**THE RECTOR MAJOR’S MESSAGE**

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A YEAR OF DREAMS FROM ON HIGH

Dear friends: we are at the threshold of a new year, 2024, a truly special year because we remember the bicentennial of Don Bosco’s dream at age nine. This dream was much more than a pleasant episode in the life of a nine-year-old boy; it was like a dream-vision and a premonition of what he was to do in the course of his life.

Sixty-two years later, while celebrating his first and last Mass in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Rome, which had been consecrated two days earlier, Don Bosco burst into tears more than fifteen times because he saw all the scenes of his life unfold, in quick succession as though as in a movie. He understood that he had always been guided by Divine Providence and, in particular, led by the hand of Her, the Help of Christians, to the point that he said, “It is She who has done everything.”

**That New Year’s Day of 1862**

This commemoration leads me to think of a significant New Year in Don Bosco’s life. It is the first of January, 1862.

*The Biographical Memoirs* tell us that Don Bosco, who had been ill until that first day of the year, announced that he had important news to give to everyone living at the Oratory, both big and small. “The excitement caused by Don Bosco’s promise [of a personal strenna] defies description. How slowly the hours dragged that night of December 31 and all the next day. How eagerly the youngsters awaited evening to hear what their good father had to tell them,” Fr. Lemoyne writes. “At last, night prayers were over and the boys, perfectly silent, stood waiting for Don Bosco. He mounted the little platform and unveiled the mystery, saying, ‘The strenna I am about to give you is not my own. What would you say if the Madonna herself were to come in person and say something to each one of you — if she herself had prepared a little note for each of you to tell you what you most need or what she desires from you? Well, that’s exactly what has happened. The Madonna gives a strenna to each of you…. I foresee that some will want to know more and will ask, ‘How did this happen?’ ‘Did the Madonna write the notes herself?’ ‘Did she speak to Don Bosco in person?’ ‘Is Don Bosco our Lady’s secretary?’ I shall not add anything to what I have already said. I wrote the notes myself, but I am not free to disclose how it all came about. Nor should anyone take it upon himself to question me, for this would place me in a very awkward position. Be satisfied with the assurance that each note comes from our Lady…. It’s an amazing thing! For several years I have been praying for this grace and have at last obtained it. Let each of you, then, take this advice as coming from our Lady’s very lips. Come, therefore, to my room, and I shall give each of you your note.’” Don Bosco could say this because he himself had received from our Lady, at the age of nine, the message that would mark the entire course of his life.

Then, continuing the narrative of that same evening, “Those mentioned [the Salesians] followed Don Bosco to his room and that evening or the next received the first of those precious New Year’s messages. John Bonetti’s read as follows: ‘Increase the number of my sons.’ He at once recorded it in his chronicle, adding: ‘My loving Mother, along with this dear advice, give me also the means to carry it out. Grant me grace to succeed in this and to be included among your sons.’”

Fr. Rua’s said, “In your spiritual needs put your trust in Me.” ([*The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco,* VII, 1-7.](https://donboscosalesianportal.org/wp-content/uploads/BM_07_en.pdf))

Beginning on the following morning, the young men crowded to the door of Don Bosco’s room to receive their notes. I can easily imagine how Don Bosco knew how to reach the heart of every Salesian and every boy in the Oratory, not by means of some invention of his, but with the deep conviction of what our Lady wanted for each of them. At the same time, he managed to do so in the way characteristic of Don Bosco: always as a true teacher and a true genius. Here, I am referring to the art of personal encounter, of dialogue, and of the gaze that reaches the depths of the heart.

As I read this, I wondered whether it would not be possible for this to happen also to us. We have sent greeting cards to many people. If Mary Most Holy had sent a greeting card to the Salesian Congregation, to each one of us, and to the beautiful and great Salesian Family, the family of Don Bosco, what would She have written?

**Walking the way of Don Bosco**

It is beautiful to imagine this. I assure you that in my imagination there are many beautiful things that our Lady would ask of us, both personally and as Don Bosco’s Family, which was raised up to accompany the boys and girls of the world – especially the poorest and neediest – in their process of growth, maturation, and transformation.

The mystery of the new year, which ultimately develops the mystery of Christmas, tells us: “You are not conditioned by the past. Today you can start anew because there is something new in you. Take into your arms the Divine Child, who brings you into contact with all the newness that is available there, genuine and intact, in your soul. Start over again with the little ones, the teens, and the young adults. Trust the newness in you! Each day is the first day.”

Perhaps it would suffice to make our own the words that Mary says to John Bosco in his dream: “‘This is your field; this is where you must work,’ the Lady told me. ‘Make yourself humble, steadfast, and strong.’” Perhaps advice that was a little more “spiritual” was expected, but only those who are humble can be kind because they are able to enjoy the presence of others. Humility is the gate of love to those who are little, defenseless, and wounded by life.

Only one who is steadfast and strong can follow Jesus today, in spite of everything, because we want to see the prisoners free and the oppressed no longer oppressed, and to know what message the poor can still believe in.

This is listening to the voice of the burning bush that will never be consumed: “I will break your chains and make you walk with your heads held high.” Mary wants the Salesians, and all her Family, the beautiful family of Don Bosco in every age, to walk the way of Don Bosco. The best guarantee of this will always be to have her as the true Teacher who is first and foremost a Mother. This is a true grace for our Family.

This is how the Rectors Major have expressed it throughout our history, as my predecessor, Fr. Renato Ziggiotti, did: “I will give you a Teacher, under whose guidance you can become wise and without whom all wisdom becomes foolishness.” These are the fateful words of that first dream pronounced by the mysterious personage, “the Son of Her whom your mother has taught you to greet three times a day.” ([*The Biographical Memoirs of St. John* Bosco, I, 95](https://donboscosalesianportal.org/wp-content/uploads/BM_01_en.pdf)) It is, therefore, Jesus who gives Don Bosco His Mother as his Teacher and infallible guide along the demanding path of his entire life. How can we give enough thanks for this extraordinary gift that was given by Heaven to our Family?”

Happy New Year 2024, with my best wishes for each of you and your families. May it be a beautiful year for all of us and a year of peace for this humanity that is still suffering so much.

Don Angel