *Name of Mary* was established and is celebrated by all of Christendom on the Sunday within the octave of the birth of Mary. This event occurred on September 12, 1683, during the

pontificate of Innocent XI. In this same church, a special solemnity is celebrated on the second Sunday of November in remembrance of the famous victory achieved by Christians against the Turks at *Lepanto* on October 7, 1571, under Pius V. Some banners taken from the Turks are also hung as trophies on the cornice of this church.

In front of St. Mary of Victory is the [Termini fountain](#), called the Fountain of *Moses*, because in a recess there is a statue of Moses who, with a staff in hand, makes water spring from the stone. It is also called *Acqua Felice* after Fra Felice, which was the name of Sixtus V when he was in the convent.

[The Tiber Island](#)

In the afternoon, we decided to go with Count De Maistre to visit the great work of *St. Michael* across the Tiber. We therefore had to cross the river at the height of a small island called the Tiber Island or also Lycaonia, from a temple dedicated to Jupiter Lycaonio. This island originated as follows. When Tarquin was expelled from Rome, the Tiber was almost devoid of water, leaving some sandbanks exposed. The Romans, driven by hatred against this king, went into his fields, cut down the grain and spelt that were almost ripe, and threw everything into the Tiber. The straw came to rest on that sand, and as the muddy sand that the water carried flowed, it became consolidated to the point of being cultivable and habitable. On this island, the pagans erected a temple in honour of Asclepius, but in 973, the **body of St. Bartholomew** was transferred there, resting in the urn beneath the main altar.

Crossing the Tiber and continuing towards St. Michael, on the right you come upon the [Church of St. Cecilia](#), built on the site where her house once stood. Urban I consecrated it around the middle of the third century, and Saint Gregory the Great enriched it with many precious objects. Entering on the right is the chapel where Saint Cecilia's bath was, in which it is

said she received the mortal blow. The main altar, protected by an iron gate, houses the **body of the saint**. Above the urn is a touching marble sculpture representing her lying down and dressed as she was found in the tomb.

Having arrived at the *St. Michael Hospice*, we had an audience with Cardinal Tosti, who narrated various episodes that happened to him during the republic. He too was forced to live away from the hospice for a while to avoid becoming a victim of some attack. Among the various items stolen in that sad circumstance from this pious cardinal were three very precious snuff boxes, especially for their antiquity and origin. Taken to the members of the triumvirate, Mazzini thought to keep one for himself and give the other two to his companions. But they did not dare to take them. Mazzini sorted everything out and graciously put all three in his pocket!

The Capitol

Along the way back, halfway along rises the highest hill in Rome, the [Capitol](#), named so from *caput Toli*, the head of Tolo, which was discovered while Tarquin the Proud was levelling the top to build a fortress. We climbed a long staircase at the top of which stand two colossal statues representing Castor and Pollux. The flat area that forms the square was anciently called *inter duos lucos*, because it was situated between the groves that covered the two peaks. Here Romulus had created a refuge for neighbouring peoples who wished to take shelter. Today's Capitol no longer has a warlike grandeur, but it is a majestic square surrounded by buildings that house museums, and where municipal affairs are conducted. In one part of this square stood the temple of Jupiter Feretrius, so named from the weapons of the vanquished that the victors would hang at the altar of that temple.

In the middle of the square stands the **famous equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius** portraying a peacemaker. It is the most beautiful among the oldest bronze statues that have been preserved intact. Part of the large buildings surrounding the

square constitutes the senatorial palace, founded by Boniface IX in 1390 on the same ground where the ancient Roman Senate stood. To the side is the Fountain of *Acqua Felice*, adorned by two reclining statues of the Nile and the Tiber. From here, through a small staircase, one reaches the tower of the Capitol, erected in the form of a bell tower on the same site where anciently observers would climb to admire Rome and monitor enemies attempting to approach the city [...]

At the highest part towards the east was the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, which was called *Jupiter Optimus, Maximus*, and was erected by Tarquin the Proud on the foundations prepared by Tarquin the Elder, who had made a vow during the war against the Sabines. Just as the excavation was being done, the *caput Toli* was discovered.

Santa Maria in Aracoeli

Where the **temple of Jupiter Capitolinus** was, now there stands the majestic [church of Santa Maria in Aracoeli](#), built in the 6th century of the common era. For a while it was called *Santa Maria in Campidoglio*, from the place where it stood. It was then called *Aracoeli* from the following fact. After lightning struck the Capitol, Octavian Augustus, fearing some misfortune, sent someone to consult the oracle of Delphi [...]. For this event, and for some sayings of the Sibyls regarding the birth of the Saviour, Augustus had an altar erected entitled: *Ara primogeniti Dei*, altar of the firstborn of God. Hence this is where the name Santa Maria in Aracoeli comes from, after a church was erected on the site in honour of the Mother of God. The interior has three naves divided by 22 marble columns that once belonged to the temple of Jupiter Feretrius. The main altar is worthy of special observation, because above it is **an image of Mary** that is venerated, **believed to be by Saint Luke**. During the time of Saint Gregory the Great, it was taken around Rome in procession to obtain liberation from the plague. The event is depicted in a painting on the pillar beside the altar. In the middle of the crossing is the **chapel of Saint Helena**, where

the *Ara Primogeniti* was erected. The altar's table is a large porphyry urn, within which the **bodies of Saint Helena, mother of Constantine, and Saints Abundius and Abundantius** are found.

In a room near the sacristy is preserved a **miraculous effigy of the Infant Jesus**. The swaddling clothes that cover him are adorned with precious stones. It is displayed for veneration during the Christmas festivities, in a beautiful nativity scene represented in the church inside a chapel. Along with the Child, the figures of Augustus and the Sibyl are also placed as a reminder of a tradition that states that the Cumaean Sibyl predicted the birth of the Saviour, and therefore Augustus erected an altar there.

Exiting Aracoeli and heading towards the western part of the Capitol, one encounters the Tarpeian Rock, which occupied the side towards the Tiber, and was named after the Virgin Tarpeia, who was unexpectedly killed there during the war with the Sabines. From the top of this rock, traitors to the homeland were thrown down. Many Christians were martyred here, who, out of hatred for the faith, were thrown down. Nearby was the Curia, and the hut of Romulus, where, it is said, he awaited the response of the vultures [...]

Descending downwards, there is the [Temple of Concord](#), built by Camillus in the year 387 of Rome. [...] Near this temple on the left side of the descent there was that of *Jupiter Tonans*, of which three marble columns remain. It was erected by Augustus on the Capitoline slope and dedicated to Jupiter in gratitude for having escaped the lightning that killed the servant who preceded him.

The Mamertine Prison

On the morning of March 2, together with the De Maistre family, we went to visit the [Mamertine Prison](#), which is at the foot of the Capitol in the western part. This prison got its name from Mamertus, or Ancus Marcius, the 4th king of Rome who had it built to instil terror in the plebeians, thus

preventing thefts and murders. Servius Tullius, the 6th king of Rome, added another prison beneath it, which was called Tullian. It has two underground chambers, which in the vault present an opening large enough for a man to pass through. Through it, the condemned were lowered with a rope [...]

Here there is a **water spring** that legend says Saint Peter miraculously caused to flow when he was imprisoned there with Saint Paul. The Prince of the Apostles used this water to baptise the Saints *Processus* and *Martinian*, the guardians of the prison, along with 47 other companions, all of whom died as martyrs. This water has miraculous properties. Its taste is natural. It never increases or decreases in volume, regardless of how much is drawn from it. Two English gentlemen, almost to mock Catholics, wanted to try to empty the small pit of water that resembles a small vase. They and their friends grew tired, but the water always remained at the same level. Many miraculous healings are reported to have been obtained from its use. Next to the spring is a stone column to which the two princes of the Apostles were tied. Beside the column is a small and low altar where, with great consolation, I celebrated Mass, attended by the De Maistre family and other pious people. Above the altar, a bas-relief represents Paul preaching and Peter baptising the guards [...]

In a corner of the first floor of the prison, on the wall one can see the **imprint of a human face**. It is said that Saint Peter received a strong slap from a henchman, so that when his face struck against the wall, he left the imprint of his face that was miraculously preserved. Above this figure is carved this ancient inscription: *"On this stone Peter struck his head pushed by a henchman and the miracle remains."* A church was built above this prison, and above this another dedicated to Saint Joseph. The confraternity of carpenters is located here. The members gather on holidays, attend sacred functions, and provide for the maintenance of the church and for the cleaning of the prison. In ancient times, to reach the entrance of the

prison, one descended through a staircase at the bottom of which was the opening from which the condemned were thrown. Those stairs were called *Gemonian*, from the moaning of the condemned [...]

Vatican City. Jubilee Devotions

March 3 was designated for the visit to Saint Peter's. Leaving home at six-thirty with a cool air that brightened life and quickened our steps, we headed towards the Vatican hill. Arriving at the Aelian Bridge, or Sant'Angelo Bridge, over which one crosses the Tiber, we recited the creed. The Popes grant fifty days of indulgence to those who recite the Apostles' symbol while passing over this bridge. It is called Aelian from Aelius Hadrian who built it. However, it is also called Sant'Angelo Bridge from Castel Sant'Angelo, which is the first building encountered on the opposite bank.

Let us say something about this castle. Emperor Hadrian wanted to erect a great tomb on the right bank of the Tiber. For its width, length, and height, it was called *Mole Adrianorum*. When Emperor Theodosius had the columns taken from Hadrian's mausoleum to furnish the Basilica of Saint Paul, this construction was left without its upper half and without columns. In the year 537, Belisarius's troops assaulted the Goths to drive them away from Rome, and then almost all the remains of that mausoleum were reduced to pieces. In the 10th century, it was called *Castro and Torre di Crescenzo* from a certain Crescentius the Younger, who took possession of it and fortified it. Shortly after, history gave it the name *Castel Sant'Angelo*, derived perhaps from a church dedicated to the angel Michael [...] However, the most probable opinion remains that which tells of a procession of Saint Gregory the Great to obtain liberation from the plague from the Virgin. On that occasion, an angel appeared on the high summit of the Mole, sheathing his sword, a sign that the scourge was about to cease. Now Castel Sant'Angelo has been reduced to a fortress and is the only one in Rome.

Continuing along our journey, we arrived at the grand Saint Peter's square. Passing in front of the *obelisk*, we removed our hats, because the popes have granted fifty days of indulgence to those who show reverence or uncover their heads while passing near that obelisk, on which a cross has been placed. It holds a piece of the Holy Wood of the Cross of Jesus.

Here we are again in the Vatican Basilica. We had already visited the larger half plus the tribune, which forms a kind of choir to the papal altar, located in the middle of the crossing, opposite the chair of Peter. This choir was erected by Clement VIII and consecrated by him in the year 1594: it encloses the altar already built by Saint Sylvester. Being the papal altar, only the Pope celebrates there, and when someone else wishes to use it, an apostolic "*Breve*" is required. On four sides rise four large spiral columns that support a baldachin adorned with friezes all in bronze. The height of this baldachin from the floor level equals that of the tallest buildings in Turin.

The tomb of Peter: curiosities of a saint

In front of the papal altar, a double marble staircase descends to the Confession level. At the end of the stairs, there are two columns of alabaster from Orte, a very rare material, transparent like a diamond. One hundred and twelve lamps burn continuously around the venerable site. At the back, a niche opens up, formed on the ancient oratory erected by Saint Sylvester, where Saint Anacletus "*erected a memorial to Saint Peter*". Here lies the **body of the Prince of the Apostles**. On the side walls, two doors equipped with an iron gate lead to the sacred grottos. On November 28, 1822, the marble statue of Pius VI, kneeling in fervent prayer, was placed directly in front of the niche. This is one of the most beautiful works of Antonio Canova. Pius VI used to go during the day and sometimes even at night to the tomb of Saint Peter to pray. In life, he showed a strong desire to be buried there, and upon his death, he wished to have it fulfilled.

However, after a shallow excavation, a tomb was discovered with the inscription: *Linus episcopus*. Immediately, everything was put back in place, and the Pope was buried in another corner of the church. In the chosen place, instead of the body, the statue we mentioned was placed. We have seen and touched with our hands how precious everything is here, but we could not see the body of the first pope, because for centuries the tomb has not been opened for fear that someone might attempt to break off some relic.

Above this tomb, a rich altar has been raised: here I had the consolation of celebrating the holy Mass. This altar, with an attached chapel, receives light from some portholes covered with metal grates. During the construction of the Basilica, a miraculous event occurred, reported by an eyewitness. Before the roof was finished, such heavy rains fell that the waters flooded the Basilica floor up to a foot high. Despite such abundance, the water did not dare to approach the altar of the *Confession*, nor did it descend into the lower oratory through the aforementioned three portholes, because, when coming close, it stopped, remaining suspended so that not even a drop reached that sanctuary to wet it. After observing every object, looking at every corner, the walls, the vaults, the floor, we asked if there was anything else to see.

– *Nothing more, we were told.*

– *But where is the tomb of the Holy Apostle?*

– *Right down below. It is located in the same place it occupied when the ancient basilica was standing [...]*

– *But we would like to see down there.*

– *It is not possible [...]*

– *But the pope said we could see everything. If he were to ask us when we return if we have seen everything, I would regret not being able to answer affirmatively.*

The monsignor [who was accompanying us] sent for some keys and opened a kind of cabinet. Here a cavity opened that descended underground. It was all dark.

– *Are you satisfied?* The monsignor asked me.

- *Not yet, I would like to see.*
- *And how do you want to do that?*
- *Send for a cane and a match.* They brought a cane and a match, which, applied to the tip of it, was lowered down, but it went out immediately in the air without oxygen. The cane did not reach the bottom. Then another cane was brought that had a metal hook at the end. Thus, it was possible to touch the lid of Saint Peter's tomb. It was seven/eight meters deep. Tapping lightly, the sound that came up indicated that the hook was hitting now iron, now marble. This confirmed what ancient historians had written.

It would take a volume to describe the things we saw. What existed in the Constantinian Basilica is preserved in side slabs, or on the floors or in the vaults of the undergrounds. I will highlight only one thing, the image of *Santa Maria della Bocciata*, very ancient, placed in an underground altar. The name derives from the following circumstance. A young man, with disdain or perhaps inadvertently, hit the figure of Mary in the eye with a ball. A great miracle occurred. Blood flowed from the forehead, and the eye, which is still red, is seen above the cheeks of the image. Two drops splashed sideways onto the stone, which is scrupulously preserved behind two iron gates.

Altars, chapels, tombs

Above the papal altar and the tomb of Saint Peter rises the vast dome that leaves those who observe it enchanted. Four large pillars support it: each of them has one hundred and fifty steps, about twenty-five *trabucchi*, of circumference. All around that high dome, there are elegant mosaic works executed by the most famous authors. On the pillars, four niches called *Loggias of the Relics* are carved, which are the *Holy Face* of Veronica, the *Holy Cross*, the *Sacred Lance*, and *Saint Andrew*. Among them, the one of the Sacred Face is famous, believed to be the cloth that the Saviour used to wipe his face dripping with blood. He left his image imprinted on

it, which he gave to Veronica, who, weeping, accompanied him to Calvary. Trustworthy people recount that this Sacred Face, in the year 1849, bled several times, even changing colour so much that it altered its features. These things were written down, and the canons of St. Peter testify to them.

Starting from the papal altar and proceeding southwards, one encounters the tomb of *Alexander VIII* of the Ottobuoni family. It was erected by his nephew Cardinal Pietro Ottobuoni. The statue of the Pope seated on the throne is made of metal. Two marble statues are on either side, representing *Religion* and *Prudence*. The urn is covered by the bas-relief of the canonization of Lorenzo Giustiniani, Giovanni da Capistrano, Giovanni da San Facondo, Giovanni di Dio, and Pasquale Baylon, made by Alexander VIII in 1690. Next to it stands the altar of *Saint Leo the Great*, on which the surprising bas-relief of the Pope going to meet the fierce Attila can be admired. Above are depicted Peter and Paul, next to the Pope is Attila, frightened by the appearance of the two and in the act of bowing to the Pontiff. In an urn under the altar rests the body of the holy pope and doctor of the Church. In front is the tomb of *Leo XII*, who died in 1829, who had so much such veneration for this glorious predecessor that he wished to be buried next to him. [...]

The following altar is dedicated to the **Virgin of the Column**, so called because it venerates the image of Mary painted on a column of the ancient Constantinian Basilica. It was placed there in 1607. The altar houses the bodies of Leo II, III, and IV. Continuing the tour along the southern line, we find on the right the tomb of Alexander VII Ghigi with four statues: *Justice*, *Prudence*, *Charity*, and *Truth*. Since this pope always had thoughts of death in mind, the sculptor laid a blanket in relief covering the figure of death that shows an hourglass, that is, a sand clock, which is about to finish its charge. The Pope is praying with hands joined on his knees. The altar on the left is dedicated to the apostles *Peter and*

Paul. It depicts the fall of Simon Magus. In front is the altar of *Saints Simon and Jude*, who rest here. The altar on the right, however, is dedicated to *Saint Thomas* and houses the body of *Boniface IV*, while the one on the left preserves the remains of *Leo IX*. In front of the sacristy door, the altar of *Saints Peter and Andrew* represents in precious mosaic the death of *Ananias and Sapphira*.

Thus, we reach the Clementine chapel, whose altar, dedicated to *Saint Gregory the Great*, is topped by a beautiful mosaic of the saint in the act of convincing the unbelievers. Under the altar, his body is venerated. Above the door leading to the organ is the tomb monument of *Pius VII*. The Pontiff, seated on a rich chair and dressed in papal garments, is in the act of blessing. The statues placed on the sides represent *Wisdom* and *Fortitude*. Before reaching the side nave, one encounters the altar of the *Transfiguration*, whose mosaic presents the Transfiguration of the Saviour on Mount Tabor.

The left minor nave

Entering the minor nave, one encounters on both sides two tombs, on the right there is that of *Leo XI* of the Medici. A bas-relief describes the Pontiff absolving Henry IV, King of France [...] Lower down are carved roses with the motto: *Sic floruit*, to indicate the transience of life and symbolise the brevity of the pontificate of *Leo XI*, which lasted only 21 days.

The sarcophagus on the left is of *Innocent XI Odescalchi*. The overlaid bas-relief depicts the liberation of Vienna from the Turks, which occurred during his pontificate. Proceeding along the nave, one arrives at the *Choir Chapel*, enriched with mosaics and paintings. Under the altar rests the body of *Saint John Chrysostom*. This chapel has an underground area where the ashes of *Clement XI* are preserved. It is called the *Sistine Chapel* by *Sixtus IV*, who erected another one in the same place as the ancient basilica. To the right, one accesses the choir loft and the *Cappella Giulia*, named so after *Julius II*, who

was its founder. Above this door, there is a stucco urn that contains the ashes of *Gregory XVI*, who died in 1846. This urn is reserved to receive the corpse of the last pope until a burial is erected for him.

The tomb of Innocent VIII of the Cibo family is in front. There are two figures of this Pope: one seated with the iron of the lance in hand, alluding to the one with which Jesus was pierced, sent to him as a gift by Bayazid II, Emperor of the Turks, while the other is lying down, under the first [...] Facing the small door that leads to the dome staircase is the cenotaph of *James III*, King of England, of the Stuart family, who died in Rome on January 1, 1766, and of his two sons Charles III and Henry IX, Cardinal, Duke of York. The three busts in bas-relief are by Antonio Canova.

The last chapel is that of the Baptistery. The baptismal font is made of porphyry and formed the lid of the urn of Otto II, Emperor, which was transported here when his ashes were placed in the Vatican grottos [...]

Rome. St. Andrew at the Quirinal

The visiting permit ended at half past noon, so Mr. Carlo, who was guiding us, and we, also guided by a strong appetite, postponed the ascent to the dome and the visit to the Vatican palace for another time. After lunch and a few hours of rest, we briefly visited the Quirinal and the most important things near our residence. The Quirinal is one of the seven hills of ancient Rome, so named by the Quirites, who came here to live, and from a temple dedicated to Romulus, venerated under the name of Quirinus. To our left, proceeding towards Piazza Monte Cavallo, there is the [Church of Saint Andrew](#), where today the novitiate of the Jesuits is located. The chapel dedicated to **Saint Stanislaus Kostka** houses the body of the saint inside a lapis lazuli urn adorned with precious marbles. Next to this church is the monastery of the Dominicans. It is believed that these two buildings were built on the ruins of the temple of Quirinus. To the right of the street rises the majestic

Quirinal palace, begun by Paul III about 300 years ago and completed by his successors. It is adorned with architecture, sculptures, paintings, and mosaics of great value. The Pope resides there for part of the year. The palace has a spacious garden of about a mile in perimeter. Among other wonders, one can admire an organ that plays powered by the force of the water that flows here.

In front of the Quirinal opens the Piazza di Monte Cavallo, so named because of two colossal bronze horses representing *Castor* and *Pollux*. Pius VI had an obelisk erected in the middle of this square. It was carried out by order of Smarre and Efre, princes of Egypt, and transported to Rome by Emperor Claudius. It has no hieroglyphics. To the south dominates the magnificent Rospigliosi Palace, built where the baths of Constantine once were. Lovers of the fine arts can visit many masterpieces of painting and sculpture here.

Basilica of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem

March 4 was dedicated to the [Basilica of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem](#). The weather was cloudy, and having travelled just a short distance, we got caught in the rain. Not having an umbrella, we arrived soaked like two rats, but the consolation felt during the visit compensated us for both the water and the discomfort endured. This is one of the seven basilicas that are visited to gain indulgences. Founded by Constantine the Great, where a palace called Sassorio stood, it was named the Sassorian Basilica and was erected in memory of the finding of the Holy Cross made by St. Helena, the emperor's mother, in Jerusalem. This princess had lots of soil from Calvary transported there, taken from the place where the Cross of Christ was found. The building took the name *Holy Cross* from the considerable part of the Holy Wood that is preserved there, and *in Jerusalem* was added because this holy relic, along with many others, were transported from that city. The church was consecrated by Pope St. Sylvester. Under the main altar rest the bodies of St. Cesarius and St.

Anastasius, martyrs [...]

In front of the altar is the Gregorian chapel, privileged because one can gain the plenary indulgence applicable to the souls in purgatory, both for those who celebrate the mass and for those who listen to it. At this altar, with great consolation, I also celebrated. Next to the church stands the convent of the Cistercians. The Abbot is a certain Marchini, from Piedmont, who treated us with great courtesy. Among other things, he had us visit the library, rich in ancient parchments and other works [...]

A rainy day

March 5 was a rainy day, so we spent almost the entire day writing. There is something peculiar about Rome, that is that it rains and there is sunshine at the same time, so that at certain times of the year one must always be equipped with an umbrella to protect oneself from either the sun or the rain. At ten o'clock that day, Father Lolli, rector of the Jesuit novitiate, passed away in the church of *St. Andrew at Monte Cavallo*, a Piedmontese who had lived for a long time in Turin, where he became famous for his preaching and diligence in the confessional apostolate. The Queen of Sardinia, Maria Teresa, had chosen him as her confessor [...]

On this day, we learned that diseases in Rome had multiplied, and that the current mortality rate was four times higher than average. In the months of January and February alone, about 6,600 people died, a very large number, considering the population amounts to about 130,000 inhabitants. Towards evening, I went out to have my beard shaved. I went into a shop and was served quite well. However, I resolved never to go there again, because of how much the barber whacked and shook me with his big hands, which would have dislocated my teeth and jaw if they hadn't had strong roots.

St. Michael's Hospice

According to the invitation we received from Cardinal Tosti,

on March 6 we went with the De Maistre family to visit *St. Michael's Hospice*. In addition to what I said last time, I can add the following. The first act of courtesy shown to us was a sumptuous breakfast, to which we could not participate because we had already eaten before leaving, and being a day of fasting, we could not eat again until lunch. So we limited ourselves to a small cup of chocolate, which His Eminence told us was compatible with fasting. We were also given a drink that tasted excellent made from mandarin, a sort of wine made with dried fruits infused with water and sugar. Only Rua, not being obliged to fast, ate something more solid.

Then we began the visit of that spacious hospice where over eight hundred people were housed. Cardinal Tosti accompanied us everywhere. We stopped especially to consider the work of the young people. Here they learn the same trades that they learn from us. Most are engaged in drawing, painting, and sculpture, and many work in an internal printing house. The Holy Father, to help the Hospice, granted it the privilege of exclusively printing the school books used in the Papal States. Above the building, there is a terrace with a magnificent view: looking west, one can see the camp of the French who came to liberate Rome [...] At twelve-thirty, by which time the boys were at lunch, and seeing that the cardinal was also very tired, we took our leave [...]

St. Mary in Cosmedin and the Mouth of Truth

As usual, it was pouring down rain, and between Rua and me, having only one very small umbrella, we found a way to get both of us soaked. We crossed the Tiber over a bridge called *Ponte Rotto* because it had fallen apart and was replaced with an iron bridge very similar to the one we have over the Po in Turin. In ancient times, it was called the Coclite Bridge, because it was the same one where Horatius Cocles made a heroic stand against the army of Porsenna until the bridge was cut, and he jumped into the Tiber, swimming to the other bank amidst the arrows of the astonished enemies.

Here one encounters a street called the [Mouth of Truth](#), because at the end of it was the place where those who had to take an oath were led. Now there is a [church called St. Mary in Cosmedin](#), a word that means *ornament*, because it was magnificently adorned by Pope Adrian I. Inside, the chair used by St. Augustine when he taught Rhetoric is preserved. We retreated under the vestibule to wait for the downpour that was flooding all the streets to stop. While we were there, we took a look at the square also called the Mouth of Truth.

The herdsmen

There were many oxen yoked together, grazing, exposed to the rain, mud and wind. The herdsmen had taken shelter under the same vestibule, sitting down to eat with enviable appetite. Instead of soup and a dish, they had a piece of raw cod, from which each one tore off a piece. Some small loaves of cornmeal and rye were their bread. Water was the drink. Seeing in them an air of simplicity and goodness, I approached and had this conversation.

- *You have a good appetite, don't you?*
- *Very much, one of them replied.*
- *Is that food enough to satisfy your hunger and sustain you?*
- *It is enough, thank God, when we can have it, since being poor, we cannot expect more.*
- *Why don't you take those oxen to the stables?*
- *Because we don't have any.*
- *Do you always leave them exposed to the wind, rain, and hail day and night?*
- *Always, always.*
- *Do you do the same in your villages?*
- *Yes, we do the same, because there too we have no stables, so whether it rains, or it's windy, or it snows, day and night they are always outside.*
- *And the cows and the calves are also exposed to such weather?*
- *Certainly. Among us, it is customary that the animals, those in the stable stay in the stable, and those that begin to stay*

outside always stay outside.

– Do you live very far from here?

– Forty miles.

– On holidays can you attend the sacred functions?

– Oh! Do you have any doubts? We have our chapel, the priest who says mass, gives the sermon and catechism, and everyone, however far away, makes an effort to attend.

– Do you also go to confess sometimes?

*– Oh! Without a doubt. Are there perhaps Christians who do not fulfil these holy duties? **Now we have the jubilee and we all will make an effort to do it well.*** From this conversation, emerges the good nature of these peasants, who in their simplicity live content with their poverty and happy with their state, as long as they can fulfil the duties of a good Christian and complete that which concerns their lowly trade.

St. Mary of the People

Sunday, March 7 was designated for the visit to [St. Mary of the People](#). Some pious and noble people wished that we go there to celebrate mass, so that they could receive communion. This was a pious devotion. At nine o'clock, Mr. Foccardi, a helpful and faithful person, came to pick us up with his own carriage to take us to the indicated place. This church was built on the site where Nero and the Domitian family had been buried. Tradition says that ghosts continuously appeared there, terrifying the citizens so much that no one wanted to live nearby. Pope Paschal II in the year 1099 had a church built there, and to drive away the diabolical infestation, he dedicated it to the Most Holy Mary. In 1227, the ancient church was threatening to collapse, and the Roman people generously contributed to the reconstruction expenses. For this reason, it was called St. Mary of the People. It is a grand church, rich in marble and paintings. In the main altar, a miraculous image of the Madonna is venerated, which was ordered to be taken from the chapel of the Saviour in Lateran by Gregory IX. Nearby is the convent of the Augustinian fathers.

The Porta del Popolo was formerly called Porta Flaminia, because it was at the beginning of the Flaminian way [...]. Outside this gate, turning right, one finds [Villa Borghese](#), a majestic building worthy of being visited by tourists because of the many art objects preserved there. The Porta del Popolo marks a large square called [Piazza del Popolo](#), adorned with abundant fountains and obelisks, which as everyone knows, are monuments of a remote antiquity erected by the kings of Egypt to immortalize the memory of their deeds. The superb obelisk that rises in the middle of the square was built in Heliopolis by order of Ramses, King of Egypt, who reigned in 522 B.C. Emperor Augustus had it transported to Rome. Unfortunately, it fell over, breaking, and so it was covered with soil. Pope Sixtus V in 1589 had it unearthed, raising it in the square, after having topped it with a high metal cross. Its four sides are covered with hieroglyphics, that is, mysterious symbols used by the Egyptians to express sacred things and the mysteries of their theology.

At the bottom of the square rises the [Church of St. Mary of Miracles](#), built by Alexander VII, and called so because of a miraculous image of the Madonna that was previously painted under an arch near the Tiber. To the left is another church, [St. Mary of Monte Santo](#), because it was built over another church that belonged to the Carmelites of the province of Monte Santo. It was inaugurated in 1662. Having thus satisfied devotion and curiosity, we got back into the carriage that took us to the home of Princess Potosca, of the Sobieski counts and princes, ancient sovereigns of Poland. The breakfast prepared for us was sumptuous, but too elegant, therefore not very suitable for our appetite. We made do as best we could. However, we were very satisfied with the truly Christian conversation that those ladies held for the time we stayed at their home.

One thing aroused our wonder. After we finished eating, the hostess had a bunch of cigars brought to her and began to smoke. Despite a very animated conversation, she continued

with great eagerness to smoke one cigar after another, and this made me uncomfortable, as I was forced to endure the smell of smoke that permeated the whole house. It made me nauseous, proving unbearable [...]

Vatican City. Going up to the Dome

We reserved March 8th to visit the famous Dome of St. Peter's. Canon Lantieri had procured the necessary ticket to satisfy this curiosity. The time allowed for the ascent is from 7 to 11:30 in the morning. The weather was clear and therefore favourable. After celebrating the Eucharist at the [Church of Jesus](#), where the Jesuits are, at the altar of St. Francis Xavier, we arrived in Vatican City at 9 o'clock in the company of Mr. Carlo De Maistre. After handing over the ticket, a small door was opened for us, and we began to ascend a very comfortable staircase made like a steep terrace. **As we climbed, we encountered various inscriptions that recall the name and year of all the popes who opened and closed the jubilee years.** Near the terrace landing are written the names of the most famous figures, kings or princes, who ascended to the ball of the dome. We were pleased to also read the names of several of our sovereigns and the royal family.

We took a look at the terrace of the Basilica. It presents itself as a vast paved square where one can play ball, bocce, and similar games. Some people entrusted with the care of the upper part of the temple live here: carpenters, blacksmiths, asphalt workers. Almost in the middle of the terrace is a fountain that is always running, where Rua went to drink. From the square below, we had observed the statues of the Twelve Apostles that adorn the high cornice of the Basilica. From down there, they appeared small, but up close we realised that the big toe of the foot alone was as thick as a man's body. From this, one can understand how high we were. We also visited the largest bell, which has a diameter of over three meters, meaning three *trabucchi* in circumference (*about 9 meters, editor's note*).

A view that was very curious for us was the Vatican Gardens where the pope usually goes for a walk on foot. It is estimated they cover a distance as long as that from Porta Susa to the beginning of Via Po. To the south, vast fields could be seen. Our guide told us:

– *That whole plain was covered with French soldiers when they came to liberate our city from the rebels.* And he pointed out the [Basilica of St. Sebastian, San Pietro in Montorio \(St. Peter on the Golden Mountain\)](#), *Villa Pamphili, Villa Corsini*, all buildings that suffered severe damage for having been made battlefields.

A spiral staircase on the sides of the dome led us up to the first railing. From this landing, it seemed we were flying high and distancing ourselves from the ground. The guide opened a small door that led to an internal railing that went around the dome. I wanted to measure it, and walking like a good traveller, I counted 230 steps before completing the circuit. A curiosity: at any point on the railing, even speaking softly with your face turned to the wall, the smallest sound is communicated clearly from one wall to the other. We also noticed that the mosaics of the church, which appeared very small from below, took on a gigantic form from there.

– *Get moving*, the guide urged us, *if we want to see other things*. So we took another spiral staircase and arrived at the second railing. Here it seemed we had risen towards Paradise, and when we entered the internal railing and let our gaze fall on the floor of the basilica, we realised the extraordinary height we had reached. The people who worked or walked down there looked like children. The papal altar, which is topped by a bronze baldachin that surpasses the tallest houses in Turin in height, looked like a simple armchair from there.

The last floor we ascended is the one that rests on the tip of the dome, from where one enjoys perhaps the most majestic view in the world. All around, one's gaze gets lost in a horizon formed by the limits of human sight. They say that looking

east, one can see the Adriatic Sea, and to the west, the Mediterranean. However, we could only glimpse the fog that the rainy weather of the past days had spread everywhere.

There was still the ball, a globe that from the ground looks like one of the balls we use to pass the time. From there it appeared enormous. Those most brave, passing through a perpendicular ladder and walking as if inside a sack, climbed like cats to a height of two *trabucchi*, or six meters. Some did not have enough courage. We, who were a bit more daring, succeeded. From the ball, everything looks wonderful. I was told it could hold sixteen people. However, it seemed to me that thirty could fit comfortably. Some holes, almost small windows, allow one to observe the city and the countryside. But the great height gives a certain sensation and does not make the view entirely pleasant. We thought it would be cold up there. Quite the opposite: the sun beating down on the bronze of the ball warmed it to such an extent that it felt like we were in the middle of summer. I believe this is one of the reasons why after lunch it is not allowed to go up there: due to the unbearable heat. Here, after discussing various matters concerning the youth of the oratory, satisfied with our venture, as if we had achieved a great victory, we began the descent with slow and grave steps, so as not to break our necks, and without stopping, we reached the ground.

To rest a bit, we went to listen to the sermon that had just begun in the Basilica. We liked the preacher. Good language, pleasant movement, but the theme did not interest us much because it dealt with the observance of civil laws. However, what did not serve to nourish the spirit served very well to give rest to the body. With a little time left, we used it to visit the sacristy, which is a true magnificence worthy of St. Peter. Meanwhile, it was eleven-thirty, and due to fasting and all the walking, we had a great appetite. Therefore, we went to have a small meal. Rua, not satisfied, thought it best to go to lunch, so I remained alone with Mr. Carlo De Maistre, an

inseparable companion of that day. After refreshing ourselves a bit, we went to visit Monsignor Borromeo, the “majordomo” of His Holiness, who welcomed us very well. After talking about Piedmont and Milan, his homeland, he noted our names to include us in the catalogue of people who wish to receive the palm from the Holy Father during the Palm Sunday service.

To the famous Museums

Next to the loggia of this prelate, around the courtyard of the papal palace, are the [Vatican Museums](#). We entered and saw truly exceptional things. I will describe only a few. There is a hall of extraordinary length adorned with marble and precious paintings. In the middle of the second arch stands a holy water font about one and a half metres high, made of malachite, one of the most precious marbles in the world. It was a gift from the Emperor of Russia to the Supreme Pontiff. There are various other objects of a similar kind. At the end of that large hall on the left opens a kind of long corridor that houses the Christian museum [...] Along the same corridor there is the [Vatican Library](#), where the most famous manuscripts of antiquity are preserved [...]

Going around Rome

From the Vatican heading towards the centre of Rome, we arrived at Scossacavalli square where the writers of the famous periodical *La Civiltà Cattolica* work. We stopped to pay them a visit and felt a real pleasure in observing that the main supporters of this publication are from Piedmont. I was now feeling a strong desire to return home, overcoming any hesitation, and we were almost at the Quirinal when Mr. Foccardi saw us pass in front of his shop and called us inside. Given the numerous invitations and so much courtesy, he kept us for quite a while, and when we asked to leave, he said:

– *The carriage is here; I will accompany you home.* Although I reluctantly got into the carriage, I agreed to please him. But Foccardi, wanting to stay with us longer, made us take a long

detour so that we arrived home late at night.

Here I was handed a letter. I opened it and read it. *Mr. Abbot Bosco is informed that His Holiness has deigned to admit him to the audience tomorrow, March 9th, from eleven forty-five to one o'clock.* This news, hoped for and much desired, caused an inner revolution in me, and for the whole evening, I could not talk about anything else but the Pope and the audience.

The papal audience. St. Mary above Minerva

March 9th had arrived, the great day of the papal audience. However, first I needed to speak with Cardinal Gaude. Therefore, I went to say Mass in the church of St. Mary above Minerva, where the cardinal had his residence. It was formerly a temple that Pompey the Great had built for the goddess Minerva. It was called [St. Mary above Minerva](#) because it was built precisely above the ruins of this temple. In the year 750, Pope Zacharias donated it to a convent of Greek nuns. In 1370, it passed to the Preachers who still officiate it today. The area in front of this church opens up to a square where we admired an Egyptian obelisk with hieroglyphics, whose base rests on the back of a marble elephant. Upon entering, we were able to admire one of the most beautiful sacred buildings in Rome. Under the main altar rests the **body of St. Catherine of Siena**. After celebrating Mass and hastily going to Cardinal Gaude, I spoke to him, and then we set off for the Quirinal.

The young liar

Along the way, we met a boy who graciously asked us for alms, and to let us know his condition, he told us that his father was dead, his mother had five daughters, and that he knew how to speak Italian, French, and Latin. Surprised, I addressed him in French, to which he replied with a single *oui*, without either understanding what I was saying or articulating any other expressions. I then invited him to speak Latin, and he, without paying attention to my words, began to recite from memory the following words: *ego stabam bene, pater meus mortuus est l'annus passatus et ego sum rimastus poverus.*

Mater mea etc. At this point, we could no longer hold back our laughter. However, we then warned him not to tell lies and gave him a baiocco.

The antechamber

Meanwhile, the time for the audience was approaching [...] Arriving at the Vatican, we climbed the stairs mechanically. Everywhere there were noble guards, dressed so they seemed like many princes. On the noble floor, they opened the door that led into the papal rooms. Guards and servants, dressed in great luxury, greeted us with deep bows. After handing over the ticket for the audience, we were led from room to room until we reached the papal antechamber. Since there were several others waiting, we waited about an hour and a half before being received.

We spent this time observing the people and the place where we were. The Pope's servants were dressed almost like the bishops of our towns. A monsignor, who is given the title of *domestic prelate*, took turns introducing people for the audience as the previous one finished. We admired large halls, well-upholstered and majestic, yet without luxury. A simple green cloth carpet covered the floor. The tapestries were made of red silk but without embellishments. The chairs were made of hard wood. A large chair placed on a somewhat elegant platform indicated that this was the papal hall. All of this pleased us because with our own eyes we were able to realise the falsity of the rumours that some spread against the space and luxury of the papal court. While we were immersed in various thoughts, the bell rang, and the prelate signalled us to advance to present ourselves to Pius IX. At that moment, I was truly confused and had to force myself to remain calm.

Pius IX

Rua followed me carrying a copy of the *Catholic Readings*. Upon entering, we genuflected at the beginning, then halfway down the hall, and finally, the third time, at the feet of the Pope. All apprehension ceased when we saw in the Pontiff the

appearance of a kind, venerable man, and at the same time the most beautiful that any painter could depict. We could not kiss his foot because he was seated at a small table; however, we kissed his hand, and Rua, remembering the promise made to the clerics, kissed it once for himself and once for his companions. Then the Holy Father signalled us to rise and stand before him. I, according to etiquette, would have liked to speak while remaining on my knees.

– *No*, he said, *you may rise*. It is worth noting here that when we announced ourselves to the Pope, our name was read incorrectly. In fact, instead of writing Bosco, Bosser was written, so the Pope began to question me:

– *Are you from Piedmont?*

– *Yes, Your Holiness, I am from Piedmont, and at this moment I feel the greatest consolation of my life, being at the feet of the Vicar of Christ.*

– *What do you do?*

– *Your Holiness, I am involved in the education of youth and the Catholic Readings.*

– *The education of youth has been a useful apostolate in all times, but today it is much more so. There is also another in Turin who is concerned with young people.* Then I noticed that the Pope had a wrong name in front of him, but, without knowing how, he also realised that I was not Bosser, but Bosco. Thus he took on a much more cheerful demeanour and asked many things regarding the youth, the clerics, the oratories [...] Then with a smiling face he said to me:

– *I remember the offering sent to me in Gaeta and the tender feelings with which those young people accompanied it. I took the opportunity to express to him the attachment of our young people to his person and asked him to accept a copy of the Catholic Readings:*

– *Your Holiness, I said, I offer you a copy of the booklets printed until now in the name of the governance. The binding is the work of the young people of our school.*

– *How many are these young people?*

– *Your Holiness, the young people of the house are about two*

hundred, the binders are fifteen.

– *Good*, he replied, *I want to send a medal to each one*. Then going into another room, after a few brief moments he returned carrying fifteen small medals of the Conception:

– *These will be for the young binders*, he said as he handed them to me. Turning then to Rua, he gave him a larger one saying:

– *This is for your companion*. Then turning again to me, he handed me a small box that contained a larger one:

– *And this is for you*. Having knelt to receive the gifts, the Holy Father invited us to rise, and then believing that we wanted to leave, he was about to dismiss us when I began to speak to him like this:

– *Your Holiness, I have something particular to communicate to you*.

– *That's fine*, he replied [...].

The Holy Father is very quick to understand questions and very prompt in giving answers, so with him, it takes five minutes to discuss what would require over an hour with others. However, the Pope's kindness and my strong desire to stay with him extended the audience by over half an hour, a considerable time both regarding his person and regarding the hour of lunch which was delayed for our sake [...].

The Janiculum

At 1:30 p.m. on March 10, Father Giacinto of the Discalced Carmelites came to pick us up with a carriage to take us to the [Basilica of St. Pancras](#) and [San Pietro in Montorio](#). These are two churches located on the Janiculum, named so because of Janus, who is said to have lived there. At the top of this hill beyond the Tiber is the Basilica of St. Pancras, built by Pope Felix II in 485, about 100 years after the martyrdom of Pancras. General Narses, having defeated the Goths, made a solemn procession together with Pope Pelagius from St. Pancras to St. Peter. St. Gregory the Great, who had great veneration for this church, celebrated Mass there several times and held some homilies, finally donating it to the Benedictine monks.

In 1673 it was entrusted to the Discalced Carmelites with the attached convent and a seminary for the missions to the Indies [...]

Under the main altar, there is another underground altar where the body of the Saint was once kept, protected by an iron railing. It was customary to bring those suspected of perjury before this railing, for if they were guilty, they would be seized by a noticeable trembling or some other accident.

The Catacombs

– *Come with me*, said Father Giacinto, *we will go to the catacombs*. He had prepared a lamp for each of us. We began to follow him. In the middle of the church, he pointed to a trapdoor on the floor. When he lifted the lid, a dark and deep cavity appeared: the catacombs began. At the entrance, it was written in Latin: *“In this place the martyr of Christ Pancras was beheaded.”* Here we are in the catacombs. Imagine long corridors now narrower and lower, now higher and more spacious, now cut by other corridors, now descending, now ascending, and you will get the first idea of these undergrounds. On the right and left, there are small graves dug parallel in the tuff. Here, Christians were buried in ancient times, especially martyrs. Those who had given their lives for the faith were designated with particular emblems. The palm was a sign of victory over tyrants; the ampoule indicated that they had shed blood for the faith; the “χ” meant that they had died in the peace of the Lord or had suffered for Christ. In others, the instruments with which they were martyred appeared. Sometimes these emblems were enclosed in the small tomb of the saint. When persecutions were not too severe, the name and surname of the martyr were written along with a few lines highlighting some important circumstance of their life. [...]

– *Here*, the guide said to us, *this is the place where St. Pancras was buried, next to him St. Dionysius, his uncle, and nearby another relative*. Then we visited some graves gathered

in a small room whose walls bore ancient inscriptions that we could not read. In the middle of the vault, there was a painting of a young man who seemed to represent St. Pancras [...]

This time the guide pointed out a crypt to us. Crypt, a Greek word, that means depth. It is a space larger than usual where Christians used to gather during times of persecution to listen to the Word, attend Mass, and sacred functions. On one side, there is still an ancient altar where it is possible to celebrate. Generally, it was the tomb of some martyr that served as an altar. After a bit of walking, we were shown the chapel where Pope St. Felix used to rest and celebrate the Eucharist. His tomb is not far away. Everywhere we saw human skeletons reduced to pieces by time. Our guide assured us that soon we would arrive at a place where slabs with intact inscriptions were preserved.

But we were very tired, also because the underground air and the difficulties of the path – everyone had to be careful not to bump their heads, not to hit their shoulders, and not to slip with their feet – had fatigued us quite a bit. The guide warned us that the undergrounds are numerous and some extend up to fifteen/twenty miles in length. If we had gone alone, we could have sung *requiescant in pace*, because it would have been very difficult to find the way back to the surface. However, our guide was very practical and soon led us back to the point from where we had started [...]

San Pietro in Montorio

Once again in the carriage with Father Giacinto, we headed down from the Janiculum to go to *San Pietro in Montorio*. The word is a corrupted version of “*mount of gold*”, because here the soil and gravel take on a yellow colour similar to gold. It was also called *Castro Aureo*, fortress of gold, for the remains of the fortress of Ancus Marcius that still exist on the top. It is one of the churches founded by Constantine the Great, rich in statues, paintings, and marble. Between the

church and the attached convent stands a round-shaped building called the [Tempietto of Bramante](#). It is one of Bramante's most significant works. It was built on the site where St. Peter was martyred. At the back, a staircase leads to a circular underground chapel, in the middle of which there is a hole where a lamp burns continuously. It is the place where the top of the cross on which St. Peter was nailed upside down was inserted. The church is located where the Janiculum ends and the Vatican begins.

Near San Pietro in Montorio is the magnificent [Paolina Fountain](#), which Paul V had built in 1612. Water flows from three columns that resemble a river. It comes from Bramario, a place 35 miles from Rome. This water, cascading down, is used to turn millstones and other machines, and it branches out advantageously at various points in the city [...].

An unfortunate event

On March 11, we were busy writing and running errands. The episode of getting lost in Rome deserves mention. I went to visit Monsignor Pacca, the domestic prelate of His Holiness. On the way back, I was accompanied by Father Bresciani, having sent Rua to look for Father Botandi at Ponte Sisto. Good Bresciani took me to the Academy of the Sapienza and then pointed out where to go to reach the Quirinal:

– *Cross this area, then always keep to the right.* Instead of going right, I went left, so after an hour of walking, I found myself in Piazza del Popolo, almost a mile from home. Poor me! If only I had Rua with me, we could have consoled each other, but I was alone. The weather was cloudy, a strong wind was blowing, and it was starting to rain. What to do? I was reluctant to sleep in the middle of that square, so with all patience, I climbed up to the Pincian Hill, named after the palace of a gentleman called Pincio [...]. This hill is not very populated and is not one of the seven hills of Rome [...]

St. Andrew of the Valley

On Friday, the 12th, I went to celebrate Mass at [St. Andrew of](#)

[the Valley](#) to distinguish it from other churches dedicated to the same Apostle. The word Valley was added because the basilica is located at the lowest point of Rome and also because of a palace belonging to the Valle family. In ancient times, the church was dedicated to St. Sebastian, who suffered martyrdom here. Nearby, another church dedicated to St. Louis, King of France, was built. But in the year 1591, a wealthy gentleman named Gesualdo had it renovated, completely renewing its design. It is one of the first churches in Rome. Its dome measures 64 palms in diameter, and therefore, after St. Peter's in the Vatican, it is the widest dome of all the others in the city.

The first chapel on the left upon entering has an iron gate that indicates the point of the sewer where it is believed the body of the martyr *St. Sebastian* was thrown. Almost opposite this church is the Stoppani palace, which served as the residence of Emperor Charles V when he came to Rome, as indicated by an inscription on the wall at the foot of the stairs.

St. Gregory the Great

An hour and a half after noon, with Mr. Francesco De Maistre, our guide, we set off to visit the [Church of St. Gregory the Great](#). It is built on a part of the Caelian Hill, formerly known as *Clivus Scauri*, meaning the descent of Scaurus, and it was the house inhabited by St. Gregory and his followers. He was the one who converted it into a monastery, where he lived until the year 590, initially as a simple monk, then as Abbot. When he was elected pope (in 590), he dedicated that building to the apostle St. Andrew, transforming part of the premises for use as a church. After his death, it was dedicated to him.

It is certainly one of the most beautiful churches in Rome. The first chapel on the left as you enter is dedicated to St. Silvia, the mother of St. Gregory. The last chapel on the right is that of the Sacrament, on whose altar St. Gregory himself celebrated. [...]. This altar, venerable for the title

and patronage of the holy Pope, became famous throughout the world due to the privileges granted by many popes. *It happened that a monk from the monastery, having been commanded by the saint, offered Mass for thirty consecutive days in suffrage for the soul of a deceased brother, and another monk saw him released from the pains of purgatory.*

Next to this chapel, there is another smaller one, where St. Gregory would retreat to rest. The exact spot where his bed was located is still shown. Nearby is the marble chair on which he sat both when he wrote and when he announced the Word of God to the people.

After passing the main altar, one encounters the chapel that houses a very ancient and miraculous image of the Madonna. It is believed to be the one that the Saint kept in his house, and every time he passed by it, he greeted it saying "*Hail, Mary*". One day, however, the good Pope, in a hurry due to some urgent matters, did not address the usual greeting to the Virgin as he left. And she gave him this sweet reproach: "*Hail, Gregory*", with which words she invited him not to forget that greeting which was so pleasing to her.

In another chapel, the statue of St. Gregory stands out, a work designed and directed by Michelangelo Buonarroti. The Saint is seated on a throne with a dove near his ear, recalling what Peter the Deacon, a relative of the Saint, asserts, namely that whenever Gregory preached or wrote, a dove always spoke to him in his ear. In the centre of the chapel is a large marble table on which the Pope would offer food to twelve poor people every day, serving them with his own hands. One day, an angel in the form of a young man sat at the table with the others, and then suddenly disappeared. From then on, the Saint increased the number of the poor he fed to thirteen. Thus, this is how the custom of placing thirteen pilgrims at the table that the Pope serves by his own hand every Holy Thursday originated. Above the table is inscribed the following distich: "*Here Gregory fed twelve poor; an angel*

sat at the table and completed the number to thirteen."

Saints John and Paul

Exiting this church and turning right, one encounters that of [Saints John and Paul](#). Emperor Jovian allowed the monk St. Pammachius to build it in 400 in honour of these two martyr brothers. It was built over their dwelling, precisely where they suffered martyrdom. It was later restored by Pope St. Symmachus around 444 [...] Upon entering, a majestic building appears. In the middle, an iron gate marks the place where the saints were killed. Their bodies, enclosed in a precious urn, rest under the main altar. In the adjacent chapel, under the altar, the body of Blessed Paul of the Cross, founder of the Passionists, is kept, to whom the church is entrusted. This servant of God is from Piedmont, born in Castellazzo in the diocese of Alexandria. He died in 1775 at the age of 82. The many miracles that occur in Rome and elsewhere through his intercession have led to the growth of the congregation of the Passionists, so named because of the fourth vow they take, namely to promote veneration for the passion of the Lord.

One of those religious, a Genoese, Brother Andrew, after accompanying us to see the most important things in the church, took us to the convent, a beautiful building that houses about eighty fathers, mostly from Piedmont.

– This, Brother Andrew told us, is the room where our holy Founder died. We entered and, in devout recollection, admired the place from which his soul departed to go to heaven.

– There is the chair, the clothes, the books, and other objects that were used by the Blessed. Everything is kept under seal and is distributed as relics to the Christian faithful.

That room is now a chapel where Mass is celebrated.

Arches of Constantine and Titus

After greeting the courteous Brother Andrew, we set off towards [St. Lawrence in Lucina](#). But after a little while, we

found ourselves under the [Arch of Constantine](#). It has been preserved almost intact. An inscription from the Senate and the Roman people indicates that it was dedicated to Emperor Constantine on the occasion of the victory over the tyrant Maxentius. This Emperor, having become a Christian, had a statue placed on the arch with a cross in hand in memory of the cross that appeared to him before the army, to remind the whole world that he professed the religion of the Crucified Jesus.

After walking a bit further, there is another arch, the [Arch of Titus](#). There are three arches in Rome, and that of Titus is the oldest and most elegant. It is adorned with bas-reliefs that commemorate the various victories achieved by that brave warrior: among them is carved the candelabrum of the Temple of Jerusalem in memory of the fall of that city and its temple. Under this arch passed the famous *Via Sacra*, one of the oldest in Rome, so named because sacred things were carried upon it every month to the Fortress, and the Augurs walked along it to receive their responses.

Upon arriving at *St. Lawrence in Lucina*, we could not enter due to the work being done there [...] This church is one of the largest parishes in Rome and was erected by Sixtus III with the consent of Emperor Valentinian in honour of St. Lawrence the martyr. To distinguish it from other churches erected to this deacon, it was named in Lucina either after the holy martyr of that name or perhaps from the place that was called as such. Attached to this church towards the street is the [Ottobuoni palace](#), built around the year 1300 over the ruins of a large ancient building called the *Palace of Domitian*. Being tired and with lunchtime approaching, we returned home [...].

St. Mary of the Angels

[...] On March 13, the Lenten station was at [St. Mary of the Angels](#), and we went there both to gain the plenary indulgence and to pray to God for our house. This church is distinguished

from another with the same name with the addition of the [Baths of Diocletian](#) because it is built on the site where the famous baths of Emperor Diocletian once stood. The supreme pontiff Pius IV commissioned Michelangelo Buonarroti, who with his immense genius was able to transform part of those superb buildings into a church. In one of the halls of the baths, there was already a small church dedicated to St. Cyril the Martyr. This was enclosed in the new church, which the Pope dedicated to St. Mary of the Angels, to please the Duke and King of Sicily, a devoted servant of the Angels, who greatly assisted in its construction.

On the day of the Lenten station, the church is adorned with special elegance, and the most significant relics are exposed for public veneration. In a chapel next to the main altar, there was a reliquary with many relics, among which we noted the bodies of St. Prosper, St. Fortunatus, St. Cyril, as well as the heads of St. Justin and St. Maximus, martyrs, and many others. Having thus satisfied our devotion, we arrived home around six, quite tired and with a good appetite.

St. Mary of the Oak

On Sunday, March 14, we celebrated at home, then we went to visit an oratory, according to the indications given by Marquis Patrizi. The church where the young people gather is called [St. Mary of the Oak](#). Here is its origin, which dates back to the time of Julius II. An image of Mary had been painted on a tile by a certain Battista Calvaro, who placed it above an oak tree in his vineyard in Viterbo. This image remained hidden for sixty years until, in 1467, it began to manifest with many graces and miracles, so that the faithful who went to visit it, with their offerings, raised a church and a monastery. Pope Julius II wished that there would also be a temple dedicated to Mary of the Oak in Rome, which is the one we are talking about.

Upon entering the church and arriving in the spacious sacristy, we were delighted by the sight of about forty young

boys. Due to their lively behaviour, they resemble very much the mischievous boys from our oratory. Their sacred functions are all performed in the morning. Mass, confession, catechism, and a brief instruction are what is done for them [...]

After noon, the youth go to [St. John of the Florentines](#), another oratory where there is only recreation without church functions. We went there and saw about a hundred young people having a great time. Their games were *tombola* (a raffle) and *campana* (hopscotch), known to us as well. They also play a game called "*buco*," which consists of five fairly large holes into which two chestnuts or something else are placed. From a distance of six paces, a ball is rolled. Whoever manages to get it into one of the holes wins what is inside. We were very sorry that they had nothing but recreation. If there were a priest among them, he could do good for their souls, as there is a great need for it. It saddened us even more because we found them well-disposed. Several were pleased to talk with us, kissing the hands of both me and Rua, who, against his will, was forced to agree [...]

Upon returning home, we received a visit from Monsignor *Merode*, the Chamberlain of His Holiness. After some pleasantries, he announced to me that the Holy Father was inviting me to preach the spiritual exercises to the female inmates in the prisons near *St. Mary of the Angels at the Baths of Diocletian*. Every desire of the Pope is a command for me, and so I accepted with true pleasure [...]

At the women's prison

At two in the afternoon, I went to see the superior of the prison to arrange the day and time to begin the preaching. She told me:

– *If it is good for you, you can start right away, as the women are in church and there is no one to preach.* So I started immediately, and the week was almost entirely dedicated to this ministry. The correctional facility is called "*At the Baths of Diocletian*" because it is located in

the same place where the baths of that famous emperor were. There were 260 inmates housed there, guilty of serious crimes and sentenced to prison [...]. The exercises went satisfactorily. The simple and popular preaching that we use among ourselves proved fruitful in this prison. On Saturday, after the last sermon, the mother superior announced to me with great pleasure that none of the inmates had failed to approach the Sacraments.

Two episodes

A pleasant episode occurred to the Holy Father this week. Count Spada went to visit him, and this conversation ensued:

– *Holiness, I would like to ask you for a memento of this visit.*

– *Ask for whatever you want, and I will try to satisfy you.*

– *I would like something extraordinary.*

– *Well, go ahead and ask.*

– *Holiness, I would like your snuffbox as a keepsake.*

– *But it is full of very poor quality tobacco.*

– *It doesn't matter. I will cherish it dearly.*

– *Take it, I gladly give it to you as a gift.* Count Spada left happier with that snuffbox than with a great treasure. It is simple, made of buffalo horn, joined with two brass rings, and is worth no more than four coins, but it is very precious because of its origin. The good count shows it to his friends as an object worthy of veneration [...]

Another anecdote was told to me about this venerable Pontiff. Last year, while the Holy Father was traveling through his states, he found himself near Viterbo. A girl with a bundle of wood, seeing that the papal carriage had stopped, thought that those gentlemen wanted to buy her bundle. She ran towards them:

– *Sir, she said to the Holy Father, buy it, the wood is very dry.*

– *We do not need it,* replied the Pope.

– *Buy it, I will give it to you for three baiocchi.*

– *Take the three baiocchi and keep your bundle.* The Holy Father gave her three *scudi*, then prepared to get back into the carriage. But the girl wanted the Holy Father to take her bundle.

– *Take it, you will be happy; there is plenty of room in your carriage.* While the Pope and his court laughed at such a deal, the girl's mother, who was working in a nearby field, rushed over shouting:

– *Holy Father, Holy Father, forgive her; this poor girl is my daughter. She does not know you. Have pity on us, for we are in great misery.* The Pope added another six *scudi* and continued on his way [...]

St. Paul Outside the Walls

On Sunday, March 22, Don Bosco went to the Cardinal Vicar, the Most Eminent Costantino Patrizi [...] After leaving the Vicariate, he wandered to [St. Paul Outside the Walls](#) to venerate the tomb of the great Apostle of the Gentiles and admire the wonders of that immense temple. After a mile of walking, he arrived at the famous place called [Ad Aquas Salvias](#), where St. Paul shed his blood for Jesus Christ. Right at this point, where there are three miraculous springs of water, which gushed from the ground where the saint's severed head made three leaps, a church has been built. Don Bosco also prayed in the nearby church of [Sancta Maria Scala Coeli](#), octagonal in shape, built on the cemetery of St. Zenon, a tribune who suffered martyrdom under Diocletian, along with 10,203 of his comrades [...]

The Colosseum

On March 23, his astonished gaze contemplated the gigantic ruins of the Flavian amphitheatre or [Colosseum](#), oval in shape with a 527-meter external circumference, and still standing fifty meters high in some places. In its time of splendour, it was covered in marble, adorned with colonnades, hundreds of statues, obelisks, and bronze chariots. Inside it supported immense terraces all around, which could hold about 200,000

people, to witness the fights of wild beasts and gladiators, and the slaughter of thousands and thousands of martyrs. Don Bosco entered the arena of the shows, which measures 241 meters in circumference [...]

St. Clement

On the 24th, Don Bosco went to the [Basilica of St. Clement](#) to venerate the relics of the fourth pope after St. Peter, and those of St. Ignatius the martyr, Bishop of Antioch, as well as to admire the architecture of the ancient three-nave church. In the middle nave, in front of the Altar of the Confession, a white marble enclosure delineates the choir for the minor clergy. It is equipped with two pulpits, one for the singing of the Gospel, near which rises the small column of the paschal candle, and the other for the reading of the epistle. Next to the latter was the lectern for the singers and readers of the prophecies and other books of scripture. Around the apse are the seats of the priests, and at the back in the centre on three steps, the episcopal chair [...].

Don Bosco proceeded from there to the [Church of the Four Crowned Martyrs](#) to visit the tombs of the martyrs Severus, Severinus, Carpophorus, and Victorinus, who were killed under Diocletian. He then passed to [St. John](#) in front of the Latin Gate, near which stands a chapel on the spot where St. John the Evangelist was immersed in a cauldron of boiling oil. From there he made his way to the little church of [Quo Vadis](#), so named because at that point the Lord appeared to St. Peter as he was leaving Rome to escape persecution:

– *Lord, where are you going?* exclaimed the astonished Apostle. And Jesus replied:

– *I come to be crucified again.* St. Peter understood, and returned to Rome where martyrdom awaited him. From this little temple, Don Bosco retraced his steps, after taking a look at the Appian Way, along which many mausoleums from pagan times can be counted, recalling the end of every human greatness.

Don Bosco... Salesian!

A charming scene occurred on the morning of March 25. Don Bosco, having crossed the Tiber, saw about thirty boys having fun in a small square. Without hesitation, he went among them, who, having suspended their games, looked at him in wonder. He then raised his hand holding a medal between his fingers, and exclaimed:

– *There are too many of you, and I regret not having enough medals to give one to each of you.* Gathering courage, they stretched out their hands and shouted loudly:

– *It doesn't matter, it doesn't matter... to me, to me!* Don Bosco added:

– *Well, since I don't have one for everyone, I want to give this medal to the best one. Who among you is the best?*

– *It's me, it's me!* they all shouted together. He continued:

– *How can I decide if you are all equally good? Then I will give it to the most mischievous! Who among you is the most mischievous?*

– *It's me, it's me!* they responded with deafening shouts.

The Marquis Patrizi and his friends, at a certain distance, smiled, moved and astonished to see Don Bosco treating those boys whom he had met for the first time, so familiarly, and exclaimed:

– *Here is another St. Philip Neri, a friend of youth.* Don Bosco indeed, as if he were an old friend of those children, continued to ask them if they had already attended Mass, which church they usually went to, and if they frequented the oratories that were in those areas [...] The dialogue was lively. Don Bosco, after encouraging them to always be good Christians, promised that he would pass through that square again and would give a medal to each one. Then, affectionately bidding them farewell, he returned to his companions showing the medal. He had given nothing to the boys, yet he had left them happy.

St. Stephen in the Round

On March 26, Don Bosco returned to the Caelian Hill in the spacious [church of St. Stephen in the Round](#), named for its

shape. The circular cornice is supported by 56 columns. All around the walls are painted scenes of the atrocious tortures with which the martyrs were torn apart. It is adorned with mosaics from the 7th century, representing Jesus crucified, with some saints, and preserves the bodies of two confessors of the faith: St. Primus and St. Felician. From there, Don Bosco passed by [St. Mary in Domnica](#), or *alla Navicella*, for a marble boat that stands in the square in front. It has three naves divided by 18 columns and contains mosaics from the 9th century. Among these, the Virgin is in the place of honour among many angels, and at her feet kneels Pope Paschal [...]

Meanwhile, the Holy Father had expressed the desire for Don Bosco to attend the devout and magnificent spectacle of the Holy Week functions in the Vatican. He then entrusted Monsignor Borromeo with the task of inviting him in his name and procuring him a place from which he could comfortably attend the sacred rites. The monsignor searched for him all day without success. Finally, at a very late hour, the messenger found him at the De Maistre house where he had returned after a day of visits. Announcing that he came on the Pope's orders, he was introduced and then he presented Don Bosco with the invitation letter, with which he was permitted to receive the blessed palm from the very hands of the Pope. Don Bosco read it immediately and exclaimed that he would go with great pleasure.

Don Bosco's Roman Easter. Palm Sunday

On Sunday, March 28, with the cleric Rua, he entered the Basilica of St. Peter long before the functions began. Count Carlo De Maistre accompanied him to his place, in the diplomatic gallery. He was very attentive as he knew the importance of the Church's ceremonies. Next to him was a Protestant English *milord*, amazed at such solemnity. At a certain point, a singer from the Sistine Chapel performed a solo so well that Don Bosco was moved to tears, and that *milord* turning to him, exclaimed in Latin, as he did not

know how to make himself understood in another language:

– *Post hoc paradisus!* That gentleman, after some time, converted to Catholicism and not only that, but he became a priest and bishop. After blessing the palms, the diplomatic corps took turns passing before the Pontiff, and each ambassador and minister received the palm from his hands. Don Bosco and the cleric Rua also knelt at the feet of the Pope and received the palm. This is what Pius IX wanted: was not Don Bosco an ambassador of God? The cleric Rua, having returned to the Rosminians, gave his to Father Pagani, who greatly appreciated it [...]

Don Bosco as a *caudatario*

Cardinal Marini, one of the two assistants to the throne, took Don Bosco on as a *caudatario* so that he could attend all the functions of Holy Week. Thus, in violet vestments, he stood almost beside the Pope the whole time, and was able to enjoy the Gregorian chants and the music of Allegri and Palestrina. On Holy Thursday, Cardinal Mario Mattei, being the oldest of the suburbicarian bishops, officiated instead of the dean cardinal who was impeded. Don Bosco followed the Pontiff, who was carrying the Blessed Sacrament in procession to the Pauline chapel, to place it inside the specially prepared urn. He accompanied him to the Vatican loggia from which the Pope blesses Rome and the world. He attended the washing of the feet performed by the Pontiff on thirteen priests, and participated in their commemorative dinner, served by the Vicar of Jesus Christ.

The *Urbi et Orbi* blessing

[...] On April 4th, the artillery salutes from Castel S. Angelo announced Easter day. Pius IX descended into the Basilica around ten for the pontifical mass. Immediately after, preceded by a procession of bishops and cardinals, he went to the Loggia for the *Urbi et Orbi* blessing. Don Bosco, with Cardinal Marini and a bishop, remained for a moment near the windowsill covered by a magnificent drape, on which three

golden Papal Tiaras had been placed. The cardinal said to Don Bosco:

– *Observe what a sight!* Don Bosco looked around the square with astonished eyes. A crowd of 200,000 people was packed with their faces turned towards the Loggia. The roofs, windows, and terraces of all the houses were occupied. The French army filled part of the space between the obelisk and the steps of St. Peter's. The battalions of the papal infantry were lined up to the right and left. Behind them were the cavalry and artillery. Thousands of carriages were stopped on both sides of the square, near Bernini's porticoes, and at the back near the houses. Especially on those for hire stood groups of people who seemed to dominate the square. There was a loud chatter, the stomping of horses, an incredible confusion. No one can imagine such a spectacle.

Trapped

Don Bosco, who had left the Pope in the Basilica while he was venerating the significant relics, believed that he would take a while to appear. Absorbed in contemplating so many people from every nation, he did not notice the approach of the gestatorial chair on which the Pope was seated. He found himself in a difficult position. Squeezed between the chair and the balustrade, he could barely move. All around him cardinals, bishops, ceremonial attendants, and seat attendants were crowded, so he could see no way to get out. Turning his face to the Pope was inappropriate, turning his back to him was uncivil and remaining in the centre of the balcony was ridiculous. Unable to do better, he turned sideways. Then the tip of one of the Pope's feet came to rest on his shoulder.

At that moment, a solemn silence reigned over the great square so that one could hear even the buzz of a fly. The horses themselves stood still. Don Bosco, completely unperturbed, attentive to every little detail, observed that a single neigh, and the sound of a clock striking the hours, could be heard while the Pope recited the customary prayers. Meanwhile,

seeing that the floor of the Loggia was strewn with leaves and flowers, he bent down, and picking up some flowers, he placed them between the pages of the book he was holding. Finally, Pius IX stood up to give his blessing. He opened his arms, raised his hands to heaven, stretched them over the multitude that bowed their heads, and his voice, singing the formula of the blessing, resonant, powerful, solemn, could be heard beyond Piazza Rusticucci and from the attic of the palace of the writers of the *Civiltà Cattolica*.

The crowd responded with an immense ovation. Then Cardinal Ugolini read the Brief of the plenary indulgence in Latin, and immediately after, Cardinal Marini repeated it in Italian. Don Bosco had knelt, and when he got back up, the papal procession had already disappeared. All the bells were ringing in celebration, the cannon thundered from Castel Sant'Angelo, and the military bands sounded their trumpets. Cardinal Marini, accompanied by the attendant, descended and went towards his carriage. As soon as it moved, Don Bosco felt a wave of nausea from the motion that turned his stomach. Unable to resist any longer, he expressed his discomfort to the cardinal. By his advice, he got into the carriage with the coachman, but the malaise did not diminish, so he got down to walk on foot. Being in a violet robe, he would have been an object of wonder or mockery if he had crossed Rome like that. Therefore, the secretary kindly got down from the carriage and accompanied him to the palace [...].

The memory of the Pope

On April 6th, Don Bosco returned for a private audience with Pius IX along with the cleric Rua and the theologian Murialdo, admitted to the Vatican through the intercession of Don Bosco himself. They entered the antechamber at nine in the evening, and immediately Don Bosco was introduced. As soon as the Pope saw him, he said with a serious face:

– *Abbot Bosco, where did you go on Easter day during the papal blessing? There, in front of the Pope, with your shoulder*

under his foot as if the Pontiff needed to be supported by Don Bosco.

– Holy Father, he replied calmly and humbly, I was caught by surprise and I ask for forgiveness if I offended you in any way!

– And you also add the affront of asking me if you offended me? Don Bosco looked at the Pope and thought he was pretending: a smile seemed to appear on his lips. But what made you think of picking flowers at that moment? It took all of Pius IX's seriousness not to burst out laughing. [...]

– Now, Most Blessed Father, Don Bosco pleaded, please suggest a maxim that I can repeat to my young people as a reminder of the Vicar of Christ.

– The presence of God! replied the Pope. Tell your young people to always regulate themselves with this thought!... And you have nothing to ask me? Surely you desire something as well.

– Holy Father, Your Holiness has deigned to grant me what I asked for, now I have nothing left but to thank you from the bottom of my heart.

– Yet, yet, you still desire something. Thereupon Don Bosco stood there as if suspended without saying a word. The Pontiff added:

– How could that be? Do you not wish to make your young people happy when you return to them?

– Holiness, yes.

– Then wait. A few moments earlier, the theologian Murialdo, the cleric Rua, and Don Cerutti from Varazze, Chancellor in the Archdiocesan Curia of Genoa, had entered that room. They were astonished by the familiarity with which the Pope treated Don Bosco and what they saw at that moment. The Pope had opened the chest, taken out a handful of gold coins, and without counting them, handed them to Don Bosco saying:

– Take these and then give your boys a good snack. Everyone can imagine the impression that this act of kindness from Pius IX made on Don Bosco, who, with great affection, also addressed the ecclesiastics who had arrived, and blessed the

crowns, crucifixes, and other objects of devotion presented to him, and gave everyone a commemorative medal.

The educational challenge of Don Bosco

Among the cardinals who came to pay their respects there was His Eminence Tosti, at whose invitation he had spoken to the young people of the San Michele Hospice. Satisfied with Don Bosco's courtesy, since it was time for his walk, he wanted to have him as a companion, so both got into the carriage. They began to talk about the most suitable system for the education of young people. Don Bosco had come to believe that the students of that hospice did not have familiarity with their superiors, rather, they feared them. This was rather unpleasant, since the educators were priests. Therefore, he said:

– *You see, Eminence, it is impossible to educate young people well if they do not have confidence in their superiors.*

– *But how, the cardinal replied, can this confidence be gained?*

– *By making sure they come close to us, removing any reason that drives them away.*

– *And how can we do to bring them closer to us?*

– *By approaching them ourselves, trying to adapt ourselves to their tastes, making ourselves similar to them. Do you want us to try? Tell me: where in Rome can we find a good number of boys?*

– *In Piazza Termini and in Piazza del Popolo, replied the cardinal.*

– *Well then, let's go to Piazza del Popolo.*

The cardinal gave the order to the coachman. As soon as they arrived, Don Bosco got out of the carriage, and the prelate stayed to observe him. Seeing a group of young boys playing, he approached them, but the mischievous ones ran away. Then he called them with good manners, and after some hesitation, they came closer. Don Bosco gave them some little gifts, asked about their families, inquired what game they were playing,

and invited them to continue, first stopping to watch them, then starting to take part. Then others, who had been watching from afar, rushed in from all corners of the square around the priest, who welcomed everyone lovingly and had a kind word and a little gift for all. He asked if they were good, if they said their prayers and if they went to confession. When he wanted to leave, they followed him for quite a distance, only leaving him when he got back into the carriage. The cardinal was amazed.

– *Did you see?*

– *You were right!* exclaimed the cardinal [...]

The final visits

Don Bosco's final visits were reserved for the Confession of St. Peter and the Catacombs. After praying in the [Basilica of St. Sebastian](#), having seen two of the arrows that wounded the holy tribune and the column to which he was tied, he descended into the underground galleries that housed the bones of thousands and thousands of martyrs, and where for many nights St. Philip Neri kept vigil in prayer. He then went to the nearby [Catacombs of St. Callistus](#). There he was awaited by the Knight G. B. De Rossi, who had discovered them, to whom he had been introduced by Monsignor di San Marzano.

Anyone who enters those places feels such emotion that it stays with them for a lifetime. Don Bosco was absorbed in holy thoughts while walking through those undergrounds, where the first Christians, through Mass, communal prayers, the singing of psalms and prophecies, the Eucharistic Communion, and listening to bishops and popes had found the necessary strength to face martyrdom. It is impossible to contemplate with dry eyes those loculi that had enclosed the bloodied or burned bodies of so many heroes of faith, the tombs of fourteen popes who had given their lives to testify to what they taught, and the crypt of St. Cecilia.

Don Bosco observed the ancient frescoes depicting Jesus Christ and the Eucharist and the images representing the marriage of

the Blessed Virgin Mary with St. Joseph, the Assumption of Mary into heaven, the Mother of God with the Child in her arms or on her knees. He was enchanted by the sense of modesty that shone in these images, in which primitive Christian art had managed to reproduce the incomparable beauty of the soul and the highest ideal of moral perfection that should be attributed to the Virgin. There were also other figures of saints and martyrs. Don Bosco exited the catacombs at 6 in the evening. He had entered at 8 in the morning [...]

Towards home

On April 14th, Don Bosco left Rome with the cleric Rua, happy that the foundations of the Society of St. Francis de Sales had been laid [...] He then took a hired carriage, made a brief stop in the town of Palo where he found the innkeeper perfectly free from fever: his healing had been instantaneous. He would never forget the incident, and around 1875 or 76, having arrived in Genoa for business reasons, he wanted to continue his journey to Turin. He asked and learned by telegraph that Don Bosco was at the Oratory, so he went there. Yet, on that day he was having lunch at Mr. Carlo Occhetto. He then went there to find him, making endless festivities. Mr. Occhetto always remembered with great pleasure the story he heard about that healing. Arriving in Civitavecchia and having visited the papal delegate, Don Bosco went to the port to embark.

The waves this time were calm and the weather was beautiful, so he was able to disembark in Livorno, spend time with some friends, and visit some churches. Resuming the sea at dusk, Fr. Rua recalls how the ship arrived in the port of Genoa at the rising of a splendid dawn that illuminated the magnificent panorama of the superb city. As soon as Don Bosco set foot on land, he went to the college of the Artigianelli, where Don Montebruno and Mr. Giuseppe Canale were waiting for him. After noon, he boarded a train. While crossing the city, he experienced a pleasant surprise. When the bells rang for

the *Angelus*, many people in the streets and squares uncovered their heads, and the porters had also risen from their benches to recite the prayer. He recounted this several times for the edification of his students. He arrived in Turin on April 16th, welcomed by the young people with such celebration and affection that no father could wish for more from his own children.

Beatification of Camille Costa de Beauregard. And afterwards...?

The diocese of Savoy and the city of Chambéry experienced three historic days on 16, 17, and 18 May 2025. An account of the events and future prospects.

The relics of Camille Costa de Beauregard were transferred from Bocage to the Church of Notre-Dame (the site of Camille's baptism) on Friday, 16 May. A magnificent procession then wound through the city streets from 8 pm onwards. After the Alpine horns, bagpipes took over to lead the march, followed by a flower-decked carriage carrying a giant portrait of the "father of orphans." Next came the relics, borne on a stretcher by young students from Bocage secondary school, dressed in splendid red sweaters emblazoned with Camille's words: *"The higher the mountain, the further we see."* Several hundred people of all ages followed in a cheerful, family-friendly atmosphere. Along the route, respectful onlookers paused in awe at this unusual parade.

Upon arrival at Notre-Dame, a priest led a prayer vigil accompanied by hymns from a beautiful youth choir. The

ceremony unfolded in a relaxed yet solemn atmosphere. At the vigil's close, everyone filed past to venerate the relics and entrust personal intentions to Camille. A truly moving moment!

Saturday, 17 May. The big day! Since Pauline Marie Jaricot (beatified in May 2022), France had not welcomed a new "Blessed." Thus, the entire Apostolic Region was represented by its bishops: Lyon, Annecy, Saint-Étienne, Valence, etc. They were joined by two former archbishops of Chambéry: Monsignor Laurent Ulrich, now Archbishop of Paris, and Monsignor Philippe Ballot, Bishop of Metz. Two bishops from Burkina Faso had travelled to attend the celebration. Numerous diocesan priests came to concelebrate, along with several religious figures, including seven Salesians of Don Bosco. The Apostolic Nuncio to France, Monsignor Celestino Migliore, was tasked with representing Cardinal Semeraro (Prefect of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints), detained in Rome for the enthronement of Pope Leo XIV. Needless to say, the cathedral was packed, as were the side chapels, forecourt, and Bocage—over 3,000 people in total.

What emotion when, after the reading of the papal decree (signed just the day before by Pope Leo XIV) by Father Pierluigi Cameroni, postulator of the cause, Camille's portrait was unveiled in the cathedral! What fervour filled that great nave! What solemnity, upheld by the hymns of a magnificent inter-diocesan choir and the grand organ, masterfully played by Thibaut Duré! In short, a majestic ceremony for this humble priest who devoted his entire life to serving the least among us!

Coverage was provided by RCF Savoie (a French regional radio station part of the RCF network, Radios Chrésiennes Francophones), with interviews of key figures involved in Camille's cause, and by KTO (the French-language Catholic TV channel), which broadcast the glorious celebration live.

A third day, Sunday 18 May, crowned the

festivities. Held at Bocage under a large marquee, it featured a thanksgiving Mass presided over by Monsignor Thibault Verny, Archbishop of Chambéry, flanked by the two African bishops, the Salesian Provincial, and several priests—including Father Jean François Chiron (13-year president of the Camille Committee founded by Monsignor Philippe Ballot), who delivered a remarkable homily. A considerable crowd gathered to pray and participate. After Mass, a “Camille Costa de Beauregard, Founder of Bocage” rose—selected by alumni and offered to dignitaries—was blessed by Father Daniel Féderspiel, Provincial of the Salesians of France (now available for purchase at Bocage’s greenhouses).

After the ceremony, Alpine horns performed a concert until Pope Leo, during his *Regina Coeli* discourse, declared his joy at the first beatification of his pontificate: Chambéry’s priest, Camille Costa de Beauregard. Thunderous applause erupted under the marquee!

That afternoon, various youth groups from Bocage—secondary school pupils, children’s home residents, and scouts—took turns on stage to enliven the festivities. What a celebration!

And now? Is it all over? Or is there more to come?

Camille’s beatification is just one step toward canonisation. The work continues, and you are invited to contribute. What remains to be done? Spread awareness of the new Blessed through every means, for many must pray for his intercession to obtain another miracle unexplained by science, which would allow the consideration of a new process and a rapid canonisation. Camille’s holiness would then be proclaimed to the world. It’s possible; we must believe! Let’s not stop halfway!

Resources of various kinds include:

– the book “Blessed Camille Costa de Beauregard: Nobility of Heart” by Françoise Bouchard (Éditions Salvator);

– the book “Praying Fifteen Days with Camille Costa de Beauregard” by Father Paul Ripaud (Éditions Nouvelle Cité);

– the comic book: “Blessed Camille Costa de Beauregard” by Gaëtan Evrard (Éditions Triomphe);

– Videos on the “Amis de Costa” website and the beatification footage;

– Visits to memorial sites at Bocage in Chambéry, are possible by contacting either the Bocage welcome desk or directly, Mr. Gabriel Tardy, Director of La *Maison des Enfants*).

To everyone, thank you for supporting Blessed Camille’s cause—he deserves it!

Fr. Paul Ripaud, SDB

The title of Basilica for the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome

On the centenary of the death of Fr Paul Albera it was highlighted how the second successor of Don Bosco realised what could be described as a dream of Don Bosco. In fact, thirty-four years after the consecration of the church of the Sacred Heart in Rome, which took place in the presence of the by now exhausted Don Bosco (May 1887), Pope Benedict XV – the pope of the famous and unheard of definition of the First World War as ‘useless slaughter’ – conferred on the church the title of Minor Basilica (11 February 1921). Don Bosco had “given his soul” (and his body too!) for its construction in the last seven years of his life. He had done the same in the

previous twenty years (1865-1868) with the construction of the church of Mary Help of Christians in Valdocco, Turin, the first Salesian church elevated to the dignity of a minor basilica on 28 June 1911, in the presence of the new Rector Major Fr Paul Albera.

Discovery of the request

But how did this result come about? Who was behind it? We now know for sure thanks to the recent discovery of the typewritten draft of the request for this title by Rector Major Fr Paul Albera. It is included in a booklet commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Sacred Heart published in 1905 by the then Rector Fr Francesco Tomasetti (1868-1953). The typescript, dated 17 January 1921, has minimal corrections by the Rector Major but, what is important, bears his handwritten signature.

After describing Don Bosco's work and the unceasing activity of the parish, probably taken from the old file, Fr Albera addresses the Pope in these terms

"While the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is growing and spreading all over the world, and new Churches are being dedicated to the Divine Heart, also through the noble initiative of the Salesians, as in S. Paolo in Brazil, in La Plata in Argentina, in London, in Barcelona and elsewhere, it seems that the primary Church-Sanctuary dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome, where such an important devotion has an affirmation so worthy of the Eternal City, deserves special distinction. The undersigned, therefore, having heard the opinion of the Superior Council of the Pious Salesian Society, humbly begs Your Holiness to deign to grant the Church-Sanctuary of the Sacred Heart of Jesus at the Castro Pretorio in Rome the Title and Privileges of a Minor Basilica, hoping that this honourable elevation will increase devotion, piety and every catholic beneficial activity".

The request, in its final draft, signed by Fr Albera, was most likely sent by the procurator Fr Francesco Tomasetti to the

Sacred Congregation of the Brevi, which welcomed it. He quickly drew up the draft of the Apostolic Brief to be kept in the Vatican Archives, had it transcribed by expert calligraphers on rich parchment and passed it on to the Secretariat of State for the signature of the the one in charge at the time, Cardinal Pietro Gasparri.

Today, the faithful can admire this original of the granting of the requested title nicely framed in the sacristy of the Basilica (see photo).

We can only be grateful to Dr Patrizia Buccino, a scholar of archaeology and history, and Salesian historian Fr Giorgio Rossi, who spread the news. It is up to them to complete the investigation begun by searching the Vatican Archives for the entire correspondence which will also be made known to the scientific world through the well-known Salesian history magazine "Ricerche Storiche Salesiane".

Sacred Heart: a national basilica with an international reach

Twenty-six years earlier, on 16 July 1885, at the request of Don Bosco and with the explicit consent of Pope Leo XIII, Archbishop Gaetano Alimonda, Archbishop of Turin, had warmly urged the Italians to participate in the success of the "noble and holy proposal [of the new church] calling it a national vow of the Italians".

Fr Albera in his request to the pontiff, after recalling Cardinal Alimonda's pressing appeal, recalled that all the nations of the world had been asked to contribute economically to the construction, decoration of the church and annexed works (including the inevitable Salesian oratory with a hospice!) so that the Church-Sanctuary, as well as a national vow, had become a "worldwide or international manifestation of devotion to the Sacred Heart".

In this regard, in a historical and ascetical paper published on the occasion of the 1st Centenary of the Consecration of the Basilica (1987), the scholar Armando Pedrini described it as: "A church that is therefore international because of the catholicity and universality of its message to all peoples",

also in consideration of the Basilica's "prominent position" adjacent to the acknowledged internationality of the railway station.

Rome-Termini is therefore not only a large railway station with problems of public order and a difficult scene to manage, often mentioned in the newspapers and like many railway stations in many European capitals. But it is also home to the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. And while in the evening and at night time the area does not convey security to tourists, during the day the Basilica offers peace and serenity to the faithful who enter it, stop there in prayer, receive the sacraments.

Will the pilgrims who will pass through the Termini railway station in the not too distant holy year (2025) remember this? All they have to do is cross the street... and the Sacred Heart of Jesus awaits them.

PS. In Rome there is a second Salesian parish basilica, larger and artistically richer than the Sacred Heart one: it is the Basilica of St John Bosco at Tuscolano, which became such in 1965, a few years after its inauguration (1959). Where is it located? Obviously in the Don Bosco district (a stone's throw from the famous Cinecittà studios). While the statue on the bell tower of the basilica of the Sacred Heart dominates the square of Termini station, the dome of the basilica of Don Bosco, slightly lower than St. Peter's, however, overlooks it directly, albeit from two extreme points of the capital. And since there is no two without three, there is a third splendid Salesian parish basilica in Rome: that of Santa Maria Ausiliatrice, in the Appio-Tuscolano district, next to the large Pio XI Institute.

Apostolic Letter entitled *Pia Societas*, dated 11 February 2021, by which His Holiness Benedict XV elevated the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to the rank of Basilica.

Ecclesia parochialis SS.mi Cordis Iesu ad Castrum Praetorium in urbe titulo et privilegiis Basilicae Minoris decoratur.

Benedictus pp. XV

Ad perpetuam rei memoriam.

Pia Societas sancti Francisci Salesii, a venerabili Servo Dei Ioanne Bosco iam Augustae Taurinorum condita atque hodie per dissitas quoque orbis regiones diffusa, omnibus plane cognitum est quanta sibi merita comparaverit non modo incumbendo actuose sollerterque in puerorum, orbitate laborantium, religiosam honestamque institutionem, verum etiam in rei catholicae profectum tum apud christianum populum, tum apud infideles in longinquis et asperrimis Missionibus. Eiusdem Societatis sodalibus est quoque in hac Alma Urbe Nostra ecclesia paroecialis Sacratissimo Cordi Iesu dicata, in qua, etsi non abhinc multos annos condita, eximii praesertim Praedecessoris Nostri Leonis PP. XIII iussu atque auspiciis, christifideles urbani, eorumdem Sodalium opera, adeo ad Dei cultum et virtutum laudem exercentur, ut ea vel cum antiquioribus paroeciis in honoris ac meritorum contentionem veniat. Ipsemet Salesianorum Sodalium fundator, venerabilis Ioannes Bosco, in nova Urbis regione, aere saluberrimo populoque confertissima, quae ad Gastrum Praetorium exstat, exaedificationem inchoavit istius templi, et, quasi illud erigeret ex gentis italicae voto et pietatis testimonio erga Sacratissimum Cor Iesu, stipem praecipue ex Italiae christifidelibus studiose conlegit; verumtamen pii homines ex ceteris nationibus non defuerunt, qui, in exstruendum perficiendumque templum istud, erga Ssmum Cor Iesu amore incensi, largam pecuniae vim contulerint. Anno autem MDCCCLXXXVII sacra ipsa aedes, secundum speciosam formam a Virginio Vespignani architecto delineatam, tandem perfecta ac sollemniter consecrata dedicataque est. Eamdem vero postea, magna cum sollertia, Sodales Salesianos non modo variis altaribus, imaginibus affabre depictis et statuīs, omnique sacro cultui necessaria supellectili exornasse, verum etiam continentibus aedificiis iuventuti, ut tempora nostra postulant, rite instituendae ditasse, iure ac merito Praedecessores Nostri sunt" laetati, et Nos haud minore animi

voluptate probamus. Quapropter cum dilectus filius Paulus Albera, hodiernus Piae Societatis sancti Francisci Salesii rector maior, nomine proprio ac religiosorum virorum quibus praeest, quo memorati templi Ssmi Cordi Iesu dicati maxime augeatur decus, eiusdem urbanae paroeciae fidelium fides et pietas foveatur, Nos supplex rogaverit, ut eidem templo dignitatem, titulum et privilegia Basilicae Minoris pro Nostra benignitate impertiri dignemur; Nos, ut magis magisque stimulos fidelibus ipsius paroeciae atque Urbis totius Nostrae ad Sacratissimum Cor Iesu impensius colendum atque adamandum addamus, nec non benevolentiam, qua Sodales Salesianos ob merita sua prosequimur, publice significemus, votis hisce piis annuendum ultro libenterque censemus. Quam ob rem, conlatis consiliis cum VV. FF. NN. S. R. E. Cardinalibus Congregationi Ss. Rituum praepositis, Motu proprio ac de certa scientia et matura deliberatione Nostris, deque apostolicae potestatis plenitudine, praesentium Litterarum tenore perpetuumque in modum, enunciatum templum Sacratissimo Cordi Iesu dicatum, in hac alma Urbe Nostra atque ad Castrum Praetorium situm, dignitate ac titulo Basilicae Minoris honestamus, cum omnibus et singulis honoribus, praerogativis, privilegiis, indultis quae aliis Minoribus Almae huius Urbis Basilicis de iure competunt. Decernentes praesentes Litteras firmas, validas atque efficaces semper exstare ac permanere, suosque integros effectus sortiri iugiter et obtinere, illisque ad quos pertinent nunc et in posterum plenissime suffragari; sicque rite iudicandum esse ac definiendum, irritumque ex nunc et inane fieri, si quidquam secus super his, a quovis, auctoritate qualibet, scienter sive ignoranter attentari contigerit. Non obstantibus contrariis quibuslibet.

Datum Romae apud sanctum Petrum sub annulo Piscatoris, die XI februarii MCMXXI, Pontificatus Nostri anno septimo.

P. CARD. GASPARRI, a Secretis Status.

The parish church of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus at Castrum Praetorium in the city is honoured with the title and privileges of a Minor Basilica.

Pope Benedict XV

For perpetual remembrance.

The Pious Society of St Francis de Sales, founded in Augusta Taurinorum by the Venerable Servant of God John Bosco and now spread throughout diverse regions of the world, is well known to all for the great merits it has acquired—not only by diligently and zealously devoting itself to the religious and moral education of orphaned and labouring children, but also by advancing the Catholic cause both among Christian populations and in distant and arduous missions among unbelievers. In this Our Beloved City, the members of the same Society also serve the parish church dedicated to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, where, though established not many years ago by the command and under the auspices of Our illustrious predecessor Pope Leo XIII, the urban faithful, through the work of these same members, are so fervently trained in divine worship and the praise of virtue that it may even rival older parishes in honour and merit.

The founder of the Salesian Society himself, the Venerable John Bosco, began the construction of this church in a new district of the City, renowned for its wholesome air and dense population, near Castrum Praetorium. As if raising it in fulfilment of the Italian people's vow and as a testimony of devotion to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, he diligently collected funds chiefly from the faithful of Italy; yet pious individuals from other nations were not lacking, who, inflamed with love for the Most Sacred Heart, contributed generously to the building and completion of this church. In the year 1887, the sacred edifice, designed according to the splendid plan of the architect Virginio Vespignani, was finally completed and solemnly consecrated and dedicated.

Afterwards, with great diligence, the Salesians adorned it not

only with various altars, skilfully painted images and statues, and all the furnishings necessary for sacred worship, but also enriched it with adjoining buildings for the proper education of youth, as our times demand. Our predecessors rightly and justly rejoiced at this, and We too approve with no less satisfaction.

Wherefore, since Our beloved son Paul Albera, the present Superior General of the Pious Society of St Francis de Sales, in his own name and that of the religious under his care, has humbly besought Us that the honour of the aforesaid church dedicated to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus may be greatly enhanced, and the faith and piety of the faithful of the urban parish may be fostered, and that We may deign in Our kindness to bestow upon the same church the dignity, title, and privileges of a Minor Basilica; We, desiring to further stimulate the faithful of this parish and of Our whole City to more fervent worship and love of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, and to publicly signify the benevolence with which We regard the Salesians for their merits, have willingly and gladly resolved to grant these pious requests.

For this reason, having consulted with Our Venerable Brothers the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church assigned to the Congregation of Sacred Rites, by Our own initiative, with certain knowledge and mature deliberation, and by the fullness of apostolic authority, We, by the tenor of these present Letters and in perpetuity, honour the aforesaid church dedicated to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, located in this Our Beloved City near Castrum Praetorium, with the dignity and title of a Minor Basilica, together with all and singular the honours, prerogatives, privileges, and indults which by right belong to other Minor Basilicas of this Beloved City.

We decree that these present Letters shall always be firm, valid, and effective, and shall perpetually obtain their full and complete effects, and shall fully avail those to whom they pertain now and hereafter; and thus it is to be judged and

defined in due form, and anything to the contrary, attempted by any authority, knowingly or unknowingly, is hereby declared null and void.

Notwithstanding any contrary provisions.

Given at Rome, at St Peter's, under the Fisherman's Ring, on the 11th day of February 1921, in the seventh year of Our Pontificate.

P. Cardinal Gasparri, Secretary of State.

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 Castelnuovo.

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)

St Francis de Sales instructs him. Future of vocations (1879)

In the prophetic dream Don Bosco recounted on 9 May 1879, Saint Francis de Sales appeared as a caring teacher and gave the Founder a booklet full of warnings for novices, professed members, directors, and superiors. The vision was dominated by two epic battles: first young men and warriors, then armed men and monsters, while the banner of "Mary Help of Christians" guaranteed victory to those who followed it. The survivors set off for the East, North, and South, foreshadowing the Salesian missionary expansion. The Saint's words emphasised obedience, chastity, educational charity, love of work, and temperance, indispensable pillars for the Congregation to grow, withstand trials, and leave its children a legacy of active holiness. It concluded with a coffin, a stern reminder to be vigilant and prayerful.

Think as we may of this particular dream, Don Bosco had another dream which he narrated on May 9. In it he saw the fierce battles which faced the men called to his Congregation, and he was given several valuable instructions for all his sons and sound advice for the future.

[I saw] a hard-fought, long-drawn-out battle between youngsters and a varied array of warriors who were armed with strange weapons. Survivors were few.

A second fiercer and more terrifying battle was being waged by gigantic monsters fully armed, well-trained tall men who unfurled a huge banner, the center of which bore an inscription in gold, *Maria Auxilium Christianorum*. The combat was long and bloody, but the soldiers fighting under the banner were protected against hurt and conquered a vast plain. The boys who had survived the previous battle linked forces

with them, each combatant holding a crucifix in his right hand and a miniature of the banner in his left. After engaging together in several sallies over that vast plain, they split, some heading eastward, a few to the north, and many for the south. Once they all left, the same skirmishes, maneuvers and leave-takings were repeated by others.

I recognized some boys who fought in the first skirmishes, but none of the others, who nevertheless seemed to know me and asked me many questions.

Shortly afterward I witnessed a shower of flashing, fiery tongues of many colors, followed by thunder and then clear skies. Then I found myself in a charming garden. A man who looked like Saint Francis de Sales silently handed me a booklet. I asked him who he was. "Read the book," was the reply.

I opened it, but had trouble reading, managing only to make out these precise words:

"For the Novices: Obedience in all things. Through obedience they will deserve God's blessings and the good will of men. Through diligence they will fight and overcome the snares set by the enemies of their souls.

"For the Confreres: Jealously safeguard the virtue of chastity. Love your confreres' good name, promote the honor of the Congregation.

"For the Directors: Take every care, make every effort to observe and promote observance of the rules through which everyone's life is consecrated to God.

"For the Superior: Total self-sacrifice, so as to draw himself and his charges to God."

The book said many other things, but I couldn't read any further, for the paper turned as blue as the ink.

"Who are you?" I again asked the man who serenely gazed at me.

"Good people everywhere know me. I have been sent to tell you of future events."

"What are they?"

"Those you have already seen and those which you will ask about."

"How can I foster vocations?"

"The Salesians will harvest many vocations by their good example, by being endlessly kind toward their pupils, and by urging them constantly to receive Holy Communion often."

"What should we bear in mind when admitting novices?"

"Reject idlers and gluttons."

"And when admitting to vows?"

"Make sure that they are well grounded in chastity."

"How are we to maintain the right spirit in our houses?"

"Let superiors very often write, visit and welcome the confreres, dealing kindly with them."

"What of our foreign missions?"

"Send men of sound morality and recall any who give you serious reason to doubt; look for and foster native vocations."

"Is our Congregation on the right path?"

"Let those who do good keep doing good. [Rev. 22, 11] Not to go forward is to go backward. [St. Gregory the Great] The man who stands firm to the end will be saved." [Mt. 10, 22]

"Will the Congregation grow?"

"It will reach out so that no one will be able to check its growth, as long as the superiors meet their obligations."

"Will it have a long life?"

"Yes, but only as long as its members love work and temperance.

Should either of these two pillars fall, your entire edifice will collapse and crush superiors, subjects and followers beneath it."

Just then four men showed up bearing a coffin and approaching me.

"Whom is that for?" I asked.

"For you."

"How soon?"

"Do not ask. Just remember that you are mortal."

"What are you trying to tell me with this coffin?"

"That while you are still living you must see to it that your sons practice what they must continue to practice after your

death. This is the heritage, the testament you must bequeath to them; but you must work on it and leave it [to your sons] as a well-studied and well-tested legacy."

"Can we expect roses or thorns?"

"Many roses and joys are in store, but very sharp thorns also threaten.

They will cause all of you acute distress and sorrow. You must pray much."

"Should we open houses in Rome?"

"Yes, but not hurriedly; proceed with extreme prudence and caution."

"Is the end of my mortal life near at hand?"

"Don't be concerned. You have the rules and other books. Practice what you preach and be vigilant."

I wanted to ask more questions, but muffled thunder rumbled through the air with flashes of lightning. Several men, rather horrid monsters, dashed toward me as if to tear me to pieces. But then a deep darkness enveloped me, shutting everything out. I felt that I must be dead and started to scream frenziedly. I awoke and found I was still alive. It was a quarter to five in the morning.

If we can draw some good from this dream, let us do so. In all things let honor and glory be given to God forever and ever.

(BM XIV, 88-90)

Photo on the title page. Saint Francis de Sales. Anonymous. Sacristy of Chieri Cathedral