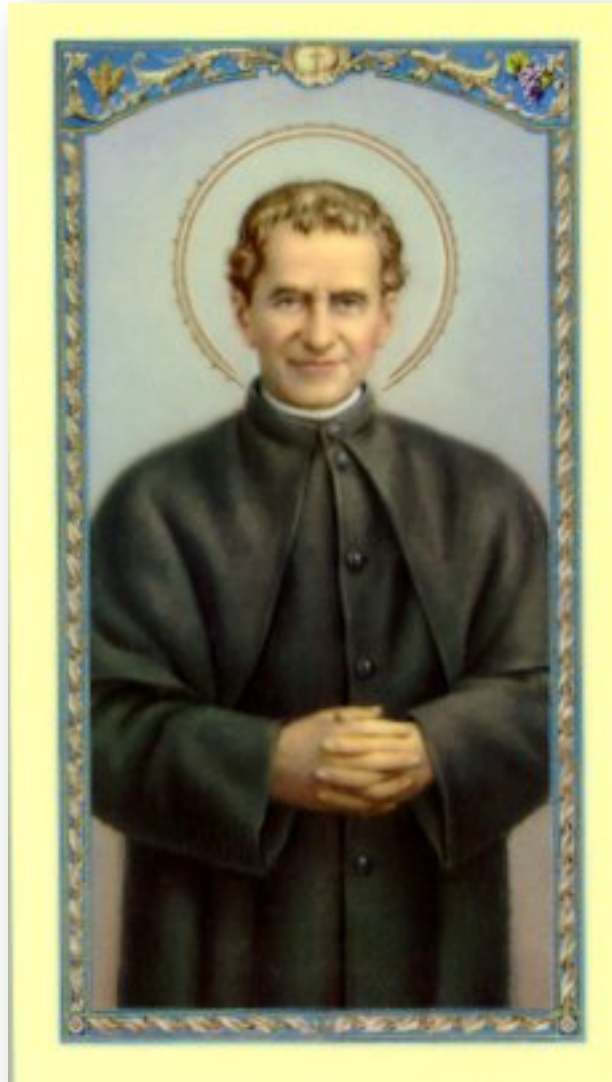

Saint John Bosco

Founder of the Salesian Society

Feast Day January 31



January 2013 Monthly Saint Reflection

St. Margaret Mary and St. Patrick's Church

St. Giovanni Melchior Bosco (*also known as St. John Bosco; Don Bosco*)

Feast Day, January 31 • Born August 16, 1815 • Died January 31, 1888



Giovanni Melchior Bosco was the founder of the Salesian Society. He was born on August 16, 1815 to poor parents in a little cabin at Becchi, a hillside hamlet near Castelnuevo, Piedmont, Italy.

His father died when he was little more than two years old, leaving his mother, Margaret Bosco to support John and his two brothers. John's early years were spent as a shepherd and he received his first instruction at the hands of the parish priest. He possessed a ready wit, a strong memory, and the desire to study and be a good student.

Unfortunately, due to his family's money struggles he often needed to leave his studies to work in the field, longing to return to his studies.

In 1835 John Bosco entered the seminary at Chieri and after six years was ordained priest on the eve of Trinity Sunday by Archbishop Franzoni of Turin.

On leaving the seminary, Don Bosco went to Turin where he worked hard in his priestly duties. It was at Turin where he encountered an incident that opened him up to the real field of effort for his priestly vocation. One of his duties was to accompany Don Cafasso on his visits to the city prisons. Don Bosco was concerned with the condition of children confined to these places who were abandoned to evil influences, and with little to look forward to but the gallows.

As a young boy, Don Bosco dreamed about the plight of troubled children, and exposure to the children's situation at the city prisons rekindled Don Bosco's early childhood concerns. He decided to devote his life to the rescue of these unfortunate

outcasts. While Don Bosco was offering mass on December 8, 1841 (the feast of the Immaculate Conception), the sacristan chased a ragged child from the Church. Don Bosco heard the child's cries and called out to him. A friendship sprang up between the priest and the child, Bartolomeo Garelli.

Don Bosco eagerly began to teach his first pupil of the streets; and other children soon followed to the Oratory (place of prayer/private chapel). Don Bosco started out by learning how to juggle and do tricks to catch the attention of the children. Once he had their attention he would teach them and take them to Mass. It wasn't always easy -- few people wanted a crowd of loud, bedraggled boys hanging around. However, the children were all drawn by a kindness they had never known. By February of 1842, the Oratory numbered twenty boys, and by March the number increased to thirty. Four years later in March of 1846, Don Bosco's group of students had swelled to four hundred!

As the number of boys increased, Don Bosco was challenged with finding a suitable meeting place. Sunday and holiday walks took place during good weather in the Turin countryside, and when Don Bosco realized how well the boys responded to music he organized a children's band.

In the fall of 1844, Don Bosco was appointed assistant chaplain to the *Rifugio*. Around this time Archbishop Franzoni approved the use of two rooms that adjoined the *Rifugio* and converted it into an Oratory (chapel) dedicated to St. Francis de Sales. The members of the Oratory now gathered at the *Rifugio*, and numbers of boys from the surrounding district applied for admission. It was around 1845 that Don Bosco started a night school to be attended by boys who were getting off work from local factories. Both Don Bosco and Don Borel instructed the their eager students.

The success of the Oratory at the *Rifugio* did not last long, and Don Bosco was sad when he was required to give up his rooms that adjoined the *Rifugio*. There was so little money and help that people thought he was crazy. Priests who promised

to help would get frustrated and leave. Don Bosco was determined to work through these challenges. Complaints were lodged against him, saying the community of boys he had befriended was a nuisance. Some people even went as far as trying to have Don Bosco confined to an asylum. The Oratory moved from the *Rifugio* to St. Martin's, next to St. Peter's Churchyard, then to three rooms in Via Cottolengo (where the night classes were resumed), to an open field, and finally to a rough shed upon the site of which grew up an Oratory that counted seven hundred members.

Don Bosco took lodgings nearby, where his mother joined him. "Mama Margaret" as Don Bosco's mother came to be known, gave the last ten years of her life in devoted service to the little inmates of this first Salesian home. Things did not look good when she first joined her son at the Oratory. She sacrificed what little she had, including her home, its furnishings, and her jewelry. She brought all the love of a mother to these children of the streets. Gradually dormitories were provided for many who wished to live at the Oratory as the number of evening classes increased. This is how the first Salesian Home was founded – which currently houses about one thousand boys.

With time, the municipal authorities came to recognize the importance of Don Bosco's work. He went on to establish a fund to be used for the erection of technical schools and workshops, which were all completed without any major problems.

What do dreams have to with prayer? Aren't they just random images of our mind?

In 1867 Pope Pius IX was upset with John Bosco because he wouldn't take his dreams seriously enough. Nine years earlier when Pope Pius IX met with the future saint who worked with neglected boys, he learned of the dreams that John had been having since the age of nine, dreams that had revealed God's will for John's life. So Pius IX asked Don Bosco to, "Write down these dreams and everything else you have told me, minutely and in their natural sense." Pius IX saw John's dreams as a legacy for those John worked with and as an inspiration for those he ministered to.

Despite Scripture evidence and Church tradition respecting dreams, John had encountered skepticism when he had his first dream at the age of

nine. The young Bosco dreamed that he was in a field with a crowd of children. The children started cursing and misbehaving. John jumped into the crowd to try to stop them -- by fighting and shouting. Suddenly a man with a face filled with light appeared dressed in a white flowing mantle. The man called John over and made him leader of the boys. John was stunned at being put in charge of this unruly gang. The man said, "You will have to win these friends of yours not with blows but with gentleness and kindness." As adults, most of us would be reluctant to take on such a mission -- and nine year old John was even less pleased. "I'm just a boy," he argued, "how can you order me to do something that looks impossible." The man answered, "What seems so impossible you must achieve by being obedient and acquiring knowledge." Then the boys turned into the wild animals they had been acting like. The man told John that this is the field of John's life work. Once John changed and grew in humility, faithfulness, and strength, he would see a change in the children -- a change that the man now demonstrated. The wild animals suddenly turned into gentle lambs.

When he was a child, John told his family about his dream, and his brothers just laughed at him. Everyone had a different interpretation of what it meant and wondered if John would become a shepherd, a priest, or a gang leader? His own grandmother advised him that, "You mustn't pay any attention to dreams."

In 1868 to meet the needs of the Valdocco quarter of Turin, Don Bosco resolved to build a church. Accordingly a plan was drawn in the form of a cross covering an area of 1,500 sq. yards. He struggled to raise the necessary money, until the charity of some friends finally allowed him to complete it at a cost of more than a million francs (about \$200,000). The church was consecrated on June 9, 1868, and placed under the patronage of Our Lady, Help of Christians. In that same year Don Bosco started the erection of the church, fifty of the priests and teachers who had been assisting him formed a society under a common rule that Pius IX provisionally approved in 1869, and finally approved in 1874.

John Bosco died on January 31, 1888; was declared Venerable by *Pius X* on July 21, 1907; was *beatified* by Pope Pius XI in 1929, and *canonized* in 1934.

St Margaret Mary and St Patrick

January 2013

Saint John Bosco

Week 1: Prepare

1. Set out the holy cloth and, if you'd like, collect other items such as a bible, cross or crucifix, candle, rosary, etc.
2. Read the story of Saint John Bosco included in the packet.
 - Talk about how Saint John Bosco was able to recognize how his childhood dreams guided him to help children in need and establish the Oratory.
 - Think about how people struggled to understand Saint John Bosco's mission, and even thought he might be insane because he wanted to help poor, needy children.
3. Read the prayer of Saint John Bosco included in the packet.

Week 2: Take Action

1. Review the story of Saint John Bosco, and discuss how to help today's needy children.
2. Help the poor children in our area by contributing a hat, gloves or warm socks to Catholic Charities; or by providing donations to a local food pantry or Soup Kitchen.

Week 3: Discern

1. Gather in your home and set out the holy cloth and any other items you'd like to use.
2. Re-read the story of Saint John Bosco, and talk about John Bosco's childhood dreams:
 - What you think it meant when John Bosco saw children change into wild animals? What did John Bosco do in his dream to make the wild animals turn into gentle lambs?
 - Who was the man with a face filled with light dressed in a white flowing mantle?
 - Do you think today's children face the same or different challenges as children did in Saint John Bosco's time?
2. Pray the prayer of Saint John Bosco.

Week 4: Take Action

1. Gather in your home and set out the holy cloth and any other items you'd like to use.
2. Color in the picture of Saint John Bosco. (Provided in this packet)
3. Pray the prayer of Saint John Bosco.

Prayer to Saint John Bosco



O glorious Saint John Bosco,
Who in order to lead young people to the feet of the divine Master
And to mould them in the light of faith and Christian morality
Didst heroically sacrifice thyself to the very end of thy life
And didst set up a proper religious Institute destined to endure
And to bring to the farthest boundaries of the earth thy glorious work,
Obtain also for us from Our Lord a holy love for young people
Who are exposed to so many seductions in order that we may generously
spend ourselves in supporting them against the snares of the devil,
In keeping them safe from the dangers of the world,
And in guiding them, pure and holy, in the path that leads to God.
Amen.

- Saint John Bosco -

