

Maronite Monks of Adoration

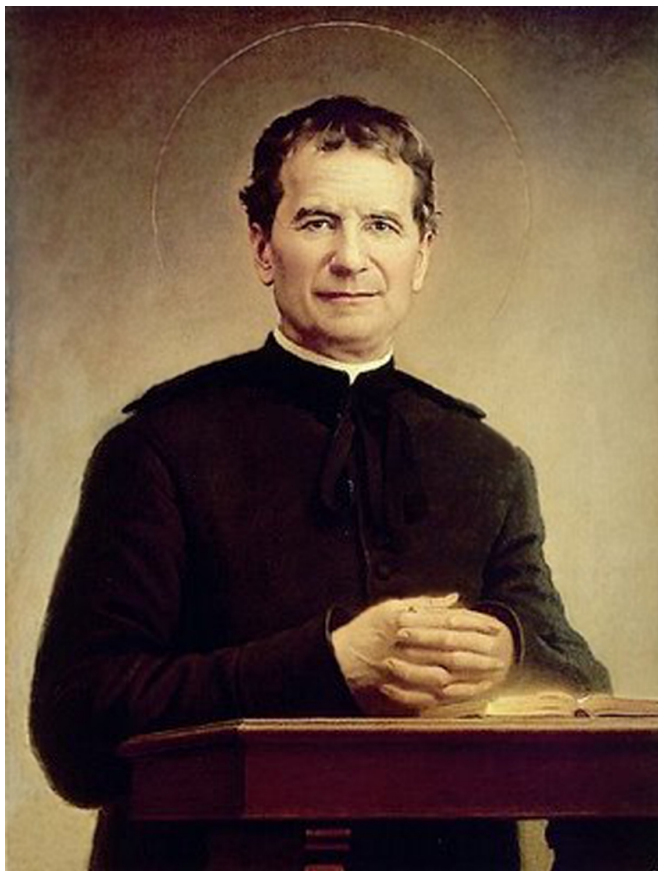
“GIVE ME SOULS. TAKE AWAY THE REST”

As we continue in the year of the priest, we now look at the life of St. John Bosco, the great Apostle of Youth. Our Lord always sends us the saint that's needed for that particular time and Don Bosco was no exception. He came among us during the time of the Industrial Revolution which caused major challenges for the family. Many young men and boys left the farm to migrate to the big cities looking for work in the new factories. Many wound up on the streets, prey to all the dangers lurking there not only to their persons, but especially to their souls. In this situation, Don Bosco found his apostolate.

Born on August 15, 1815 in the hamlet of Becchi (near the present-day Turin) young John lost his father at the age of two and with his mother, aunt, step-brother and brother had to work hard on the farm to support the family. His mother, the Servant of God Margaret (know as “Mama Margaret”) instilled in him a strong piety so that he would later say, “She was the best religion teacher I ever had.” And this about a woman who was illiterate and never traveled more than 20 miles from the place she was born during her entire life. We see in her the great importance of the parents in fostering vocations. At the age of 9 John had a mysterious dream. He found himself in a great field with many boys running, shouting and some cursing. Upon hearing the bad language he

plunged into the crowd swinging his fists at those cursing. Suddenly, a majestic man appeared and said to him, “Not by blows but by kindness will you win them over.” Then he said, “I will give you a teacher”, pointing to a very noble lady. The lady explained that in due time he would understand everything. Only much later did he realize that it was Our Lord and the Blessed Mother.

John felt the call to the priesthood at an early age. One day when passing a priest he cheerfully said, “Good morning Father.” The priest gave a gruff reply, not even looking at him. Saddened, John told his mother about it and said, “When I grow up, I will be kind to children. He left the farm to board with relatives so as to earn money for his education. Apprenticing himself, he



St. John Bosco

learned the skills of tailoring, cobbling, and various skills which he would later teach to his boys as vocational skills. On Sundays he would gather the children from the nearby farms to teach them catechism and explain the Sunday sermon.

Extremely important in a priestly vocation is having a good spiritual director. John had one of the best in St. Joseph Cafasso. Being much devoted to St. Francis of Assisi, John planned to enter the Capuchin novitiate but Fr. Cafasso advised him that God had other plans for him. Being an exemplary seminarian, John was ordained on June 5, 1841. Still not quite sure of God's design Don Bosco continued his studies

for another year. Then two events occurred which showed him his vocation. Fr. Cafasso ministered as a prison chaplain and one day brought Don Bosco to the prison to assist two men, a father and son condemned to death. While present at the execution he fainted and thereby resolved to do everything to prevent boys from winding up in prison. The second occurred on December 8, 1841. While preparing to offer Mass, an orphaned boy, Bartholomew Garelli came into the church to get out of the cold. Supposing him to be an altar boy, the sacristan called to him, "Go serve Don Bosco's Mass." "But I don't know how to serve," replied Bartholomew. Furious, the sacristan chased him yelling at him to leave. Hearing the commotion, Don Bosco called to the sacristan saying, "He's my friend." He said a Hail Mary with Bartholomew and invited him back the next week. Bartholomew returned, bringing a few of his friends along. That would grow and grow until in a short time, he had several hundred boys coming to him.

This began what was called "The Wandering Oratory." Virtually every week they were kicked out of the place they met. Complaints about noise and damaged property brought regular visits from the police. Fellow priests thought that he was giving the priesthood a bad name by playing their games. A few even attempted to have him committed to an asylum. Fortunately a generous man donated a run-down shed and a few acres of land. The "Pinar di Shedi" gave the oratory a permanent home. Several priests, inspired by his work, offered their help and soon donations came in which added buildings resulting in schooling and trades being offered.

Almighty God often uses rather strange instruments in furthering His work and did so with Don Bosco. At this time a Masonic government ruled Piedmont expelling religious and closing monasteries. One of these Masonic ministers, named Ratazzi, greatly admiring his work, came to visit Don Bosco. During the conversation he said, "This is great work but you will not live forever. What will happen to this when you die?" Here was born the idea for the Salesian Congregation. Ratazzi suggested how he could start a new society without having the government suppress it. As the boys reached young adulthood, some wanted to stay with Don

Bosco to help him. Gathering them together on January 26, 1854, Don Bosco began what would develop into the Salesians of St. John Bosco, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (Salesian Sisters) and the Salesian Cooperators (a type of Third Order). He chose St. Francis De Sales to be the patron because he wanted the saint's gentle optimism to be characteristic of the new society. In 1874, the Salesian Congregation received Papal approval.

Don Bosco's spirit is characterized by reason, religion and kindness. You become the friend of youth, show interest in them and always treat them with respect, even when correcting them. No matter what he did, for Don Bosco the salvation of their souls was everything. All was subordinated to that end. Religion would permeate the studies, work, and recreation, all. His motto, "Give me souls. Take away the rest" says it all. Don Bosco had a great loyalty to the Pope and wanted his new society to especially cultivate a devotion to the Papacy in youth and in the poorer classes. The Pope of his time, Blessed Pius IX, experienced much persecution since he was considered to be an opponent of "progress" (much like our present Holy Father). Several attempts were made on the life of Don Bosco because of his defense of the Pope. For Don Bosco becoming a saint was a simple matter. "Do the ordinary things well." You didn't have to do austere penances. God had given each person a particular vocation and mission in life. Do that well. It's that simple. Do everything well and with cheerfulness. That's the Salesian spirit.

Like many saintly priests he poured himself out completely for his boys. For him the priesthood entailed victimhood and no sacrifice for him was too great when the good of souls demanded. He slept 3 hours a night and 1 night a week he stayed up all night. His diet was frugal. Constantly begging, working, he literally wore himself out. When told by his doctor that he needed a rest and should take a vacation he replied, "I'll take a vacation when the Devil does." In fact, the Adversary noticed him well. He frustrated his work and as a result Don Bosco was subjected to diabolic attack at different periods. A lone lady, Mary Mazzarello, inspired by his work, dreamed of starting something similar for young girls. After meeting Don Bosco, she collaborated with him

in founding the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians which has now grown to become one of the largest women's congregations.

On January 31, 1888, totally worn out, he entered eternity. In a short time his congregation grew to become the third largest of the men's congregations. Don Bosco recommended the following as a devotion: devotion to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, devotion to Mary under the title of Help of Christians, and devotion to the Papacy. May Don Bosco watch over our youth especially in these times when so many snares are set for them. ✠