

SAVIO

**A Study Guide for Parents,
Priests and Educators**

to accompany

SAINT DOMINIC SAVIO by St. John Bosco

by

Joseph Aubry, S.D.B.



REVISED EDITION

A SAINT SPEAKS TO EDUCATORS

Dominic Savio was a high school boy in the school of Saint John Bosco. The brilliant educator-saint taught Dominic and his companions a zest for life and zeal for down-to-earth teenage holiness.

Saint John Bosco's own account of Dominic's life is a spiritual classic of charity and simplicity. In this Study Guide, Father Joseph Aubry shows parents, priests, educators—all those who work daily with the young—how to apply the wisdom of Saint John Bosco to their own efforts.

What Others Say

“Savio is a magnificent example of youthful sanctity.”

Pope Paul VI

“Saint Dominic Savio comes from your midst. He is one of your own. In a unique and timely manner he is able to speak to you personally. Dominic Savio is in a very particular way a Saint for the young believer.”

Cardinal Humberto Medeiros

The Study Guide is “A valuable MUST for educators everywhere.”

*Bro. Gerard Harasym, SDB
National Moderator,
St. Dominic Savio Clubs*

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Joseph Aubry, S.D.B.

translated by Joseph Boenzi, S.D.B.

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The Spiritual Writings of St. John Bosco

The Salesian Spirit

The Renewal of Our Salesian Life

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Introduction

Why do so many of us approach Dominic Savio with little enthusiasm? Perhaps it is because this young saint has not always been presented to us in his true stature. For many of us, in fact, he is almost a total stranger.

Yet it is important that we discover the identity of this youngster. The Church singles out some of her children and calls them “saints” precisely to make them known and to offer them as examples of Christian living. In Dominic’s case this is particularly clear. Pius XI saw in Savio a model for all young Christians and called him “a little—no, I mean a giant of the Spirit!” Pius XII went on to explain, on the day of his canonization: “At an age so tender, one might expect to find only a kindly and amiable disposition of soul. Instead we are surprised to discover the wonderful paths of the inspiration of divine grace, a constant and unreserved attachment to the things of heaven which his faith understood with an intensity that is rare.” Even Don Bosco in his great admiration for Dominic could not speak about this boy without being deeply moved.

Dominic would not appreciate a purely emotional or sentimental admiration. He was not that type. We will therefore stick to the facts. To facilitate objectivity, we propose a series of reflections on three dimensions of this young saint’s style of holiness: the historical, spiritual and prophetic.

This study is not a biography, nor does it pretend to be the last word on Dominic Savio. It is rather meant to serve as an

introduction—a type of “guide book.” Its style is purposely simple and at times even “telegraphic.” It is not written for children nor for historians, but for parents and educators who want to become better acquainted with Dominic in order to help the young grow up to be “giants of the Spirit.”

CHAPTER ONE

Historical References

A saint is always an historical figure. This simple statement needs to be properly understood. It means that holiness is not some abstract virtue, but a way of life. It is the whole-hearted commitment to Christ and the Gospel realized in a certain moment, in a certain place, through concrete actions and circumstances. This is as true for Dominic Savio as for every other saint. Therefore, we will not try to manufacture a “heavenly” or an “airborne” Dominic. We wish to bring our study down to earth and see Dominic as he was in real life. When we know the truth about him, we will be able to appreciate him more fully.

Any serious historical study must always return to primary sources, and in the biography of Savio written by Don Bosco we have an exceptionally valuable document at our disposal. How many saints offer historians such a gift: their life story chronicled by another saint, by their spiritual director who lived in constant contact with them during the three most important years of their lives? This *Vita del Giovinetto Savio Domenico*, published in January 1859, is our surest and richest guide. As Eugene Ceria describes it, this book is “perhaps Don Bosco’s masterpiece.” When this work was called into question during the apostolic process for Dorninic’s canonization as being too moralizing and untrue to history, Pius XI ordered an examination by the history department of the Congregation of

Rites (1931-32). After a thorough examination, this congregation spoke favorably of its authentic historicity.

Other very useful documents include the minutes of the diocesan and apostolic investigations made for Dominic's beatification and canonization, and Caviglia's commentaries. We also have the life written by Cardinal Salotti, the precious volume entitled *S. Domenico Savio nel ricordo dei contemporanei*, the special April 1950 issue of the *Salesianum* magazine (seven articles), and the recent *Nuova vita di Domenico Savio* by the tireless researcher, Michael Molineris.

This study carries with it a number of interesting side benefits. Our investigation of the life of Dominic Savio will immerse us in the history of the first Salesian Oratory. We will gain added insights into the character of the great educator and patron of youth, St. John Bosco, and witness his "preventive system" of education in action as he prepared for the foundation of the Salesian Congregation.

FIRST PERIOD

THE CHILD (APRIL 2, 1842 – OCTOBER 2, 1854)

1. Origins

On March 2, 1840, in Cerretto d'Asti, Carl Savio (1815-1891) of Castelnuovo d'Asti (hamlet of Ravello), blacksmith, married Brigida Gaiato (1820-1871), a seamstress. The young couple set up house in Mondonio, where on November 3, Brigida gave birth to a son whom she named Dominic. The baby died on November 18.

In 1841 the Savios moved to San Giovanni di Riva, near Chieri, where our Dominic Joseph was born on April 2, 1842, at 9 o'clock in the morning. That afternoon at 5:00 he was baptized in the church of Riva.

In November of the following year, the family returned to

the hill country, renting a home in Morialdo (in the Township of Castelnuovo), about one mile from the hamlet of Becchi. Here Dominic passed ten years of his brief life. Two brothers and two sisters were born in this house: Carl (1844) who died the day after birth, Remondina (1845), Maria (1847), who died at the age of eleven, and John (1850).

We observe that Dominic was “a son of the common people,” born in a profoundly Christian family. His parents were still quite young at the time of his birth: Brigida was only twenty-two years old, and Carl was twenty-six. They were poor and had already been visited by grief.

2. First signs of a Christian spirit

Dominic was a naturally gifted child. He had a stupendous memory (cf. the episode of his first meeting with Don Bosco at Becchi), a lively intelligence (he was always among the top of his class at school), a warm sensitivity (for his father when he used to return home from work, for his friends, for those who suffered), a strong will and self-mastery (in keeping his resolutions, in putting up with suffering), and an open, cheerful, spontaneous personality.

He was unfortunate in other respects. He had a fragile constitution. Physically he was always somewhat small for his age. He had striking blue eyes, “calm but penetrating, which mirrored the beauty of his heart.”

The grace of God made itself felt very early in Dominic’s life. At the age of four he knew the usual prayers and liked to pray alone. From the age of five he attended Mass almost every day. He would often be found waiting for the chaplain to open the doors of the village church, and before long had mastered all the rituals and Latin responses of an altar boy.

When he was six and a half (1848) he began to frequent Morialdo’s one-room school. His teacher was the young chaplain, Fr. Zucca, who was thirty years old. Six months later, since Dominic knew the “little catechism” by heart, he was admitted by

an extraordinary permission to his First Communion, which he made on Easter Sunday April 8, 1849, in the same parish church of Castelnuovo where St. Joseph Cafasso and St. John Bosco had made their first Communions. John Cagliero, who was eleven years old at the time, served the Mass. Dominic's fervor that day was exceptional, and he made his famous four-fold resolution that would be the true starting point of his sanctity.

3. Thirst for study

From November 1848 to September 1850, Dominic followed the "lower cycle" of the Morialdo school (first and second grades). When the time came for him to transfer into the "upper cycle" in Castelnuovo, his mother decided to keep him at home. He was still quite small for his age and his health was not at all good. Dominic, however, wanted to study. When he was ten years old he began to plead and insist until finally his parents allowed him to go to school in Castelnuovo in the summer of 1852. Summer and winter he trekked twice a day the three-mile-road to school and back. From June 21, 1852, until September, then from November until February 1853, he covered the material of the third and fourth grades. Fr. Allora, his teacher, left us this report: "He made marvelous progress in his school work." It was during this period that Dominic told a passing farmer: "I'm not scared. I've got my guardian angel to keep me company. I work for a master that pays real good wages." We also recall the two episodes involving invitations to go for a dip in the stream,

In February 1853 Dominic, overtired, became sick. Once again the family moved to Mondonio, where another brother and three of Dominic's sisters were born: William (April 20, 1853) died at the age of twelve—like Dominic and John he would become a student at the Oratory of Valdocco; Catherine (1856), Dominic's god-child; Teresa (1859); the only one able to testify at the process for his beatification; and Luigia (1863), who died at fifteen months.

On April 13, 1853, Dominic received the Sacrament of Confirmation in the parish church of Castelnuovo. For a year and a half he frequented the school of Mondonio, completing his elementary education. He began to study Latin with Fr. Cugliero, to whom he manifested his desire to become a priest. During this period we find Dominic accepting an unjust punishment for a classroom prank. Fr. Cugliero was so impressed with the boy that he spoke to Don Bosco about him.

4. The Decisive Meeting

On Monday, October 2, 1854, the day after the solemnity of the Holy Rosary, Dominic and his father went to meet Don Bosco at Becchi. Don Bosco was struck by the workings of grace in this twelve and one half-year-old boy. We recall their famous dialogue on the material and the tailor. In this decisive moment, Dominic already showed his own personality. Guided by a precise ideal, he was capable of making great efforts and sacrifices to keep on the path of Christian holiness.

SECOND PERIOD:

THE ADOLESCENT AT DON BOSCO'S

ORATORY IN TURIN

(OCTOBER 29, 1854 TO MARCH 1, 1857)

1. The Oratory: How Dominic Finds It

After the stage coach trip from Castelnuovo to Turin, Dominic and his father arrived at the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales (in the "Valdocco district") on Sunday, October 29, 1854. He immediately went to Don Bosco's office (as often portrayed in pictures: dialogue on the motto "*Da mihi animas*").

Don Bosco was in his prime at thirty-nine, and his work was just beginning to expand. The original apostolate, the Sun-

day Oratory with several hundred boys, now included a night school and, since 1847, the “annex house”—a hospice for boys who had come to the city to study or find work. There were sixty-five residents when Dominic entered the program. A year later eighty artisans and thirty-five students boarded at the Oratory, and by 1857 the number had climbed to approximately one hundred seventy. A year had passed since Don Bosco had installed three rudimentary work rooms for apprentice shoemakers, tailors and bookbinders. Dominic would see a new workshop open for carpenters in 1856. Finally, it was one year since Don Bosco had fully launched the apostolate of the popular press, begun in September 1853, with the monthly *Catholic Readings*. It was a time in which Don Bosco fought anti-clerical and Waldensian propaganda and was protected by the dog “Grigio,” whom Dominic certainly saw and petted.

The plan of the Oratory included a complex of three adjoining buildings constructed at different times. As a result, the appearance of the Oratory was rather motley. On the left there was the church of *Saint Francis de Sales* (blessed on June 20, 1853) which was to witness Dominic’s ecstatic fervor. At the center, the little old *Pinardi House*—two stories, nine rooms, which included shops and sleeping quarters. Its famous shed, which formerly served as the chapel, had become the study hall. Dominic would work there for almost two years.

On the right was the *residence building*, a very important three-story construction which had only recently been completed. Its two wings connected on a right angle to form an “L-shaped” structure with porticos at ground level, housing classrooms, a kitchen and dining room, dormitories, and Don Bosco’s offices and bedroom. In March 1856, Dominic would see the demolition of the *Pinardi House* for the elongation of the southern wing of the residence, unifying the style and connecting everything to the church.

Behind these buildings was a small yard which served as a playground. In front there was a triangular courtyard which contained a vegetable garden and further recreational space for

the boys of the Oratory. It was enclosed by a small wall which bordered with the public road, *Via della Giardiniera*, which was removed for construction of the Church of Mary Help of Christians in 1865. All this covered less than 4000 square meters, and was still on the outskirts of the city.

The Oratory staff. As permanent helpers, Don Bosco had only his mother, the wonderful *Mamma Margaret*, an aunt, *Marianna Occhiena*, a priest who had arrived two months earlier, the Reverend *Victor Alasonatti* (forty-two years old, prefect-economer), and several young clerics who helped supervise the boys while pursuing their education. Among these seminarians we find *Michael Rua* (seventeen), *John Baptist Francesia* and *John Cagliero* (both sixteen). A few months earlier (January 26, 1854) these young helpers had taken the name of *Salesians*; their group was gradually to expand. Dominic arrived precisely at the time when Don Bosco was working to establish the Salesians as a religious congregation (this would officially take place in December 1859).

The atmosphere of the house was one of practical asceticism (“Spartan poverty,” no heating, sufficient but simple food, patched clothes and army surplus coats). There was a hearty spirit of *work* and fervent *piety*, nurtured by religious instruction, a stress on the sacraments, and devotion to Mary. A joyful spirit of family unity and simplicity animated the entire house and every boy, artisan and student alike, experienced the extraordinary warmth of Don Bosco’s fatherly love.

2. School Year 1854-1855 (First and Second Grammar School)

The Piedmontese secondary school curriculum at that time was organized over a five-year program: three years of “Grammar School” (which would correspond to our sixth and eighth

grades), and two additional grades called *Humanities* (ninth grade) and *Rhetoric* (tenth grade). None of these classes were as yet held at the Oratory. The boys were sent to local schools. Don Bosco, however, wanted to avoid the public schools because of the political unrest (Turin was the capital of the Italian Risorgimento), and so he chose two private schools conducted by two very trustworthy friends. These were the semi-exclusive schools of Professor Joseph Bonzanino and of the Reverend Matthew Picco. Both catered to young men from Turin's first families (Dominic rubbed elbows with the sons of counts and government ministers, and found himself completely at ease). The Oratory boys, all from simple backgrounds, were accepted for only a nominal fee. They paid their way, above all by good example and by their seriousness in their studies.

Dominic entered the first grade of secondary school at Professor Bonzanino's school. The walk was much less than he was used to: Professor Bonzanino's school was approximately one mile from the Oratory. He did not make the trek alone as in Castelnuovo, but in the company of his classmates. As in the one-room school of Castelnuovo, Dominic took his daily duties as a student very seriously (note the episode of his victory over a temptation to skip classes) and he made such progress scholastically that he passed to the second grade after only a few months.

December began with the novena in preparation for the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Everyone at the Oratory was especially fervent that year. Between August and November there had been 1400 cholera victims in Turin, while no one at the Oratory had suffered so much as a fever. The youngsters attributed their deliverance to the Madonna. The feast of the Immaculate Virgin became a feast of genuine thanksgiving. But the feast of the Immaculate Conception was important for another reason. That year Catholics all over the world eagerly awaited the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God. Dominic made a general confession and on the evening of December 8th, consecrated

himself to Mary. This marked the starting point of a period of renewed fervor: a surprised Don Bosco began to “take note” of the boy’s acts of virtue. During that same year (March 1855?) Dominic heroically stopped a rock duel between two of his companions.

In March, one of Don Bosco’s sermons on holiness gave Dominic a thirst, almost an obsession for perfection: a new tap of his sanctity. During the spiritual retreat, thirteen-year-old Dominic struck up a deep friendship with John Massaglia, a seventeen-year-old rhetoric student. He took the initiative of founding the “Company of Mary Immaculate.” He was very discreet in forming this new sodality, inviting his best friends, the clerics Rua and Cagliero, then Bonetti and Bongiovanni (all eighteen years old) and Massaglia.

He passed part of the summer vacation (the end of July and August) with his family at Mondonio and at Piova-Massai d’Asti with his aunt Raimonda Succo (Carl’s sister). There he became very active apostolically with his companions in the village and above all with his sisters, Remondina (ten) and Maria (eight), and his two little brothers, John (five) and William (two). At the end of August he returned to Turin. In a letter to his father dated September and now reserved in the Salesian archives, he tells of his joy to have been able for the first time to spend an entire hour speaking with Don Bosco. Cholera once more threatened the city and he became a member of an association of emergency nurses. On September 8th, miraculously warned, he led Don Bosco to an old woman who was dying. In an analogous episode, one night he led the priest to the death-bed of a fallen-away Catholic.

3. School Year 1855-1856 (Third Grammar School)

The Oratory numbered ninety artisans and sixty-three students. Don Bosco opened a secondary school at the Oratory by inaugurating the third grade—the very class which Dominic was ready to enter. His teacher was the cleric, seventeen-year-

old John Francesia. Spared the daily four mile hike to and from school, Dominic's health improved. This allowed him greater freedom in his playground apostolate, and a greater possibility of "follow-up." Witnesses noted how that year the Oratory had a marked religious tone under the impulse of Dominic and the Company of Mary Immaculate. He passed from weekly to daily Communion.

Dominic was quick to welcome the new arrivals as the school year began. Among these was Camillo Gavio, who was enrolled in the school of fine arts in down-town Turin. Dominic helped him overcome his homesickness (sanctity = joy) and struck up a deep friendship. But the friendship did not last long; Camillo died on December 29.

In March or April 1856, Dominic and his friend John Massaglia (a cleric since October) exchanged letters which have been preserved. Sickness had constrained Massaglia to return home, where he died on May 20. Dominic was crushed by grief, and from that time on he had the foreboding of his own death.

In May 1856 Dominic became extraordinarily fervent and apostolic, as we see in an episode at the shrine to Mary set up in the Oratory dormitory. It was during this period that Dominic and Bongiovanni, with Don Bosco's help, drew up the regulations of the Company. On June 8th the members of the Company gathered before the altar of Our Lady of the Rosary in the church of Saint Francis de Sales. Dominic solemnly read the regulations and Rua was elected president. This event begins the last nine months of Dominic's life during which his zeal and enthusiasm gained momentum..

Toward the end of June, Dominic's health began to give way. Doctor Vallauri prescribed a momentary interruption of his studies and Don Bosco sent him home to Mondonio for a rest. He returned in late August for exams.

On September 12th, he asked Don Bosco for permission to go home again to "cure" his mother in the name of the Madonna. A difficult pregnancy had put her life in grave danger. When Dominic placed a scapular around her neck, how-

ever, the danger immediately passed and Brigida Savio delivered a healthy baby girl (Catherine). Dominic stood in as godfather at the baby's baptism before returning to Turin the next day. After exams he returned home again for a rest before the new school year began.

4. School Year 1856-1857 (Humanities)

Dominic entered the first year of high school in mid-October. As yet there were no high school courses offered at the Oratory. Consequently he had to continue his schooling downtown. This time he attended the school of Don Matthew Picco near the church of Saint Augustine only a ten or fifteen minute walk from the famous Consolata shrine. He continued to be a most helpful friend to everyone.

If the summer had brought back his health, the strain of the new school year and the typically bad weather of the Turin autumn forced him to bed. Consequently he missed classes and had to change his schedule in favor of rest, home-study, and light work around the house. During these months he especially enjoyed helping out in the infirmary and taking care of the sick.

His apostolic activity remained very intense. The Company worked so well that at Christmas Don Bosco had the joy of seeing all his boys receive Communion (episode with the artisan Rattazzi, who insults and slaps Dominic but who is forgiven; Dominic's growing premonition of an early death).

January-February: the harsh winter aggravated his ever-weakening health. He suffered from chronic headaches, stomach pains, a persistent and ugly cough. No one suspected the gravity of his illness, however, because Dominic rarely stayed in bed. He maintained his characteristic smile and never complained of pain. The doctor advised that the boy return to the fresh air of his country home. Dominic decided to go, but he would have preferred to stay with Don Bosco and die at the Oratory.

On the first Sunday of Lent, March 1st, the boys of the Oratory participated in a day of retreat. Dominic went to Confession and made his Communion with intense joy. Then, after the noontime dinner, he said farewell to Don Bosco and to his companions, without forgetting to give some last recommendations to the members of the Company. At about 2 o'clock he left with his father, who had come to take him home. He was convinced that he would die within a very short time.

THIRD PERIOD:

LAST DAYS AT MONDONIO AND AFTERWARDS

1. Last Illness and Death

Dominic remained on his feet another three or four days, but his cough worsened while his strength and appetite dwindled. Doctor Cafasso ordered him to bed. On Wednesday evening he went to bed, never to get up again. On Thursday, March 5, he underwent a bloodletting against the supposed "inflammation." He was to undergo ten blood lettings in five days, with a super human calm, after which he himself asked for the "heavenly doctor." He made his confession and received Communion knowing that this would be the last time, and he renewed his first Communion resolutions.

The last blood letting took place on Monday, March 9. "The disease is conquered now," the doctor triumphantly declared. Dominic smiled and asked for the last rites. By evening he had lost all his strength, but when the pastor, Father Dominic Grassi, came to call at about 8 o'clock, Dominic was lucid, tranquil and smiling. Around 9:00, he fell asleep. He woke up about a half-hour later. "Dad, it's time," he said, and asked his father to read him the litany-prayer for a happy death, which he repeated phrase for phrase. Then he seemed to fall asleep again. After a few minutes he opened his eyes and exclaimed with a clear and limpid voice, "Good-bye, Dad, good-bye! Oh!!! What

a beautiful sight I see!” He closed his eyes and fell back against his pillow so softly that his father believed he had fallen asleep again, but the boy had died. It was 10:00 pm. Dominic had lived fourteen years and eleven months.

On Tuesday, March 10, Carl Savio wrote a letter to Don Bosco announcing his son’s death. Don Bosco was deeply moved as he told the boys of Dominic’s death in a long talk after night prayers.

On Wednesday, March 11, the whole village of Mondonio participated in the funeral rites for Dominic. He was buried in the small cemetery near the chapel of SS. Fabian and Sebastian. In Turin, Father Picco broke the sad news to his students in a long eulogy before morning classes,

2. Dominic Speaks for Himself

One night, about a month after his death, Dominic *appeared to his father*. The boy assured him that he was in heaven where he was praying for the family (Don Bosco included this incident in the very first edition of the biography).

In January 1859 Don Bosco published the first edition of his *Life of Dominic Savio* in an issue of the monthly *Catholic Readings*. Other editions revised or reviewed by Don Bosco were published in 1860, 1861, 1866, and 1878: These later editions featured an appendix of graces received through Dominic’s intercession.

On December 6, 1876, Don Bosco had a dream in which he saw Dominic in glory. Dominic shared a number of revelations on the past, present, and future state of the Oratory and of the Salesian Congregation.

On January 11, 1879, sixty-four-year-old Carl Savio, Dominic’s father, went to live at the Oratory of Valdocco where he rendered various services as blacksmith, kitchen worker, etc. He died on December 16, 1891, at the age of seventy-six. His wife Brigida had died in Mondonio on July 14, 1871, at the age of fifty-one.

3. The Road to Canonization

The Diocesan Process for Dominic's beatification was begun by the chancery office of Turin on April 4, 1908, by Cardinal Richelmy. The postulator was Father Giovanni Marengo; the vice postulator was Father Luigi Piscetta.

February 10-11, 1914. The Apostolic Process for beatification was introduced in Rome by postulator Father Dante Munerati, on February 10, 1914. On October 27, 1914, Dominic's remains were identified and transferred from Mondonno to Valdocco where they were placed in the basilica of Mary Help of Christians. Teresa Savio, Dominic's sister was among the witnesses at the proceedings.

July 9, 1933. The Jubilee Year of the Resurrection—the Holy See officially recognized the decree of the heroicity of his virtues and Dominic was pronounced "Venerable." In his famous discourse, Pius XI presented Dominic as a model of purity, piety, and apostolic action. At the conclusion of the ceremony, the Pope received Giovanni Roda, then ninety-three, a former companion and "convert" of Dominic.

Dominic was beatified by Pius XII, on March 5, 1950, three-and-one half months before the canonization of Maria Goretti, who at the age of twelve preferred to die rather than sin. The two miracles required for Dominic's beatification were the cure of a seven-year-old boy from Salerno, Albano Sabato, in 1927, and of a ten-year-old girl from Barcelona in 1936.

On *June 12, in the Marian Year 1954*, Dominic was canonized, again by Pope Pius XII, together with Pier-Louis Chanel (+1842), Gaspare del Bufalo (+1837), Joseph Pignate SJ (+1811), and Maria-Crocifissa Di Rosa (+1855), Only fifteen days earlier, on May 29, Pius X, the Pope of the Eucharist, had been declared a saint.

This time the two miracles satisfying the requirements for Dominic's canonization involved two women. One, Mrs. Maria Porcelli, was the mother of six children, and the other, Mrs. Antoinette Miglietti, was the mother of four. Both were from the

southern Italian province of Lecce, and both miracles took place within a few days of Dominic's beatification.

On June 8, 1956, Pius XII proclaimed Saint Dominic Savio the "heavenly protector before God of choirboys" (*pueri cantores*).

CHAPTER TWO

Dominic's Spiritual Orientation

Two characteristics stand out in this original and fascinating figure of Christian youth. First was his *unity of spirit* in a harmonious ascent from the beginning to the end of his life, to the heights of love—a love that logically and progressively made greater and greater demands. And secondly, his *wealth of character* with its providential multiplicity of gifts, virtues, and sense of commitment that made Dominic a very suitable model for Christian children and adolescents.

CHILDHOOD ORIENTED TOWARD GOD: A BOY FROM THE COUNTRY

1. A Life in God's Presence

The foundation of Dominic's Christian life consisted in that stupendous attraction he felt from childhood for the mystery of a God who is invisible and yet present and accessible. Every "religious" life begins by entering into a personal relation and dialogue with the living God. We could call this "primordial grace." It presupposes, however, an atmosphere of *intense faith and recollection*.

Young Dominic found himself in this atmosphere both at home, in the warmth of his working class family and in the context of his tranquil country village of Morialdo, “the village by the rolling hills.” Prayer played an important role in the Savio household. The family prayed together, and the children were encouraged to pray on their own. It is no surprise, then, that as a very young child Dominic already had a taste for prayer. Very early this piety was directed toward Christ’s presence in the Eucharist. From the time he was five years old, the church and the altar became the focal point of his spiritual life. His biography abounds in significant episodes regarding the Mass: how he tried to go to Mass daily, his devotion during the services, his determination and struggle to master the ceremonies proper to an altar boy, and how he longed to receive Communion.

Dominic not only learned to live “under the eye of God,” of Christ, of Mary and of his guardian angel, but also *in their company*. This attitude enlightened and inspired his whole life. At the age of ten he was not afraid to walk three miles to school all by himself. His response to the farmer on the road is typical: “I’m not alone.” It was exactly this sense of piety and his admirable behavior during prayer that would strike the priest of the mission parish of Mondonio when Dominic was eleven, and later his companions and teachers in Turin. This was the cornerstone. No one can be “religious” without perceiving the invisible world of the Spirit, of which the first reality is God—God is present. With this as the starting point, life can unfold in a context of faith.

2. Personal Love for Christ and His Mother

For Dominic, religion became more and more an expression of his relationship with God and neighbor. This attitude is brought into sharp relief by the resolutions he made at his first Communion. Already at the age of seven he realized that he had certain responsibilities before God, and his four-fold pro-

posal has the tone of a “plan of life.” His third resolution—*my friends shall be Jesus and Mary*—appears to be the key to this whole plan. In a way, it explains and justifies the other three.

One must read chapter three of Don Bosco’s life of Savio very attentively in order to measure the full weight of Dominic’s decision to make Jesus and Mary his friends. His quest for sanctity had its beginnings here in a very personal way. His resolutions, “which guided his actions until the end of his life,” became almost a *leit-motif* in the most important moments of his life. He consecrated himself to Mary on the evening of December 8, 1854, and during his daily visits to chapel he always reserved a moment for the Madonna. Jesus was really the center of his spirituality, however, as manifested in his serious preparations and thanksgivings for daily Communion. This friendship of his for Jesus and Mary comes to the fore, finally, on his death bed. Meeting Jesus, perceiving his love, uniting oneself completely and firmly to him: this is what the Christian life is all about. In Dominic’s case, this attachment to Christ is tightly linked to the Eucharist, as underlined in his second resolution, “I will go to Confession and Communion as often as my confessor allows me,” (Remember that when Dominic arrived at the Oratory, he had been going to Communion once a month, but by the end of the year he was approaching the Sacrament daily.) And if he placed Mary beside Jesus as the second pillar of his life, it was probably the result of the devotion he had learned at home where the family used to recite the Angelus and the rosary every day.

3. The Categorical Refusal of Every Sin

“You are my friends if you do what I command you” (John 15, 14). “Stronger than death is love.”

Dominic took his pact of friendship with Jesus and Mary so seriously that he concluded it as one would conclude any solemn treaty—by staking his life on it. “Death but not sin!” This is a daring way for a seven-year-old to affirm his trust in

God! From this moment, Dominic had the soul of a martyr, just like Maria Goretti, who was also nourished and fortified by the Eucharist.

Early in life Dominic was sensitive to goodness and horrified by evil. The very thought of committing sin brought him to tears, as when he begged his mother for forgiveness on the night before his first Communion, or when he feared that he had perhaps betrayed his friendship with Jesus, during the first incident at the swimming hole. We do not know the details of what exactly took place, but it seems the boy was alarmed because of his sense of modesty. When his mother later warned him that playing in the torrents of the Po could be physically and spiritually dangerous, “he displayed profound sorrow . . . and wept bitterly.” The second time he was invited to go “down to the river,” he categorically refused.

Similarly, he felt “great remorse” when, during his first year in Turin, he realized that he was about to give in to the evil advice of some classmates who wanted him to join them and play truant. Afterwards he was more careful about whom he chose for friends, whom he divided into three categories.

4. Heroic Fulfilment of His Day-to-day Duties

At home, his mother “received nothing but comfort from him.” *At school*, he worked very hard and made rapid progress in his studies. Even in the elementary school of Castelnuovo he amazed his teacher Fr. Aliora by his serious efforts and concentration in class. This fact should not be overlooked!

Let us try to understand what it meant for a ten-year-old boy, who was small for his age, to hike twelve miles every day, no matter what the weather. This is one of the most striking proofs we have that Dominic was a strong-willed boy. But this obstinate energy was sustained by grace! He considered the hard life of a school boy as his way of serving God, and so he also experienced profound joy. For further illustrations of this it will help to read chapter five of Don Bosco’s life of Dominic

attentively, as well as the beginning of chapters nine and twenty-six.

Dominic was a bright lad, though not exceptionally so. If he was always among the first in his class, it was more the fruit of his supernatural love for work than his intelligence. There was never a student more attentive, hard-working, and willing to improve! We would do well to pause for a moment and reflect on Don Bosco's remarks in the middle of his biography, chapter eight. In his first few months at the Oratory, Dominic did not stand out among his companions except that he was always open with his superiors and "very careful to keep the rules of the house . . . He showed a remarkable sense of duty which would be difficult to beat." Observe his reaction after seven hours in ecstasy. Again it is typical—Don Bosco says, "He humbly asked forgiveness for breaking the rules of the house."

Dominic treasured his friends and tried to be on good terms with everyone. This did not stop him from refusing to approve of or follow them if they misbehaved. Yet he never held himself aloof. He radiated a human warmth and kindness that made him "the delight of his companions," as Father Cagliero described him. He could sympathize with those in trouble to the point of accepting a humiliating punishment in the place of his accusers. To sum up, he was firm when it came to being faithful to what he knew were his own ideals and understanding when it came to accepting the faults and injustices of others.

Dominic's four-fold program (presence of God, personal love for Christ and his Mother, refusal of sin, devotion to duty) is at the basis of every Christian spirituality. These virtues were already so ingrained in Dominic as a youngster that after his first meeting with Don Bosco, the priest confessed, "I was quite surprised to see the wonderful workings of divine grace in a boy so young." Far from weakening in the future, these virtues would take root and grow, and new spiritual horizons would more clearly define Dominic's youthful, open, and original personality.

ADOLESCENCE: THE YOUNG TEENAGER IN THE CITY

1. The Marvel of an Adolescent Saint in the Hands of a Priest Saint

Three elements converged in order to permit Dominic to become the saint he should be: his age, the environment, and a sure guide.

His Age

Dominic had just entered that period of life which psychologists call “the first adolescence.” Taking the adolescent phase as a whole, they distinguish between the “stage of the uneasiness of puberty, from twelve to about sixteen years old, and that of youthful enthusiasm.” It is unreasonable to imagine Dominic as an eternal child. His physical aspect was deceiving. His small build and slight stature, his light complexion with those tranquil and penetrating blue eyes gave him the appearance of a much younger boy. However, psychologically, intellectually, and more so spiritually, he was an *adolescent*.

There is one feature of this age that he did not exhibit: instability. His extraordinary self-mastery, his docility to the advice of Don Bosco, and above all his habitual spirit of recollection and union with God helped him to dominate the natural fickleness of his age. But *he had all the other traits*, and these all contributed in some way to his adolescent holiness: the affirmation of self, the appeal of grand horizons, the strong sentiments and fervor. These resulted evidently in that surprising discovery and impassioned desire of his “to become a saint,” which appeared exactly during his first spring at Valdocco. He had that tremendous will to be a doer, to be an influence on others, to construct a “great work,” beginning with the association which he dubbed “The Company of Mary Im-

maculate.” He had an energetic but tender devotion for the Madonna, and a genuine affection for his intimate friends.

On the other hand, he already exhibited some of the qualities that would characterize the period of “youthful enthusiasms.” It is a noteworthy fact that this boy of thirteen or fourteen (who had therefore only begun his secondary studies) always found himself at ease among youth of sixteen and seventeen, with teenage tradesmen as well as with seminarians. His friend John Massaglia, for example, was older than Dominic by four years. During the meetings of the Company of Mary Immaculate (CMI) he spoke with a sense of authority. He had the “assurance of a professor.” These were all signs that Dominic was more mature than the average boy of his age.

Even if not characterized by instability, these twenty-eight months do not give the impression of that peaceful growth he experienced in the first twelve years of his life. He had his share of troubles and turbulent moments at the Oratory. For instance, when he first “tried out” for sanctity, he thought he must become rigid and grave. Later on, he suffered a bad case of scruples which led him to the confessional every three or four days. His fury to practice extraordinary penances almost exasperated Don Bosco. Finally, there was the hurried “business” that accompanied his foreboding of an early death. He knew suffering and repeated tragedy: the terrible grief at the untimely death of two of his closest friends, his alarm over his poor health, his painful departure from the Oratory. All these factors make our Dominic an authentic and attractive *adolescent*, and the Church has consecrated this title in the liturgical prayers she dedicates to him.

His New Environment

It is important to realize that Dominic experienced a total change of environment when he was twelve years old. He passed from the intimacy of a tightly knit family to the wide open world of a youth hostel. The flexibility of a one-room

school in a tranquil country town was traded for the competitive schedule of a graded classroom in the noisy capital city. Providence willed that he should know both sides of life. At the Oratory he was both a boarder and a day student, and came into contact with rough artisans as well as the malicious. He found himself among boys who played hooky from school, who blasphemed at the drop of a hat, who snickered at bad magazines, who complained about the least little inconvenience and who found no difficulty in solving their problems with their fists or in a rock-duel. It was among these boys that Dominic grew up and became a saint.

When Dominic came to the city he entered the modern world. There were timetables and rules to keep at the Oratory and at school. He passed the markets and the inviting display windows of Turin's fashionable downtown shops on his way to school every morning. He saw fields sold to developers and apartment buildings being constructed. He had his share of chores and homework to do and became involved in all the sports boys his age played. Except for bicycles and television, his life was not much different from today's typical junior high school student. He is the "young student saint": a type of saint unknown before in the Church. We must also add that he was not totally an exception. In that first Salesian house where he came to live in 1854, he had plenty of reinforcement. As we have noted above, among the thorns many lilies grew.

A Guide

This is the novelty that is most striking. Adolescence is the period of personality development: a time when one needs a great amount of personal guidance and individual attention. Who does not know how restless youngsters become at this age? Every educator knows how many teenagers become very secretive and obstinate at this age. But even here Dominic Savio is an ideal model for the adolescent. He provides the disconcerting proof of the success that follows when the generosity of the

adolescent meets the concern and guidance of a true priest. Dominic's greatest asset when he entered Don Bosco's house was his desire to be supple material in the hands of the tailor. "He placed himself completely in the hands of his superiors," accepting their words as if coming from God himself. It was to *this ready docility and his willingness to let himself be guided* that Don Bosco attributed the starting point of Dominic's quest for holiness as a student.

The Sacrament of Penance played a decisive role in Dominic's development as monthly Confession became weekly. Dominic programmed this as a means of guidance, showing an "unlimited confidence" in his spiritual director (this phrase is taken from Don Bosco's biography, chapter fourteen—a great chapter to be meditated upon carefully). Never as during this period did Don Bosco better realize his title and function as "father and teacher of adolescents."

Let us take a look at the marvelous road which our young adolescent, so well guided, was about to take. Perhaps this whole period could be characterized on the spiritual plane as the discovery of the mystery of redemption. Dominic began to perceive Jesus as "Savior." He saw Mary as the "Immaculate Mother of Sorrows." He became very conscious of his need and the need of all his companions to be saved . . . through the mystery of the cross.

2. Two Fundamental Friendships Grow and Become More Radical

Under the pressure of external events and his own inner needs, Dominic found himself again before Jesus and Mary. The first spiritual event to mark his stay at Don Bosco's was the feast of the Immaculate Conception which in 1854 coincided with the proclamation of this mystery as a dogma of the faith by Pius IX. This moving encounter with the Immaculate Virgin was an important milestone for Dominic; and we can never meditate

on it enough. His sanctity, the sanctity of the “adolescent saint,” is the outcome of that December 8th.

On that day, by means of a general confession and his personal consecration to the Madonna, he made the double gesture of entrusting himself to the purifying ministry of a priest and to Mary most pure.

His total dedication to Mary. From that moment onward he would see Mary under the guise of the *Immaculate One*, and the resolution he made at his First Communion would assume a new aspect. The evil which he would abhor to the point of choosing “death before sin” was by now, in a way more precisely, impurity. Don Bosco sees this tender and almost chivalrous devotion to Mary Immaculate (and also to the Immaculate Heart of Mary) as the key to Dominic’s limpid purity and his heroic efforts to preserve it intact.

Dominic also began to have a devotion to Mary as the *Mother of Sorrows*. Every Wednesday he received Communion in her honor and prayed for the conversion of sinners. On Fridays he would bring a few companions to chapel where they would recite together the seven sorrows of Mary. He was often observed rapt in prayer before the small shrine to Our Lady of Sorrows in the dormitory. At one point he wanted to fast on bread and water every Saturday in her honor, but was forbidden.

This double devotion inspired his apostolate, especially in the Company of Mary Immaculate. He was so enthusiastic in his personal devotion that he was able to demand that all members truly consecrate themselves to the Virgin Mary. Finally, his greatest consolation at the moment of death was “the assistance of the powerful and loving Mother of God.”

Dominic also found himself in a new position before Jesus. The Mass and daily Communion had become more meaningful to him, and he renewed their benefits by frequent visits to the chapel which was always close by. He learned to integrate devotion and faith, and saw Jesus as *Savior*—*his* Savior and the *Savior of his companions*. It was Don Bosco who led him to this perspective.

His spirituality was eminently concrete. Virtue was no abstraction, but a personal commitment. Sin also was personal in the sense that it involved an individual in a radical choice. It was a personal offense against the heavenly Father. As such, it could not be limited to the category of “faults.” His hatred for sin grew gradually as he better perceived how much it cost Christ and His mother. All these ideas began to converge. He would speak instinctively of the *passion* of Jesus and make innumerable and surprising references to Christ *who shed His blood for us*. The paschal event nourished his love, his spirit of penitence, and his apostolic zeal.

His spirit of penance: Dominic was not afraid of suffering. He saw it as an opportunity to grow in the likeness of the suffering Jesus. This sustained him when he was falsely accused, when he slept with only one blanket in the wintertime, when he was forced to take bitter medicines; and when he underwent blood-letting at the hands of the doctor even up to one hour before his death.

His apostolic zeal received its nourishment at the same font: the desire to impede and atone for sin because it destroyed the work of divine grace. To ensure the salvation of his companions he found many ways of doing good. This explains the nature of his various interventions. A good example of his concern can be seen in the way he handled the rock duel. In a surprise move, he held up a crucifix and laid down the conditions for the fight: “You have to look at this crucifix . . . and say, ‘Jesus was innocent and died forgiving his murderers, but I am a sinner and I’m going to offend him by bloody revenge!’”

Other interventions were less dramatic but just as effective. He reacted immediately to blasphemy, which hurt him very much—even physically. On the playground, during a lull in the recreation, he would recount edifying stories or teach his companions how to make the sign of the cross well. Here is an adolescent who lived the whole mystery of redemption under the sign of Jesus crucified and of his immaculate and sorrowful mother.

3. The Commitment to Joyful Holiness

The second great spiritual event in the life of this teenager occurred in the spring of 1855. Don Bosco preached a sermon on holiness that ignited in this young soul a fire that would never die. He made a *great discovery*: *God wanted him to be a saint*, and he defined sanctity in these words: “I want to give all that I am and all that I have to the Lord.” It was a precise call to a more complete gift of self, and Dominic began to realize that love demanded that he make continual headway, that he grow, that he become ever more the master of himself. “I have to and I *can* belong totally to the Lord,” he concluded.

The call to holiness coincided with Dominic Savio’s interior impulses. “I feel a need to become a saint,” he confided to Don Bosco, “and I absolutely want to be one.” Chapter ten of Don Bosco’s biography is especially helpful if we want to see how the action of grace, personal energy, and the influence of a minister of God worked together harmoniously in Savio’s life. At a certain point, we read, Dominic thinks that he must imitate the severe practices of penance and extraordinary piety that are usually reported in the lives of the saints. Don Bosco corrects him. He prescribes smiling, keeping calm, fulfilling his ordinary duties and joining whole-heartedly in the games and recreations with his companions.

“I’m going to be a saint” becomes the vital principle that motivates this young adolescent for the next two years until his death. He understands the purpose of his whole existence only in these terms. “If I don’t become a saint, I won’t ever amount to anything . . . and I will be unhappy until I do.” In a feastday greeting to Don Bosco in late June of that same year, Dominic renews his request: “please help me to become a saint.” He instills this ideal in the Company of Mary Immaculate, which he forms during this period. Its members were to be youths working together to “become saints,” as we see in his conversations with Camillo Gavin and John Massaglia. By May 1856, “to become a saint” had become a constant refrain. He was doing

nothing other than restating in a *positive form* that resolution made six years earlier. “Death but not sin.” His love for Jesus and Mary was now cast in absolute terms.

The most marvelous aspect of this new impulse is the profound joy that animates it. Dominic’s brand of holiness is therefore genuinely Salesian. This becomes evident when *he* defines sanctity as “keeping very cheerful” (his admirable response to Gavio sums up the Salesian triptych of piety, work, joy). A few years later Don Bosco gave this very program to Francis Besucco. The Eucharist, like a divine spring, nourishes this joy.

Perhaps at this point it would be opportune to note that Dominic was guided by the “holy fear of the Lord” but that he was not afraid of God. He never doubted his eternal salvation. “Don Bosco made use of the concept of hell when it was necessary to motivate or move someone who may have needed it, but he did not make it a key point in his teaching on the spiritual life. In Savio’s conversations, the idea of hell only occurred a few times, and only then in the case of a grave admonition to certain companions. As far as he himself was concerned, he never returned to the subject, as if he were not at all interested. Instead, he often speaks about heaven and lives in an almost celestial joy, in fulfillment of the words of Jesus, “I shall see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”

4. Apostolic Action

To the three-fold formula for sanctity noted above, Don Bosco added the decisive element of the apostolate (Don Bosco’s chapter ten is tightly linked to his eleventh chapter on this point). During his last two years, the adolescent saint, anticipating his priestly ideal, became an ardent apostle in his own familiar surroundings. This is a *natural result of the wholesome purity* which he offered to the Immaculate Virgin. The two preceding themes, after all, were nothing other than an intensifi-

cation of his orientation as a child, This, instead, is an innovation, and here is where the mind of Dominic comes singularly close to Don Bosco's own point of view. He seems to have assimilated the motto, "Lord, give me souls!" and the method, "Let me love to let Jesus be loved." Dominic is a *true Salesian* before the Salesian Congregation is even founded.

What animated his apostolate?

Interiorly, Dominic was strengthened and animated by his *love* for Jesus as Savior, which he nourished in the Eucharist, and for Mary as the Immaculate Mother of Sorrows. This gave him a deep appreciation for every individual person. Exteriorly, he had an extraordinary capacity to win the affection of others because of his outgoing and honest nature. These two qualities worked in his favor as a young apostle.

Any lingering idea of a Dominic who was more or less ingenuous or sleepy-headed is completely false and calumnious. It is enough to read the beginning of Don Bosco's twelfth chapter. Perhaps any blame for such an idea would lie with a very bad portrayal of Dominic as represented in so many statues and paintings! Anyone who ever knew him has testified to his air of cheerfulness and his lively nature which endeared him even to companions who were less inclined towards religion. Everyone enjoyed his company, "his gentle and pleasant manner of dealing with people." According to his companions Cagliero, Piano, and Cerruti, "His behavior was never affected or distorted . . . He was a friend to all and loved by all. He cared for his companions out of true love." He was always cheerful and even-tempered. "In his free time he was the life of the recreation." Michael Rua testified that, "During the recreation he took a lively part in the games to the delight of his friends." Once during class "he could not refrain from bursting into laughter" so that the teacher, Rua, made him kneel down in front of the class for punishment! In short, he was a very likeable and personable boy, capable of putting his popularity at

the service of his zeal for the welfare of his companions. “This was his most earnest aspiration.”

Personal Apostolate

Dominic found the natural outlet for his own energy in doing good among his companions.

- 1) He made every effort to obstruct and correct evil; whether it was in the form of brawls and arguments, blasphemy, dangers to the faith and purity (the anti-religious charlatan, the bad magazine) or complaining and murmuring.
- 2) At opportune moments he was ready to give good advice or to recount edifying stories from the lives of the saints. He was especially solicitous of five categories of companions: the unruly, new arrivals, the lonely, classmates with difficulties in school, and the sick— “my works of mercy!”
- 3) He was among those who taught catechism and prepared the Oratory children for their First Communion—a typically Salesian apostolate!
- 4) We frequently read of incidents when he led his companions to chapel for a prayer before the Blessed Sacrament or to the Blessed Mother; or brought his friends to Confession and Communion.
- 5) He intensified his apostolate in his home town during the summer holidays.

Don Bosco’s biography, chapters nine to sixteen, gives us a fairly complete picture of Dominic’s personal dedication and apostolic spirit among his peers. Most of the time he was well accepted, but at other times he received insults and injuries, especially from the artisans. His perseverance in the face of antagonism, however, won him even greater admiration.

Organized Apostolate

An important fact about the Company of Mary Immaculate comes to the surface. Don Bosco always attributed its creation to Dominic who was helped by the cleric Michael Rua and Joseph Bongiovanni. Here we see the culmination of his personality as an adolescent initiator and founder. The Company was a group which stressed piety and action at the same time. It operated with discretion, a true movement of Catholic action, autonomous and perfectly adapted to the environment. Its regulations are the written expression of Dominic's own soul, and the Company itself is nothing else than the institutionalization of Dominic's own personal program of holiness. One of the most noteworthy points here is friendship practiced among the members as a means of personal growth and of furthering the apostolate.

Wider Horizons

Dominic, as the faithful disciple of Don Bosco, also had a keen ecclesial spirit. His "sense of the Church" manifested itself in three important forms: a great love for the Pope, whom he desired to see; his strange preoccupation for the conversion of England, where he wanted to go and preach as a missionary; and constant thoughts for the foreign missions, for which he prayed every day. He echoed the spirit of the Little Flower when she said, "I will pass my heaven doing good on earth."

3. Suffering: the Sign and Spirit of Redemption

Knowing how to accept suffering is the badge of the truly great soul. It is the fullest form of love for Jesus and Mary. One remains astonished when confronted with the heroic strength manifested in the facts recounted by Don Bosco, especially when one begins to read between the lines. For example, not everything is reported in detail about the sufferings that tor-

mented Dominic's poor body during his last eighteen months. Only with Christian insight based on personal experiences can we appreciate his extraordinary spirit of love and generosity. Among the most indicative aspects of this heroic selflessness are:

- the continuity of the humble sacrifices that characterized his whole life;
- the *permanent smile* he maintained without ever complaining.
- his *obedience* in the quest for mortification—the proof that he was not self-seeking;
- his patience during his last illness— “Exceptional patience . . . he showed himself a model of holiness,” writes Don Bosco.
- the recurring references he made to Christ's passion, as we have noted above.

6. Mystical and Charismatic Life

Even if this is a delicate point, we can and should speak about it because we are dealing with the truth. We find this feature, which is lacking in a great number of saints, in our adolescent of fourteen years! It is the response of the infinite love which fills generous souls, but that fills them as it wills.

Ineffable intimacy with God and a foretaste of the joys of heaven. The starting point of Dominic's mystical expression is the Eucharist. Read the middle portion of Don Bosco's fourteenth chapter (“his thanksgiving knew no bounds”), then the famous twentieth chapter. When he received Communion or simply prayed before the tabernacle he would be caught up in “rapture.” He sees “things that are so beautiful that the hours fly by as if a moment” (We recall the episodes of the six-hour

thanksgiving, his dialogue with Jesus in a loud voice, and his vision of the Pope).

What is more extraordinary is that “he was so used to speaking with God that . . . even in the most noisy games he could still gather his thoughts together and raise his heart to God. He was animated by a love of God and by a ‘desire for the things of heaven’ to such an extent that could be said that he was habitually absorbed in God.” He would be caught up in these raptures and heavenly visions “in study hall, on his way to school and back, in the classroom, during recreation.” Similar phenomena are encountered only in the lives of the great mystics!

On his death-bed he said, “Oh Dad, I want to sing the praises of the Lord forever!” It is probable that he did have an apparition of Jesus and Mary in his last moments and his tranquility and joy at the point of death are incredible— “smiling,” says Don Bosco at the end of chapter twenty-five. Don Bosco’s own death would be much more humble!

The charisms of prophecy and miracles. Don Bosco narrates three episodes: Dominic guides him one night to the door of a dying Protestant; he foresees the conversion of England; he knows that his own death is imminent. There were other incidents too: finding the old woman in her death agony, and above all the prodigious help brought to his mother when she was about to give birth to Catherine. The scapular made by Dominic continued to work cures for many years to come. Finally, we know of the apparition to his father and the apparition to Don Bosco, which was full of precious instruction.

CONCLUSION

Here is an impressive saint! He is a strong, dynamic person, and a conqueror! A masterpiece of supernatural balance at a difficult age! Did he have any defects? Witnesses portray him as “a lively character, with a ready disposition. He was sensitive to

contradiction.” According to Cagliero and Cerruti he was “rather irascible by nature.” And one of his companions, the future Monsignor Francesco Vaschetti, affirms that he and Savio once got into a scuffle (in the playground in the heat of a game). In any case, Don Bosco explicitly states that he had to make “great efforts” to master his eyes and “to control the vehemence of his temper. Grace does not substitute personal effort, but provokes and sustains it. According to the beautiful title that Father Cojazzi gave his biography, Dominic was “a boy who knew what he wanted.”



CHAPTER THREE

Practical Lessons Learned From Dominic

The Church has officially recognized Dominic Savio's brand of holiness as authentic by canonizing him a saint of the universal Church. If the Christian teaching about Providence has any significance at all, we cannot doubt that Christ, the Church, and Don Bosco have something to say to us through this fourteen-year-old boy. The message to youth and educators alike is clear: the gospel—that is, a life of holiness—still has meaning today.

Dominic was never afraid to speak of “the things of heaven,” and his whole life became a proclamation of the Gospel. He was radical in his resolutions and radical in his actions. The preceding pages contain many useful teachings, but it is not out of place at this point to take a more radical step and formulate a practical program of holiness for ourselves in the light of Dominic's life. What follows is an invitation to each of us to reflect and deepen our appreciation of the Christian calling in the context of today's world and own particular situation.

FOR ADULTS

1. Lessons for Parents—Especially Mothers

The basis of Christian education is the family. As we have seen in the case of the Savios, the *sense of the presence of God* is fun-

damental for each and every Christian. This living contact with God is fostered by prayer and encouraged by example. It begins with prayer in the family (so much neglected nowadays), conscientious participation at religious functions, and above all adoration and love of God in the ordinary activities of every day life. “Good example” follows as a necessary consequence of this faith lived day by day, and is expressed in the way we judge and react to life, in our work, in the events we experience, in the difficulties and trials that come our way.

As a corollary to this sense of God’s presence, there is a second important element: the *refusal of sin*. Sin is perceived as the supreme evil, and there is a real concern about avoiding bad company, evil environments, and compromising situations.

Faith and a spirit of detachment are necessary for a solid education. In Dominic these can be traced quite clearly to his mother. Since she put the faith and holiness of her child above all else, she already allowed him at the age of five to go to Mass every day, even in the winter. When he was ten, she permitted him to walk twelve miles to and from school every day, no matter what the weather. Even though his health was weak, she gave him permission to live with Don Bosco in the unknown surroundings of the big city. Certainly today we instinctively show more concern—and rightly so—for our children’s health. But how often is this our *only* concern, as if they were not authentic sons of God who also need help to grow spiritually?

An early and well prepared First Communion is a blessing, a “treasure without compare.” Dominic learned to keep Christ as Savior at the center of his life, thanks to the example given him at home. When his parents realized that his spirit of piety and prayer was not a passing spurt of enthusiasm, they did not hesitate to ask their pastor that he be allowed to make his First Communion while still very young (he was seven: the customary age was twelve). They took it upon themselves to prepare him at home, and his mother was the one who was largely re-

sponsible for Dominic's very serious sense of commitment and his remarkable fervor. Don Bosco always insisted that parents have a serious responsibility before God and the Church for the Christian upbringing of their children, and he utilizes this incident to drive home his point. In the words of Vatican II, "Parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children . . . Let parents clearly recognize how vital a truly Christian family is for the life and development of God's own people."

Saint Dominic Savio and Saint Maria Goretti received much the same education at home. The similarity of these two youths is striking. St. Agnes and St. Aloysius Gonzaga were children of noblemen, Dominic and "Marietta" are children of the common people, born to young couples—working people who were forced to move several times. Assunta Goretti, Maria's mother, had married when she was just nineteen (Brigida Savio at twenty). She saw her first-born die at eight months (Brigida at fifteen days). She had ten children (as did Brigida), and Maria, even if she was the third child, would have an important role in helping to raise the other children (just like Dominic).

But aside from any curious comparisons and coincidences, both the Savio and the Goretti families were solidly Christian. "I taught her to pray and to fear offending God," Assunta said of her daughter. In fact, there was an atmosphere at home of fervent prayer and deep Marian devotion, of obedience, of avoidance of bad companions. Marietta had the exceptional fortune of being confirmed when she was six (as Dominic made his First Communion at the age of seven), and at her First Communion she too could have said although she probably never wrote it, "My friends will be Jesus and Mary, death but not sin."

Dominic's tenderness for his mother inspired a tenderness for Mary, the "Mother" *par excellence*. Providence seems to have willed to confide in him some sort of mission toward all moth-

ers. Two facts at least merit reflection. The first concerns the miraculous role played by the scapular that Dominic put around his mother's neck, embracing her in the name of the Madonna at the most explicit moment of motherhood. The second concerns the two miracles that Dominic obtained within the octave of his beatification—one on behalf of a mother of six children, the other for a mother of four.

2. Lessons for Priests and All Christian Educators

Education that claims to be “Christian” aims at the promotion of the whole person. Therefore, it includes *a vigorous preoccupation for the supernatural*. Pope Pius XI described the aim of Christian education as the cooperation “with grace to form Christ in the child.”

“The scope of education,” according to the French Jesuit P. Lyonnet, “is to render our youngsters blessed according to the Gospel, capable of kneeling without deceit at Bethlehem, at Nazareth, and on Calvary.” Furthermore, the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on Christian Education describes this duty with precision in its second paragraph. Producing university graduates, wide-awake citizens, athletes and artists are certainly worthwhile goals. Before everything else, however, Christian education must help the young grow in the likeness of Jesus Christ. It must produce saints, that is, boys and girls who are open and sincere, pure, the masters and mistresses of themselves, ready to welcome and to serve their brothers and sisters.

It is marvelous to see the power of God’s grace at work in children and young people. The world today finds itself in a very difficult situation spiritually, and the Church may be tempted to work only among adults. Now, without committing the opposite error of creating “kindergarten religion,” *pastors and Christian leaders need to become convinced that God is also concerned about children, pre-adolescents, teenagers, and young adults*. He loves them. They are often his privileged favorites.

(Isn't the Gospel enough for us? "Let the children come to me . . . and taking them up in his arms, he put his hands on them and blessed them" (Mark 10, 14-16). God's grace can operate in them as profoundly as it does in mature adults. In the mind of the Church, religion has never been "reserved for adults only." This is why she recommends early Communion and Confirmation.

How many wonders had God worked in the world through young people—young people in whom he incites a holiness glowing with purity, joy, faithful and generous love! Consider Mary of Nazareth, sixteen at the time of the annunciation . . . Agnes of Rome, twelve . . . Joan of Arc . . . Stanislaus Kostka, seventeen . . . the twenty-two page boy martyrs of Uganda . . . Maria Goretti . . . and right in the Salesian family, Dominic Savio, Michael Magone, and Francis Besucco. Perhaps we need to be a little more humble and fair in order to accept the lessons of these boys and girls, "mere children," who are holier than ourselves. And we ought to work with conviction to raise up *saints* among the young people that God entrusts to our care.

The active presence of a priest-guide is indispensable for the Christian adolescent. Here Dominic offers us an example of what Don Bosco judged to be the most important means of Christian growth. This growing boy confided completely in his confessor. He was equally ready to obey both his advice and his commands. With this decisive attitude he was able to become a saint. What Don Bosco says about confession needs to be extended to all forms of spiritual direction.

Besides the general directives given from the pulpit or in Don Bosco's "Good Nights" (already adapted for a young audience), and besides those received in the intimacy of the Sacrament of Penance, Dominic received some guidance in his frequent private conversations with Saint John Bosco. These were almost always very brief encounters, be they on the playground, after evening prayers, or in the saint's office. At most, these "sessions" lasted a couple of minutes. Only after one year

at the Oratory did Dominic spend an entire hour with Don Bosco.

We should make a special note of the *weekly confession* on the part of this admirably pure and generous teenager. The Sacrament of Reconciliation does not only restore a person to the grace of God or adjust disorders. It also permits the priest and penitent to “program” and “control” spiritual growth. It diffuses the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit as a divine help for human effort, purifying and stimulating love. To put it concisely, it helps one progress on the road of true holiness.

Two other precious means for the Christian education of adolescents are *devotion to Mary and frequent Communion*. The holiness of Dominic obliges us to reflect on the important role true devotion to the Madonna has in the spiritual life of an adolescent. It reinforces his faith in Christ and reinforces in him the virtue of purity. It diminishes the spiritual and emotional turmoil common at this age.

Is it a coincidence that Dominic should enthusiastically consecrate himself to Mary on December 8, 1854, and be canonized 100 years later during the Marian Year, 1954? Or can this be a sign that the Immaculate Virgin wants to be recognized as Queen and protectress of adolescents who want to grow up fighting for their purity?

The Madonna and the priest together lead Dominic Savio to Jesus, especially Jesus in the Eucharist. Let priest-educators meditate on Don Bosco’s method: “Before coming to the Oratory Dominic used to go to Confession and Communion once a month. But then he started going more often, especially after he had heard me say once, ‘Boys, if you want to keep on the path to heaven, do three things: go to Confession regularly, receive Communion often, and choose a steady confessor to whom you can unburden your heart.’

“Dominic took the advice. He chose a confessor, whom he never changed as long as he was at the Oratory . . . At first he went to Confession and received Communion every two weeks, then every week. Observing the great profit he experi-

enced and his spiritual progress, his confessor advised him to go to Communion three times a week and, by the end of the year, every day.”

Here is a priest who directs, forms, guides, and encourages! A great deal of credit, however, should also go to Dominic himself for the great seriousness with which he approached the sacraments, especially when making acts of thanksgiving afterward (something that young people must be assisted and taught to do well, even if the *style* of doing so has greatly changed).

A teenager's Christian life should open up in the apostolate. Dominic at first exercised only an apostolate of good example. It is typical that Don Bosco twice calls our attention to Dominic's careful choice of friends: he resolutely avoided bad companions. This indicates that for Dominic “good example” was not an “accident of nature,” as some like to think, but the fruit of a willful choice. However, once Dominic had entered with great fervor into the last two years of his life, he vigorously dedicated himself to a conscious and explicit apostolate toward his companions, even toward the mischievous. This evolution is characteristic. In the education of *children* one needs to insist on the four themes illustrated in Dominic's childhood. Their motto should be: “piety, work, joy,” putting under this last word the intimate joy of friendship with Jesus the Lord, and the glowing joy of the first suitable apostolate. In the education of adolescents, on the other hand, there is a real need to insist on the themes treated in Dominic's life from the time of his coming to the Oratory. Significant dates and events are October 2 and 29, 1854: his total openness with Don Bosco; December 8, 1854: consecration to Mary; March 1855: thirst for apostolic holiness. Their motto could be “faith, purity, apostolate” (the priest, the Madonna, Christ in his redemptive work). This order is not arbitrary. Docility to the priest sustains the efforts for purity (interiorly sustained by the Virgin and by the Eucharist). Purity leads to charity, self-giving, and renders it

effective. This would merit a long reflection illustrated with further examples.

For instance, the Virgin Mary herself was prepared by her docility toward God and by her exceptional purity to make an absolute gift of herself to Christ and to his redemptive work. And the religious who are dedicated to the active apostolate do not profess the vows of obedience and chastity for nothing. These are means which “liberate” them for their pastoral mission.

3. Lessons Particularly for the Salesian Family

Members of the Salesian family can claim a special role in the transmission of Dominic’s message of evangelical holiness. He is their brother—a member of their own family. He attained sanctity by following the same ideal to which they have pledged their lives, and if they have been designated as the first to transmit his message to the young, they must be the first to profit from it.

God has treated the Salesian family as a privileged people. Grace does not just operate by chance. If it has worked with such force in the son of a blacksmith from Riva in 1842 and not in someone else, this can be explained by the fact that God destined him to serve a special purpose for Don Bosco and his Society: so that Don Bosco as a priest could test his educational method on him, and so that Dominic, in exchange, could make his own original contribution to the spirit of the first Salesian community.

Without being triumphalistic, Salesians can view this as a sign of God’s predilection for their society and the work that they are expected to carry out (what other congregation of educators has a boy-saint among its students?). History clearly shows us that three personalities played a decisive role in prompting Don Bosco to realize his life’s mission: *Pope Pius IX*, whom Don Bosco called the “second founder of the Salesian Society,” and who would protect it against strong ecclesiastical

opposition; *Don Michael Rua*, who relieved Don Bosco of a mountain of administrative, financial, and disciplinary preoccupations; and *Dominic Savio*, who permitted him to fully realize his ideal as an educator.

Who, the teacher or the pupil, contributed more to the other? Let us not forget that Dominic, besides, being the animator of the Company of Mary Immaculate, *paved the way for the foundation of the Salesian Society itself*. Of the first eighteen Salesians of December 18, 1859, seventeen were members of that Company! This is perhaps the only case in the history of the Church where a congregation was born in this manner—with a group of young men barely past adolescence.

The Immaculate Mother of God has treated the Salesian family as privileged people. Here again the facts speak for themselves. It is well known (at least it was well known to Don Bosco) that the Immaculate Virgin “is the foundress and support of all Salesian works.” It is no accident that the Virgin who led Bartholomew Garelli to Don Bosco on a snowy December 8, 1841, is the same Virgin to whom Dominic consecrated himself on December 8, 1854, and who obtained the halo of sainthood for Dominic during the centennial year of the proclamation of the dogma of her Immaculate Conception, Bartholomew Garelli and Dominic Savio: how Don Bosco must have meditated on these two names! That Bartholomew, so ignorant of the things of God, and that Dominic, one of the “little ones” to whom the heavenly Father was pleased to reveal the mysteries of the kingdom: both are joined under the sign of the Immaculate Conception! She herself presides over the whole gamut of the Salesian educational work, from the first rough shaping of a religious perception to the most admirable fine details. *The Immaculate Virgin is therefore the Madonna of all adolescents*.

Perhaps this sheds some light on the Salesian mission to be educators of adolescents in the Church.

The Immaculate Conception, who later will come to be

called “Help of Christians” (1860’s and after), is the Madonna of the holy battles of Christ her son against the deceitful one, whose head he crushes. To form youth the Salesian family must instill in them the sense of God and a correct sense of sin. We must arm them with an earnest desire for a liberating purity and the energy to become, like Dominic, fighters and winners for Christ. Only then will they be able to enter the ranks of committed Christians, as apostles and leaders.

Don Bosco guides the Salesian family. A proverb of biblical inspiration says: “*Gloria patris filius sapiens*—a wise son the glory of his father.” Saint Dominic Savio is the most vivid glory of Saint John Bosco, and the most solemn confirmation of the validity of his educational method. This is not to say that Dominic is the *product of a system*. Father Albert Caviglia clarifies this point:

“Don Bosco’s system did Savio some good in as much as it put him in a condition of life and in an environment where he was able to develop his special gifts of holiness. It could be said that personally he did not need this. Humanly speaking he had already attained the goal towards which the preventive system tends: God’s grace had already made its impact. Savio was not a product or, like Magone, a conquest of the system. He lived in it but was very much above it. What stimulated him was precisely *its spiritual content*, which is not just *an educational method*, but the cultivation of souls for sanctity. This explains why in Don Bosco’s book the references to the system are few and always indirect. For the most part we must presuppose it in order to set the facts against an appropriate historical background.”

Father Caviglia adds that the “system” appears here precisely in its three principal and essential factors: the efficacious reception of the sacraments, a “family spirit” which permits the educator to have personal contact with the youngster in a joyful atmosphere that opens hearts, and finally the apostolate among his peers, which is “historically his most glorious merit.”

The rapport between Don Bosco and Dominic marvelously exemplifies the relationship which ought to exist between the Salesian (read "Christian Educator") and every youngster who is confided to his care: a relationship marked by true fatherly tenderness, which is both profoundly supernatural and delicate. Don Bosco was certain that grace was at work in this young soul, and in his zeal, he never intervened arbitrarily, but did his best to correspond with the action of grace. He had faith in the boy, even if sometimes his initiatives were daring, like that of founding the Company of Mary Immaculate even though the Saint Aloysius Sodality already existed.

Finally we should note how Don Bosco infused in his pupil the spirit of holiness which he himself was living: love for Mary, for Christ in the Eucharist, purity, zeal, and above all, concern for the Church. For example, if Dominic was so preoccupied about England, it was because Don Bosco used to speak about it. Pius XI asserted, "It can be said that the great figure of Blessed Don Bosco comes back again in the person of his little pupil who reflected all his zeal for apostolic action in his own brief life."

Dominic guides our youngsters. "Those who dwell in heaven . . . have been received into their homeland and are present to the Lord; through him and with him and in him, they do not cease to intercede with the Father for us." Certainly Dominic intercedes on behalf of children and young people all across the globe, but in a particular way for those in Salesian centers, and among these more especially for the members of apostolic groups. The work accomplished by Dominic and his Company of Mary Immaculate to improve the Oratory's spirit during the years he spent with Don Bosco resulted in an intense fervor that was noticeable to all. Not only did the first Salesians grow up there, but there were also other young saints such as Michael Magone and Francis Besucco. These boys knew how to cooperate with their educators, and for us today the lesson is clear. Education is not just the concern of teachers and su-

periors. It can only work with the conscious participation of the boys and girls involved—especially of those who are more spiritually mature.

4. The Universal Appeal of Saint Dominic Savio

We must not be afraid to “exploit” the life of Dominic Savio. We can follow the example of Don Bosco himself. He was a great believer in the formative value of living examples. That is why he did not delay in writing Dominic’s biography. He was convinced of the boy’s authentic sanctity and, foreseeing his future glorification (we have witnesses who affirm this conviction of his), he used to speak of him very frequently.

Dominic can certainly inspire young people, and adults themselves have much to learn from him. But providentially, Dominic *is more directly the saint of children and adolescents*. These are better prepared psychologically to accept him. They are more capable of profiting from his example. He is one of them: he is really their brother.

Among children and adolescents, every category or type of group can find in him something that touches them directly. All school children to the age of fifteen, all young parishioners (until he was twelve-and-a-half Dominic participated in the life of his parish), altar boys, choir boys, young explorers, junior seminarians, youngsters who are sick, those preparing for their First Communion, young members of Marian societies and missionary groups, and evidently the members of groups and clubs named after him are all able to learn from his example.

We can offer many lessons from Dominic’s life to our youngsters. It is almost possible to take every paragraph of the biography written by Don Bosco and find a practical application. And why not? This was Don Bosco’s reason for writing the book! In the pages that follow we will try to explore some of the most typical themes from Dominic’s biography.

FOR ADOLESCENTS

1. Lessons for All Children and Adolescents

First Communion Resolutions. Take advantage of their inestimable value. The key resolution is the third, which is at the same time an excellent definition of the *state of grace*. In this light the fourth resolution gives the *exact sense of sin*: an offense against divine friendship, sometimes to the point of a real break. A pure heart is worth more than life itself, and the first proof of love for Jesus is to say no to sin. Finally, the first and second resolutions indicate the best means of maintaining this love for Jesus and this refusal of sin.

A strong-willed boy who was a born fighter. We have already said how necessary it is to vigorously destroy the false image of a sugar-coated Dominic Savio. He was an extraordinary boy who had plenty of personality and a forceful temperament. It is enough to see with what seriousness he would make a resolution and with what tenacity he would maintain it (this is a great lesson for boys, who are usually so fickle at this age). “Death but not sin,” is not a wistful remark. Neither is “I feel I must absolutely become a saint,” nor “I made up my mind to be the master of my eyes!” If these statements do not seem concrete enough, we can stop for a moment to consider how much energy and character went into accomplishments such as those twelve miles he walked every morning at the age of ten . . . the calumny and punishment he accepted at the age of eleven . . . his intervention during the rock duel as well as other interventions among older and stronger companions . . . his continual mortifications (great lessons for the children and adults of our consumer society!). He founded and led the Company of Mary Immaculate (of which he was the youngest member, and in the end he knew how to accept the fatigue and sufferings of illness with a smile.

Nevertheless, before underlining these extraordinary accomplishments, we should show how *heroic he was in fulfilling those every-day duties* common to a boy his age. He observed the rules of his school and worked hard on his assignments because he was convinced that this was what his friend Jesus wanted of him,

Adolescence the age for holiness. Adolescence has sometimes been called “the awkward age” or worse “the stupid age.” Dominic proves what a really dynamic age it is, for he became a saint before he reached the age of fifteen! No, it is a generous age—the age of love that knows how to give with a smile. Adolescents are not weighed down by the calculations of maturity or the bitterness of old age. Their motto is “onward forever!” and they are ready to march toward the Absolute with great courage and earnestness.

It is important (even crucial!) to understand the exact object of all Dominic’s energetic efforts. It was not an exterior project, not a sporty gallantry, and much less an intellectual ambition that led Dominic Savio to the honors of the altar. It was rather the spiritual adventure of a boy who pledged to love God and everyone he met. This “adventure in holiness” is the most beautiful adventure on which one can embark . . . and it is the most necessary. Holiness is a real thing and it is attainable in any and every situation—even during a school day. It is not something that requires a lot of time. It is possible that one can die at the age of fifteen already a great soul who has lived a very full life. “Length of days is not what makes age honorable, nor is the number of years the true measure of life; understanding, this is man’s gray hairs; an untarnished life, this is worth a ripe old age . . . Coming to perfection in so short a while, he achieved long life” says the Book of Wisdom.

Evidently, *certain conditions* are indispensable for youthful holiness: the guidance of a priest, love for Jesus and his mother, a strong sense of prayer and sacramental piety, readiness to fight for purity, involvement in the apostolate.

There is also a delicious reward to be gained: an immense and lasting joy in one's heart.

Certainly we are not presenting an early death as an ideal. Living a long life with the prospect of a promising future is important. But even the death of Dominic helps us to understand the real value of life and death. *Living*, by and of itself, is worth little if there is no growth. It is necessary to make something out of our lives and to never forget that our present life, though "hidden with Christ in God," will lead us to glory on that day when Christ—and he is our life—"will be revealed" (Col 3,3).

2. Lessons for the Leaders of Youth Groups and Movements

The qualities of a leader. In this respect we have already underlined the two principles of Dominic's powerful action among his peers. Inwardly, the love of the Redeemer made him understand the value and originality of each person, of each companion; outwardly, he had the gift of a warm, personal charm. The value of these two themes should be pointed out to young leaders, as well as his serious and authentic zeal. "The constant thought of Dominic's heart was how he could win souls to God." "If I could only win over my schoolmates to God,' he was often heard to say, 'how happy I would be.'" He also had the sense to adapt his apostolate to the person and the place. The famous regulations of the Company of Mary Immaculate demonstrate the down-to-earth spirit of a realist.

The Virgin Mary and Group Leaders. The place of the Madonna in Dominic's apostolate is perhaps one of the most interesting of all this apostle's characteristics. Many young leaders have not yet discovered her place in their lives and work. Dominic's zeal is rooted in his consecration to Mary Immaculate and becomes his way of honoring her. His apostolate consisted in serving Christ and His mother. The members of the

Company of Mary Immaculate had the names of Jesus and Mary as a kind of “password.”

Friendship Among the Leaders Themselves. This is an essential and precious means to further the apostolate and to attain holiness. Don Bosco’s life of Savio, chapters eighteen and nineteen, can offer some very profitable reflections in this regard.

APPENDIX I

Mass of SAINT DOMINIC SAVIO ADOLESCENT May 6

Entrance Antiphon

Cf. Rev 14: 5, 4b

Let us celebrate with joy the triumph of Saint Dominic Savio: he is among those in whom there is no stain, and who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They have been chosen from the nations to be the first fruits for God and for the Lamb (*P.T. Alleluia*).

The Gloria is said.

Opening Prayer

O God, the source of everything that is good,
in Saint Dominic Savio you have given to young people
a wonderful example of charity and purity;
grant that we too may grow as your children
in joy and love,
till we attain the full stature of Christ,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, forever and ever. Amen.

Where this day is celebrated as a solemnity, the first reading is taken from the book of Revelation with its proper responsorial psalm (below), and the second from 1 Thessalonians (without its psalm).

FIRST READING

1 Thessalonians 5:12-24

A reading from the first letter of Paul to the Thessalonians

Test everything; hold fast to what is good

We ask you, brothers, to respect those who are laboring among you and who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you, and to show esteem for them with special love on account of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. We urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, cheer the fainthearted, support the weak, be patient with all. See that no one returns evil for evil; rather, always seek what is good both for each other and for all. Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; retain what is good. Refrain from every kind of evil.

May the God of peace himself make you perfectly holy and may you entirely, spirit, soul, and body, be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will also accomplish it.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 119: 9-12, 129-130, 165-166

Happy are they who follow the law of the Lord.

How shall a young man be faultless in his way?

By keeping to your words.

With all my heart I seek you;

let me not stray from your commands.

Happy are they who follow the law of the Lord.

Within my heart I treasure your promise,

that I may not sin against you.

Blessed are you, O Lord;

teach me your statutes.

Happy are they who follow the law of the Lord.

Wonderful are your decrees;

therefore I observe them.

The revelation of your words sheds light,

giving understanding to the simple.

Happy are they who follow the law of the Lord.

Those who love your law have great peace,

and for them there is no stumbling block.

I wait for your salvation, O Lord,

and your commands I fulfill.

Happy are they who follow the law of the Lord.

GOSPEL

Alleluia: I am the bread of life, says the Lord; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall not thirst. (John 6:35)

John 6:1-15

†A reading from the holy gospel according to John

He gave the people all the food they wanted

After this, Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee. A large crowd followed him, because they saw the signs he was performing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. The Jewish feast of Passover was near. When Jesus raised his eyes and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, he said to Philip, "Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?" He said this to test him, because he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred days' wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little."

One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?"

Jesus said, "Have the people recline." Now there was a great deal of grass in that place. So the men reclined, about five thousand in number. Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were reclining, and also as much of the fish as they wanted. When they had had their fill, he said to his disciples, "Gather the fragments left over, so that nothing will be wasted." So they collected them, and filled twelve wicker baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves that had been more than they could eat. When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, "This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world."

Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain alone.

The gospel of the Lord.

or:

Alleluia: You shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life. (Cf. Philippians 2:15b-16a)

†A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke

Be prepared

Jesus said to his disciples, “Gird your loins and light your lamps and be like servants who await their master’s return from a wedding, ready to open immediately when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival. Amen, I say to you, he will gird himself, have them recline at table, and proceed to wait on them. And should he come in the second or third watch and find them prepared in this way, blessed are those servants. Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour when the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Prayer over the Gifts

May the sacrifice of salvation
that we offer you, Father,
produce in us the ardor of your Spirit
which enlivened the heart of Saint Dominic Savio.
Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Preface

Docile to the Holy Spirit in joyful holiness

Father, all-powerful and ever-living God,
we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In the festive assembly of your saints
you make the youth Dominic Savio
a shining light.
Docile to the action of your Spirit,
he was able to travel in a short space of time
a sure and simple way to holiness
in joy of heart and faithful fulfillment
of his daily duties.

In the company of the angels and saints
we raise our humble voices in a hymn of praise
as we proclaim your glory:

Holy, holy, holy...

Communion Antiphon

John 6:51

I am the living bread which has come down from heaven, says the Lord. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh for the life of the world (*P.T.* Alleluia).

Prayer after Communion

May our sharing in this Eucharist
help us, Father, to overcome sin;
as we follow the example of Saint Dominic Savio,
strengthen in us the commitment
to lead our brothers and sisters
to a life of joyful service in your friendship.
Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Solemn Blessing

May God our Father,
who has brought us together to celebrate
the feast of Saint Dominic Savio,
grant you the abundance of his grace
and let you savor the fullness of his love.

R/. Amen.

May Christ Jesus,
who has freed us from sin by his death on the cross,
give you courage to seek his friendship
above all else.

R/. Amen.

May the Holy Spirit,
who made Dominic Savio
a tireless apostle among his companions
make you joyful proclaimers of his love.

R/. Amen.

And may the blessing of almighty God,
Father, Son, + and Holy Spirit,
come down upon you,
and remain with you forever.

R/. Amen.

When this day is celebrated as a solemnity, the first reading and responsorial psalm are the following:

FIRST READING

Revelation 7:9-17

A reading from the book of Revelation

These are the people who have been through the great persecution

After this I had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation comes from our God who is seated on the throne, and from the Lamb."

All the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They prostrated themselves before the throne, worshiped God, and exclaimed: "Amen. Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving, honor, power, and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

Then one of the elders spoke up and said to me: "Who are these wearing white robes, and where did they come from?" I said to him, "My lord, you are the one who knows." He said to me, "These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

"For this reason they stand before God's throne and worship him day and night in his temple. The one who sits on the throne will shelter them. They will not hunger or thirst anymore, nor will the sun or any heat strike them. For the Lamb who is in the center of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to springs of life-giving water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORY

Psalm 24:1-6

Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.

The Lord's are the earth and its fullness;
the world and those who dwell in it.

For he founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the rivers.

Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.

Who can ascend the mountain of the Lord?
or who may stand in his holy place?

He whose hands are sinless, whose heart is clean,
who desires not what is vain,
nor swears deceitfully to his neighbor.

Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.

He shall receive a blessing from the Lord,
a reward from God his savior.

Such is the race that seeks for him,
that seeks the face of the God of Jacob.

Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.

APPENDIX II

For Prayer and Meditation

For Bible Services or for Meditation

(in addition to the readings indicated for the mass)

Here we have re-grouped a number of scriptural passages around some of the themes culled from Dominic's life.

1. Intimacy with Christ Beginning with First Communion

- “Let the children come to me” (Mark 10: 13-16)
- “I have found him whom my heart loves” (Songs 3: 4; 8: 6)
- “I give praise to you, Father, because you have revealed these things to the childlike” (Matt 11: 25-27)
- “Whoever loves me . . . I will love him and reveal myself to him” (John 14: 21-23)
- “You are my friends if you do what I command you” (John 15: 14)
- “The child grew in wisdom and age and favor before God and man” (Luke 2: 40. 52)
- “The boy left accompanied by the angel” (Tob 6: 2; cf. 5: 4-22)
- “Jesus, looking at him, loved him” (Mark 10: 21)

2. True Wisdom Can Be Acquired from the Days of One's Youth

Wisdom consists in the quest for and the knowledge of God. It is joyful docility to his will, particularly through his representatives. This carries true happiness with it. The following passages develop this theme: Prov 3-4; Sir 6: 18-37; 14: 20ff.; 51: 13-30; Wis 8: 2-18; Ps 119 (esp. v. 9).

3. The Holy Fear of God and the Horror of Evil

- “The beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord” (Sir 1: 12-18; 2: 15-18)
- “Happy the man who fears the Lord” (Ps 112)
- “Young men, you have conquered the evil one” (1 John 2: 13-17)

4. God Loves the Pure of Heart

- “My lover has come down to his garden . . . to gather lilies” (Songs 6: 1-3)
- “Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God” (Matt 5: 8)
- Purity and control of the eyes (Sir 9: 5, 7; Job 31: 1; cf. Matt 18: 9)
- “At the resurrection they . . . are like the angels in heaven” (Matt 22: 30)
- “These are . . . virgins and these are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever he goes” (Rev 14: 4; cf. 7: 13-17; 14: 1-5: this passage caught Dominic up in ecstasy, and Don Bosco heard this text sung in his dream of 1876.)

5. The Joyful Service of God

- “Do not give in to sadness. . . . Gladness of heart is the very life of man” (Sir 30: 21-23)

- “Serve the Lord with gladness” (Ps 100; Ps 21)
- “With a sincere heart I have willingly given all these things, and now with joy I have seen your people here present also giving to you generously” (1 Chr 29: 17)
- “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor 9: 7)

6. Dominic’s Early Death Seen with the Eyes of Faith

- “Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one, come! For see, the winter is past” (Songs 2: 10-13)
- “Take courage, I have conquered the world” (John 16: 33)
- “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23: 46)
- “Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival” (Luke 12: 37)
- “Well done, my good and faithful servant . . . come and share your master’s joy” (Matt 25: 23)
- “Isaac blessed Jacob, saying, ‘Ah, the fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field that the Lord has blessed’” (Gen 27: 27)

The liturgical texts for the feasts of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga (June 21), Saint Agnes (January 21), and Saint Maria Goretti (July 6) can also be very helpful.

