

□ Reading time: 9 min.

*Blessed Michele Rua (1837-1910) represents an extraordinary figure in the history of Salesian spirituality. As Don Bosco's first successor, he faithfully embodied the founder's charism, becoming his spiritual heir and most authentic continuator. His life, marked by profound humility and total obedience, testifies to how holiness can be expressed in ordinary life lived with heroic love. From the young age when he donned the ecclesiastical habit until his death, Don Rua dedicated himself tirelessly to the formation of young people and the development of the Salesian Congregation, which experienced extraordinary expansion under his guidance. We offer a novena for those who – with faith – will ask for special graces in view of the miracle awaited for his canonisation.*

Michael Rua was born in Turin on 9 June 1837. The last of nine children, he lost his father at the age of eight. He studied at the Brothers of the Christian Schools until third grade.

He should have started work in the Royal Arms Factory in Turin, where his father was a worker, but Don Bosco – who heard confessions in his school on Sundays – suggested he continue his studies with him, assuring him that Providence would take care of the expenses. A collaborator of the Immaculate Conception Sodality with Dominic Savio, he was a model pupil, an apostle among his companions.

On 25 March 1855 in Don Bosco's little room he took the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in the hands of the founder. In 1858 he accompanied Don Bosco to Pope Pius IX for approval of the rules. On 28 July 1860 he was ordained a priest. Don Rua opened the first Salesian house outside Turin at Mirabello. A few years later he returned to Valdocco and replaced and assisted Don Bosco in everything. In November 1884 Pope Leo XIII appointed Frn Rua as Don Bosco's vicar and successor, who died in his arms four years later. Fr Rua, already considered the living rule, became as paternal and loving as Don Bosco. He faced and overcame numerous difficulties in governing the Congregation. He consolidated the missions and the Salesian spirit.

He died on 6 April 1910, aged 73. With him the Society had grown from 773 to 4000 Salesians, from 57 to 345 Houses, from 6 to 34 Provinces in 33 countries. Paul VI beatified him in 1972.

**Prayer to implore the canonisation of Blessed Michael Rua...**

Almighty and merciful God  
you have placed in the footsteps of St John Bosco  
Blessed Michael Rua, who imitated his example,  
inherited his spirit and propagated his works;  
now that by beatification you have raised him to the glory of the altars  
deign to multiply his patronage towards those who invoke it  
and hasten his canonisation.  
We ask this through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians,  
whom he loved and honoured with a child's heart,  
and through the mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

***A thought each day of the novena, from Fr Rua's biography***

**1st day, 20 October**

*Prayer to implore the canonisation of Blessed Michael Rua...*

18th December 1859 is Sunday. In the evening, eighteen people are gathered in Don Bosco's little room, which at that moment is Salesian Bethlehem. The founding meeting of the "Pious Society of St Francis de Sales", that is, of the Salesians, is taking place. The eighteen pray, declare their desire to come together as a Society to sanctify themselves and to dedicate their lives to the abandoned and perilous youth. The first elections are held. Don Bosco, the founder, is called by all to be the first Superior General. The subdeacon Michael Rua, aged 22, is elected Spiritual Director of the Society. He is to work, together with Don Bosco, on the spiritual formation of the first Salesians. Michael did not take this new task as an "ad honorem" office. Giulio Barberis, who was among the very young and attended his formation classes, testified: "He was most diligent in preparing for the lessons and in encouraging us to study."

*Our Father..., Hail Mary... and Glory Be...!*

*Prayer of intercession to Blessed Michael Rua...*

**Day 2, 21 October**

*Prayer to implore the canonisation of Blessed Michael Rua...*

Fr Joseph Vespignani, who was to become a great Salesian and missionary in South America, arrived in Valdocco in 1876. A fresh priest of 23, he had come from Faenza to be with Don Bosco. In his simple "A Year at Don Bosco's School" he gave us a vivid picture of Fr Rua's activities, of which he was one of the secretaries in the early days. With the sensitivity that those who live the normality of everyday life do

not usually have, he photographed the atmosphere and environment of Valdocco, animated by the presence of two saints, Don Bosco and Fr Rua.

"From the very first day," he wrote, "I put myself wholeheartedly at the command of my dear superior Fr Rua. How many things I learned at his school of piety, of charity, of Salesian activity! His was a cathedra of doctrine and holiness, but it was above all a school of Salesian formation. Every day more and more I admired in Fr Rua his punctuality, tireless constancy, religious perfection, self-denial combined with the gentlest gentleness. What charity, what fine manners to lead one of his employees into the office he wanted to entrust to him! What delicate study, what penetration in knowing and testing their aptitudes to educate them in such a way as to make them useful to the Work of Don Bosco!"

*Our Father..., Hail Mary... and Glory Be...!*

*Prayer of intercession to Blessed Michael Rua...*

### **3rd day, 22 October**

*Prayer to implore the canonisation of Blessed Michael Rua...*

In the letter sent on 30 December to all the Salesians to give the latest news about Don Bosco's health, Fr Rua wrote: "Last night, at a time when he could speak with less difficulty, while we were around his bed Bishop Cagliero, Fr Bonetti and I, said among other things: I recommend to the Salesians devotion to Mary Help of Christians and frequent Communion. I then added: This could serve as a New Year's gift to be sent to all our Houses. He resumed: Let this be for our whole life." Every suggestion from Don Bosco was a command for Fr Rua. Those words, which were the consistent continuation of a whole life, Don Rua sealed them in his heart: those were the ways Don Bosco ordered him to help the Congregation progress "for the whole of its life". Fr Rua was as faithful as ever to this assignment: Jesus in the Eucharist, Mary Help of Christians, together with the three vows and total fidelity to Don Bosco. With his heroic example, as well as his words, he would testify unceasingly that this was the Salesian way to holiness.

*Our Father..., Hail Mary... and Glory Be...!*

*Prayer of intercession to Blessed Michael Rua...*

### **4th day, 23rd October**

*Prayer to implore the canonisation of Blessed Michael Rua...*

On 3 October 1852, during the outing that the best young men of the Oratory made every year to the Becchi for the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, Don Bosco clothed him in the clerical habit. Michael was 15 years old. In the evening, returning to Turin, Michael overcame his shyness and asked Don Bosco: "Do you remember our

first meetings? I asked you for a medal, and you made a strange gesture, as if you wanted to cut off your hand and give it to me, and said: 'You and I will do everything by halves.' What did you mean?" He said: "But dear Michael, you still haven't understood? And yet, it's very clear. The more you go on in years, the better you will understand that I wanted to tell you: In life, the two of us will always do everything by halves. Sorrows, cares, responsibilities, joys and everything else will be shared in common." Michael remained silent, full of silent happiness: Don Bosco, in simple words, had made him his universal heir.

*Our Father..., Hail Mary... and Glory Be...!*

*Prayer of intercession to Blessed Michael Rua...*

### **5th day, 24 October**

*Prayer to implore the canonisation of Blessed Michael Rua...*

In Fr Rua detachment is synonymous with poverty. Poverty, he wrote, is a guarantee of absolute temperance, it is the only climate in which our Congregation can live and prosper, especially today.

Even in the Regulations for the Cooperators, whom he was pleased to call "Salesians without vows", he outlines a standard of living that has all the austerity of religious poverty: modesty in clothes, frugality at table, simplicity in furnishings, chastity in speech, exactitude in the duties of one's state.

Fr Rua, at the detachment of all comforts, became an ascetic in practice.

*Our Father..., Hail Mary... and Glory Be...!*

*Prayer of intercession to Blessed Michael Rua...*

### **6th day, 25 October**

*Prayer to implore the canonisation of Blessed Michael Rua...*

In 1863 Don Bosco took a decisive step for his Work. It functioned well at Valdocco, because the charismatic and paternal figure of Don Bosco was at its helm. But transplanted elsewhere, without Don Bosco, would it have worked? In the spring of that year, Don Bosco had a confidential and intense meeting with Fr Rua, who was 26 years old. "I have a big favour to ask of you. In agreement with the Bishop of Casale Monferrato, I have decided to open a 'Junior Seminary' in Mirabello. I'm thinking of sending you to direct it. It is the first work that the Salesians are opening outside Turin. We will have a thousand eyes on it. I have full confidence in you. I am giving you three aids: five of our most solid Salesians, including Fr Bonetti, who will be your 'deputy'; a group of boys chosen from among the best who will come from Valdocco to continue their schooling there, to be the leaven among the new boys you will receive; and together with you will come your mother." Fr Rua left in

October. Don Bosco wrote him four pages of precious advice that would be transcribed for each new Salesian rector: they are considered one of the clearest documents about Don Bosco's educational system. Among other things he wrote: "Every night you must sleep at least six hours. Strive to make yourself loved before making yourself feared. Try to spend all your recreation time among the young people. If questions arise about material things, spend whatever is necessary, as long as charity is preserved.". Fr Rua sums up all these counsels, which for him are commands, in one sentence: "At Mirabello I will try to be Don Bosco."

*Our Father..., Hail Mary... and Glory Be...!*

*Prayer of intercession to Blessed Michael Rua...*

### **7th day, 26th October**

*Prayer to implore the canonisation of Blessed Michael Rua...*

Amidst the accumulation of his duties, in all those years Fr Rua was always the Director of the many young people who crowded Valdocco: students, artisans, aspiring Salesians, very young Salesians. Fr Rua strove to "become Don Bosco" in everything, even in external behaviour. Of course, physical appearance and temperament were different. "His manners, his voice, his features, his smile, did not have that mysterious charm that attracted and drew young people to Don Bosco. But he was for everyone the caring and affectionate father, concerned to understand, encourage, support, forgive, enlighten, love" as he had begun to be at Mirabello. And the young people at Valdocco, infallible diviners like all the young people of the world when it comes to understanding who loves them and who instead is "just pretending", demonstrated by their actions that they recognised a father and friend in him.

*Our Father..., Hail Mary... and Glory Be...!*

*Prayer of intercession to Blessed Michael Rua...*

### **8th day, 27 October**

*Prayer to implore the canonisation of Blessed Michael Rua...*

When all the work on the Shrine was finished, Fr Rua also seemed finished. One morning in the torrid heat of July in Turin, on the door of the Oratory, as he was leaving, he fell into the arms of a friend who stood beside him. "Severe peritonitis" the doctor immediately called. "Nothing more can be done. Give him the Holy Oils." Penicillin had yet to be invented, surgery was still in its infancy. Fr Rua, feverish and in great pain, called for Don Bosco; but he was in town. He was sent for. When he arrived and was told that Fr Rua was at the end, what he then did seemed incomprehensible. There were the boys in church for the monthly recollection and

he went straight to hear their confessions. "Rest assured, Fr Rua will not leave without my permission", he said as he entered the church. He left very late, and instead of going to the infirmary he went to the modest dinner set aside for him. Then he went up to his room to put down his bag of papers, and finally, while everyone was on their toes, he went to Fr Rua's bedside. He saw the jar of Holy Oils and almost got angry: "Who is the good man who had that idea?" Then he sat down next to Fr Rua and told him: "Listen to me. I don't want you to die. You must get well. You will have to work and work hard by my side, other than to die. Listen to me well: even if I threw you out of the window as you are, you would not die." Francesia and Cagliero had seen and heard everything, and they gained the belief that Don Bosco, who spoke in dreams with Our Lady and wrung impossible favours from Her, had been given the guarantee that "that boy", the only one who had survived all his brothers, is one that Our Lady would leave with him for the rest of his life.

*Our Father..., Hail Mary... and Glory Be...!*

*Prayer of intercession to Blessed Michael Rua...*

### **9th day, 28 October**

*Prayer to implore the canonisation of Blessed Michael Rua...*

"Fr Rua was the most faithful, therefore the most humble and at the same time the most valiant son of Don Bosco." With these decisive words, on 29 October 1972 Pope Paul VI forever sculpted the human and spiritual figure of Fr Rua. In the homily delivered under the dome of St Peter's, the Pope outlined the new Blessed with words that almost hammered home this fundamental characteristic of his: fidelity. "Successor of Don Bosco, that is, continuer: son, disciple, imitator... He made of the Saint's example a school, of his life a story, of his rule a spirit, of his holiness a type, a model; he made of the spring, a current, a river." Paul VI's words elevated the earthly life of this "slender and worn-out profile of a priest" to a greater height. They uncovered the diamond that had sparkled in the meek and humble texture of his days.

Throughout his life Fr Rua had shown absolute obedience, so "absolute" that Don Bosco sometimes joked about it. In the deposition for the process of beatification, the Rector Major Fr Philip Rinaldi testified: "Don Bosco said: 'Fr Rua is not given orders, not even as a joke', such was his readiness to do whatever the Superior told him... Obedience was very easy for Fr Rua because he was profoundly humble. Humble in his behaviour, humble in his words, humble with the great and the small."

*Our Father..., Hail Mary... and Glory Be...!*

*Prayer of intercession to Blessed Michael Rua...*

**Prayer of intercession to Blessed Michael Rua**

*God our Father*

*you gave Blessed Michael Rua, priest and  
spiritual heir of St John Bosco,*

*the ability to form your divine image  
in young people;*

*grant that we, who are called to educate the young,  
may know the true face of Christ your Son.*

*We ask you to glorify your servant,  
and to grant us, through his intercession,  
the grace that we ask...*

*Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Blessed Michael Rua,  
pray for us!**