

# 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,*

## The dream of the 22 moons (1854)

*In March 1854 on a feast day, after evening prayer Don Bosco gathered all the pupils in the back sacristy saying he wanted to tell them about a dream. Among others present were young Cagliero, Turchi, Anfossi, clerics Reviglio and Buzzetti. Our narration is based on their accounts. All of them believed that Don Bosco's dreams were true supernatural revelations. Don Bosco spoke as follows:*

I was with you in the playground, delighted to see all of you so lively and happy, jumping, shouting, and running about. Suddenly, however, one of you came out of the building wearing some sort of top hat and began strolling around in the playground. The transparent headgear was lit from the inside and revealed the picture of a moon with the number '22' in its center. Amazed, I was about to walk up to the boy and tell him to cut off that nonsense when suddenly all of you stopped playing as if the bell had rung and lined up as usual on the porch by classes. It was now semi-dark. While all of you looked frightened, nearly a dozen of you were deathly pale. I passed in front of these pale ones for a closer look, and among them I saw the boy with the top hat. He was even paler than the rest, and a black drape-like those used at funerals was hanging from his shoulders. I was about to ask him what his strange garb meant when a grave and dignified-looking stranger stopped me and said: "Wait! Know that this boy has only twenty-two moons to live. Before these are over, he will die. Take care of him and prepare him!" I wanted some

explanation of this message and his sudden appearance, but the stranger had already vanished. My dear boys, I know who that lad is. He is right here among you.

Terror gripped all of the boys. This was the very first time that Don Bosco had ever predicted the death of anyone in the house publicly and so solemnly. He could not help noticing their fear, and so he continued: "Don't be afraid! True, I know that boy, and he is here now, but this is a dream, as I have said, and you know that dreams are only dreams. One thing is certain, though-we must always be prepared, just as Our Divine Savior has warned us in the Gospel, and never commit sin. If we follow this rule, death will not frighten us. Put your conscience in order, therefore, and resolve not to offend God anymore. On my part, I shall look after the boy of the twenty-two moons. These moons signify twenty-two months. I hope that he will die a good death."

Understandably, this announcement frightened the boys, but in the long run it did them good because their attention was focused on death as they kept themselves in God's grace and counted the months. Now and then when Don Bosco would ask: "How many more moons?" they would reply "Twenty" or "Eighteen" or "Fifteen" and so on. Sometimes those who paid the closest attention to

everything he said would tell him that so many moons had already gone by, attempting at the same time to make their own predictions or guesses, but Don Bosco would say nothing. When [John Baptist] Piano entered the Oratory as a young student in November, 1854, he heard his companions say that nine moons had already passed. He then found out about Don Bosco's prediction and he too began keeping track of the moons.

The year 1854 went by, and so did many months of 1855, and then came October, the twentieth month. At this time the cleric [John] Cagliero was in charge of three adjoining rooms in the old Pinardi house. They served as a dormitory for several boys, including Secundus Gurgo a handsome, healthy,

seventeen-year-old from Pettinengo (Biella) who seemed destined to live to a ripe old age. His father had asked Don Bosco to take him in as a boarder. The youth, an excellent pianist and organist, studied music assiduously and earned good money by giving lessons in town. From time to time during the course of the year Don Bosco had asked Cagliero about the conduct of his charges with more than routine interest. In October he called him and asked: "Where do you sleep?"

"In the last room," Cagliero answered. "From there I can keep an eye on the other two."

"Wouldn't it be better if you moved your bed into the middle room?"

"If you say so, but I think I'd better tell you that it is rather damp because one of its walls is actually the wall of the church tower, which is still very porous. Winter is coming and I might get sick. Besides, I can watch all the boys in the dormitory quite well from where I am!"

"I know you can," Don Bosco replied, "but it would be better if you moved into the middle room." Cagliero complied, but after a while he asked Don Bosco's permission to move his bed back to the last room. Don Bosco did not let him do so. "Stay where you are and don't worry," he told him. 2You won't get sick!"

Cagliero felt at ease again. A few days later Don Bosco summoned him again. "How many sleep in your room?"

"There are three of us: Gurgo, Garavaglia, and myself-four, if you include the piano!"

"Good," Don Bosco said. "You are all musicians and Gurgo can teach you to play the piano. Make sure that you look after him well." That was all he said, but Cagliero's curiosity was aroused.

Suspecting something, he tried to question Don Bosco, but he cut him short, saying: "You'll know in due time." The secret, of course, was that the boy of the twenty-two moons was in that room.

One evening, at the beginning of December, after night prayers, Don Bosco mounted the podium as usual to give the Good Night and announced that one of the boys would die before Christmas. We must note that no one at the Oratory was sick at that time. Naturally this announcement, coupled with the fact that the twenty-two moons would soon be over, made everyone jittery. There was much talk about what he had said as well as fear that it would come true.

During these days Don Bosco once more sent for the cleric Cagliero. He asked him how Gurgo was behaving and whether he returned to the Oratory punctually after giving his music lessons in town. Cagliero replied that the boy was doing fine, as were the other boys. "Good," Don Bosco said. "See that they keep it up, and let me know if anything goes wrong."

About the middle of December Gurgo had a sudden attack of abdominal pains so violent that the doctor, who had been summoned at once, recommended that the boy receive the Last Sacraments. The pains continued for eight days, but, thanks to Dr. Debernardi's care, they at last began to subside and Gurgo was able to get up again. The trouble apparently vanished, but – in the doctor's opinion – the boy had had a narrow escape. Meanwhile, his father had been informed. No one had, as yet, died at the Oratory, and Don Bosco wanted to spare the boys the sight of a funeral. The Christmas novena had begun and Gurgo – now almost completely recovered – was planning to go home for Christmas. Nevertheless, Don Bosco seemed to doubt the good news of the boy's recovery. His father arrived and, finding his son in good condition, asked permission to take him home for some further convalescence. He then went to book two seats on the stagecoach, intending to leave on the next day for Novara and Pettinengo. It was Sunday, December 23

[1855]. That evening Gurgo felt a craving for meat, although the doctor had forbidden it. Thinking that it would help to build his strength, his father went out to buy some and cooked it in a little pot. The boy drank the broth and ate the half-cooked meat-perhaps to excess. At bedtime his father retired for the night while Cagliero and the infirmarian remained with the boy. Sometime during the night Gurgo suffered another very severe attack of colic. "Cagliero, Cagliero!" he gasped. "I'm through giving you piano lessons."

"Come now, don't say that!" Cagliero protested.

"I'll never see home again. Pray for me. Oh, what pains. Pray to Our Lady for me."

"Of course I'll pray, and you do likewise."

Cagliero began praying but, overcome by fatigue, he soon fell asleep. He was suddenly awakened by the infirmarian who pointed to Gurgo and ran out to call Father Alasonatti whose room was next door. He came immediately, but within minutes Gurgo was dead. That morning Cagliero met Don Bosco as he was coming down the stairs on his way to say Mass. He had been informed of the death and looked very, very sad.

The whole Oratory was stunned. The twenty-second moon was not yet over. By dying shortly before dawn on December 24 Gurgo had also fulfilled Don Bosco's second prediction-namely that one of the boys would die before Christmas.

After lunch, the boys and the clerics silently gathered around Don Bosco. The cleric John Turchi asked him point-blank whether Gurgo had been the boy of the moons. "Yes," Don Bosco replied, "it was he; he was the one I saw in my dream." Then he added: "You may have noticed that some time ago I had him sleep in a special room. Into that same room I also moved one of the best clerics, John Cagliero, so that he could look after him constantly." As he said this, he turned to Cagliero



and said: "The next time you'll know better than object to Don Bosco's arrangements. Do you understand now why I did not allow you to leave that room? I did not let you have your way because I wanted Gurgo to have someone to look after him. If he were still alive, he could tell you how often I spoke to him of death in a roundabout way and prepared him for it."

"I understood then," Bishop Cagliero later wrote, "why Don Bosco had given me those instructions. I learned to appreciate more and more his words and fatherly advice."

"I still remember," Peter Enria stated, "that on the evening of that day-Christmas Eve-at the Good Night Don Bosco was looking about as though searching for someone. After a while he said: 'Gurgo is the first boy to die here at the Oratory. He was well prepared and we hope he is now in heaven. I exhort you to be ever ready. . .' He could say no more, so great was his grief at the loss of one of his boys."

*(BM V, 243-247)*

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## **The Vicar of the Rector Major. Don Stefano Martoglio**

We have the joy of announcing that Don Stefano Martoglio has been re-elected as Vicar of the Rector Major.

The chapter members elected him today with an absolute majority and from the first ballot.

We wish Don Stefano a fruitful apostolate and assure him of our prayers.

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# New Rector Major: Fabius Attard

**We are pleased to announce that Fr. Fabius Attard is the new Rector Major, the eleventh successor of Don Bosco.**

Brief information about the new Rector Major:

Born: 23.03.1959 in Gozo (Malta), diocese of Gozo.

Novitiate: 1979-1980 in Dublin.

Perpetual profession: 11.08.1985 in Malta.

Priestly ordination: 04.07.1987 in Malta.

He has held various pastoral and formative positions within his home province.

He was for 12 years the General Councillor for Youth Ministry, 2008-2020.

Since 2020 he has been the Delegate of the Rector Major for the Ongoing Formation of Salesians and laity in Europe.

Last community of belonging: Rome CNOS.

Languages known: Maltese, English, Italian, French, Spanish.

We wish Fr. Fabio a fruitful apostolate and assure him of our prayers.

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# Election of the first Rector Major

*During the eleventh General Chapter of the Salesian Congregation, the first Rector Major, Fr. Paolo Albera, was*

*elected. Although he formally represents the second successor of Don Bosco, he was actually the first to be elected, as Don Rua had already been personally appointed by Don Bosco, through divine inspiration and at the request of Pope Pius IX (Don Rua's appointment was officially confirmed on November 27, 1884, and subsequently ratified by the Holy See on February 11, 1888). Let us now be guided by the narrative of Fr. Eugenio Ceria, who narrates the election of Don Bosco's first successor and the works of the General Chapter.*

It hardly seems possible to speak of ancient Salesians without starting from Don Bosco. This time it is to admire divine Providence, which led Don Bosco to meet the indispensable men along the arduous path in various roles and offices of his newly established Congregation. Men, I say, not made, but to be made. It was up to the founder to seek out young boys, to raise them, educate them, instruct them, inform them of his spirit, so that wherever he sent them, they would represent him worthily among the members and before outsiders. This is also the case with his second successor. The small and slender Paolino Albera, when he came to the Oratory from his native village, did not stand out among the crowd of companions for any of those characteristics that draw attention to a newcomer. Yet Don Bosco soon noticed in him the innocence of his character, intellectual ability veiled by natural shyness, and a childlike disposition, which gave him good reason to hope. He accompanied him up to the priesthood, sent him as Director to Sampierdarena, then Director to Marseille and Inspector for France, where they called him *petit Don Bosco*, until 1886 when the trust of his brothers elected him General Catechist or Spiritual Director of the Society. But his progress did not stop there.

After Don Rua's death, according to the Rule, the governance of the Society passed into the hands of the General Prefect, Fr. Filippo Rinaldi, who therefore presided over the Superior Chapter and directed the preparations for the General Chapter to be held within the year 1910. The great meeting was

set to open on August 15, preceded by a course of spiritual exercises, conducted by the Chapter members and preached by Fr. Albera.

An intimate diary of Fr. Albera, in English, allows us to know what his feelings were during the waiting period. Under April 21, we find: "I spoke at length with Fr. Rinaldi and with great pleasure. I wholeheartedly desire that he be elected to the position of Rector Major of our Congregation. I will pray to the Holy Spirit to obtain this grace." And under the 26th: "Rarely is there talk of Fr. Rua's successor. I hope that the Prefect is elected. He has the necessary virtues for the position. Every day I pray for this grace." Again, on May 11: "I accept to go to Milan for Fr. Rua's funeral. I am very happy to obey Fr. Rinaldi, in whom I recognise as my true Superior. I pray every day asking that a Rector Major be elected." Under June 6, he reveals the reason for his strong inclination towards Fr. Rinaldi, writing about him: "I have a high opinion of his virtue, his ability, and initiative." Shortly after going to Rome in his company, he wrote on the 8th in Florence: "I see that Fr. Rinaldi is well-received everywhere and regarded as Fr. Rua's successor. He leaves a good impression on those with whom he speaks."

If it had been permissible to campaign, he would have been a great elector. Numerous Salesians thought the same way, not to mention the Spaniards, among whom he had left a great legacy of affection. Inspectors and delegates, when they arrived from Spain for the General Chapter, did not make many mysteries even when speaking with him. However, he showed all the indifference of a deaf person who does not understand a word of what is said to him. In this, his attitude was such that it impressed his cheerful interlocutors. There was a true sense of mystery.

On the evening of the Assumption, the opening meeting was held, in which Fr. Rinaldi "spoke very well," as noted by Fr. Albera in his diary. The election of the Rector Major took place in the session the following morning. From the beginning of the voting, the names of Fr. Albera and Fr.

Rinaldi alternated at short intervals. The former appeared increasingly troubled and astonished. The latter, on the other hand, showed no sign of emotion. This was noted, not without a hint of curiosity. A great applause greeted the vote, which reached the absolute majority required by the Rule. Fr. Rinaldi, having completed the last act in his capacity as President of the Assembly with the proclamation of the elected, asked to read a memorandum. Upon receiving consent, he had a sealed envelope returned to him by Fr. Lemoyne, Secretary of the Superior Chapter, which had been given to him on February 27 and bore the inscription: "To be opened after the elections to take place upon the death of dear Fr. Rua." Having received it in his hands, he unsealed it and read: "Fr. Rua is seriously ill, and I feel it is my duty to put in writing what I keep in my heart for his successor. On November 22, 1877, the usual feast of St. Charles was celebrated in Borgo San Martino. At the table presided over by the Venerable John Bosco and Msgr. Ferrò, I too was seated next to Fr. Belmonte. At a certain point, the conversation turned upon Fr. Albera, with Don Bosco recounting the difficulties posed by the clergy of his country. It was then that Msgr. Ferrò wanted to know if Fr. Albera had overcome those difficulties: – Of course, replied Don Bosco. He is my second... – And running his hand over his forehead, he stopped the phrase. But I immediately calculated that he did not mean the second who entered nor the second-ranked, since he was not from the Superior Chapter, nor the second Director, and I concluded that he was the second successor. However, I kept these things in my heart, waiting for events. Turin, February 27, 1910." The electors then understood the reason for his demeanour and felt their hearts expand. They had therefore elected the one preconised by Don Bosco thirty-three years earlier.

Fr. Bertello was immediately entrusted with formulating two telegrams to inform the Holy Father and Cardinal Rampolla, Protector of the Society. The message to the Pope was: "Fr. Paolo Albera, new Rector Major of the Salesian Society and General Chapter, who with the utmost

concord of spirits today, the ninety-fifth anniversary of the birth of the Venerable Don Bosco, who elected him and celebrates him with the greatest joy, and thank Your Holiness for the precious advice and prayers and declare profound respect and unlimited obedience." His Holiness promptly replied by sending his Apostolic Blessing. The telegram alluded to a pontifical autograph of August 9. It read as follows: "To the beloved sons of the Salesian Congregation of the Venerable Don Bosco gathered for the election of the General Rector, in the certainty that all, setting aside any human affection, will cast their vote for that Brother, whom they judge in the Lord to be the most suitable to maintain the true spirit of the Rule, to encourage and guide all the Members of the religious Institute towards perfection, and to make the many works of charity and religion to which they have dedicated themselves prosper, we impart with paternal affection the Apostolic Blessing. From the Vatican, August 9, 1910. Pius PP. X."

The Cardinal Protector also addressed a "fatherly word of encouragement and blessing" to the Moderator and Electors of the Chapter on August 12, saying among other things: "Your beloved Don Bosco, with the most intense affection of a father, undoubtedly turns his gaze from Heaven towards you and fervently implores the Divine Paraclete to pour upon you the heavenly light, inspiring you with wise counsel. The holy Church awaits from your votes a worthy successor to Don Bosco and Fr. Rua, who knows how to wisely preserve their work, and indeed to increase it with new growth. And I too, with the most vivid interest, united with you in prayer, transmit warm wishes that, with divine favour, your choice may be content in every respect and bring me the sweet consolation of seeing the Salesian Congregation ever more flourishing for the benefit of souls and in honour of the Catholic Apostolate. Therefore, let your hearts be far from human concerns and personal feelings in such a sacred and solemn act, so that, guided solely by right intentions and a burning desire for the glory of God and the greater good of

the Institute, united in the name of the Lord in the most perfect concord and charity, you may choose as your leader the one who, by the sanctity of life, is an example to you, by the goodness of heart a loving father, by prudence and wisdom a sure guide, by zeal and firmness a vigilant guardian of discipline, religious observance, and the spirit of the Venerable Founder." His Eminence, receiving Fr. Albera not long after, gave him unmistakable signs of believing that the choice had been made in accordance with the wishes he had expressed.

The very early moments of the feelings of the elected one were expressed in the diary, in which under August 16 we read: "This is a day of great misfortune for me. I have been elected Rector Major of the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales. What a responsibility on my shoulders! Now more than ever I must cry out: *Deus, in adiutorium meum intende*. I have prayed a lot, especially in front of Don Bosco's tomb." In his wallet, a yellowed sheet was found, on which this programme was outlined and signed: "I will always have God in view, Jesus Christ as a model, the Helper in aid, myself in sacrifice."

At the same time, all the members of the Superior Chapter had expired, and it was necessary to hold the election, which took place in the third session. The General Prefect was elected first. The votes on the name of Fr. Rinaldi were overwhelmingly in favour. Of the 73 voters, 71 voted for him. Thus, there was only one vote missing, which went to Fr. Paolo Virion, the French Inspector. The other, most likely his, was for Fr. Pietro Ricaldone, Inspector in Spain, whom he greatly esteemed. He therefore resumed his daily toil, which was to last another twelve years, until he himself became Rector Major.

Having done this, the Chapter moved on to electing the remaining members, who were: Fr. Giulio Barberis, General Catechist; Fr. Giuseppe Bertello, Economist; Fr. Luigi Piscetta, Fr. Francesco Cerruti, Fr. Giuseppe Vespignani, Councillors. The latter, Inspector in Argentina, thanked the

assembly for the act of trust, stating that he was obliged for particular reasons and also for health to decline the nomination, asking to proceed to another election. But the Superior did not believe he should accept the resignation so readily and asked him to suspend any decision until the next day. The next day, invited by the Rector Major to notify the resolution taken, he replied that, following the Superior's advice, he fully submitted to obedience with the intention of taking on the role.

The first act of the re-elected General Prefect was to officially inform the members of the election of the new Rector Major. In a short letter, briefly mentioning the various phases of his life, he appropriately recalled the so-called "Dream of the Wheel," in which Don Bosco saw Fr. Albera with a lantern in his hand illuminating and guiding others (BM VI, 910). He then concluded very appropriately: "My dear brothers, let the loving words of Don Bosco in the testamentary letter resonate once again in your ears: 'Your Rector is dead, but another will be elected for you, who will take care of you and your eternal salvation. Listen to him, love him, obey him, pray for him, as you have done for me.'"

To the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Fr. Albera deemed it appropriate to issue a communication without too much delay, especially since he was receiving a good number of letters from them. He therefore thanked them for their congratulations, but above all for their prayers. "I hope," he wrote, "that God will grant your wishes and that He will not allow my ineptitude to be detrimental to those works to which the Venerable Don Bosco and the unforgettable Fr. Rua dedicated their whole lives." He finally hoped that among the two branches of Don Bosco's family there would always be a holy competition in preserving the spirit of charity and zeal left as a legacy by the founder.

Now let us take a brief look at the works of the General Chapter. It can be said that there was only one fundamental theme. The previous Chapter, having completed a rather summarised revision of the Regulations, had decided



that, as they were, they would be practiced for six years *ad experimentum* and that Chapter XI would resume their examination, establishing the definitive text. There were six Regulations: for the Inspectors, for all Salesian houses, for the novitiate houses, for the parishes, for the festive oratories, and for the Pious Union of Cooperators. The same Chapter X, with a petition signed by 36 members, had requested that the administrative issue be addressed during the XI<sup>th</sup>, and especially on how to make the income sources granted by Providence to each Salesian house increasingly fruitful. To facilitate the arduous work, a Commission, so to speak, of technicians was appointed for each Regulation, with the task of conducting the relevant studies and presenting the conclusions to the Chapter itself.

The discussions, which began during the fifth session, went on for another 21. In order to close the matter, it would have been necessary to prolong the works much longer. Still, the General Chapter unanimously deferred the task of completing the review to the Superior Chapter, which promised to carry it out by appointing a special Commission. Nevertheless, in order to show that it was not disinterested and to assist the work, the General Chapter expressed the desire to create a Commission with the task of formulating the main criteria that should guide the new Commission of Regulations in its long and delicate task. So, this was done. Therefore, ten directive norms, elaborated by its delegates under the presidency of Fr. Ricaldone, were brought to the assembly's attention and approved. Their context was to maintain the spirit of Don Bosco intact, preserving those articles that were recognised as his, and to eliminate anything that was purely exhortative from the Regulations.

I will remember nothing more than two episodes from the XI<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, which seem to have particular importance. The first refers to the Regulations of the festive oratories. The extra-chapter Commission had deemed it appropriate to simplify it, especially for the part concerning

the various roles. Fr. Rinaldi felt that the concept of Don Bosco regarding the festive oratories was thus abolished, hence he rose up saying: "The Regulations printed in 1877 were truly compiled by Don Bosco, and Fr. Rua assured me of this four months before his death. I therefore wish that it be preserved intact, for if it is practiced, it will be seen that it is still good even today."

At this point an animated discussion arose, of which I will highlight the most notable points. The speaker declared that the Commission was completely unaware of this particularity, but he also noted that this Regulation had never been fully practiced in any festive oratory, not even in Turin. The Commission opined that the Regulations had been commissioned by Don Bosco based on the Regulations of the Lombard festive oratories. In any case, the intention was only to simplify it and to introduce what was practical as found in the best Salesian oratories. Yet Fr. Rinaldi did not calm down, and he insisted upon Fr. Rua's desire that these Regulations be respected, as a work of Don Bosco, even with the introduction of what was deemed useful for young adults.

Fr. Vespignani reinforced this thesis. Having come to the Oratory already a priest in 1876, he had received from Fr. Rua the task of transcribing the Regulations from Don Bosco's original writings, and he still retained the early drafts. Fr. Barberis also assured that he had seen the autograph. The opponents had objections regarding the roles, but Fr. Rinaldi did not disarm. On the contrary, he uttered these forceful words: "Nothing of Don Bosco's Regulations should be altered, otherwise they would lose their authority." Fr. Vespignani confirmed his thoughts once again with examples from America and especially Uruguay, where, when at the time of Msgr. Lasagna there was an attempt to try differently, nothing was achieved. Finally, the controversy was closed by voting the following order of the day: "The XI General Chapter decides that the 'Regulations of the festive oratories' of Don Bosco, as printed in 1877, be preserved intact, making only in the appendix those additions deemed appropriate, especially

for the sections of older youth." The sensitivity of the assembly in the face of an attempt at reform in matters sanctioned by Don Bosco is commendable.

The second episode belongs to the penultimate session for a matter not unrelated to the Regulations, as it might seem at first glance. Once again, it was proposed by Fr. Rinaldi, who became the interpreter of the desire of many, that the position of the Directors in the houses be defined after the decree on confessions. Until 1901, being ordinary confessors of the members and students meant that in directing, they acted habitually with a paternal spirit (this topic is extensively covered in Annals III,170-194). After that, however, it began to be observed that the paternal character desired by Don Bosco in his Directors and insinuated in the Regulations of the houses and elsewhere was being abandoned. The Directors indeed began to attend to material, disciplinary, and school affairs, thus becoming Rectors and no longer Directors. "We must return," said Fr. Rinaldi, "to the spirit and concept of Don Bosco, especially manifested to us in the 'Confidential Memories' (Annals III,49-53) and in the Regulations. The Director should always be a Salesian Director. Except for the ministry of confession, nothing has changed."

Fr. Bertello lamented that the Directors had believed that with confession they had to leave the spiritual care of the house as well, dedicating themselves to material offices. "Let us hope," he said, "that it was just a momentary thing. We must return to the ideal of Don Bosco, as described in the Regulations. Let those articles be read, meditated upon, and practiced" (He cited them according to the edition of the time; in the present they would be 156, 157, 158, 159, 57, 160, 91, 195). Fr. Albera concluded by saying: "It is an essential issue for the life of our Society that the spirit of the Director be preserved according to the ideal of Don Bosco; otherwise, we change the way of educating and will no longer be Salesians. We must do everything to preserve the spirit of fatherhood, practicing the memories that Don Bosco left us:

they will tell us how to do it. Especially in the reports, we will be able to know our subjects and direct them. As for the young, fatherhood does not mean caresses or unlimited concessions, but caring for them, allowing them the opportunity to come and see us. Let us not forget the importance of the evening talk. Let the sermons be done well and with heart. Let us show that we care about the salvation of souls and leave the unpleasant parts to others. Thus, the Director will retain the halo that Don Bosco wanted him surrounded with."

This time as well the Capitulars found a General Exhibition of the Salesian Professional and Agricultural Schools open in the Oratory, the third, which lasted from July 3 to October 16. Having already described the two previous ones, there was no need to stop and repeat more or less the same things (Annals III, 452-472). Naturally, the past experience served for a better organisation of the exhibition. The criterion already stated twice by the organiser Fr. Bertello prevailed, namely, according to an arrangement desired by Don Bosco, that every Exhibition of this kind is an event intended to be repeated periodically for the teaching and encouragement of the schools. The opening and closing were graced by the presence of city authorities and representatives of the Government. Visitors were never lacking, including high-ranking personalities and even true experts. On the last day, Professor Piero Gribaudo made the first presentation of about 300 former Turin students to the new Rector Major. Deputy Cornaggia, in his final speech, pronounced this judgment worthy of being remembered (Salesian Bulletin, Nov. 1910, p. 332): "Whoever has had the opportunity to delve into the study of the organisation of these schools and the concepts that inspire them cannot help but admire the wisdom of that Great One, who understood the workers' needs in the conditions of new times, anticipating philanthropists and legislators."

Fifty-five houses participated in the exhibition with a total of 203 schools. The examination of the exhibited

works was entrusted to nine distinct juries, which included 50 of the most distinguished professors, artists, and industrialists from Turin. Since it was necessary that the Exhibition have an exclusively educational character, the works were judged according to this criterion, and the prizes were awarded. These were substantial, offered by the Pope (a gold medal), by the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce (five silver medals), by the Municipality of Turin (one gold medal and two silver medals), by the Agricultural Consortium of Turin (two silver medals), by "Pro Torino" (one *vermeil* medal, one silver, and two bronze), by the former students of the "Don Bosco" Circle (one gold medal), by the "Augusta" Company of Turin (500 Lire in typographic material to be divided into three prizes), and by the Salesian Superior Chapter (a golden laurel crown as the *grand prize*) (Those awarded are listed in the cited issue of the Salesian Bulletin).

It is worth reporting the last periods of the report that Fr. Bertello read before the winners were announced. He said: "About three months ago, at the inauguration of our small Exhibition, we lamented that due to the death of the Rev. Fr. Rua, we had lost he to whom we intended to pay tribute with our studies and our works on his priestly jubilee. Divine Providence has given us a new Superior and Father in the person of the Rev. Fr. Albera. Therefore, in closing the Exhibition, we place our intentions and hopes in his hands, confident that the artisan, who was first cared for by the Venerable Don Bosco and then the joy of Fr. Rua, will always have a fitting place in the affection and concerns of their Successor."

That was Fr. Bertello's last achievement. A little more than a month later, on November 20, an unexpected illness suddenly extinguished such an industrious existence. His robust intellect, solid culture, firmness of character, and goodness of spirit made him first a wise Director of the college, then a diligent Inspector, and finally for twelve years an expert General Director of the Salesian professional and agricultural schools. He owed everything, after God, to

Don Bosco, who had raised him in the Oratory since he was little and had formed him in his image and likeness.

Fr. Albera did not delay in fulfilling the great duty of paying homage to the Vicar of Jesus Christ, to the One whom the Rule calls "the arbiter and supreme Superior" of the Society. Immediately on September 1, he left for Rome, where, upon arrival on the 2nd, he already found the audience ticket for the morning of the 3rd. It almost seemed that Pius X was eager to see him. From the Pope's lips, he gathered some kind expressions, which he kept in his heart. In response to the thanks for the autograph and the blessing, the Pope said he believed he acted this way to make known how much he appreciated the worldwide activity of the Salesians and added: "You were born recently, it is true, but you are spread all over the world and everywhere you work a lot." Being informed of the victories already obtained in the courts against the slanderers of Varazze (Annals III, 729-749), he warned: "Be vigilant, for your enemies are preparing other blows against you." Finally, when humbly asked for some practical guidelines for the governance of the Society, he replied: "Do not stray from the customs and traditions introduced by Don Bosco and Fr. Rua."

1910 had already come to an end, and Fr. Albera had not yet made a communication to the entire Society. New and incessant occupations, especially the many conferences with the 32 Inspectors, always prevented him from sitting down at the table. Only in the first half of January, as noted in the diary, did he write the first pages of a circular, which he intended to be somewhat lengthy. He sent it with the date of the 25th. Apologising for the delay in making himself known, commemorating Fr. Rua and praising Fr. Rinaldi for his good interim governance of the Society, he elaborated on particular news about the General Chapter, his own election, the visit to the Pope, and the death of Fr. Bertello. In all, he had the air of a father who converses familiarly with his children. He also shared with them his worries about the events in Portugal. After the monarchy was overthrown in

Lisbon in October 1910, the revolutionaries had fiercely targeted the religious, attacking them with wild fury. The Salesians did not have any victims to mourn, however, the brothers at Pinheiro near Lisbon had a bad day. A gang of thugs invaded and looted that house, not only mocking the priests and clerics but also sacrilegiously profaning the chapel and even more sacrilegiously scattering and trampling the consecrated hosts. Almost all the Salesians had to leave Portugal, seeking refuge in Spain or Italy. The revolutionaries occupied their schools and laboratories, from which the students were expelled. The persecution also extended to the colonies, so that it was necessary to abandon Macao and Mozambique, where much good was being done (Annals III, 606 and 622-4). But even then, Fr. Albera could write: "Those who have scattered us recognise that they have deprived their country of the only professional schools it possessed."

He, who in the early days of the Society had often heard Don Bosco predict the multiplication of his children in every even remote nation, and then saw those predictions marvellously fulfilled, certainly felt the weight of the immense legacy received and believed that for some time it was not appropriate to embark on new works, but it was necessary to focus on consolidating the existing ones. He therefore deemed it necessary to instil the same thing in all the Salesians. To achieve this, it was not enough for the Superiors alone. He strongly recommended common cooperation. Since in those years modernism was also posing threats to religious families, he warned the Salesians, urging them to flee every novelty that Don Bosco and Fr. Rua could not have approved.

Together with the circular, he also sent each house a copy of the circulars of Fr. Rua, who from his deathbed had entrusted him to collect in a volume. The typographic work had already been completed about two months earlier. In fact, the publication included a letter from Fr. Albera dated December 8, 1910.

For the upcoming anniversary of Don Bosco's death,

he therefore sent the houses a double gift, the circular and the book. He held this second one in special regard because he knew he was offering a great treasure of asceticism and Salesian pedagogy in it. He had proposed to follow the traces of Fr. Rua, especially aiming to imitate his charity and zeal in procuring the spiritual good of all the Salesians.

*Annals of the Salesian Society, Vol. IV (1910-1921), pp. 1-13*

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## **A Mysterious and Prophetic Wheel (1861)**

*The wise man's heart," we read in Holy Scripture, "knows times and judgments; for there is a time and a judgment for everything. Yet it is a great affliction for man that he is ignorant of what is to come; for who will make known to him how it will be?" [Eccl. 8, 5-7]*

*That Don Bosco knew when to toil and when to pause and explain, that he was not ignorant of things past and future concerning his mission, is further proven by the unswerving dedication inspiring the chronicles of Father Ruffino and Father Bonetti and the memoirs of Bishop John Cagliero, Father Chiala, and others who were privileged to hear Don Bosco's words.*

With remarkable accord, they report another dream in which Don Bosco saw the Oratory and its beneficial results, the spiritual condition of his pupils, their vocation – as Salesian priests or brothers or as laymen in the world – and, lastly, the future of his budding congregation.

Don Bosco's dream occurred during the night of May 1, 1861 and lasted about six hours. At dawn on May 2, he arose



and jotted down the dream's highlights and the names of some of the various people he had seen in it. He narrated it after night prayers on three successive nights from the little rostrum in the porticoes. The first night, May 2, he spoke for nearly forty-five minutes. The introduction, as usual, seemed somewhat obscure and strange for reasons we have already explained and for others we shall soon give.

After announcing his topic, he continued:

This dream concerns the students only. Very much of what I saw simply defies description. I seemed to have just started out of my house at Becchi on a path leading to Capriglio, a village near Castelnuovo. I wanted to see a field belonging to my family in a little dale behind a farmstead called "Valcappone." As a boy I had often worked there. The field was very sandy and its yield barely equaled the taxes on it. As I was nearing it, I met a man in his forties, of average height, suntanned, and with a long, well-trimmed beard. He wore a tunic reaching to his knees and fastened around his waist, and a white beret. He seemed to be waiting for somebody. He greeted me cordially, like an old acquaintance, and then asked, "Where are you going?"

"To a nearby field of mine," I answered. "And what brings you around here?"

"Don't be so curious," he replied. "You don't have to know that."

"Very well. Will you at least tell me your name? You seem to know me, but you are a stranger to me."

"You don't have to know that, either. Just come along with me."

I followed him and after a few steps saw a large fig orchard. "Look at those figs!" the man exclaimed. "Aren't they luscious? Go ahead, help yourself!"

Taken aback by the sight, I replied, "That's funny! There never were figs here before!"

"There are now!" he replied.

"But this isn't the season for figs! They can't be ripe."

"But some are! If you want to pick them, hurry because it's getting late." I did not stir and so my friend insisted: "Hurry, don't waste time because it will soon be dark."

"Why do you rush me? Besides, I don't want any. I like to look at them and give them away, but I personally don't care very much for them."

"In that case, let's go on. But remember what St. Matthew's Gospel says about great events menacing Jerusalem: 'From the fig tree learn a parable: When its branch is now tender and leaves break forth, you know that summer is near.' [Matt. 24, 32] It's all the nearer now that the figs are already beginning to ripen."

We resumed our walk and came to a vineyard. "Perhaps you care for grapes," the man said. "Take some!"

"Not now! In due time I'll pick them from my own vineyard."

"But you have grapes right here!"

"Not now!"

"Can't you see how ripe they are?"

"I can hardly believe it. This isn't the season for grapes!"

"Hurry because it's getting dark. You can't afford to lose time."

"What's the hurry? It will be soon enough if I get home before dark." "Hurry, I say, because night is coming."

"So what? Morning will follow!"

"You are wrong. There will be no morning!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that night is coming."

"What kind of night? Are you trying to say that I have to pack up for eternity?"

"I repeat: Night is coming! You haven't much time left."

"Tell me, at least, if it will be very soon."

"Don't be so curious. *Non plus sapere quam oportet sapere*. [Don't try to know more than is good for you.]"

"That's what my mother used to say about nosy people," I thought. Then I said aloud: "All right, but I still don't want any grapes!"

So we continued along the road and soon came to my field. My brother Joseph was there loading a wagon. He greeted us both, but, seeing that the stranger ignored him, asked me if he was a schoolmate of mine.

"No," I answered. "I never saw him before."

My brother then turned to him. "Would you please tell me your name?" There was no response. In amazement my brother again asked me, "Who is he?"

"I don't know. He won't tell!"

We both again pleaded with the stranger to identify himself but he kept repeating, "*Non plus sapere quam oportet sapere*. [Don't try to know more than is good for you.]"

My brother gave up and left us alone. The stranger then turned to me and said, "Would you like to see something unusual?"

"Certainly!" I replied.

"Would you like to see your boys as they are now and as they will be in the future? Would you want to count them?"

"Very much so!"

"Come here then."

From I don't know where he pulled out a strange contraption housing a large wheel and set it on the ground.

"What's this wheel?" I asked.

"The wheel of eternity," he replied, and, seizing the handle, he gave it a spin.

"Now, you try it," he said.

I did so.

"Look inside."

I looked and saw a large lens encased in the wheel. The lens was about five feet in diameter, and its edge bore the inscription: *Hic est oculus qui humilia respicit in caelo et in terra*. [This is the eye that sees the lowly things

in heaven and on earth.]

I immediately looked through the lens. What a sight! All the Oratory boys stood there before my eyes. "How can this be?" I said to myself. "I have never before seen anyone around here and now the place is full of boys. Aren't they in Turin?" I carefully examined the whole contraption; only through the lens could I see anybody. I looked at the stranger in amazement. After a few moments, he ordered me to turn the handle once more. Something startling happened: the boys were separated into two groups: the good and the bad; the former beaming with joy, the latter – not many, thank God – a sorry sight. I recognized them all. How different they were from what their companions believed them to be! Some had tongues pierced through with holes, others had pitifully squinting eyes, and still others had ugly sores covering their heads or worms gnawing at their hearts. The longer I looked, the more I grieved for them. "Can these possibly be my boys?" I asked. "What can these strange ailments mean?"

"I will tell you," the stranger replied. "Pierced tongues symbolize foul talk; squinting eyes indicate a lack of appreciation of God's graces by setting earthly things above the heavenly. Sores on the head show that they neglect your advice and cater to their own whims; worms symbolize evil passions gnawing at their hearts. There are boys, too, who do not want to hear your words lest they have to put them into practice."

At a nod from him, I spun the wheel again and pressed my eyes to the lens. Four boys bound with heavy chains came into view. I looked at them carefully and recognized them. I asked the stranger what that meant. "That shouldn't be hard to figure out," he replied. "These are the boys who pay no attention to your advice. If they do not mend their ways, they run the risk of ending up in jail and rotting there for their crimes."

"Let me jot their names down lest I forget," I said, but the stranger objected, "You don't have to! Their names are in this book."

I noticed then that he carried a notebook. At his word I gave the wheel another turn and looked. This time I saw seven other boys, defiant and distrustful, their lips padlocked. Three were also clamping their ears shut with their hands. Again I wanted to write their names down, but again the stranger firmly forbade it.

Painfully amazed to see those boys in their predicament, I asked why their lips were padlocked.

"Can't you see it for yourself?" the stranger replied. "These are the boys who refuse to tell."

"Tell what?"

"They won't tell, that's all!"

I understood then that he meant confession. These are boys who, even when questioned by their confessor, will not answer or will answer evasively or contrary to the truth. They say "no" when the answer should be "yes." My friend then went on: "Do you see those three clamping their hands over their ears? Aren't they a sorry sight? Well, they are boys who not only do not tell their sins, but even refuse to listen to their confessor's advice, warnings, and orders. They hear your words, but pay no heed to them. They could unplug their ears, but won't. The other four boys, instead, listened to your exhortations and warnings but did not put them into practice."

"How can they get rid of that padlock?" I inquired.

*"Ejiciatur superbia e cordibus eorum"* he replied. [Let pride be cast out of their hearts.]

"I will speak to these boys," I went on, "but there is little hope for those who willfully shut their ears." That stranger then advised that whenever I say a few words by way of sermon, half those words should be on making a good confession.

I promised that I would. I don't mean to say that I will carry out that injunction to the letter because I would make myself tiresome, but I will do my best to impress the importance and need of good confessions upon all and as often as possible. In fact, more people are eternally lost through

bad confessions than in any other way because even the worst people occasionally do go to confession. There are very many, however, who make bad confessions.

When, at the stranger's command, I gave the wheel another turn, I was horrified to see three boys gripped from behind by three husky monkeys armed with horns. Each beast gripped its victim's throat by its forepaws so tightly that the boy's face became flushed and his bloodshot eyes almost popped out of their sockets. Moreover, the beast's hind legs and long tail bound the boy's thighs and legs so as to almost completely immobilize him. These were boys who go through a spiritual retreat and still remain in mortal sin, guilty especially of impurity, of a serious offense against the Sixth Commandment. The devil chokes them to keep them from speaking when they should; he makes them blush to the point of losing their heads so that they no longer realize what they are doing. A false shame then overwhelms them and leads them to perdition. The devil has them by their throats so tightly that their eyes seem to pop from their sockets, and they can no longer see their miserable condition and the way to get out of their horrible mess. A senseless fear and repugnance keep them from the sacraments. The devil grips their thighs and legs to make it impossible for them to take a step in the right direction. So strong are their bad habits that these boys become convinced they can no longer help themselves.

I assure you, my dear boys, that I wept at that sight. I wanted to rescue those unfortunate lads, but as soon as I drew away from the lens I could see them no more. I also wanted to take down their names, but my friend would have none of it. "It's unnecessary," he kept saying, "because they are all written down in this notebook."

Grieved by this sight beyond words, I tearfully turned to my companion, sobbing, "How is this possible? How can these boys be in such miserable shape after I lavished so much care on them in confession and out of confession?"

*"Labor, Sudor, Fervor,"* was his scrambled, mumbled reply.

"I didn't quite get it," I said. "Please speak more clearly."

Again he muttered, "*Labor, Sudor, Fervor*"

"It's no use," I said. "As long as you keep mumbling, I can't make out what you are saying."

"Are you making fun of me?" he asked.

"Not at all! I just can't understand you."

"Listen, you know your grammar. Just pay attention: *Labor* – comma; *Sudor* – comma; *Fervor* – period. Do you get it now?"

"I get the words," I replied, "but what's the message?"

"All right, I'll make it clearer: *Labor in assiduis operibus* [Constant hard work]; *Sudor in poenitentiis continuis* [Incessant, painstaking mortification]; *Fervor in orationibus ferventibus et perseverantibus* [Fervent and persevering prayer]. For these boys, however, your sacrifices, no matter how great, will be of no avail. You will not win them over, because they do not want to shake off Satan's yoke of slavery."

Meanwhile I kept staring through the lens, fretting and thinking, "How is this possible? Are those boys really doomed, even after a spiritual retreat? Were all my sacrifices, efforts, sermons, suggestions, and warnings to no avail? Were all their promises a sham? What a letdown!"

These thoughts utterly disheartened me. My friend noticed it. "How proud and conceited you are!" he chided me. "Do you expect your boys to be converted just because you work for them, to respond to your cares just because you love them? Do you perhaps think that you love, work, and suffer more than Our Blessed Savior? Do you expect your words to be more effective than His? Do you preach better than He did? Do you believe you have been more loving and anxious for your boys than Our Lord was for His Apostles? Aren't you aware that they lived constantly with Him, endlessly benefited from all kinds of graces and favors, heard His admonitions and precepts, and witnessed His divine example? Shouldn't all this have

effectively spurred them to saintly lives? Didn't He do all He could for Judas? And yet Judas betrayed Him and died impenitent. Are you better than the Apostles? Didn't they carefully choose seven deacons? They chose but seven and one of them went astray. Are you surprised and upset if among five hundred boys a few will not respond to your care? Are you so conceited as to expect that none of your boys will turn out badly and be lost? How proud can you be?"

These words silenced me, but for all that I still felt very much disheartened.

"Cheer up!" my friend went on. "Turn the wheel again and see how generous God is! See how many souls He wants to give you! Look at all those boys."

I peered again into the lens and saw a very large number of boys totally unknown to me.

"I see them," I remarked, "but I don't know any of them."

"Well," he replied, "the Lord will give you all these boys to make up for the fourteen who do not cooperate with you. For each one of them He will give you a hundred!"

"Poor me!" I exclaimed. "The Oratory is full already. Where shall I put them?"

"Don't worry. Right now that's no problem. Later, He who sends them will make room for them."

"I'm not too worried about that," I said. "My greatest worry is feeding them!"

"Don't worry about that either! The Lord will provide."

"In that case, I am quite happy!" I replied in deep relief.

Delightedly I kept looking at those boys, studying the features of very many so as to be able to recognize them if I ever met them.

Thus ended Don Bosco's talk on the night of May 2, 1861.

Don Bosco resumed his story on the following night, concisely and vividly. Through the lens he had also



seen the vocation of each of his boys. However, he did not disclose any names and postponed to a later account the questions he had put to his guide and the latter's answers concerning symbols and allegories of the dream.

The cleric Dominic Ruffino was nevertheless able to gather a few names confidentially from the boys themselves to whom Don Bosco had more privately manifested what he had seen about them. Ruffino recorded the names in 1861 and gave us the list. To make our narration clearer and avoid repetitions, we shall insert names and explanations, mostly in non-dialogue form, while still reporting the chronicle word by word. Don Bosco resumed his narration on May 3, as follows:

was rejoicing to see so many new boys when the stranger, still standing by his apparatus, asked me: "Would you like to see something even more delightful?"

"Certainly!" I replied.

"Then give the wheel another turn."

I did and peered through the lens. I saw the boys separated into two groups, some distance apart, in a broad area. At my left I could see a vast field, in which all sorts of vegetables were growing, and a meadow lined at its edge with a few rows of wild vines. The first group of boys was working this field with spades, hoes, picks, shovels, and rakes. They were broken up into squads, each with a foreman. The whole group took orders from Chevalier Oreglia who was busy handing out tools and prodding sluggish workers. Farther away, near the edge of the field, I saw other boys sowing seed. A second group was working on my right in a vast field covered with golden wheat. A long trench separated this field from other fields which stretched out as far as the eye could see. All the boys were busy harvesting – bundling into sheaves, piling them, gleaning, carting, threshing, sharpening sickles, and handing them out.

Some boys were also playing guitars. I assure you, it was quite a scene. Nearby, in the shade of ancient trees, were tables laden with food; a little further off, one could see a gorgeous garden with all kinds of flowers in full bloom.

The two groups of boys symbolized different vocations: the lay state and the priesthood. I did not know this at the time, and so I asked, "What's the meaning of all this?"

"Can't you see it yet?" he replied. "Boys tilling the soil are those who work for themselves alone. They are not called to be priests."

I understood then that this applied to the artisans. In their state of life they only think of saving their own souls and feel no special obligation to work at saving the souls of others.

"And the second group?" I asked. But then it dawned on me that these boys were called to be priests. Now I knew who were called to the priesthood and who were not.

As I watched very interestedly, I noticed that Provera was handing out sickles. I took this to mean that he might become the rector of a seminary, a religious community, or a house of studies; perhaps he might become something even more important. I observed that not all the reapers received their sickles from him. The boys who did are those who are destined to join the [Salesian] Congregation. The others, instead, are to become diocesan priests. The sickle symbolized the Word of God. Another detail: Provera did not readily give a sickle to all who asked. Some he just ordered to take either one or two morsels of food. The first morsel signified piety, the second knowledge. James Rossi was sent to take one. The boys had to report to the cleric [Celestine] Durando who was in the little grove setting tables and serving the reapers – the task of those who are particularly destined to promote devotion to the Most Blessed Sacrament. Matthew Galliano was busy serving beverages. Costamagna, too, asked for a sickle, but was first sent by Provera to pick two flowers from the garden. The same happened to Quattroccolo. Rebuffo was promised a sickle on condition that he first pick three flowers. Olivero also was there.

Meanwhile, all the other boys were scattered here and there in the wheatfield, some working abreast with larger or narrower rows to cultivate. Father Ciattino, the pastor of

Maretto, was using a sickle he had received from Provera. Francesia and Vibert were cutting wheat. So too were Hyacinth Perucatti, Merlone, Momo, Garino, and Jarach – an indication that they would save souls by their preaching if they persevered in their vocation. Some reaped more than others. Bondioni was cutting wheat like mad, but how long could he last? Others hacked at the wheat with all their strength but cut nothing. Vaschetti took hold of a sickle, began to cut, and went at it zestfully until he found himself working in another field. He wasn't the only one, either. Some sickles were dull or blunted or in such poor condition that they actually did more harm than good.

Dominic Ruffino had a long row to take care of. His sickle was very sharp, but blunted at the point, signifying lack of humility and an ambition to outdo his companions. He went to Francis Cerruti to have his sickle fixed. The latter had been given that task, a symbol that one day he would become a teacher and instill knowledge and piety into students. Hammering, in fact, is the task of those charged with forming priestly candidates. Provera handed the blunted sickles to Cerruti and the dull ones to Rocchietti and others – an indication that they would one day form priestly vocations to piety. Viale came up for a sickle and picked out a dull one, but Provera made him take one he had just sharpened. I also saw Rinaudo servicing farm tools.

While all this was going on, Fusero was tying sheaves. This meant that his task would be to keep souls in God's grace, particularly the souls of those called to the priesthood. In other words, he would one day form young clerics.

Others were helping him; among them I saw Turchi and Ghivarello. This meant that they would work especially in setting consciences right, as, for example, in hearing confessions, particularly of priests or priestly candidates.

Others were loading sheaves on a wagon symbolizing God's grace. Converted sinners must climb upon this wagon in order to make a start on their way to heaven. When the wagon

was fully loaded, oxen – a symbol of strength and perseverance – started pulling it. Some boys led them, following Rua. This means that Rua's task will be to lead souls to heaven. [Angelo] Savio trailed behind, gleaning ears of wheat or sheaves which fell from the wagon.

Scattered about the field were John Bonetti, Joseph Bongiovanni, and others, busily gleaning. Their task will be to rescue obstinate sinners. Bonetti, especially, is called by God to seek such unfortunate people.

Fusero and Anfossi were preparing sheaves for threshing. Perhaps this suggested a teaching career. Others, like Father Alasonatti, stacked them; they are those who administer finances, watch over the observance of rules, and teach prayers and hymns – in short, those who materially and morally contribute in directing souls to heaven.

One strip of land had been cleared and smoothed out for threshing. John Cagliero, who had just gone to the garden for flowers and had handed them out to his companions, betook himself to the threshing area, still holding a little bouquet of flowers. Threshing grain symbolizes God's call to instruct the common people.

Far off, black columns of smoke were rising to the sky. Some boys had gathered cockle and were burning it outside the field. This symbolized those who would remove the bad from the good as directors of our future houses. Among them I saw Francis Cerruti, John Baptist Tamietti, Dominic Belmonte, Paul Albera, and others, who are now studying in the lower Latin grades.

All the above scenes kept unfolding simultaneously. I saw some boys in that crowd hold lighted lanterns, though it was broad daylight. Evidently they were destined to be beacons, giving good example to other workers in the Lord's vineyard. Among them was Paul Albera, who, besides carrying a lamp, also played the guitar. This means that not only will he guide priests, but he will also encourage them to persevere. It suggested, too, some high post in the Church.

Amid so much hustle and bustle, however, not all the boys were busy. One fellow was holding a pistol, an indication that he was inclined to a military career, though he was as yet uncertain. Others just stood about idly, watching the reapers, with no intention of joining them. Some looked undecided; being too lazy for action, they couldn't make up their minds. Others instead ran for a sickle, but a few of these did nothing on reaching the field. There were also some who swung the sickle wrongly. Molino was one of them. These are boys who always do the opposite of what they should. Quite a few others kept roaming about or picking wild grapes, denoting those who waste their time in tasks not pertaining to them.

The boys tilling the soil in the field at the left were also an odd sight. While most of those sturdy lads worked very diligently, a few were using their hoes the wrong way or only pretending to work. Some knocked the blade off the handle at every blow. The handle symbolized the right intention.

I also observed artisans reaping wheat and students hoeing. I again tried to jot down some notes, but my guide would immediately show me his notebook and stop me. I could also see that very many boys stood idly about because they couldn't make up their minds. Instead, the two Dalmazzo brothers, Primo Gariglio, Monasterolo, and many others seemed determined to make a decision one way or the other. I saw some quit hoeing to go and do some reaping. One boy was in such a hurry that he forgot to get a sickle. Shamefacedly, he went back for one, but the person in charge refused to give it to him despite his insistence. "It's not time yet!" he told him.

"Yes, it is!" the lad insisted. "I want it now!"

"Not now!" was the reply. "First go to the garden and pick two flowers."

"All right," he exclaimed, shrugging his shoulders. "I'll pick all the flowers you want."

"Two will do!"

He ran to the garden but, on getting there, realized he had not asked which two flowers he should pick. He

rushed back to ask.

"Pick the flower of charity and that of humility," he was told.

"I've got them already."

"You only think you have them!"

The boy fumed, clenched his fists, and raged.

"This is no time for a tantrum," the one in charge told him, and he absolutely refused to hand him a scythe. The lad bit his fists in rage.

After this I stopped looking through the lens, which had enabled me to learn so much. I felt stirred, too, by the moral applications my friend had suggested. I again asked for a few more explanations. The stranger repeated: "The wheat field is the Church; the harvest is the fruit reaped; the sickle is the tool – the Word of God especially – to harvest the fruit. The dull blade means lack of piety; the blunted point signifies lack of humility. Leaving the field while reaping means leaving the Oratory and the Salesian Society."

The following night, May 4, 1861, Don Bosco concluded his narrative. The first part had shown him the Oratory pupils, especially the students; the second indicated those who were called to the priesthood. The third part was a succession of visions: the Salesian Society in 1861, its prodigious growth, and the gradual disappearance of the first Salesians and their replacement by others. Don Bosco spoke thus:

After I had leisurely taken in the richly varied harvest scene, the obliging stranger said, "Now give the wheel ten turns and look."

I obeyed. Marvelously, those very lads whom I had patted as children a few days before were now virile, bearded men, some with greying hair.

"How could this happen?" I inquired. "That man was a mere youngster the other day!"

My friend answered, "Don't be surprised! How many turns did you give the wheel?"

"Ten."

"Then they are all ten years older. We have gone from 1861 to 1871."

"Oh!" Through that mysterious lens I saw new places, new houses of ours, and many pupils in the care of my dear Oratory boys, now priests, teachers, and directors.

"Give the wheel ten more turns, and we shall reach 1881," the stranger told me. I complied and peered into the lens. Now I saw only about half the boys I had seen before. Nearly all were grey-haired, a few stooping.

"Where are the others?" I asked.

"Gone into eternity," he replied.

This striking loss grieved me considerably, but I was consoled by the sight of an immense tableau of new and unknown regions and a multitude of boys led by teachers unknown to me but pupils of my first boys, some already mature in years.

I gave the wheel ten more turns and then saw only one-fourth of the boys I had seen but a few moments before. They were much older and white-haired.

"Where are the others?" I asked.

"Gone into eternity. This is now 1891."

I then beheld a very touching sight. My toil-worn priests were surrounded by boys I had never seen; many were of a different race and color.

I turned the wheel ten more times. I could only see a few of my first boys, tottering and bent with age, gaunt and thin. Among others I remember seeing Father Rua, so old and haggard as to be hardly recognizable.

"What about all the others?" I asked.

"Gone into eternity! We are now in the year 1901."

I saw many houses of ours, but none of my old Salesians. The directors and teachers were all unknown to me. The multitude of boys kept growing, as was the number of houses and personnel.

"Now," the stranger said, "turn the wheel ten more times, and you will see things that will both cheer and sadden you." I complied.

"Nineteen hundred and eleven!" my friend exclaimed.

My dear boys, I saw new houses, new boys, new directors, and teachers dressed differently from us. And what about my first Oratory boys? I searched and searched through the great multitude and could find only one of you, white-haired, bent with age. Surrounded by boys, he was telling them about the Oratory's beginnings and repeating things he had learned from Don Bosco, while pointing out to them his picture hanging on the parlor wall. And what about the first pupils and superiors that I had just seen as old men? . . .

At a nod from the stranger, I again gave the wheel several turns. All I could see was a vast solitude, with nobody in sight. "Oh!" I gasped. "There is nobody here! Where are all the cheerful, lively, strong boys that are at the Oratory with me right now?"

"Gone into eternity! Remember that a decade goes by with every ten turns of the wheel."

I figured that I had given the wheel fifty turns and that around 1911 the boys that are now at the Oratory would all be gone into eternity.

"Now," the stranger said, "would you like to see something really startling?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Watch! Give the wheel as many turns counterclockwise as you did clockwise."

I did so.

"Now look!" the stranger cried.

I saw an immense crowd of boys of countless nations, features, and tongues. So vast was the throng that I could single out only a small fraction with their superiors.

"I don't know any of them," I said to the stranger.

"Still," he replied, "they are all your sons. Listen. They are talking about you and your first boys, their superiors, now long dead, and the teaching you and your first sons handed down to them."



Again I looked intently, but on removing my gaze from the lens, I saw the wheel begin to spin by itself so fast and so noisily that I awoke and found myself in bed, exhausted.

Now that I have told you all these things, you may think that Don Bosco is an extraordinary man, a great man, a saint, no doubt! My dear lads, before you entertain such foolish notions about me, feel absolutely free to believe or not believe these things and to make whatever you want of them. I only ask that you do not make fun of them, whether among yourselves or with outsiders. Bear in mind, though, that Our Lord can manifest His will in many ways. Sometimes He makes use of the most unsuitable, unworthy instruments, as when He made Balaam's donkey speak and even used Balaam himself – a false prophet – to foretell many things concerning the Messiah. Such may be the case with me. I warn you, then, not to follow my example blindly. What you must do is to pay close attention to all I say because that at least, I hope, will always be in accordance with God's will and helpful to your souls.

As for what I do, never say, "Don Bosco did it and so it has to be good." Examine it first. If you see it is good, do likewise, but if it were, perchance, bad, beware of imitating it. Don't! [Good night!]"

*(MB IT VI, 898-916 / MB EN VI, 530-544)*

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## **The history of the Salesian missions (1/5)**

*The 150th anniversary of the Salesian missions will be held on November 11, 2025. We believe it might be interesting to offer our readers a brief history of what has gone before and early*

*stages of what was to become a kind of Salesian missionary epic in Patagonia. We will do so over five episodes, with the help of unpublished sources that allow us to correct the many inaccuracies that have passed into history.*

Let us clear the field immediately: it is said and written that Don Bosco wanted to leave for the missions both as a seminarian and as a young priest. This is not documented. While, as a 17 year old student (1834) he applied to join the Franciscan Reformed friars at the Convent of the Angels in Chieri who had missions, the request was apparently made mainly for financial reasons. If ten years later (1844), when he left the "Convitto" in Turin, he was tempted to enter the Congregation of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, who had just been entrusted with missions in Burma (Myanmar), it is however also true that a missionary vocation, for which he had perhaps also undertaken some study of foreign languages, was only one of the possibilities of apostolate for the young Don Bosco that opened up before him. In both cases Don Bosco immediately followed the advice, first of Fr Comollo to enter the diocesan seminary and, later, of Fr Cafasso to continue to dedicate himself to the young people of Turin. Even in the twenty years between 1850 and 1870, busy as he was in planning the continuity of his "work of the Oratories", in giving a juridical foundation to the Salesian society he was setting up, and in the spiritual and pedagogical formation of the first Salesians and all young people from his Oratory, he was certainly not in a position to follow up on any personal missionary aspirations or those of his "sons". There is not even a hint of him or the Salesians going to Patagonia, although we see this in writing or on the web.

### **Heightening missionary sensitivity**

This does not detract from the fact that the missionary sensitivity in Don Bosco, probably reduced to faint hints and vague aspirations in the years of his priestly formation and early priesthood, sharpened considerably over

the years. Reading the Annals of the Propagation of the Faith gave him good information on the missionary world, so much so that he drew episodes from them for some of his books and praised Pope Gregory XVI who encouraged the spread of the Gospel to the far corners of the earth and approved new religious Orders with missionary aims. Don Bosco could have received considerable influence from Canon G. Ortalda, director of the diocesan Council of the Propaganda Fide Association for 30 years (1851-1880) and also promoter of "Apostolic Schools" (a sort of minor seminary for missionary vocations). In December 1857 he had also launched the project of an Exposition in favour of the Catholic Missions entrusted to the six hundred Sardinian Missionaries. Don Bosco was well informed about it.

Missionary interest grew in him in 1862 at the time of the solemn canonisation in Rome of the 26 Japanese protomartyrs and in 1867 on the occasion of the beatification of more than two hundred Japanese martyrs, also celebrated with solemnity at Valdocco. Also in the papal city during his long stays in 1867, 1869 and 1870 he was able to see other local missionary initiatives, such as the foundation of the Pontifical Seminary of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul for foreign missions.

Piedmont with almost 50% of Italian missionaries (1500 with 39 bishops) was in the vanguard in this field and Franciscan Luigi Celestino Spelta, Apostolic Vicar of Hupei, visited Turin in November 1859. He did not visit the Oratory, instead Fr Daniele Comboni did so in December 1864, publishing his Plan for Regeneration for Africa in Turin with the intriguing project of evangelising Africa through Africans.

Don Bosco had an exchange of ideas with him. In 1869 Comboni tried, unsuccessfully, to associate him with his project and the following year invited him to send some priests and lay people to direct an institute in Cairo and thus prepare him for the missions in Africa, at the centre of which he counted on entrusting the Salesians with an Apostolic Vicariate. At Valdocco, the request, which was not granted,

was replaced by a willingness to accept boys to be educated for the missions. There, however, the group of Algerians recommended by Archbishop Charles Martial Lavigerie found difficulties, so they were sent to Nice, France. The request in 1869 by the same archbishop to have Salesian helpers in an orphanage in Algiers in times of emergency was not granted. In the same way, the petition by Brescian missionary Giovanni Bettazzi to send Salesians to run an up-and-coming institute of arts and trades, as well as a small minor seminary in the diocese of Savannah (Georgia, USA) was suspended from 1868. Proposals from others, whether to direct educational works in “mission territories”, or direct action *in partibus infidelium*, could also have been attractive, but Don Bosco would never give up either his full freedom of action – which he perhaps saw compromised by the proposals he had received – or above all his special work with the young, for whom he was at the time very busy developing the newly approved Salesian Society (1869) beyond the borders of Turin and Piedmont. In short, until 1870 Don Bosco, although theoretically sensitive to missionary needs, was cultivating other projects at a national level.

#### **Four years of unfulfilled requests (1870-1874)**

The missionary theme and the important questions related to it were the object of attention during the First Vatican Council (1868-1870). If the document *Super Missionibus Catholicis* was never presented in the general assembly, the presence in Rome of 180 bishops from “mission lands” and the positive information about the Salesian model of religious life, spread among them by some Piedmontese bishops, gave Don Bosco the opportunity to meet many of them and also to be contacted by them, both in Rome and Turin.

Here on 17 November 1869 the Chilean delegation was received, with the Archbishop of Santiago and the Bishop of Concepción. In 1870 it was the turn of Bishop D. Barbero, Apostolic Vicar in Hyderabad (India), already known to Don Bosco, who asked him about Sisters being available for India.

In July 1870 Dominican Archbishop G. Sadoc Alemany, Archbishop of San Francisco in California (USA), came to Valdocco. He asked, successfully, for the Salesians for a hospice with a vocational school (which was never built). Franciscan Bishop L. Moccagatta, Apostolic Vicar of Shantung (China) and his confrere Bishop Eligio Cusi, later his successor, also visited Valdocco. In 1873 it was the turn of Bishop T. Raimondi from Milan who offered Don Bosco the possibility of going to direct Catholic schools in the Apostolic Prefecture of Hong Kong. The negotiations, which lasted over a year, came to a standstill for various reasons, just as in 1874 did a project for a new seminary by Fr Bertazzi for Savannah (USA) also remain on paper. The same thing happened in those years for missionary foundations in Australia and India, for which Don Bosco started negotiations with individual bishops, which he sometimes gave as a *fait accompli* to the Holy See, while in reality they were only projects in progress.

In those early 1870s, with a staff consisting of little more than two dozen people (including priests, clerics and brothers), a third of them with temporary vows, scattered across six houses, it would have been difficult for Don Bosco to send some of them to mission lands. All the more so since the foreign missions offered to him up to that time outside Europe presented serious difficulties of language, culture and non-native traditions, and the long-standing attempt to have young English-speaking personnel, even with the help of the Rector of the Irish college in Rome, Msgr Toby Kirby, had failed.

(continued)

Historic photo: The Port of Genoa, November 14, 1877.

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# Fifth missionary dream: Peking (1886)

During the night of April 9th, Don Bosco had a new missionary dream, which he related to Father Rua, Father Branda, and Brother Viglietti, in a voice at times choked by sobs. Viglietti wrote it down immediately afterwards and, at Don Bosco's direction, sent a copy to Father Lemoyne so that he could read it to all the superiors of the Oratory for their general encouragement. "But," the secretary warned, "this is nothing more than a sketch of a very long, magnificent vision." The text that we are publishing is that of Viglietti, slightly touched up stylistically by Father Lemoyne to put it into more correct Italian:

Don Bosco found himself in the neighborhood of Castelnuovo standing on the hillock known as Bricco Del Pino 3 near the Sbornau valley. He turned his gaze everywhere, but could see nothing more than thick scrubs that sprawled everywhere and which were covered by an infinite number of small mushrooms.

"Now," Don Bosco said to himself, "this is also the country estate of Joseph Rossi (*As a joke, Don Bosco had named Coadjutor Brother Joseph Rossi "count" of that piece of land*). He ought to be here!"

Shortly after that, in fact, he saw Rossi on a distant hilltop, gazing most seriously over the valleys spread out beneath him.

Don Bosco hailed him, but he answered only with a distracted glance, as if his thoughts were elsewhere.

Turning in another direction, Don Bosco also saw Father Rua at a distance, who just as Rossi, was most seriously, but peacefully, seated as if resting.

Don Bosco called to both of them, but they remained silent, not replying by so much as a gesture.

So he descended from the hillock and walked over to another

one, from the summit of which he saw a forest, but it was cultivated, and roads and paths ran through it. He gazed around in another direction, looking toward limits of the horizon, and even before his eye perceived them, his ear was struck by the uproar created by an immense crowd of children. No matter how much he tried to discover from where the noise came, he saw nothing. Then a shout followed the uproar, as though in the wake of some catastrophe. At length he saw a vast crowd of boys who ran toward him, crying, "We've been waiting for you. We've been waiting for you so long. Now at last you're here. You're among us and you won't get away from us!"

Don Bosco did not understand at all and wondered what these boys wanted from him. But while he was standing there, dazed in their midst, gazing at them, he saw an immense flock of lambs led by a shepherdess. After she had separated the boys from the sheep, she set one group to one side and the other to the opposite side. She stopped in front of Don Bosco, to whom she said, "Do you see what's before you?"

"Yes, I do," Don Bosco answered.

"Good. Do you recall the dream you had when you were ten years old?"

"Oh! It's quite hard for me to remember it! My mind's tired and, at present, I don't remember it clearly."

"Good, good! Think hard and you'll recall it."

Then she summoned the boys to Don Bosco's side, telling him, "Now look in this direction. Look further on – all of you, look further and read what is written over there. So what do you see?"

"I see mountains, then the sea, then hills, and again mountains and seas."

"I read *Valparaiso*," one boy said.

Another boy said, "I read *Santiago*."

"I read both those names," added a third.

"Well," continued the shepherdess, "set out from there and you will form an idea of how much the Salesians have to do in the future. Now look in that direction. Draw a visual line and

look."

"I see mountains, hills, and seas!"

The boys, too, focused their eyes and exclaimed in chorus, "We read *Peking!*"

Then Don Bosco saw a great city. Through it ran a wide river, over which some big bridges had been built.

"Good," said the maiden, who seemed to be the boys' teacher.

"Now draw a single line from one end to the other, from Peking to Santiago. Establish your center in the middle of Africa, and you will get an exact idea of how much the Salesians have to do."

"But how can all this be accomplished?" Don Bosco exclaimed.

"The distances are enormous, the places difficult, and the Salesians few."

"Don't worry. Your sons, the sons of your sons, and their sons again will do this. Just let them steadfastly observe the Rules and keep the spirit of the Pious Society."

"But where are we to find so many people?"

"Come here and look. Do you see fifty missionaries standing ready there? Farther on, do you see others, and still others? Draw a line from Santiago to the center of Africa. What do you see?"

"I can see ten central [mission] stations."

"Well, these central stations that you see will make up houses of studies and novitiates and will send forth a multitude of missionaries to staff these lands. Now look to this other side. Here you see ten more centers reaching from Africa to Peking. These, too, will provide missionaries for all of these other lands. There's Hong Kong; there, Calcutta; farther on, Madagascar. Here and also elsewhere there will be more houses, houses for studies and novitiates."

Don Bosco listened as he looked and examined, then he said:

"And where can so many people be found, and how can missionaries be sent to all those places? There you have savages that feed on human flesh. In this place you have heretics and in that one persecutors. So how shall we manage?"

"Look," the shepherdess answered. "Be of good will. There is



only one thing to do: recommend that *my sons constantly cultivate the virtue of Mary.*"

"Okay, good. I believe I understand. I will preach your words to all of them."

"And beware of the error now prevailing, which is to mix those who are studying the human arts with others studying the divine arts, for the science of Heaven is not to be mixed with earthly matters."

Don Bosco wanted to say more, but the vision disappeared.

His dream was over.

(*BM XVIII, 49-52*)

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## What a gift, time!

*The start of a new year in our liturgy, is enlightened by the ancient blessing with which the Israelite priests used to bless the people: "May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord let his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord look upon you with kindness and give you peace."*

Dear friends and readers of the Salesian Bulletin, we are at the beginning of a new year. Let us express our best wishes to each other for this new year and for all the time that lies ahead. Let our greetings be a gift that contains all other gifts for a truly fulfilling life.

Let this wish be really enlightening. Let us let Don Bosco who, when he arrived at the seminary in Chieri stopped in front of the sundial that still exists today in the courtyard, and reflected: "Looking up at a sundial, I read this verse: *"Afflictis lentae, celeres gaudentibus horae."* Here, I said to my friend, is our program of life: let us always be cheerful and time will pass quickly (Biographical Memoirs I, 374).

Our first wish to all of you is to live what Don Bosco reminds us: live well, live serenely, and bring serenity to all those around you and time will acquire a different value! Every moment in time is a treasure; but it is a treasure that passes quickly. Don Bosco always loved to comment: "The three enemies of man are: death (which surprises); time (which escapes him), the devil (who lays his snares to entice him)" (MB V, 926).

According to an old saying: "Remember that being happy is not having a sky without storms, a road without accidents, work without effort, and relationships without disappointments." "Being happy is not just celebrating successes, but learning lessons from failures. Being happy is recognizing that life is worth living, despite all the challenges, misunderstandings, and periods of crisis. It is thanking God every morning for the miracle of life."

A wise man kept a huge pendulum clock in his study that chimed every hour with solemn slowness, but also with a resounding echo.

"But doesn't it disturb you?" asked a student.

"No," replied the wise man. "Because at every hour I am forced to ask myself: what have I done with the hour that has just passed?"

Time is the only non-renewable resource. It consumes itself at an incredible speed. We know that we will not have another chance. Therefore, all the good we can do, all the love we can give, all the kindness and the gentleness we are capable of must be given now. Because we will not return to this earth again. With a perpetual veil of remorse within us, we feel that Someone will ask us: "What have you done with all that time I gave you?"

### **Our hope is called Jesus.**

In this new year that we have just begun, the dates and numbers of a calendar are conventional signs; they are signs and numbers invented to measure time. In the transition from the old year to the new year, very little has changed. Yet the perception of a year that is ending forces us to always take

stock. How much have we loved? How much have we lost? How much have we become better? How much have we become worse? Passing time never leaves us the same.

The liturgy, at the dawn of the new year, has its own way of making us take stock. It does so through the initial words of the Gospel of John – words that may seem to be difficult to grasp, but actually reflect the depth of life: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God: all things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” At the core of every life resounds a Word greater than us. It is the reason for our existence, for the existence of the world, for the existence of everything. This Word is God Himself – the Son. This Word is Jesus. The name of the reason why we were made is called Jesus.

He is the true reason for which everything exists, and it is in him that we can understand what exists. Our life should not be judged by comparing it with history, with its events, and with its way of thinking. Our life cannot be judged by looking at ourselves and at our own experience alone. Our life is understandable only if it is approached from the perspective of Jesus. In him everything takes on a profound sense of meaning. Even the apparent contradictions and injustices are seen in a different light. It is by looking at Jesus that we come to get a deeper insight into ourselves. A psalm says it well: “In your light, we see light.”

This is the way to see Time according to the Heart of God, and we hope to live this new time in this way.

The new year will bring to all of us, to the Salesian family, and to the Congregation in particular important events and novelties. All in the context of the gift of the Jubilee that we are living in the Church!

Within the spirit of the Jubilee, let us be carried away by the Hope that is the presence of God in our lives.

The first month of this new year, January, is dotted with

Salesian feasts that lead us to the Solemnity of Don Bosco. Let us thank God for this delightful dish with which he allows us to begin this new year.

Let us therefore leave the last word to Don Bosco and let this maxim of his shape our 2025: "My children, preserve time and time will preserve you forever." (MB XVIII 482, 864).

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# **Wonders of the Mother of God invoked under the title of Mary Help of Christians (13/13)**

[\*\(continuation from previous article\)\*](#)

**Graces obtained through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians.**

I. Grace received from Mary Help of Christians.

It was the year of our Lord 1866 when my wife, in the month of October, was struck by a very serious illness, namely a severe inflammation combined with great congestion, and a parasitic infection. In these painful circumstances, we first turned to the experts of the art, who quickly declared that the illness was extremely dangerous. Seeing that the illness was getting much worse, and that human remedies were of little or no use, I suggested to my companion that she recommend herself to Mary Help of Christians, and that she would certainly grant her health if it was necessary for the soul; at the same time I added the promise that if she obtained health, as soon as the church was finished, which was

being built in Turin, I would take us both to visit her and make some donation. She replied that she could recommend herself to some Shrine closer so as not to be obliged to go so far away; to this I replied that one should not look so much at convenience as at the greatness of the benefit one hopes for.

She then prayed as recommended and promised what she proposed. O power of Mary! Barely 30 minutes after she had made her promise I asked her how she was, and she said: "I am feeling much better, my mind is clearer, my stomach is no longer oppressed, I feel an aversion to ice which I had so craved before, and I am more inclined to have broth which I previously found so distasteful."

At these words I felt myself born to new life, and if it had not been at night I would immediately have left my room to publish the grace received from the Blessed Virgin Mary. The fact is that she passed the night peacefully, and on the following morning the doctor appeared and declared her free from all danger. Who healed her if not Mary Help of Christians? In fact, after a few days she left her bed and took up domestic chores. Now we anxiously await the completion of the church dedicated to her, and thus fulfil the promise made.

I have written this, as a humble son of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, and I desire that all such publicity be given to it as will be judged good for the greater glory of God and the august Mother of the Saviour.

Luigi COSTAMAGNA  
of Caramagna.

## **II. Mary Help of Christians Protectress of the countryside.**

Mornese is a small village in the diocese of Acqui, province of Alessandria, of about one thousand inhabitants. This village of ours, like so many others, was sadly plagued by phomopsis cane (a grape disease), which for

over twenty years had devoured almost the entire grape harvest, our main wealth. We had already used many kinds of things to ward it off, but to no avail. When word spread that some peasants from neighbouring towns had promised a portion of the fruit from their vineyards for the continuation of the work on the church dedicated to Mary Help of Christians in Turin, they were wonderfully favoured and had grapes in abundance. Moved by the hope of a better harvest and even more by the thought of contributing to a work of religion, the people from Mornese decided to offer the tenth part of the harvest for this purpose. The protection of the Holy Virgin made itself felt among us in a truly merciful way. We had the abundance of happier times, and we were very happy to be able to scrupulously offer in kind or in money what we had promised. When we invited the construction manager for the church to come and collect the offerings, there was a feast of true joy and public exultation.

He appeared deeply moved by the promptness and selflessness with which the offerings were made, and by the Christian words with which they were accompanied. But one of our patriots spoke loudly in the name of all of what was happening. He said that we owe great things to the Holy Virgin Help of Christians. Last year, many people from this area, having to go to war, placed themselves under the protection of Mary Help of Christians, most of them wearing a medal around their necks. They went bravely, and had to face the gravest dangers, but none fell victim to that scourge of the Lord. Moreover, in the neighbouring districts there was a plague of cholera, hail and drought, and we were spared all of that. Hardly any of our neighbours' harvests survived, and we were blessed with such abundance, more than for or twenty years. For these reasons we are happy to be able to manifest our indelible gratitude to the great Protectress of mankind in this way.

I believe I am a faithful interpreter of my fellow-citizens in asserting that what we have done now, we will also do in the future, convinced that we will thus make

ourselves ever more worthy of heavenly blessings.

25 March 1868

An inhabitant of Mornese.

### **III. Prompt recovery.**

Young Giovanni Bonetti from Asti in the College at Lanzo had the following grace. On the evening of the 23rd of December last, he suddenly entered the director's room with uncertain steps and a distraught face. He approached him, leaned his body against the pious priest, and with his right hand rubbed his forehead without saying a word. The priest, astonished to see him so distressed, supported him bidding him sit down he asked what it was he wanted. In response to the repeated questions, the poor man could only sigh more laboriously and deeply. The priest then looked more closely at his face and saw that his eyes were motionless, his lips pale, and his body, succumbing to the weight of his head, threatened to collapse. Seeing then in what life-threatening danger the young man was, they immediately sent for the doctor. Meanwhile, his condition worsened by the moment; his face became distorted and no longer looked the same as before, his arms, legs, and forehead were cold, phlegm choked him, his breathing grew increasingly shallow, and his pulse could barely be felt. He remained in this state for five agonising hours.

The Doctor arrived, applied various remedies, but always to no avail. No hope, the doctor said sorrowfully, before morning this young man will be dead.

Thus, in defiance of human hopes, the good priest turned to heaven, praying that if it was not his will that the young man should live, he would at least give him a little time for confession and communion. He then took a small medal of Mary Help of Christians. The graces he had already obtained from invoking the Virgin with that medal were many, and increased his hope of obtaining help from the heavenly

Protectress. Full of confidence in her, he knelt down, placed the medal on his heart and, together with other pious people who had come, said a few prayers to Mary and the Blessed Sacrament. And Mary listened to the prayers that were raised to her with such confidence. Little John's breathing became freer, and his eyes, which had been as if petrified, turned lovingly around to look at and thank the onlookers for the compassionate care they were giving him. Nor was the improvement short-lived; on the contrary, everyone held his recovery to be ensured. The doctor himself, astonished at what had happened, exclaimed: "It was the grace of God that wrought his recovery. In my long career I have seen a great number of sick and dying people, but I have never seen any of those who were at Bonetti's point recover. Without the beneficent intervention of heaven, this is for me an inexplicable fact. And science, used nowadays to breaking that admirable bond that unites it to God, paid humble homage to him, judging itself powerless to achieve what God alone had accomplished. The young man who was the object of the Virgin's glory continues to this day to be very well. He tells and preaches to all that he owes his life doubly to God and to his most powerful Mother, from whose valid intercession he obtained this grace. He would consider himself ungrateful of heart if he did not give public testimony of gratitude, and thus invite others and other unfortunates who in this valley of tears suffer and go in search of comfort and help.

(From the newspaper: *La Vergine*).

#### **IV. Mary Help of Christians frees one of her devotees from a severe toothache.**

In an educational institution in Turin, there was a young man of 19 or 20 years who had been suffering from severe toothaches for several days. All the usual medical treatments for such cases had already been tried without any success. As a result, the poor young man was reduced to such a



state of agony that he aroused the pity of all who heard him. While the day seemed dreadful to him, the night appeared eternal and most wretched, during which he could not close his eyes to sleep except for brief and interrupted moments. What a deplorable state his was! It continued like this for some time, but on the evening of April 29th, the pain seemed to become far worse. The young man groaned incessantly in his bed, sighed and cried out loudly without anyone being able to relieve him. His companions, concerned about his unhappy condition, went to the director to ask if he would come and comfort him. He came and attempted to soothe him and his companions with words, essential for him to regain calm and for his companions to find rest. However, the intensity of the pain was so overwhelming that, despite being obedient, he couldn't cease his lamenting. He expressed that he doubted if even in hell itself one could endure more excruciating agony. Recognising the severity of the situation, the superior decided to place him under the protection of Mary Help of Christians, whose honour is upheld by a majestic church in our city. We all knelt down and said a short prayer. And? Mary's help was not long in coming. As the priest bestowed the blessing on the desolate young man, he was instantly calm, and fell into a deep and placid sleep. At that instant a terrible suspicion flashed into our minds; that the poor young man had succumbed to illness but no, he had already fallen deeply asleep, and Mary had heard the prayer of her devotee, and God the blessing of his minister.

Several months passed, and the young man subject to the toothache was no longer troubled by it.

*(By the same).*

*V. Some of Mary Help of Christians' wonders.*

I believe that your noble periodical will take a good look at some of the events that have taken place among us, which I set out in honour of Mary Help of Christians. I

will only select a few that I witnessed in this city, omitting many others that are recounted every day.

The first concerns a lady from Milan who for five months had been consumed by pneumonia combined with the fact that her whole life was ebbing away.

Passing through these parts, Fr B. advised her to have recourse to Mary Help of Christians by means of a novena of prayer in her honour, with the promise of some donation to continue the work on the church which was being built in Turin under the title of Mary Help of Christians. This donation was only to be made once the grace had been obtained.

How marvellous! On that very day, the sick woman was able to resume her ordinary and serious occupations, eating all kinds of food, going for walks, entering and leaving the house freely as if she had never been ill. When the novena was over, she was in a flourishing state of health, such as she never remembered having enjoyed before.

Another Lady had been suffering from palpitations for three years, with many of the problems that go hand in hand with this illness. A fever and a kind of dropsy had rendered her immobile in bed. Her illness had reached such a point that when the aforementioned priest gave her his blessing, her husband had to hold her hand so that she could make the sign of the holy cross. A novena in honour of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Help of Christians was also recommended, with the promise of some donation for the aforementioned sacred edifice, but only after the grace had been given. On the very day on which the novena ended, the sick woman was free of all illness, and she herself was able to compile the narrative of her illness, in which I read the following:

“Mary Help of Christians has cured me of an illness, for which all doctors’ advice and ministrations has been useless. Today, the last day of the novena, I am free from all illness, and I can join my family at table, something I had not been able to do for three years. As long as I live, I shall not cease to glorify the power and goodness of the

august Queen of Heaven, and I shall endeavour to promote devotion to her, especially in the church that is being built in Turin."

Let me add yet another fact, which is even more marvellous than the preceding ones.

A young man in the prime of life was in the midst of one of the most luminous careers in the sciences when he was struck down by a cruel illness in one of his hands. In spite of every treatment, every solicitude of the most accredited doctors, no improvement could be achieved, nor could the progress of the disease be halted. All the conclusions of the experts in this skill concurred that amputation was necessary to prevent the total ruin of the body. Frightened by this judgement, he decided to have recourse to Mary Help of Christians, applying the same spiritual remedies that others had practised so fruitfully. The acuteness of the pains ceased instantly, wounds were mitigated, and in a short time the healing appeared complete. Whoever wished to satisfy his curiosity could admire that hand with the indentations and holes of the healed sores, which recall the severity of his illness and the marvellous healing of it. He wanted to go to Turin to offer his donation in person, to further demonstrate his gratitude to the august Queen of Heaven.

I have many other stories of this kind which I will tell you in other letters, if you judge this to be appropriate for your periodical. I beg you to omit the names of the persons to whom the facts refer, so as not to expose them to importunate questions and observations. However, may these facts serve to revive trust in the protection of Mary Help of Christians more and more among Christians, to increase her devotees on earth, and to have one day a more glorious crown of her devotees in heaven.

(From the *Vera Buona Novella*, Florence).

With Ecclesiastical approval.

*End*