THE RECTOR MAJOR’S MESSAGE

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THE MEMORY OF THE FUTURE

We have a dream that is our greatest wealth.

Two hundred years ago, a little nine-year-old boy, poor and with no future but to be a farmer, had a dream. He recounted it to his mother, grandmother, and brothers in the morning, who found it funny. Grandma concluded, “Pay no attention to dreams.” Many years later, that boy, John Bosco, wrote: “I agreed with my grandmother. However, I was unable to cast that dream out of my mind.”

Because it wasn’t a dream like so many others and it didn’t die with the dawn.

The dream came back again and again – with enthralling energy. It was a source of joyful security and inexhaustible strength for John Bosco – the source of his life.

At the diocesan inquiry into Don Bosco’s cause for beatification, Fr. Rua, his first successor, testified: “Lucy Turco, a member of a family where Don Bosco often went to visit her brothers, told me that one morning she saw him arrive more jubilant than usual. Asked what the cause was, he replied that during the night he had had a dream that thoroughly cheered him up. Asked to recount it, he explained that he had seen a Lady coming toward him, who had a very large flock behind her, and who approached him, called him by name and said to him: ‘Behold, John: I entrust all this flock to your care.’ He asked: ‘How would I be able to care for so many sheep? And so many lambs? Where will I find pastures to feed them?’ The Lady replied: ‘Don’t be afraid. I’ll assist you,’ and then she disappeared.”

From that moment on, his wish to study in order to become a priest became more ardent; but serious difficulties stood in his way: the financial straits of his family and the opposition of his half-brother Anthony, who wanted him to work in the fields like him.

Indeed, it all seemed impossible, but Jesus’ command had been “imperious” and our Lady’s assistance a sweet certainty.

Fr. Lemoyne, Don Bosco’s first historian, summed up the dream as follows: “It seemed to him that he saw the Divine Savior dressed in white, radiant with the most splendid light, in the act of leading an innumerable crowd of young men. Turning to John, he said to him, “Come here, and put yourself at the head of these children, and lead them yourself.” ”But I can’t,” replied John. The Divine Savior insisted imperiously until John placed himself at the head of that multitude of boys and began to guide them just as he had been commanded.”

In the seminary, Don Bosco wrote a page of admirable humility about the motivation for his vocation: “Morialdo’s dream always left an impression on me; it was renewed on other occasions in a much clearer way, so that if I wished to believe in it, I had to choose the priesthood, to which I was greatly inclined. But I didn’t want to believe in dreams, and my manner of life, and the absolute lack of the virtues necessary for this state of life, rendered that decision doubtful and very difficult.”

We can be certain that he had recognized the Lord and his Mother. Despite his modesty, he had no doubt at all that he had been visited by Heaven. Nor did he doubt that these visits were intended to reveal to him his own future and that of his work. He himself said: “The Salesian Congregation didn’t take any step unless a supernatural fact advised it. It hasn’t developed as it has without a special order from the Lord. We could have written all our past history in advance in its most humble details.”

For this reason, the Salesian Constitutions begin with an “act of faith”: “With a feeling of humble gratitude we believe that the Society of St. Francis de Sales came into being only as a merely human venture but by the initiative of God.”

**Don Bosco’s testament**

The Pope himself ordered Don Bosco to write down the dream for his sons. He began: “Now, what purpose can this chronicle serve? It will be a record to help people overcome problems that may come in the future by learning from the past. It will serve to make known how God himself has always been our guide. It will give my sons some entertainment to be able to read about their father’s adventures. Doubtless they will read much more avidly when I have been called by God to render my account, when I am no longer among them.”

Don Bosco clearly reveals his intention to involve the reader in the adventure narrated, to the point of making the reader participate in it as a story that concerns him and that he, having been dragged into the story, is called to continue. The narration of the dream clearly becomes Don Bosco’s “testament.”

Here is the mission: the transformation of the world beginning from the least, the youngest, and the most abandoned. Here is the method: goodness, respect, patience. There is the security of the strong protection of the Holy Trinity and the tender and maternal protection of Mary.

In the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Don Bosco recounts that many years after that first dream in 1824, there was “another dream, which seems to be an appendix to the one I had at Becchi when I was nine years old. . . . I dreamt that I was standing in the middle of a multitude of wolves, goats and kids, lambs, ewes, rams, dogs, even birds. All together they made a din, a racket, or better, a bedlam to frighten the stoutest heart. I wanted to run away, when a lady dressed as a shepherdess signalled me to follow her and accompany that strange flock while she went ahead. . . . After we had walked a long way, I found myself in a field where all the animals grazed and gamboled together and none made attacks on the others.

“Worn out, I wanted to sit down beside a nearby road, but the shepherdess invited me to continue the trip. After another short journey, I found myself in a large courtyard with porticoes all round. At one end was a church. I then saw that four-fifths of the animals had been changed into lambs and their number greatly increased. Just then, several shepherds came along to take care of the flock; but they stayed only a very short time and promptly went away.

“Then something wonderful happened. Many of the lambs were transformed into shepherds, who as they grew took care of the others. . . .

“I wanted to be off …; but the shepherdess invited me to look to the south. I looked and saw a field sown with maize, potatoes, cabbages, beetroot, lettuce, and many other vegetables.

“ ‘Look again,’ she said to me.

“I looked again and saw a wondrously big church. . . . Inside the church hung a white banner on which was written in huge letters, *Hic domus mea, inde gloria mea.* [This is my house; thence goes forth my glory].”

For this reason, when we enter the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, we enter Don Bosco’s dream… which begs to become “our” dream.