

Being lovable like Don Bosco (1/2)

Being lovable is a human quality that is cultivated, accepting the effort that it so often entails. For Don Bosco it was not an end in itself, but a way to lead souls to God.

An address given at the 42nd Salesian Spirituality Days in Valdocco, Turin.

All good things in this world began with a dream (Willy Wonka).

Don't give up yours (Willy Wonka's mother).

A sculptor was busily working with his hammer and chisel on a large block of marble. A little boy, who was walking around licking ice cream, stopped in front of the wide-open workshop door.

The little boy stared in fascination at the shower of white dust, of small and large stone chips falling left and right.

He had no idea what was happening; the man who was pounding the large stone like a madman seemed a little strange to him.

A few weeks later, the little boy walked past the studio and to his surprise saw a large and mighty lion in the place where the marble block used to be.

All excited, the boy ran to the sculptor and said to him: "Sir, tell me, how you knew there was a lion in the stone?"

Don Bosco's dream is God's chisel.

Our Lady's simple and unique advice in the dream at nine years of age, "Make yourself humble, strong and energetic" became the scaffolding for a unique and fascinating personality. And above all a "style" that we can define as "Salesian".

Everyone loved Don Bosco. Why? He was attractive, a born leader, a real human magnet. Throughout his life he would always be a "conqueror" of affectionate friends.

John Giacomelli, who remained his friend for life, recalls, "I entered the seminary a month after the others. I knew almost no one, and in the early days I seemed to be lost in my loneliness. It was the cleric Bosco who came up to me the first time he saw me alone, after lunch, and kept me company all the time at recreation, telling me various nice things to distract me from any thoughts I might have of home or relatives left behind. Discussing with him, I learned that he had been quite ill during the holidays. He was then very kind to me. Among other things, I remember that since I had a much over-sized cap, which several of my companions made fun of me for, and which displeased me and Bosco, who often came with me, fixed it for me himself, since he had the necessary material with him and was very good at sewing. From then on I began to admire the goodness of his heart. His company was edifying.

Can we borrow some of his qualities to become "lovable" too?

1) Being a positive force

Someone who constantly maintains a positive attitude helps us see the bright side and pushes us forward.

"When Don Bosco first visited the miserable shed which was to be used for his oratory, he had to be careful not to bump his head, because on one side it was only a metre high; for a floor it had the bare ground, and when it rained the water penetrated from all sides. Don Bosco felt big rats running between his feet, and bats fluttering overhead." But for Don Bosco it was the most beautiful place in the world. And he set off at a run: "I ran right back to my boys. I gathered them around me and began to shout in a loud voice, 'Great news, my sons, we've got a place for our Oratory, a more reliable one than we've had till now. We'll have a church, a sacristy, classrooms and a place to play. Sunday, next Sunday, we'll go to our new Oratory which is over there in Pinardi's house. And I pointed the place out to them.'".

Joy

Joy, a positive and happy state of mind, was the norm in Don Bosco's life.

More true than ever for him is the expression "My vocation is something else. My vocation is to be happy when others are happy."

Where love is concerned there is no adult, just children, this childlike spirit that is abandonment, carefreeness, inner freedom.

" Don Bosco [thus] covered the whole playground, and he was always considered a good player to have, although it entailed a great deal of exertion and sacrifice on his part. 'It was heartwarming just to see him in our midst', said one of the pupils, now already at an advanced age. 'Some of us had no coats or they were in bad shape; others had trousers that were more rags than anything else; others, too, had no hat or their shoes were so worn that the toes stuck out. We were a disheveled and, occasionally, quite grubby, ill-mannered, importunate and capricious lot, but he was happy to be with the poorest of us. With the smaller boys he was as gentle as a mother. If two of them started calling each other names and broke into a

fight, Don Bosco would quickly run up to them and tell them to behave. But the two boys, blind with anger, would pay him no attention. He would then raise his hand as if to strike them, but would suddenly check himself and just separate them. Soon peace would be restored as if by magic.

He often divided the boys into two teams for a game, leading one himself. Both sides played so hard that players and spectators got very excited. One team wanted the honor of beating Don Bosco and his team, while the other was sure of undisputed victory.

Often he would mark a finish line and challenge all the boys to a race with, of course, a prize for the victor. After they were all lined up, Don Bosco would hitch his cassock to his knees. "Ready?" he would cry. "Get set! Go!" And the race was on, as a swarm of boys raised a cloud of dust and trailed Don

Bosco. He always won. The last of these contests took place in 1868, when Don Bosco, in spite of his swollen legs, still ran so swiftly that he left eight hundred boys behind him, including some top racers. We were there ourselves and could hardly believe our own eyes. (BM III (English edition), 85).

2) Sincerely caring for others

One of the characteristics of “attractive” people is genuine and sincere care and concern for others. It is not just a matter of asking someone how their day went and listening to their answer. It is about really listening, empathising and showing genuine interest in the lives of others. Don Bosco wept with a broken heart at the death of Fr Calosso, of Luigi Comollo, at the sight of the first boys behind prison bars.

An anticlerical young man

We make mention of this young man because he can represent a hundred and one others of his kind. In the autumn of 1860 Don Bosco went into the coffee shop known as the Consolata, because it was near the famous Shrine of that name, and took a seat in a secluded room to quietly read the correspondence he used to bring with him. A casual and courteous waiter served the patrons there. His name was Giovanni Paolo Cotella, a native of Cavour (Turin), aged 13. He had run away from home in the summer of that year, because he was intolerant of his parents’ reproaches and severity. We leave the description of his meeting with Don Bosco, as he narrated it to Fr Francesco Cerruti.

“One evening”, he recounted, the boss said “Bring a cup of coffee to a priest who is in the room over there.” “Me bring coffee to a priest?” I said as if startled. Priests were then as unpopular as they are now, even more so than now. I had heard and read all kinds of things and had therefore formed a very bad opinion of priests.

I went over ready to mock him: “What do you want from me, priest?” I asked Don Bosco rudely. And he looked at me steadily, “I would like a cup of coffee from you, my good

young man" he replied with great kindness, "but on one condition." "What's that?" "That you bring it to me yourself." Those words and that look won me over and I said to myself "This is not a priest like the others."

I brought him his coffee; some mysterious force kept me close to him, and he began to question me, still in the most loving way, about where I was born, my age, my work and above all why I had run away from home. Then he said "Do you want to come with me?" "Where?" "To Don Bosco's Oratory. This place and this kind of work are not for you." "And when I am there?" "If you like, you can study." "But will you look after me properly?" "Oh, just think about it! You can play have fun, be happy there." "Well, well" I replied, "I'll come. But when? Immediately? Tomorrow?" "This evening" Don Bosco said.

I handed in my resignation to my boss who would have liked me to stay a few more days, and I took my few rags and went to the Oratory that same evening. On the morrow Don Bosco wrote to my parents to reassure them about me, and inviting them to come to him for a necessary understanding regarding help with food and related expenses. In fact my mother came and, after listening to what she said about the family's circumstances, Don Bosco concluded by saying "Well, let's do this; you pay 12 lire a month, Don Bosco will find the rest."

I admired not only the exquisite charity, Don Bosco showed in this but his prudence. My family was not rich, but they enjoyed sufficient wealth. If, therefore, he had accepted me completely free of charge, it would not have been a good decision, for this would have been detrimental to others more needy than me."

For two years his parents had kept their agreement with Don Bosco regarding the boarding fee, but at the beginning of the third year they stopped paying and no longer wanted to hear of it. The youngster, though extremely lively, was open, frank, good-hearted, of exemplary conduct, and benefited much from his studies. Now in this school year (1862-1863), as he was about to enter fourth class, and afraid of having to cut short his studies, he opened up to Don Bosco, who replied: "And what

does it matter if your parents no longer want to pay? Aren't I here? Rest assured that Don Bosco will not abandon you." And indeed, as long as he stayed at the Oratory, Don Bosco provided him with everything he needed.

When he had finished his fourth year of secondary school and had passed his exams successfully, he began work; and the first money he was able to put together with his work, he sent to Don Bosco at some cost to himself and in small instalments to make up the balance of the small fee that his parents had neglected to pay in his last year at the Oratory. He lived as a good Christian, he zealously disseminated the *Catholic Readings*, was among the first to join the past pupils union and always kept in affectionate communication with his former superiors.

3) Being a good listener

In a world where everyone seems to be talking all the time, a good listener stands out. Listening to what someone says is one thing, but really listening – absorbing and understanding – is something else. Being a good listener is not just about remaining silent while the other person speaks. It is about participating in the conversation, asking probing questions and showing genuine interest.

Contact as an exchange of energy

He had one of the rarest qualities: the "grace of existence". A life overflowing, like good wine from the vat. For which thousands of people said "Thank you for being there!" and "I am someone else when I am with you!"

"He listened to the boys with the greatest attention as if the things they were saying were all very important. Sometimes he would get up, or walk with them around the room. When the conversation was over, he would accompany them to the threshold, open the door himself, and bid them farewell by saying: "We will always be friends, right?" (Memorie Biografiche VI, 439).

4) The beauty of the good man

This is why Don Bosco is attractive. Cardinal John Cagliero reported the following fact noted personally when accompanying Don Bosco. After a conference held in Nice, Don Bosco had just finished a sermon and was leaving the sanctuary to walk to the door, his passage blocked by people crowding about him. A dangerous-looking man stood stock-still, staring at him as though deliberating a violent move. Somewhat concerned, Father Cagliero kept an eye on him as Don Bosco slowly drew nearer to him. Finally they stood face to face. On seeing him, Don Bosco asked, "What do you want?"

"I? Nothing!"

"You look as though you have something to tell me."

"No, not at all!"

"Would you perhaps like to make your confession?"

"I? How silly!"

"Why are you here then?"

"Because . . . well, because I cannot walk away "

"I understand. Friends, leave us alone for a while" Don Bosco said to those about him. When they pulled back, Don Bosco whispered briefly into the man's ear. He fell to his knees and made his confession then and there in the middle of the church." (cf. BM XIV, 22).

Pope Pius XI, the Pontiff who canonised Don Bosco and who had been Don Bosco's guest at the Pinardi House in the autumn of 1883, remembers, "Here he was answering everyone: and he had the right word for everything, so right that it was amazing: at first surprising then so amazing."

Two things make us understand eternity: love and wonder. Don Bosco summed them up in his person. Outward beauty is the visible component of inner beauty. And it manifests itself through the light that shines from the eyes of each individual. It does not matter if they are badly dressed or does not conform to our canons of elegance, or if they do not try to impose themselves on the attention of the people around them. The eyes are the mirror of the soul and, to some extent, reveal what seems hidden.

But, in addition to their ability to shine, they possess another quality: they act as a mirror both for the gifts held within the soul and for the men and women who are the object of their gaze.

Indeed, they reflect who is looking at them. Like any mirror, the eyes return the innermost reflection of the face before them.

An elderly priest, a former pupil at Valdocco, wrote in 1889, "Don Bosco's most striking trait was his glance – kindly, yet penetrating the heart's inmost recesses; a glance which charmed, frightened, or crushed, as the case might be. In my life I never saw the like of it. Generally his portraits, even his photographs, do not bring this out; they simply make him a good-natured man. (BM VI, 2).

Another former pupil, from the 1870s, Pons Pietro, reveals in his recollections: "Don Bosco had two eyes that pierced and penetrated the mind... He used to walk around talking and looking at everyone with two eyes that turned every which way, electrifying hearts with joy" (MB XVII, 863).

You know you are a good person when people always come to you for advice and encouragement. Don Bosco's door was always open for young and old. The beauty of the good man is a difficult quality to define, but when it is there, you notice it: like perfume. We all know what the scent of roses is, but no one can stand up and explain it.

Sometimes this phenomenon happened, that a young man heard Don Bosco's word and could not tear himself away from his side, absorbed almost in a luminous idea... Others kept vigil at his door at night, tapping lightly every so often, until it was opened for them, because they did not want to go to sleep with sin in their souls.

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Don Bosco's last will and testament

With a will, as we know, someone disposes of their belongings for the time after their death. One would not think, therefore, that what we are about to deal with is an overly pleasant topic. Yet it serves to make us better appreciate Don Bosco's great serenity and prudence. Even as a young man, he always had the thought of death before him and spoke of it often.

Various manuscripts of his last will and testament are preserved in the Central Salesian Archives (ASC 112 – FdB No. 73).

In Turin in 1846 he became so ill that his life was at risk. In the 1850s there were those who tried to assassinate him. And Don Bosco always kept himself prepared for every event.

The first of Don Bosco's wills that we possess dates back to 26 July 1856, when Don Bosco was about to turn 41 years of age and his mother was still alive. It began with these words: "In the uncertainty of life in which every man who lives in this world finds himself..., etc."

He left the usufruct of his possessions in Turin to Fr Vittorio Alasonatti, economer of the Valdocco house, and the property to the cleric Michael Rua, who was his right-hand man even then.

He left the Castelnuovo property to his relatives, bearing in mind that his mother, who was still alive was to remain the beneficiary. When his mother died in November of that year, he corrected what he had written: "All that I possess in Castelnuovo d'Asti, I leave to my brother Giuseppe..."

Later manuscripts

In February 1858, Don Bosco left for Rome for the first time in order to attend an audience with Pope Pius IX and present him with his plan for the Salesian Society. He had decided to go there by sea and return by land through Tuscany, the States of Parma, Piacenza, Modena and Lombardy-Veneto. He set off on the early morning of 18 February after a freezing snowy night, accompanied by his faithful cleric Michael Rua.

He only did the Turin-Genoa stretch by train. He then had to embark on the *Aventino*, a steamboat that ran to Civitavecchia. From Civitavecchia to Rome he travelled by mail coach. On 21 February he arrived in the city of the Popes where he was the guest of Count De Maistre in Via del Quirinale 49, at the Quattro Fontane, while Don Rua stayed with the Rosminians (MB V, 809-818).

But before embarking on that journey Don Bosco had arranged not only for a passport but also to make a will.

Another copy of Don Bosco's will bears the date 7 January 1869. In it he appointed Fr Michael Rua as his universal heir and executor, as far as Salesian property and, in the event of the latter's death, Fr John Cagliero.

On 29 March 1871 he reconfirmed Fr Rua and Fr Cagliero as his heirs and, for the Castelnuovo properties, his relatives. In the same year, during his illness in Varazze, he wrote a confirmation of his previous will on 22 December 1871 (MB X, 1334-1335).

The 1884 Testament

In 1884 Don Bosco was about to leave for France for the tenth time in search of money for the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Rome. He was in poor health. Dr Albertotti, who had been called in to dissuade him from the journey, after examining him had said:

"If he makes it to Nice without dying, it will be a miracle."

"If I don't come back, patience" Don Bosco had replied, "it means we'll put things right before we go, but we

have to go" (MB XVII, 34).

And so he did. On the afternoon of that 29 February he sent for a notary and witnesses and dictated his will, as if he was about to leave for eternity. Then, bringing in Fr Rua and Fr Cagliero, and pointing to the notarial deed on the table, he told them:

"Here is my will... If I never return, as the doctor fears, you will already know how things stand."

Fr Rua left the room with a swollen heart. The saint beckoned Fr Cagliero to stop and left him a gift of a small box containing his father's wedding ring.

On 7 December that year Fr Cagliero was consecrated titular Bishop of Magida and left for America on 3 February 1885, as Apostolic Vicar in Patagonia.

Don Bosco's spiritual testament

The Central Salesian Archives also contains a manuscript of Don Bosco's *Memoirs* covering the years 1841-1886, known in the Salesian tradition as *Don Bosco's Spiritual Testament*. We quote a particularly significant passage from it:

"Having thus expressed the thoughts of a Father towards his beloved children, I now turn to myself to invoke the Lord's mercy upon me in the last hours of my life.

– I intend to live and die in the holy Catholic religion which has the Roman Pontiff, Vicar of Jesus Christ above the earth, as its head.

– I believe and profess all the truths of the faith which God has revealed to holy Church.

– I humbly ask God's forgiveness for all my sins, especially for every scandal given to my neighbour in all my actions, in all the words spoken at an inappropriate time; I especially ask His pardon for the excessive care I have taken of myself under the specious pretext of preserving my health...

– I know that you, my beloved children, love me, and this love, this affection is not limited to mourning after my death; but pray for the eternal repose of my soul...

– May your prayers be addressed with special purpose to Heaven so that I may find mercy and forgiveness at the first moment that I present myself to the fearful majesty of my Creator” (F. MOTTÒ, *Memorie...*, *Piccola Biblioteca dell’ISS*, n. 4, Roma, LAS, 1985, p. 57-58).

It is a document that needs no comment!

The Exercise for a Happy Death in Don Bosco’s educational experience (1/5)

The annual All Souls Day commemoration presents us with reality that no one can deny: the end of our earthly life. For many, talking about death seems a macabre thing, to be avoided at all costs. But this was not so for St John Bosco; throughout his life he had cultivated the exercise for a happy death, setting the last day of the month for this purpose. Who knows if this is not the reason why the Lord took him to be with him on the last day of January 1888, finding him prepared...

Jean Delumeau, in the introduction to his work on *LaPaura in Occidente* (*Fear in the West*), recounts the anguish he felt at the age of twelve when, as a new pupil at a Salesian boarding school, he first heard the “disquieting sequences” of the litany for a happy death, followed by an *Our Father* and *Hail Mary* “for the one among us who will be the first to die”. Starting from that experience, from his early fears, his difficult efforts to become accustomed to this fear, his teenage reflections on the last things, his personal patient search for serenity and joy in acceptance, the French

historian drew up a project of historical investigation focused on the role of “guilt” and the “pastoral use of fear” in the history of the West and came to an interpretation “of a very broad historical panorama: for the Church, suffering and the (temporary) annihilation of the body are less to be feared than sin and hell. Man can do nothing against death, but – with God’s help – it is possible for him to avoid eternal punishment. From that moment on, a new type of fear – a theological one – replaced what came before and was visceral and spontaneous: it was an heroic remedy, but still a remedy since it introduced an exit where there was nothing but emptiness; this was the kind of lesson that the religious responsible for my education tried to teach me.”[\[1\]](#)

Even Umberto Eco recalled with ironic sympathy the exercise for a happy death that he was presented with at the Nizza Monferrato Oratory:

Ancient religions, myths, rituals made death, though always fearful, familiar to us. We were accustomed to accepting it by the great funeral celebrations, the wailing women, the great *Requiem* Masses. We were prepared for death by sermons on hell, and even during my childhood I was invited to read the pages on death by Don Bosco’s *Companion of Youth*. Hewas not just the cheerful priest who made children play, but had a visionary and flamboyant imagination. He reminded us that we don’t know where death will surprise us – whether in our bed, at work, or in the street, from the bursting of a vein, a bad cold, a haemorrhage, a fever, a plague, an earthquake, a lightning strike, ‘perhaps as soon as we have finished reading these thoughts.’ At that moment we will feel our head grow dull, our eyes hurt, our tongue parched, our jaw closed, our chest heavy, our blood frozen, our flesh consumed, our heart pierced. Hence the need to practise the Exercise for a Happy Death [...]. Pure sadism, one might say. But what do we teach our contemporaries today? That death takes place far from us in hospital, that we no longer usually follow the coffin to the cemetery, that we no longer see the dead. [...]

Thus, the disappearance of death from our immediate horizon of experience will make us much more terrified when the moment approaches, when faced with this event that also belongs to us from birth – and with which the wise man comes to terms throughout life.”[\[2\]](#)

In Salesian houses the monthly practice of the exercise for a happy death, with the recitation of the litany included by Don Bosco in the *Companion of Youth* remained in use from 1847 until the threshold of the Council.[\[3\]](#) Delumeau recounts that every time he happened to read the litany to his students at the Collège de France he noticed how astonished they were: “It is proof” he writes, “of a rapid and profound change in mentality from one generation to the next. Having rapidly become out of date after being relevant for so long, this prayer for a happy death has become a document of history insofar as it reflects a long tradition of religious pedagogy.”[\[4\]](#) The scholar of mentalities, in fact, teaches us how historical phenomena, in order to avoid misleading anachronisms, must always be approached in relation to their internal coherence and with respect for cultural otherness, to which every collective mental representation, every belief and cultural or cultic practice of ancient societies must be traced. Outside those anthropological frameworks, that set of knowledge and values, ways of thinking and feeling, habits and models of behaviour prevalent in a given cultural context, which shape the collective mindset, it is impossible to adopt a correct critical approach.

As far as we are concerned, Delumeau’s account is a document of how anachronism not only undermines the historian. Even the pastor and educator run the risk of perpetuating practices and formulas outside the cultural and spiritual worlds that generated them: thus, at the very least, besides appearing strange to the younger generations, they may even be counterproductive, having lost the overall horizon of meaning and the “mental and spiritual tools” that made them meaningful. This was the fate of the prayer for a happy death

that was used for over a century, for students in Salesian works all over the world, then – around 1965 – completely abandoned, without any replacement that would safeguard its positive aspects. The abandonment was not only due to its obsolescence. It was also a symptom of the ongoing process of the eclipse of death in Western culture, a sort of “interdiction” and “prohibition” now strongly denounced by scholars and pastors.[\[5\]](#)

Our contribution aims at investigating the meaning and educational value of the exercise for a happy death in Don Bosco's and the first Salesian generations' practice, relating it to a fruitful secular tradition, and then identifying its spiritual features through the narrative testimonies left by the Saint.

[\(continued\)](#)

[\[1\]](#) Jean Delumeau, *La Paura in Occidente* (14th-18th centuries). *La città assediata*, Turin, SEI, 1979, 42-44.

[\[2\]](#) Umberto Eco, “La bustina di Minerva: Dov'è andata la morte?”, in *L'Espresso*, 29 November 2012.

[\[3\]](#) The “Prayers for a Happy Death” are still to be found, with a few substantial variations, in the revised Manual of Prayer for Salesian Educational Institutions in Italy, which ultimately replaced *The Companion of Youth*, used until then: Centro Compagnie Gioventù Salesiana, *In preghiera. Manuale di pietà ispirato al Giovane Provveduto di san Giovanni Bosco*, Torino, Opere Don Bosco, 1959, 360-362.

[\[4\]](#) Delumeau, *La Paura in Occidente*, 43.

[\[5\]](#) Cf. Philippe Ariés, *Storia della morte in Occidente* Milan, BUR, 2009; Jean-Marie R. Tillard, *La morte: Enigma o Misterio?* Magnano (BI), Edizioni Qiqajon, 1998.

Progress

An explorer was travelling through the immense forests of the Amazon in South America.

He was looking for possible oil deposits and was in a great hurry. For the first two days, the natives he had hired as porters adapted to the fast and anxious pace that the white man demanded for everything.

But on the morning of the third day, they stood silent, motionless, breathless.

It was clear that they had no intention of setting out again.

Impatiently, the explorer, pointing to his watch, gesticulated and tried to make the leader of the porters understand that they had to move, because time was pressing.

– Impossible, replied the man, calmly. These men have walked too fast and are now waiting for their souls to catch up with them.

People of our age are always moving faster. And they are restless, dazed and unhappy, because their souls have fallen behind and can no longer catch up with them.

Venerable Archbishop Antônio

de Almeida Lustosa “father and friend of the poor”

On 22 June 2023, the Holy Father Francis received Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints in audience, and during the Audience the Supreme Pontiff authorised the same Dicastery to promulgate the Decree concerning the heroic virtues of the Servant of God Antônio de Almeida Lustosa, of the Salesian Society of St John Bosco, Archbishop of Fortaleza; born 11 February 1886 in São João del Rei (Brazil) and died 14 August 1974 in Carpina (Brazil).

A life in the light of the Immaculate

Antônio de Almeida Lustosa was born in the city of São João del Rei, in Minas Gerais (Brazil), on 11 February 1886, on the anniversary of the first apparition of the Immaculate at Lourdes, a circumstance that marked him profoundly, giving him a filial devotion to Our Lady, so much so that he was described, by now a priest, as the poet of the Virgin Mary.

He received a good Christian and human upbringing from his parents, João Baptista Pimentel Lustosa and Delphina Eugênia de Almeida Magalhães, exemplary Christians. An intelligent boy with a good and generous disposition, the son of a judge, he showed visible signs of a strong priestly vocation at an early age. That is why at the age of sixteen he entered the Salesian College at Cachoeira do Campo, in Minas Gerais, and three years later he was in Lorraine as a novice and assistant to his companions. After his first religious profession in 1906, he also became a teacher of philosophy, while studying theology.

Perpetual profession took place three years later, while 28 January 1912 marked the date of his priestly ordination.

After a number of assignments within his Religious Congregation, in 1916 he was rector and master of novices at Lavrinhas, in the Colégio São Manoel, to which those from

Lorraine had been transferred, and where he had taught the year before. In the five years he spent there, the young Lustosa expressed the best of himself both as a priest and as a Salesian, leaving, according to those who knew him, indelible traces.

Episcopal ministry

After his role as Rector at the Mary Help of Christians secondary school in Bagé and his appointment as assistant parish priest in the adjoining parish, he was consecrated Bishop of Uberaba on 11 February 1925, the day he chose to commemorate the presence of Our Lady in his life.

In 1928 he was transferred to Corumbá, in Mato Grosso, and in 1931 he was promoted to Archbishop of Belém do Pará, where he remained for 10 years.

On 5 November 1941, he became Archbishop of Fortaleza, capital of the State of Ceará.

Together with an unusually large number of initiatives and activities of a social and charitable nature, he created more than 30 new parishes, 45 schools for the needy, 14 health centres on the outskirts of Fortaleza, the School of Social Services, the São José and Cura d'Ars hospitals, to mention only a few of the most significant works attributed to his episcopate.



Monsignor Lustosa enters the Archdiocese of Belém do Pará (15.12.1931)

His pastoral activity developed particularly in the field of catechesis, education, pastoral visits, an increase in vocations, enhancement of Catholic action, improvement of the living conditions of the poorest, defence of workers' rights, renewal of the clergy, the establishment of new religious orders in Ceará, not to mention his rich and fruitful activity as a poet and writer.

Even before the Second Vatican Council, Fr Antônio had described catechesis as the primary objective of his pastoral action. To this end, he founded two religious Congregations, the Institute of Cooperators of the Clergy and the Congregation of the Josefinas. Today, the Josefinas are spread throughout Northeast Brazil, as well as in the Diocese of Rio Branco in Acre.

Wherever he went, and wherever he worked, his name and memory were remembered with respect and veneration, as a man of God, a true model of virtue and holiness.

Eleven years after his resignation from the Archdiocese, following which he retired to the Salesian House in Carpina, and confined to a wheelchair due to a disastrous fall that caused him to fracture his femur, he died on 14 August 1974, demonstrating, even during his illness and suffering, an exemplary attitude of complete and unconditional acceptance of God's will.

His body was transported to Fortaleza, where his funeral was celebrated with an incalculable number of faithful and ecclesiastical and civil authorities paying their last respects. His burial became to all intents and purposes a true popular consecration of a life, such as that lived by the Servant of God Bishop Lustosa, entirely devoted to God and the good of his neighbour.

Abandoned to the will of God

A virtuous, ascetic bishop, marked by obedience and a strong desire to do the Father's will, always and in everything, Bishop Lustosa demanded the most total abandonment of himself to the cause of God and neighbour.

His great concern was indeed to live up to God's and the Church's expectations in the exercise of his episcopal ministry.

He travelled in various regions of Brazil, from north to south, always bringing with him the gifts that Divine Providence had reserved for him.

In this fruitful activity he left significant legacies, not only for the material works he accomplished, but especially for the memory of his luminous and evangelising presence.

A humble and simple man, who shunned any ostentation or any quest for public recognition of his pastoral actions in the service of the Church and the society in which he was embedded, he was endowed with an extraordinary charisma, tireless perseverance, and a rich and fruitful religious and social vision.

He strove to lift the people of the regions in which he served, from the precarious and poor conditions in which they found themselves. The greater the challenge, the greater his dedication to finding alternatives that would at least minimise the suffering of those he came into contact with.



Monsignor Lustosa blesses the foundation stone of the agricultural school (09.02.1932)

He tried to offer and create opportunities for the most disadvantaged people to take care of their families, he worked to provide them with a religious and cultural background, so as to free them from illiteracy and provide them with the tools to gain a place in society.

Pastor with a big heart

For 22 years in the Ceará region, Bishop Lustosa showed the full force of his cultural, religious and social work, anticipating and realising works that would later be incorporated by government authorities, both at state and municipal level.

He made the working classes aware of their value and importance, welcoming those who were on the margins of society, including single mothers, domestic helpers, orphaned and abandoned children, the homeless, those in need of housing, the illiterate, the sick, exalting the rights and duties of each and every person and restoring and/or

recognising their dignity.

He placed himself totally at the service of God and humanity, faithfully responded to the divine inspiration that guided his steps and actions towards a society closer to justice, supported by the Church's social doctrine – *sub umbra alarum tuarum*.

He radiated holiness to all those who had the privilege of knowing him and living with him, continuing to this day to spread his radiance over all those who come more or less directly into contact with his figure and works.

With his meritorious pastoral action, he not only guided souls, but also hearts in a harmonious action that led to a true Christian spiritualisation of the immense flock of which he was Pastor.

His work of spiritual guidance was considered and recognised then, and even more so today, as a work of social harmony, and spiritual balm in difficult conflict situations. His personal action worked the miracle of disarming spirits, going beyond the limits of dogmatic, liturgical and theological preaching, succeeding in instilling in people a heightened religious sense and giving them a greater and/or new awareness of the right to freedom and justice.

Bishop Lustosa's work, which exalts the popular soul, ennobles the sense of faith, spreads the feeling of human solidarity and the virtue of brotherhood, crosses geographic borders and asserts itself internationally.

A rich personality



Monsignor Lustosa receives the visit of the Rector Major, don Luigi Ricceri in Carpina (27.06.1970)

The personality of the illustrious Archbishop Antônio de Almeida Lustosa is multifaceted, generated from a very young age and consolidated throughout his earthly life, always guided by the common good and the defence and promotion of Christian principles and values.

Archbishop Antônio left a trail of spirituality, both through the books he published and the catechetical work he took to the most distant and inaccessible regions.

A salient feature of his rich spirituality was his extraordinary spirit of prayer, intimately rooted in him and never flaunted. He was also a man who imposed upon himself mortification, sacrifices and fasts.

Another noble dedication of his spirit was his literary verve, and his work in literature was great, from pastoral letters to articles in newspapers and periodicals and numerous works, published and unpublished, of a historical, folkloristic, religious, geographical, cultural, anthropological, spiritual and ascetic nature.

He was, like Don Bosco, a prolific writer in various fields, in theology, philosophy, spirituality, hagiography, literature, geology, botany.

His literary works reveal his deep spirituality and the extent of his social concerns in evangelising his flock. With his pen, he brought the Gospel to all.

Archbishop Antônio de Almeida Lustosa was a faithful example of a fully realised vocation. He proved this over his long pastoral activity in the dioceses he led and guided with the hands of a spiritual master.

He was a model bishop of his time, characterised by unshakeable fervour and firmness of mind.

A true man of God, he was always concerned about people's welfare, which is why he was known as "the father and friend of the poor".

Archbishop Lustosa sought to be faithful to the founder of the Salesian Congregation – St John Bosco – by following in his footsteps, embracing his examples, thus implementing the Salesian charism in Brazil, so much so that he was recognised as the Bishop of social justice.

The following words paid tribute to the Servant of God on the 19th anniversary of his death, by the then Postulator General

of the Cause, Fr Pasquale Liberatore, and eloquently and effectively summarise the importance and significance of his message in the Church and society of his time, as well as its relevance today: “He was a great ascetic (even from his external appearance: ‘an airy shell’ was said of his physical person), but with an adamantine will, which belied the fire that burned within him. Thanks to his inner strength he was able to do exceptional work, traces of which remain in the most diverse fields: a passionate seeker of truth, a serious scholar, a writer and poet, the creator of many works: the Cure d’Ars pre-seminary, the Cardinal Frings Institute, the São José Hospital, the shrine of Nossa Senhora de Fátima, the Assunção Cearense radio station, the Casa do Menino Jesus, schools, workers’ groups, etc., and above all – he was the founder of a religious congregation.

Both great yet simple, he knew how to combine the Bishop’s many commitments with catechism to children and – in the last years of his life – his erudite Latin lessons with the humble collection of stamps. A zealous pastor, he loved his people, never left his flock, felt the urgency of vocations and filled his seminaries with them.

In his heart he always remained Salesian. He was said to be “an eternal Salesian”. Already Master of Novices as soon as he was ordained a priest, he remained a forger of souls in Salesian style throughout his life.

An ascetic, I said at the beginning. In reality he personified the motto left to us by Don Bosco: work and temperance.

The secret of his holiness is to be found in his having abhorred all forms of mediocrity. He was an athlete of the spirit – perhaps that is why we like to remember him “always on his feet” (even though in his later years he was confined to a wheelchair). Always on his feet! Even today. Like one who continues to teach a lesson. The most difficult and most demanding lesson: that of holiness.

Dr Cristiana Marinelli

Colleague in the Salesian General Postulator’s Office

This is love...

this is the simple and silent good that Don Bosco did. This is the good that we continue to do together.

Friends, readers of the Salesian Bulletin: as you do every month, please accept my warmest greetings, greetings that I prepare by letting my heart speak, a heart that seeks to continue looking at the Salesian world with the hope and certainty that Don Bosco himself had, and that together we can do much good and that the good that is done must be made known.

I see in many Salesians Don Bosco's "passion" for the happiness of young people. A formula that has become famous attempts to condense Don Bosco's educational system into three words: reason, religion, loving-kindness. School, church, playground. A Salesian house is all this realised in stone. But Don Bosco's oratory is much more. It is an arsenal of encouragement and creativity: music, theatre, sport and walks that are true immersions in nature. All seasoned with real, fatherly, patient, enthusiastic affection.

Mother courage

Well then, as I read the chronicle of Sudan with pain and concern, where everyone's situation is very difficult, including the Salesian situation, today I would like to offer another beautiful testimony, although this time I was not an eyewitness, but I recount what was shared with me.

The scene takes place in Palabek (Uganda), where, when the first refugees arrived five years ago, we Salesians of Don Bosco wanted to be with the first refugees that went there. The accommodation was a tent and the chapel for prayer and the celebration of the first Eucharist was the shade of a tree. Every day many hundreds of refugees from Sudan arrived at

Palabek. First because of the conflict in South Sudan. Years later, they continue to arrive, now because of the conflict in Sudan (North Sudan, that is).

It was the General Councillor for Missions who told me what I am telling you. He had gone to Palabek a few days earlier to continue to accompany this presence in a refugee camp where tens of thousands have already been received.

Ten days ago, a woman arrived with eleven children. Alone, without any help, she had crossed several regions full of danger for herself and the children; she had walked more than 700 kilometres in the last month and the group of children was growing. And this is what I want to talk about, because this is HUMANITY and this is LOVE. This woman arrived in Palabek with eleven children in her care, and she presented them all as her children. But in reality six were her children from her womb. Three others were the children of her brother who had recently died and whom she had taken in charge, and two others were little orphans she had found on the street, alone, with no one and, of course, without papers (who can think of papers and documentation when the most essential things for life are missing?), and they had become this woman's foster children.

On some occasions, a mother who gave her life to defend her child has been called a "courageous mother". In this case, I would like to give this mother of eleven children the title of Mother Courage. She is above all a woman who knows very well – in the "bowels of her heart" – what it is to love, even to the point of suffering, because she lives and has lived in absolute poverty with her eleven children.

Welcome to Palabek, brave Mother. Welcome to the Salesian presence. No doubt everything possible will be done so that these children do not lack food, and then a place to play and laugh and smile – in the Salesian oratory – and a place in our school.

This is the simple and silent good that Don Bosco did. This is the good that we continue to do together because, believe me, to feel that we are not alone, to have the certainty that many of you see with pleasure and sympathy, the effort we make

every day for the benefit of others, also gives us a lot of human strength, and no doubt the Good Lord makes it grow.

I wish you a wonderful summer. No doubt ours, mine too, will be more serene and comfortable than is the case for this mother in Palabek, but I think I can say that having thought of her and her children, we have, in some way, built a bridge. Be very happy.

Don Bosco's gaze

But who would believe it? Don Bosco's 'vision' was such that he... saw so many things!

An elderly priest, a former pupil at Valdocco, wrote in 1889: "What stood out most in Don Bosco was his gaze. It was gentle but penetrated to the depths of the heart, and one could hardly resist gazing at him. So, it can be said that his eye **attracted, terrified, arrived** on purpose. In my travels around the world, I have never met a person whose gaze was more impressive than his. Portraits and paintings do not generally represent this feature."

Another former pupil from the 1970s, Pietro Pons, reveals in his recollections: "Don Bosco had two eyes that pierced and penetrated the mind... He used to walk around talking and looking at everyone with those two eyes roving every which way, electrifying hearts with joy."

Salesian Fr Pietro Fracchia, a pupil of Don Bosco, recalled an encounter he had with the saint sitting at his desk. The young man dared to ask him why he wrote like that with his head down and turned to the right, as he wrote. Don Bosco, smiling, answered him: "The reason is this, you see! From this eye Don Bosco can no longer see, and from this other very little!" "You see very little? But then how is it that the other day in the courtyard, while I was far away from you, you looked at me

as vividly, brightly, as penetrating as a ray of sunlight?" "Well...! You people immediately think and see who knows what...!" And yet that's how it was. And the examples could be multiplied. With his scrutinising eye, Don Bosco penetrated and guessed everything in the youngsters: their character, intelligence, heart. Some of them purposely tried to escape his presence because they could not bear his gaze. Fr Dominic Belmonte assured us that he had personally witnessed this: "Many times Don Bosco looked at a young man in such a special way that his eyes said what his lips did not say at that moment, and made him understand what he wanted from him." Often, he would follow a young man with his gaze in the courtyard, while he was conversing with others. Suddenly the young man's gaze would meet Don Bosco's and he would understand. He would approach him to ask what he wanted from him and Don Bosco would whisper it in his ear. Perhaps it was an invitation to confession. One night a pupil could not get to sleep. He sighed, he bit the sheets, he cried. The classmate sleeping next to him, woken up by this agitation, asked him: "What's the matter? What's the matter with you?" "What's wrong with me? Last night Don Bosco looked at me!" "Oh, wonderful! That's nothing new. There's no need to disturb the whole dormitory for that!" In the morning he told Don Bosco and Don Bosco replied: "Ask him what his conscience says!" One can imagine the rest.

More testimonies from Italy, Spain and France



Don Bosco at 71 – Sampierdarena, 16 March 1886

Fr Michele Molineris, in his *Vita episodica di don Bosco* published posthumously at Colle in 1974, gives another series of testimonies on Don Bosco's gaze. We refer to just three of them, also as a way of remembering this scholar of the Saint who, in addition to the rest, had a unique knowledge of the places and people of John Bosco's childhood. But let us come to the testimonies he collected.

Bishop Felice Guerra personally recalled the vividness of Don Bosco's gaze, declaring that it penetrated like a double-edged sword to the point of plumbing hearts and moving consciences. And yet "he could not see out of one eye and even the other was of little use to him!"

Fr John Ferrés, parish priest at Gerona in Spain, who saw Don Bosco in 1886, wrote that "he had very lively eyes, a penetrating gaze... Looking at him I felt forced to look within and examine my soul."

Mr Accio Lupo, an usher for Minister Francesco Crispi, who had introduced Don Bosco to the statesman's office, remembered him as **"an emaciated priest... with penetrating eyes!"**.

And finally, we recall impressions gathered from his travels in France. Cardinal John Cagliero reported the following fact he noticed personally when accompanying Don Bosco. After a conference held in Nice, Don Bosco left the presbytery of the church to go to the door, surrounded by the crowd that would not let him walk. A grim-looking individual stood motionless, watching him as if he were up to no good. Fr Cagliero, who was keeping an eye on him, uneasy about what might happen, saw the man approaching. Don Bosco addressed him: "What do you want?" "Me? Nothing!" "Yet you seem to have something to tell me!" "I have nothing to tell you" "Do you want to go to confession?" "Hear my confession? Not by a long shot!" "Then what are you doing here?" "I am here because ... I cannot leave!" "I understand ... Gentlemen, leave me alone for a moment", Don Bosco said to those around him. The neighbours drew back, Don Bosco whispered a few words in man's ear and he fell to his knees, and went to confession there in the middle of the church.

More curious was the event in Toulon, which happened during Don Bosco's trip to France in 1881.

After a conference in St Mary's parish church, Don Bosco, with a silver plate in his hand, went around the church begging. Don Bosco presented him with the plate a worker turned his

face away, shrugging his shoulders rudely. Don Bosco gave him a loving look as he passed by and said: "God bless you!" The worker then put his hand in his pocket and placed a penny on the plate. Don Bosco, staring him in the face, said: "May God reward you." The other, making the gesture again, offered two pennies. And Don Bosco said: "May God reward you more and more!" The man, hearing this, took out his purse and gave a franc. Don Bosco gave him a look filled with emotion and went off. But the man, as if drawn by some magical force, followed him through the church, went after him into the sacristy, followed him into the city and stayed behind him until he saw him disappear. The power of Don Bosco's gaze!

Jesus said: "The eyes are like the lamp for the body; if your eyes are good you will be totally in the light."

Don Bosco's eyes were totally in the Light!

The stork and its duties

The white stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) is a large bird, unmistakable for its tapering red beak, long neck, very long legs, and predominantly white plumage, with black feathers on the wings. It is migratory by nature, and its arrival in spring in many countries of Europe is considered a good omen. As soon as they arrive, these birds start to make or rebuild their nests in high places, often in the same place.

In the past, when there were no electricity grid support poles, the highest places were the covered chimneys of houses, and the warmest ones were preferred by storks. And the houses that were also warm in the spring were those where a newborn baby was in need of a propitious environment. Hence the legend of the stork carrying babies, a legend that has become a symbol. In fact, even today, greeting cards to new mothers

feature a stork in flight, with a bundle tied to its beak.

The Creator endowed storks with superior instincts, making them noble birds. And they are so faithful to the task assigned to them by nature that they deserve to be placed among the first in the “book of creation”.



The first thing that strikes one is that they tend to be monogamous: once a couple is formed, they stay together for life. Sure, there will be squabbles in their existence, but these never lead to separation.

They almost always return to the same nest, rebuilding and enriching it. They never tire of repairing it every year and improving it, even if this requires much effort. And the nest is always high up, on chimneys, electric poles or bell towers, because they want to protect their offspring from wild animals.

Although no one has taught them, they manage to build wonderful nests that can exceed two metres in diameter with twigs and also with other materials they find within their flying range, even with textiles and plastics; they do not destroy nature, but recycle.

The female lays three to six eggs, not worrying about how she will support her young. Once the eggs are laid, she never neglects her duty to brood, even if she has to face bad times. If the nests are close to roads, the constant noise of cars, the vibrations caused by heavy vehicles or their dazzling lights at night does not make them leave. When the sun gets scorching hot, the stork opens its wings a little or moves occasionally to cool off, but does not try to get into the shade. When it is cold, especially at night, it does everything it can not to leave its eggs outside too much. When a strong wind comes, it does not let itself be carried away and does everything to keep still. When it rains, she does not

take cover to protect herself from the water. And when even a hailstorm comes, it stoically resists at the risk of losing its life, but does not stop doing its duty.

And this behaviour is wonderful if we remember the basic instincts that the Creator has left to every living being. Even in the most basic organisms, the single-celled ones, we find four basic instincts: nutrition, excretion, preservation of the individual (self-defence) and preservation of the species (reproduction). And when an organism has to choose whether to give priority to one of these instincts, the preservation of the individual, self-defence, always prevails. In the case of the stork, the fact that it stays put to protect its eggs even in storms, even when there is a hailstorm endangering its life, shows that the instinct of preservation of the species becomes stronger than that of preservation of the individual. It is as if this bird is aware that the liquid in those eggs is not a generated product from which she can separate, but that inside the egg is a life that she must protect at all costs.

The female alternates with the male while brooding. The male is ready to give his consort a change to allow her to get food and get some exercise. And this for the entire time, just over a month, until the eggs hatch and the new creatures come to light. After this period, the parents continue to take turns to provide a warm place for the young, to feed them for another two months until they begin to leave the nest. And up to three weeks they feed them with regurgitated food because their young are unable to feed themselves otherwise. They are content with what they find: insects, frogs, fish, rodents, lizards, snakes, crustaceans, worms, etc.; they make no demands for food. And by satisfying this need to feed, they participate in the natural balance, reducing agricultural pests such as grasshoppers.

They ensure the survival of their chicks by defending them from predatory sparrows, hawks and eagles, because they know that they are incapable of recognising aggressors or even

defending themselves.

The young, once they have grown wings, learn to fly and look for food, and gradually leave their nest, as if they are aware that there is no more physical space for them, as the nest is limited in size. They do not live by weighing on their parents, but they get busy. They are non-possessive birds; they do not mark their territory, but coexist peacefully with others.

In this way, young storks begin to live as adults, even if they are not yet adults. In fact, to begin to reproduce they must wait their time, until they are 4 years old, when they join forces in pairs with another bird of the same temperament, but of the opposite sex, and begin the adventure of their lives. For this they will have to learn that in order to survive they must migrate even very long distances, struggling, seeking their opportunities to live in one place during the summer and in another during the winter. And to do so safely, they will have to associate with other storks which have the same nature and interest.

The instincts of these creatures have not escaped human observation. Since ancient times, the stork has been the symbol of love between parents and children. And it is the bird that best represents the ancient bond between man and nature.

The white stork has a mild character and for this reason it is loved by people and is well liked everywhere; the Abbey of Chiaravalle even wanted it in its coat of arms next to the pastoral baculus and mitre.

Today it is difficult to see it in nature. It is not often you see a stork's nest and even less so up close. But someone came up with the idea of using technology to show the life of these birds by placing a live video camera next to a nest on a road. Watching to learn. The "book of nature" has so much to teach us...



St Francis de Sales. Gentleness (7/8)

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

GENTLENESS IN SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES (7/8)

Some episodes from Francis's life leads us to contemplate "Salesian gentleness".

In order to improve the situation of the clergy in the parishes, Francis had decided that at least three candidates for a parish would be named. The best would be chosen.

Now, it had happened that a Knight of Malta, furious because one of his servants had been excluded from the selection (this candidate knew more about courting women than commenting on the Gospel!) had abruptly entered the bishop's study and had insulted and threatened him, and Francis had remained standing, hat in hand. The bishop's brother then asked him if anger had ever taken hold of him at any time and the holy man did not hide from him that "then and often anger boiled in his brain like water boiling in a pot on the fire; but that by the grace of God, even if he had to die for having violently resisted this passion, he would never have said a word favour of it."

The first monastery was being built in the city (the *Sainte Source*) and work was not progressing because the Dominicans were protesting with the workers. According to them, there was not the required distance between the two buildings. The protests were lively and the bishop kindly and patiently rushed in to calm tempers. This calmness and gentleness did

not please Jane de Chantal, who blurted:

"Your gentleness will only increase the insolence of these malicious people." "Not so, not so" Francis replied, "so, Mother, do you want me to destroy the inner peace I have been working on for more than eighteen years in just a quarter of an hour?"

There is an important premise for understanding what Salesian gentleness is. An expert, Salesian Fr Pietro Braido, tells us about it:

"It is not sentimentalism, which evokes mushy kinds of expressions; it is not the kindness that is typical of people who are happy to close their eyes to reality so as not to have problems and annoyances; it is not the short-sightedness of people who see everything beautiful and good and for whom everything is always fine; it is not the inert attitude of people who have no suggestions to offer... Salesian gentleness (Don Bosco would use the term loving-kindness) is something else: it undoubtedly stems from a deep and solid charity and demands careful control of one's emotional and affective resources; it expresses itself in constant, serene humour, sign of someone with a rich humanity; it requires a capacity for empathy and dialogue and creates a serene atmosphere, free of tension and conflict. So Francis' gentleness is not to be confused with weakness; on the contrary, it is strength that requires control, goodness of mind, clarity of purpose and a strong presence of God."

But Francis was not born this way! Endowed with marked sensitivity, he was easy given to mood swings and outbursts of anger.

Lajeunie writes:

"Francis de Sales was a true Savoyard, habitually calm and gentle, but capable of terrible rages; a volcano beneath the snow. By nature he was very quick to anger, but committed himself daily to correction.

Given his lively and sanguine temperament, his habitual

gentleness was often put to the test. He was much hurt by insolent and unpleasant words and vulgar gestures. In 1619 in Paris, he confessed that he still had outbursts of anger in his heart and had to rein it in with both hands! 'I made a pact with my tongue not to say a word when I was in a rage. By the grace of God I was able to have the strength to curb the passion of anger, to which I was naturally inclined.' It was by the grace of God that he had acquired the ability to master the angry passions to which his temper was prone. His gentleness was thus a strength, the fruit of a victory."

It is not difficult to discover the saint's personal experience in the following quotations, made up of patience, self-control, inner struggle ...

He said to one woman:

"Be very gentle and affable in the midst of the occupations you have, because everyone expects this good example from you. It is easy to steer the boat when it is not hindered by the winds; but in the midst of troubles, problems, it is difficult to remain serene, just as it is difficult to steer a course in the midst of gales."

To Madame de Valbonne, whom Francis described as "a pearl", he wrote:

"We must always remain steadfast in the practice of our two dear virtues: gentleness towards our neighbour and loving humility towards God."

We find the two virtues dear to the Heart of Jesus together: gentleness and humility.

It is necessary to practise gentleness **to self as well**.

"Whenever you find your heart without gentleness, content yourself with taking it very gently in your fingertips to put it back in its place, and do not take it with closed fists or too abruptly. We must be willing to serve this heart in its illnesses and also to use some kindness in its regard; and we must bind our passions and inclinations with chains of gold, that is, with the chains of love.

“He who can maintain meekness amid pain and weariness, and peace amid worry and overwhelming cares, is well nigh perfect. Perfect evenness of temper, true gentleness and sweetness of heart, are more rare than perfect chastity, but they are so much the more to be cultivated. I commend them to you, my dearest daughter, because upon these, like the oil of a lamp, depends the flame of good example. Nothing is so edifying as a loving good temper.”

Francis reminded parents, educators, teachers, superiors in general to practise gentleness especially when it comes to making some **remark or reproaching** someone. Here the Salesian spirit emerges:

“Even when reprimanding them, as is necessary, one must use much love and gentleness with them. In this way, reprimands easily obtain some good results.

Correction dictated by passion, even when it has a reasonable basis, is much less effective than that which comes solely from reason.”

“I assure you that every time I have resorted to sharp retorts, I have had to regret them. People do much more out of love and charity than out of severity and rigour.”

Gentleness goes hand in hand with another virtue: **patience**. Here, then, are a few letters recommending it:

“As long as we remain down here [on earth], we must resign ourselves to putting up with ourselves until God takes us to heaven. We must therefore be patient and never think that we can correct in a day the bad habits we have contracted because of the meagre care we have taken of our spiritual health [...]. We must, let us admit it, be patient with everyone, but first of all with ourselves.”

To Madame de Limonjon he wrote: “It is not possible to get to where you aspire to in one day: we must gain a point today, tomorrow another; and so, step by step, we will arrive at being masters of ourselves; and it will be no small victory.”

Patience, for Francis, is the first virtue to be put in place

in building a solid spiritual edifice.

“The effect of patience is to possess one’s soul well, and patience is all the more perfect the more it is free from restlessness and haste.”

“Have patience with regard to your inner cross: the Saviour allows it so that, one day, you may better know who you are. Do you not see that the restlessness of the day is calmed by the rest of the night? This means that our soul needs nothing more than to abandon itself completely to God and be willing to serve Him amidst roses as well as thorns.”

Here are two practical letters: to Madame de la Fléchère he wrote:

‘What do you want me to say about the return of your miseries, except that you must take up arms and courage again and fight more decisively than ever? You will have to use a lot of patience and resignation to get your affairs in order. God will bless your work.”

And to Madame de Travernay he said:

“You must know how to accept the annoyances that touch you in the course of the day with patience and gentleness, and for the love of Him who permits them. Therefore lift up your heart often to God, implore his help, and consider the good fortune you have to be his as the main foundation of your consolation!”

Finally, this text I call **the hymn to charity according to St Francis de Sales**.

“He who is gentle offends no one, bears willingly those who do him harm, suffers with patience the blows he receives, and does no evil for evil. He who is gentle never becomes upset, but conforms all his words to humility, overcoming evil with good. Always make corrections from the heart and with gentle words.

In this way corrections will produce better effects. Never resort to retaliation against those who have displeased you. Never resent or be angry for any reason, for that is always an

imperfection.”

[\(continued\)](#)

St Francis de Sales. The Eucharist (6/8)

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

THE EUCHARIST IN SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES (6/8)

Francis received his First Communion and Confirmation at the age of about nine. From then on he received Communion every week or at least once a month.

God took possession of his heart and Francis would remain faithful to this friendship that would gradually become the love of his life.

His fidelity to Christian life continued and was strengthened during the ten years in Paris. “He received communion at least once a month, if he could not do so more often.” And this for ten years!

Regarding his time in Padua we know that he went to Mass every day and that he received communion once a week. The Eucharist united with prayer became the nourishment of his Christian life and vocation. It is in this profound unity with the Lord that he perceived His will: it is here that the desire to be “all of God” matured.

Francis was ordained a priest on 18 December 1593 and the

Eucharist would be at the heart of his days, and his strength for spending himself for others.

Here are some testimonies taken from the Beatification Process:

"It was easy to notice how he kept himself in deep recollection and attention before God: his eyes modestly lowered, his face recollected with a sweetness and serenity so great that those who observed him carefully were struck and moved by it."

"When he celebrated Holy Mass he was completely different from how he usually was: a serene face, without distraction and, at the moment of communion, those who saw him were deeply impressed by his devotion."

St Vincent de Paul adds:

"When I repeated his words to myself, I felt such an admiration for him that I was led to see in him the man who best reproduced the Son of God living on earth."

We already know of his departure in 1594 as a missionary to the Chablais.

He spent his first months in the shelter of the Allinges fortress. Visiting what remains of this fortress, one is impressed by the chapel which has remained intact: small, dark, cold, made of stone. Here Francis celebrated the Eucharist every morning at around four o'clock and paused in prayer before going down to Thonon with a heart full of charity and mercy, drawn from the divine sacrament.

Francis treated people with respect, indeed with compassion, and "Some wished to make themselves feared; but he desired only to be loved, and to enter men's hearts through the doorway of affection" (J.P. Camus).

It is the Eucharist that sustained his initial struggles: he did not respond to insults, provocations, lynching; he related to everyone with warmth.

His first sermon as a sub-deacon had been on the subject of the Eucharist and it would certainly serve him well in the Chablais, because "this august sacrament" would be his warhorse: in the sermons he gave in the church of St Hippolytus, he would often address this subject and expound the Catholic point of view with clarity and passion.

The following testimony, addressed to his friend A. Favre, tells of the quality and ardour of his preaching on such an important subject:

"Yesterday M. d'Avully and the elders of the city, as they are called, came openly to my preaching, because they had heard that I was to speak about the august sacrament of the altar. They had such a desire to hear from me the exposition of what Catholics believe and their proofs concerning this mystery that, not having dared to come publicly, for fear of seeming to be ignoring the law they had imposed on themselves, they listened to me from a place where they could not be seen."

Little by little, the Body of the Lord infused his pastor's heart with gentleness, meekness, goodness, so that even his preacher's voice was affected: a calm and benevolent tone, never aggressive or polemical!

"I am convinced that he who preaches with love, preaches sufficiently against heretics, even if he does not say a single word or argue with them."

More eloquent than any treatise is this experience that took place on 25 May 1595.

At three in the morning, while engrossed in deep meditation on the most holy and august sacrament of the Eucharist, he felt moved to rapture by the Holy Spirit in an abundance of sweetness... and since his heart was overwhelmed by such delight, he was finally forced to throw himself to the ground and exclaim: "Lord, hold back the waves of your grace; withdraw them from me because I can no longer bear the greatness of your sweetness, which forces me to prostrate myself."

In 1596, after more than two years of catechesis, he decided to celebrate the three Christmas Masses. They were celebrated amidst general enthusiasm and emotion. Francis was happy! This midnight Mass on Christmas 1596 was one of the high points of his life. In this Mass was the Church, the Catholic Church re-established in its living foundation.

The Council of Trent had advocated the practice of the **Forty Hour Devotion**, which consisted of the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for three consecutive days by the entire Christian community.

At the beginning of September 1597, they took place in Annemasse, on the outskirts of Geneva, in the presence of the bishop, Francis and other collaborators, with **much greater fruit than hoped for**. They were intense days of prayer, processions, sermons, masses. Over forty parishes participated with an incredible number of people.

Given this success, the following year they were held in Thonon. It was a feast lasting several days that exceeded all expectations. Everything ended late at night, with the last sermon given by Francis. He preached on the Eucharist.

Many scholars of the life and works of the saint maintain that only his great love for the Eucharist can explain the 'miracle' of the Chablais, that is, how this young priest was able to bring the entire vast region back to the Church in just four years.

And this love lasted all his life, until the end. In the last meeting he had in Lyons with his Daughters, the Visitandines, by then near to death, he spoke to them about confession and communion.

What was the Eucharist for our saint? It was first and foremost:

The heart of his day, which meant he lived in intimate communion with God

"I have not yet told you about the sun of the spiritual exercises: the most holy and supreme Sacrifice and Sacrament of the Mass, the centre of the Christian religion, the heart of devotion, the soul of piety."

It was the confident handing over of his life to God whom he asks for strength to continue his mission with humility and charity.

"If the world asks you why you receive communion so often, answer that it is to learn to love God, to purify you from your imperfections, to free you from your miseries, to find strength in your weaknesses and consolation in your afflictions. Two kinds of people must receive communion often: the perfect, because being well-disposed they would do wrong not to approach the fountain and source of perfection; and the imperfect in order to strive for perfection. The strong not to weaken and the weak to strengthen themselves. The sick to seek healing and the healthy not to become sick."

The Eucharist creates a profound unity in Francis with so many people

"This sacrament not only unites us to Jesus Christ, but also to our neighbour, with those who partake of the same food and makes us one with them. And one of the main fruits is mutual charity and gentleness of heart towards one another since we belong to the same Lord and in Him we are united heart to heart with one another."

It is a gradual transformation in Jesus

"Those who have good bodily digestion feel a strengthening for the whole body, because of the general distribution that is made of the food. So, My daughter, those who have good spiritual digestion feel that Jesus Christ, who is their food, spreads and communicates to all parts of their soul and body. They have Jesus Christ in their brain, in their heart, in their chest, in their eyes, in their hands, in their ears, in their feet. But what does this Saviour do everywhere? He straightens everything, purifies everything, mortifies

everything, enlivens everything. He loves in the heart, understands in the brain, breathes in the chest, sees in the eyes, speaks in the tongue, and so on: he does everything in everyone and then we live, not we, but it is Jesus Christ who lives in us.

It also transforms the days and nights, so that 'Nights are days when God is in our hearts and days become nights when He is not.'"

[\(continued\)](#)