

Crown of the Seven Sorrows of Mary

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

Preface

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

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

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

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

Preparation

Dearest brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, we undertake our

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

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

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

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

Let us pray.

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

First Sorrow: The Prophecy of Simeon

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

One Our Father and seven Hail Marys.

Prayer`

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

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

Second Sorrow: The Flight into Egypt

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

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

Prayer

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

Third Sorrow: The Loss of Jesus in the Temple

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

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

Prayer

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

Fourth Sorrow: Meeting Jesus Carrying the Cross

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

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

Prayer

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

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

Fifth Sorrow: The Crucifixion of Jesus

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

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

Prayer

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

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

Sixth Sorrow: The Descent from the Cross

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

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

Prayer

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

Seventh Sorrow: The Burial of Jesus

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

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

Prayer

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

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

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

Hail Mary, etc.

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

Hymn – Lament of the Blessed Virgin Mary

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

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

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

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

Invoke divine help by saying:

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

Act of Contrition

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

First Sorrow

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

Meditation

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

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

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

Second Sorrow

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

Meditation

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

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

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

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

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

Third Sorrow

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

Meditation

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

sighing thus:

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

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

Fourth Sorrow

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

Meditation

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

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

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

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

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

Fifth sorrow

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

Meditation

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

a sight?

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

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

Sixth sorrow

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

Meditation

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

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

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

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

Seventh sorrow

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

Meditation

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pray for us, O most sorrowful Virgin.

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

Let us pray

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

Praise be to God and to the most sorrowful Virgin.

With ecclesiastical approval

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

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The Venerable Monsignor Stefano Ferrando

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

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

He was ordained a priest in Borgo San Martino (Alessandria) on

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Saint Monica, mother of Saint Augustine, witness of hope

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

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

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

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

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

Her origins in Tagaste

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

Her upbringing was marked by the influence of an austere

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

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

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

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

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

Monica as a mother

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

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

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

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

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

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

in the Christian faith.

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

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

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

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

A mother’s tenacity

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

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

Augustine’s conversion

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ostia: ecstasy and death

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

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

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

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

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

Monica's spiritual profile

Augustine describes his mother with well-measured words:

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

And again:

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

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

From this Augustinian testimony, a surprisingly contemporary figure emerges.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A simple and extraordinary woman

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

influenced the history of the Church.

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

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

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

Don Bosco with his Salesians

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

Don Bosco's fiefdoms

In 1830 Margaret Occhiena, widow of Francis Bosco, made the division of the property inherited from her husband between her stepson Anthony and her two sons Joseph and John. It consisted, among other things, of eight plots of land comprising meadows, fields and vineyards. We know nothing precise about the criteria followed by Mamma Margaret in dividing her father's inheritance between the three of them.

However, among the plots of land there was a vineyard near the Becchi (at Bric dei Pin), a field at Valcapone (or Valcappone) and another at Bacajan (or Bacaiau). In any case, these three lands constitute the “fiefdoms” as Don Bosco jokingly termed his property.

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

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

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

Once Don Bosco went to the Porta Nuova station with Joseph Rossi, who was carrying Don Bosco’s suitcase. As usual, he arrived as the train was about to leave and all the coaches were full. The windows were either closed or had passengers blocking the view to convey the impression that there were no vacant seats in their compartments. Turning to Rossi, Don

Bosco rather loudly remarked, "My dear Count, I regret inconveniencing you. You shouldn't be carrying my suitcase." "Forget it. I feel honoured to be of service to you." At hearing this, the passengers closest to them exchanged surprised looks.

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

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

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

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

The pumps and a shack

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

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

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

Otis, botis, pija tutis

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

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

"No, Father!"

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

"No!"

"I know those words are hard to understand. That's why I never reveal their meaning. No one knows it and no one ever will because it would not be wise for me to reveal it. It is the big secret to all my wonders. With this magic formula I can read consciences and solve any mystery. Let's see how smart you are. See if you can make something out of it!" He would then repeat the four words while placing his forefinger successively on the questioner's forehead, nose, chin, and chest, ending with an unexpected little tap on the cheek. The boy or cleric would laugh and, while kissing Don Bosco's hand, still insist, "But, Father, at least translate those words."

"I could, but you still wouldn't understand." And then playfully he would add in Piedmontese dialect, "When they give you a beating, take it like a man!" This conclusion would set them all laughing heartily. (BM VI, 236-237). And he meant that in order to become a saint, one must accept all the sufferings that life has in store for us.

Protector of tinsmiths

Every year the young boarders went on an outing to Monsieur Olive's villa, the generous cooperator already known to us. On this occasion, the father and mother waited on the superiors while their children waited on their pupils. They also organized a lottery, giving a number to everyone of the superiors and boys so that everyone won something. In this way, the Olive family made a gift of their coach to the Oratory of St. Leo. This outing occurred during Don Bosco's

visit to Marseille in 1884, and an amusing incident occurred. While the boys were playing in the gardens, a servant came running up to Madame Olive, greatly agitated.

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

The boys obeyed and instantly the pot stopped leaking. This is an historical event, and when Don Bosco heard it, he laughed heartily, saying, “From this day on, people will say that Don Bosco is the patron of tinsmiths.” (BM XVII, 36-37).

Cardinal Augustus Hlond

The second of 11 children, his father was a railway worker. Having received a simple but strong faith from his parents, at the age of 12, attracted by Don Bosco's reputation, he followed his brother Ignatius to Italy to dedicate himself to the Lord in the Salesian Society, and soon attracted two other brothers there: Antonio, who was to become a Salesian and a renowned musician, and Clement, who was to become a missionary. The college at Valsalice accepted him for his secondary studies. He was then admitted to the novitiate and received the cassock from Blessed Michael Rua (1896). Having made his religious profession in 1897, his superiors sent him to Rome to the Gregorian University for the philosophy course which he graduated in. From Rome he returned to Poland to do his practical training in the college at Oświęcim. His fidelity to Don Bosco's system of education, his commitment to assistance and to the school, his dedication to the young and the

amiability of his manner won him great acclaim. He also quickly made a name for himself for his musical talent.

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

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

He was in the full fervour of his Salesian activity when, in 1922, the Holy See having to provide religious accommodation for Polish Silesia still bleeding from political and national strife, the Holy Father Pius XI entrusted him with the delicate mission, appointing him as Apostolic Administrator. His mediation between Germans and Poles gave birth in 1925 to the diocese of Katowice, of which he became bishop. In 1926 he was Archbishop of Gniezno and Poznań and Primate of Poland. The following year the Pope created him Cardinal. In 1932 he

founded the Society of Christ for Polish emigrants, aimed at assisting the many compatriots who had left the country.

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

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

Cardinal Hlond was a virtuous man, a shining example of a Salesian religious and a generous, austere pastor, capable of prophetic vision. Obedient to the Church and firm in the exercise of authority, he showed heroic humility and unequivocal constancy in times of greatest trial. He cultivated poverty and practised justice to the poor and needy. The two pillars of his spiritual life, in the school of St John Bosco, were the Eucharist and Mary Help of Christians. In the history of the Church of Poland, Cardinal Augustus Hlond was one of the most eminent figures for the religious witness of his life, for the greatness, variety and originality of his pastoral ministry, for the sufferings he faced with an intrepid Christian spirit for the Kingdom of God. The apostolic ardour distinguished the pastoral work and spiritual physiognomy of the Venerable Augustus Hlond, who took *Da mihi animas coetera tolle* as his episcopal motto. As a true son of St John Bosco he confirmed it with his life as a consecrated man and bishop, bearing witness to tireless pastoral charity.

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

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

The Education of Conscience

with St. Francis de Sales

It was most likely the advent of the Protestant Reformation that brought the issue of conscience—and more precisely, “freedom of conscience”—to the forefront. In a 1597 letter to Clement VIII, the Provost of Sales lamented the “tyranny” that the “state of Geneva” imposed “on the consciences of Catholics.” He asked the Holy See to intervene with the King of France to ensure that the Genevans would be granted “what they call freedom of conscience.” Opposed to military solutions for the Protestant crisis, he glimpsed in *libertas conscientiae* a possible way out of violent confrontation, provided reciprocity was respected. Claimed by Geneva for the Reformation and by Francis de Sales for Catholicism, freedom of conscience was about to become a pillar of modern thought.

The Dignity of the Human Person

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

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

greedy."

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

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

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

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

Self-Respect

From the affirmation of each person's dignity and responsibility must arise self-respect. Socrates and all

ancient pagan and Christian thought had already shown the way:

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

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

The likeness and image of God we bear within us is stained and disfigured, the dignity of our spirit dishonoured, and we are made similar to irrational animals [...], enslaving ourselves to our passions and overturning the order of reason.

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

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

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

compassion" rather than anger and fury.

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

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

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

The "Respect Due to Persons"

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

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

Offer often to the eternal glory of your Creator the little

creature whose formation He has wanted to take you as His cooperator.

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

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

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

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

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

The “one-different” Salesian”

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

For him, every being is unique. People are like Pliny's pearls, "so unique in quality that no two are perfectly equal." His two major works, *Introduction to the Devout Life* and *Treatise on the Love of God*—are addressed to individuals, Philothea and Theotimus. What variety and diversity among beings! "Without doubt, as we see that two men are never perfectly equal as to the gifts of nature, so they are never perfectly equal as to the supernatural gifts." The variety also enchanted him from a purely aesthetic point of view, but he feared an indiscreet curiosity about its causes:

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

Diversity does not hinder unity; on the contrary, it makes it richer and more beautiful. Each flower has its characteristics that distinguish it from all the others. "It is not exactly of the roses to be white, it seems to me, because those vermilions are more beautiful and have a better scent, which however is proper to the lily." Of course, Francis de Sales

does not tolerate confusion and disorder, but he is equally an enemy of uniformity. The diversity of beings can lead to dispersion and rupture of communion, but if there is love, "bond of perfection", nothing is lost, on the contrary, diversity is exalted by the union.

In Francis de Sales there is certainly a real culture of the individual, but this is never a closure to the group, the community or society. He spontaneously sees each person marked by their "state of life," which marks the identity and belonging of each one. It will not be possible to establish an equal programme or project for all, simply because it will be applied and implemented in a different way "for the gentleman, the artisan, the servant, the prince, the widow, the maiden, the married." It must also be adapted "to the strengths and duties of each individual. The bishop of Geneva sees society divided into vital spaces characterized by social belonging and group solidarity, as when he deals with "the company of soldiers, the workshop of craftsmen, the court of princes, the family of married people."

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

The human being is in a state of becoming

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

themselves, for better or for worse.

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

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

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

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

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

For though these traits may be innate and natural in each of

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

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

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

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

Don Bosco and the Church of the Holy Shroud

The Holy Shroud of Turin, one of Christianity's most revered relics, has a thousand-year history intertwined with that of the House of Savoy and the Savoyard city. Arriving in Turin in 1578, it became an object of profound devotion, with solemn

exhibitions linked to historical and dynastic events. In the 19th century, figures such as Saint John Bosco and other Turin saints promoted its veneration, contributing to its widespread appeal. Today, preserved in Guarini's Chapel, the Shroud is at the centre of scientific and theological studies. In parallel, the Church of the Holy Shroud in Rome, linked to the House of Savoy and the Piedmontese community, represents another significant place, where Don Bosco attempted to establish a Salesian presence.

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

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

Expositions in the 19th century and veneration of the Shroud

In the 19th century, the Expositions in 1815, 1842, 1868 and 1898 are particularly worthy of note: the first for the return of the Savoy family to their states, the second for the wedding of Victor Emmanuel II to Maria Adelaide of Habsburg-Lorraine, the third for the wedding of Umberto I to Margaret of Savoy-Genoa, and the fourth for the Universal Exhibition.

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

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

Today, the priceless canvas, donated by Umberto II of Savoy to the Holy See, is entrusted to the Archbishop of

Turin's "Pontifical Custodian" and kept in the sumptuous Guarini Chapel behind the Cathedral.

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

The Church of the Holy Shroud in Rome

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

During his stays in Rome, Don Bosco celebrated Mass in that church several times and formulated a plan for it and the adjacent house in line with the purpose of the then extinct Confraternity, dedicated to charitable works for abandoned youth, the sick and prisoners.

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

But already in 1867 Don Bosco had come up with the idea of proposing to the Savoy Government to hand over the use and administration of the church to him, offering his collaboration in money to complete the restoration work. Perhaps he foresaw the entry of the Piedmontese troops into

Rome not far away and, wishing to open a house there, he thought of doing so before the situation precipitated making it more difficult to obtain the Holy See's approval and the State's respect for agreements (BM IX, 192, 223, 301).

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

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

In 1874 Don Bosco again tested the ground with the Government. But, unfortunately, intemperate news leaked from the newspapers definitively put a stop to the project (BM X, 532-533).

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

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

The Tenth Hill (1864)

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

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

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

A lofty bank blocked one end of the valley. As Don Bosco wondered what to do with all those boys, a voice said to him:

"Do you see that bank? Well, both you and the boys must reach its summit."

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

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

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

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

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

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

As Don Bosco kept wondering which way to go, a wide, level road strewn with thorns opened before him. Suddenly there also appeared six white-clad former pupils who had died at the Oratory. Holding aloft another splendid banner with the inscription *Poenitentia* [Penance], they placed themselves at the head of the multitude which was to walk the whole way. As

the signal to move was given, many priests seized the wagon's prow and led the way, followed by the six white-clad boys and the rest of the multitude.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Many of those who had fallen off the wagon joined those who were walking. Meanwhile the singing in the wagon continued, and it was so sweet that it gradually abated Don Bosco's

sorrow. Seven hills had already been climbed. As the boys reached the eighth, they found themselves in a wonderful village where they stopped for a brief rest. The houses were indescribably beautiful and luxurious.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The future is now past; facts have borne out our belief. The dream revealed Don Bosco's life-span. For comparative purposes, let us match this dream with that of The Wheel of Eternity, which we came to learn only years later. In that dream each tum of the wheel symbolized a decade, and this also seems to be the case in the trek from hill to hill. Each hill stands for a decade, and the ten hills represent a century, man's maximum life-span. In his life's first decade, Don Bosco, as a young boy, begins his mission among his companions at Becchi and starts on his journey; he climbs seven hills-

seven decades-and reaches the age of seventy; he climbs the eighth hill and goes no farther. He sees beautiful buildings and meadows, symbols of the Salesian Society which, through God's infinite goodness, has grown and borne fruit. He has still a long way to go on the eighth hill and therefore sets out again, but he does not reach the ninth because he wakes up. Thus he did not live out his eighth decade; he died at the age of seventy-two years and five months.

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

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

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

Don Bosco smiled and nodded approval.

(1864, BM VII, 467-471)

Female education with Saint Francis de Sales

The educational thinking of Saint Francis de Sales reveals a profound and innovative vision of the role of women in the Church and society of his time. Convinced that the education of women was fundamental for the moral and spiritual growth of the entire community, the holy bishop of Geneva promoted a balanced education that respected female dignity but was also attentive to fragility. With a paternal and realistic gaze, he was able to recognise and value the qualities of women, encouraging them to cultivate virtue, culture, and devotion. Founder of the Visitation with Jane de Chantal, he vigorously

defended the female vocation even in the face of criticism and prejudice. His teaching continues to offer relevant insights into education, love, and freedom in choosing one's own life.

During his trip to Paris in 1619, Francis de Sales met Adrien Bourdoise, a reformist priest, who reproached him for paying too much attention to women. The bishop calmly replied that women were half of humanity and that by forming good Christian women, there would be good young people, and with good young people, there would be good priests. After all, did not St. Jerome devote a great deal of time and various writings to them? Francis de Sales recommended the reading of his letters to Madame de Chantal, who found in them, among other things, numerous instructions "for educating her daughters". It can be deduced that, in his eyes, the role of women in education justified the time and attention devoted to them.

Francis de Sales and the women of his time

"We must help the female sex, which is despised," the Bishop of Geneva once said to Jean-François de Blonay. To understand Francis de Sales' concerns and thinking, it is necessary to place him in his own time. It must be said that a number of his statements still seem very much in line with the thinking of the current time. In the women of his time, he deplored "this feminine tenderness towards themselves," their ease "in pitying themselves and desiring to be pitied," a greater propensity than men "to give credence to dreams, to be afraid of spirits, and to be credulous and superstitious," and above all, the "twists and turns of their vain thoughts." Among the advice he gave to Madame de Chantal on the education of her daughters, he wrote without hesitation, "Remove vanity from their souls; it is born almost at the same time as sex."

However, women are endowed with great qualities. He wrote about Madame de La Fléchère, who had just lost her husband, "If I had only this perfect sheep in my

flock, I would not be distressed at being the shepherd of this afflicted diocese. After Madame de Chantal, I do not know if I have ever met a stronger soul in a female body, a more reasonable spirit and a more sincere humility." Women are by no means the last in the practice of virtue. "Have we not seen many great theologians who have said wonderful things about virtue, but not in order to practise it, while, on the contrary, there are many holy women who cannot speak of virtue, but who nevertheless know very well how to practise it?"

Married women are the worthiest of admiration, "Oh my God! How pleasing to God are the virtues of a married woman; for they must be strong and excellent to endure in such a vocation!" In the struggle to preserve chastity, he believed that "women have often fought more courageously than men."

Founder of a congregation of women together with Jeanne de Chantal, he was in constant contact with the first religious. Alongside praise, criticism began to rain down. Pushed into these trenches, the founder had to defend himself and defend them, not only as religious women, but also as women. In a document that was to serve as a preface to the Constitutions of the Visitandines, we find the polemical vein he was capable of displaying, directing himself no longer against 'heresiarchs' but against malicious and ignorant 'censors':

The presumption and inappropriate arrogance of many children of this century, who ostentatiously condemn everything that is not in accordance with their spirit [...], gives me the opportunity, or rather compels me, to write this Preface, my dearest Sisters, to arm and defend your holy vocation against the barbs of their pestilent tongues, so that good and pious souls, who are undoubtedly attached to your lovable and honoured Institute, may find here how to repel the arrows shot by the temerity of these bizarre and insolent censors.

Perhaps foreseeing that such a preamble might

damage the cause, the founder of the Visitation wrote a second, softened edition, with the aim of highlighting the fundamental equality of the sexes. After quoting Genesis, he commented as follows, "Woman, therefore, no less than man, has the grace of having been made in the image of God; equal honour in both sexes; their virtues are equal."

The education of daughters

The enemy of true love is "vanity". This was the flaw that Francis de Sales, like the moralists and educators of his time, feared most in the education of young women. He points out several manifestations of it. Look at "these young ladies of the world, who, having established themselves well, go about puffed up with pride and vanity, with their heads held high, their eyes open, eager to be noticed by the worldly."

The Bishop of Geneva amuses himself a little in mocking these "society girls", who "wear loose, powdered hats", with their heads "shod like horses' hooves", all "plumed and flowered beyond description" and "laden with frills". There are those who "wear dresses that are tight and very uncomfortable, just to show that they are slim; this is true madness that mostly makes them incapable of doing anything."

What then are we to think of certain artificial beauties transformed into "boutiques of vanity"? Francis de Sales prefers a "clear and clean face;" he wants "nothing affected, because everything that is embellished is displeasing." Should we therefore condemn all "artifice"? He readily admits that "in the case of some defect of nature, it must be corrected so that the correction can be seen, but stripped of all artifice."

And perfume? the preacher asked himself when speaking of Mary Magdalene. "It is an excellent thing," he replied, "even the one who is perfumed perceives something excellent in it," adding, as a connoisseur, that "Spanish musk is highly prized throughout the world." In the chapter on

“decency in dress,” he allows young women to wear clothes with various adornments, “because they may freely desire to be pleasing to many, but with the sole purpose of winning a young man with a view to holy matrimony.” He concluded with this indulgent observation, “What do you want? It is only fitting that young ladies should be a little pretty.”

It should be added that reading the Bible had prepared him not to be harsh in the face of female beauty. In the lover of the *Song of Songs*, admired “the remarkable beauty of her face, like a *bouquet* of flowers.” He describes Jacob who, meeting Rachel at the well, “wept tears of joy when he saw a virgin who pleased him and enchanted him with the grace of her face.” He also loved to tell the story of St. Brigid, born in Scotland, a country where “the most beautiful creatures one can see” are admired; she was “an extremely attractive young woman,” but her beauty was “natural,” our author points out.

The Salesian ideal of beauty is called ‘good grace,’ which designates not only “the perfect harmony of the parts that make something beautiful,” but also the “grace of movements, gestures, and actions, which is like the soul of life and beauty,” that is, goodness of heart. Grace requires “simplicity and modesty.” Now, grace is a perfection that comes from within the person. It is beauty combined with grace that makes Rebecca the feminine ideal of the Bible. She was “so beautiful and graceful at the well where she drew water for the flock,” and her “familiar goodness” inspired her to give water not only to Abraham’s servants but also to his camels.

Education and preparation for life

In the time of St. Francis de Sales, women had little opportunity to pursue higher education. Girls learned what they heard from their brothers and, when the family could afford it, attended a convent. Reading was certainly more common than writing. Colleges were reserved for boys, so learning Latin, the language of culture, was practically

forbidden to girls.

We must believe that Francis de Sales was not opposed to women becoming educated, but on condition that they did not fall into pedantry and vanity. He admired Saint Catherine, who was "very learned, but humble in her great knowledge," Among the bishop of Geneva's female interlocutors, the Lady of La Fléchère had studied Latin, Italian, Spanish, and the fine arts, but she was an exception.

In order to find their place in life, both socially and religiously, young women often needed special help at a certain point. Georges Rolland reports that the bishop personally took care of several difficult cases. A woman from Geneva with three daughters was generously assisted by the bishop, "with money and credit; he placed one of her daughters as an apprentice with an honest lady in the city, paying her board for six years, in grain and money." He also donated 500 florins for the marriage of the daughter of a printer in Geneva.

The religious intolerance of the time sometimes caused tragedies, which Francis de Sales tried to remedy. Marie-Judith Gilbert, educated in Paris by her parents in the 'errors of Calvin,' discovered the book *Filotea* at the age of nineteen, which she dared to read only in secret. She took a liking to the author, whom she had heard about. Closely watched by her father and mother, she managed to be taken away by carriage, was instructed in the Catholic religion, and entered the Visitation Sisters.

The social role of women was still rather limited. Francis de Sales was not entirely opposed to women's involvement in public life. He wrote in these terms, for example, to a woman who was given to intervene in public affairs, both appropriately and inappropriately:

Your sex and your vocation allow you to repress evil outside yourselves, but only if this is inspired by good and accomplished with simple, humble, and charitable remonstrances towards transgressors and by warning your superiors as far as

possible.

On the other hand, it is significant that a contemporary of Francis de Sales, Mademoiselle de Gournay, an early feminist *ante litteram*, an intellectual and author of controversial texts such as her treatise *L'égalité des hommes et des femmes* (The Equality of Men and Women) and *La plainte des femmes* (The Complaint of Women), expressed great admiration for him. She devoted her entire life to demonstrating this equality, gathering all possible evidence on the subject, without forgetting that of the "good and holy bishop of Geneva".

Education to love

Francis de Sales spoke a lot about God's love, but he was also very attentive to the manifestations of human love. For him, in fact, love is one, even if its 'object' is different and unequal. To explain God's love, he could do no better than start from human love.

Love arises from the contemplation of beauty, and beauty can be perceived by the senses, especially by the eyes. An interactive phenomenon is established between the gaze and beauty. "Contemplating beauty makes us love it, and love makes us contemplate it." The sense of smell reacts in the same way; in fact, "perfumes exercise their unique power of attraction through their sweetness."

After the intervention of the external senses, the internal senses take over, the imagination and fantasy, which exalt and transfigure reality. "By virtue of this reciprocal movement of love towards sight and sight towards love, just as love makes the beauty of the beloved more resplendent, so the sight of the beloved makes love more enamoured and pleasant." We can then understand why "those who have painted Cupid have blindfolded him, affirming that love is blind." At this point, love-passion arrives; it makes us "seek dialogue, and dialogue often nourishes and increases love;" moreover, "it desires secrecy, and when lovers have no

secrets to tell each other, they sometimes take pleasure in telling them secretly;" and finally, it leads us to "utter words that would certainly be ridiculous if they did not spring from a passionate heart."

Now, this love-passion, which perhaps boils down to nothing more than 'amorucci' (little loves) and 'galanterie' (gallantries), is exposed to various vicissitudes, to such an extent that it prompts the author of the *Filotea* to intervene with a series of considerations and warnings about "frivolous friendships that are formed between people of the opposite sex and without any intention of marriage." Often, they are nothing more than "abortions or, rather, semblances of friendship."

St. Francis de Sales also expressed his views on kissing, wondering, for example, along with the ancient commentators, why Rachel allowed Jacob to embrace her. He explains that there are two kinds of kisses: one bad, the other good. Kisses that are easily exchanged between young people and that are not bad at first can become so later because of human frailty. But a kiss can also be good. In certain places, it is required by custom. "Our Jacob embraces his Rachel very innocently; Rachel accepts this kiss of courtesy from this man of good character and clean face." "Oh!" concluded Francis de Sales, "give me people who have the innocence of Jacob and Rachel, and I will allow them to kiss each other."

On the question of dancing, which was also on the agenda, the Bishop of Geneva avoided absolute commands, as did the rigorists of the time, both Catholic and Protestant, while still showing great prudence. He was even harshly reproached for writing that "dances and ballroom dancing are in themselves indifferent things." As with certain games, they too become dangerous when one becomes so attached to them that one can no longer detach oneself from them. Dancing "must be done for recreation and not for passion; for a short time and not to the point of exhaustion and dizziness." What is more dangerous is that these pastimes often become occasions that

provoke "quarrels, envy, mockery, and love affairs."

The choice of lifestyle

When the little daughter grows up, "the day comes when it is necessary to talk to her, I mean to refer to the decisive word, the one in which one tells young women that one wants to marry them off." A man of his time, Francis de Sales largely shared the idea that parents had an important role in determining their children's vocation, whether to marriage or religious life. "One does not usually choose one's prince or bishop, one's father or mother, and often, not even one's husband," noted the author of *Filotea*. However, he clearly states that "daughters cannot be given in marriage as long as they say no."

The current practice is well explained in this passage from the *Philothea*: "For a marriage to truly take place, three things are necessary with regard to the young woman who is to be given in marriage. First, that the proposal be made to her; second, that she accepts it; and third, that she consents to it." Since girls often married at a very young age, their emotional immaturity is not surprising. "Girls who marry very young truly love their husbands, if they have them, but they never cease to love their rings, their jewellery, and their friends with whom they have so much fun playing, dancing, and acting foolishly."

The problem of freedom of choice arose equally for children who were destined for religious life. La Franceschetta, daughter of the Baroness of Chantal, was to be placed in a convent by her mother, who wanted her to become a nun, but the bishop intervened. "If Franceschetta willingly wants to be a nun, fine; if not, I do not approve of her will being anticipated by decisions that are not hers." Moreover, it would not be appropriate for the reading of St. Jerome's letters to lead the mother too much in the direction of severity and coercion. He therefore advised her to "use moderation" and to proceed with "gentle inspiration".

Some young women hesitate between religious

life and marriage, without ever making up their minds. Francis de Sales encouraged the future Mrs. de Longecombe to take the step of marriage, which he wanted to celebrate himself. He did this good work, her husband would later say, in response to his wife's request "that she wished to marry by the hands of the bishop, and without his presence, she would never have been able to take this step, because of the great aversion she felt towards marriage."

Women and 'devotion'

Unfamiliar with any form of feminism *ante litteram*, Francis de Sales was aware of the exceptional contribution of femininity on a spiritual level. It has been pointed out that by encouraging devotion in women, the author of *Philothea* also encouraged the possibility of greater autonomy, a "private life for women".

It is not surprising that women have a particular disposition for 'devotion'. After listing a number of doctors and experts, he was able to write in the preface to *Teotimo*: "But in order that it may be known that this kind of writing is better composed with the devotion of lovers than with the doctrine of the wise, the Holy Spirit has caused many women to perform wonders in this regard. Who has ever better manifested the heavenly passions of divine love than Saint Catherine of Genoa, Saint Angela of Foligno, Saint Catherine of Siena, and Saint Matilda?" The influence of Chantal's mother in the writing of the *Teotimo* is well known, particularly in the ninth book, "your ninth book on the *Love of God*," according to the author's expression.

Could women get involved in matters concerning religion? "Here is this woman who acts as a theologian," says Francis de Sales, speaking of the Samaritan woman in the Gospel. Must we necessarily see this as disapproval of women theologians? Not necessarily. Especially since he strongly affirms, "I tell you that a simple and poor woman can love God as much as a doctor of theology." Superiority does not always reside where one thinks it does.

There are women who are superior to men, starting with the Blessed Virgin. Francis de Sales always respected the principle of order established by the religious and civil laws of his time, to which he preached obedience, but his practice testified to a great freedom of spirit. Thus, for the government of women's monasteries, he believed that it was better for them to be under the jurisdiction of the bishop rather than dependent on their religious brothers, who risked weighing excessively on them.

The Visitation Sisters, for their part, would not depend on any male order and would have no central government, each monastery being under the jurisdiction of the local bishop. He dared to give the unexpected title of 'apostles' to the sisters of the Visitation setting out on a new foundation.

If we interpret the thinking of the Bishop of Geneva correctly, the ecclesial mission of women consists in proclaiming not the word of God, but 'the glory of God' through the beauty of their witness. The heavens, prays the psalmist, tell of God's glory only by their splendour. "The beauty of the heavens and the firmament invites men to admire the greatness of the Creator and to proclaim his wonders;" and "is it not a greater wonder to see a soul adorned with many virtues than a sky studded with stars?"

Joseph Augustus Arribat: Righteous Among the Nations

1. Biographical Profile

The Venerable Joseph Augustus Arribat was born on 17 December 1879 in Trédou (Rouergue – France). The poverty of his family forced the young Augustus to begin secondary school

at the Salesian oratory in Marseilles only at the age of 18. Due to the political situation at the turn of the century, he began Salesian life in Italy and received the cassock from the hands of Blessed Michael Rua. Back in France he began, like all his confreres, Salesian life in a semi-clandestine state, first in Marseilles and then in La Navarre, founded by Don Bosco in 1878.

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

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

2. Profoundly a man of God

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

This total gift of self manifested itself to the

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

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

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

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

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

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

by young people and neighbours from the valley.

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

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

Fr Arribat lived over thirty years at Navarre, in the house that Don Bosco himself wanted to place under the protection of St Joseph, head and servant of the Holy Family, a model of faith in hiddenness and discretion. In his solicitude for the material needs of the house and through his closeness to all the people dedicated to manual labour, peasants, gardeners, workers, handymen, kitchen or laundry people, this priest made people think of St Joseph, whose name he also bore. And did he not die on 19 March, the feast of St Joseph?

4. An authentic Salesian educator

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

Fr Arribat had none of the particular qualities that easily impress young people outwardly. He was not a great

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

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

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

Open-faced and smiling, this son of St Francis de Sales and Don Bosco bothered no one. While his thin body and asceticism recalled the holy curé of Ars and Fr Rua, his smile and gentleness were typically Salesian. As one witness put it:

“He was the most natural man in the world, full of humour, spontaneous in his reactions, young at heart.”

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

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

5. Fr Arribat an ecologist?

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

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

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