

IV. SPIRITUAL FORMATION OF THE YOUNG THROUGH PREACHING, “GOODNIGHTS” AND DREAM ACCOUNTS

In Don Bosco's educational system preaching has special importance, both that which is bound up with the liturgical or catechetical context, and that of the informal, familiar kind. The saint often addressed the community of young people with brief and fervent talks aimed at stirring up their emotions, nurturing their minds, encouraging good resolutions and devout sentiments, and looking ahead to stimulating horizons.

In his familiar community chats before they went to bed at night (“goodnights”) he mixed in the oratory genre of spiritual exhortation, imaginary and allegorical stories, communication, and educational reminders.

The material in the archives is huge: we have chosen a few talks offering a panorama of Don Bosco's preferred themes and his expressive style. The texts here are written up from notes taken by some of his listeners during or immediately after the saint spoke. Not every word is literal but they certainly contain the substance. The Biographical Memoirs make extensive use of this material, correct the language, integrate text and various testimonies. We have preferred to go with the sources.

In the “goodnights” to the boys, Don Bosco made broad use of his dream accounts. He was a very able narrator, and this enabled him to imprint on the minds of his listeners the messages that he had most at heart. When recounting his dreams to the educative community at Valdocco “the pedagogical motive is often interlaced with the supernatural or openly providential.”¹⁸ We see this in the four examples here (nos. 210, 213, 217, 223) which, “in their allegorical construction”, are an excellent example of his communicative style and pastoral concerns¹⁹.

The goodnights and Sunday preaching generally deal with the recurring themes of sin and grace, purification of the heart through the sacrament of confession, frequent communion, spiritual fervour, exact fulfilment of duty and doing good,

¹⁸ P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani...*, I, p. 374.

¹⁹ Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia delle religiosità cattolica...*, II, p. 505.

a peaceful conscience (nos. 211, 214, 216, 218, 219, 220). The instruction on the “beautiful virtue” (no. 209)—one of his preferred topics—is a particularly interesting Sunday talk for its argument, all made up of examples drawn from the Scriptures following a typical approach of Don Bosco’s, and with a particular spiritual and eschatological outlook where he presents virginity: the “beautiful” virtue introducing one to a taste for spiritual life. It allows a more intense and intimate relationship with God. It makes it possible to follow Christ more wholeheartedly. It introduces one into the band of blessed spirits who are the “crown of the divine Lamb and follow him wherever he goes”.

The insistence on vocational discernment and choice of state of life emerges in particular (nos. 212, 215, 221, 222). The conference on March 19, 1876 (no. 212)—reserved for Salesians but open for any boys who were interested—effectively represents the way Don Bosco was able to present an apostolic vocation, opening up horizons of meaning as wide as the world itself, enthusing and motivating. Everyone, he says, is called to work in the Lord’s vineyard for the salvation of souls; it is a vast harvest that needs many kinds of workers, some dedicated to preaching and teaching, others to a variety of essential services; all aimed at conquering the hearts of the young to lead them to God through prayer, good example, word, works of charity, meekness, fraternal correction. The only condition is right intention, meaning the sincere desire to cooperate in the salvations of one’s brothers and sisters and generous availability for any service and sacrifice as good disciples of the crucified Christ.

209. Instructions on the beautiful virtue

ASC A0040601 *Memoria di alcuni fatti 1858-1861*, ms by Giovanni Bonetti, pp. 1-7²⁰

(cf. MB VI, 62-66).

Sunday 17 October 1858

The Church largely dedicates October to Our Blessed Lady. The first Sunday of this month is dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary in memory

²⁰ This was an afternoon instruction given in church after Vespers and before Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

of the many graces obtained, the wondrous miracles wrought through her intercession, to keep the keen memory alive in the hearts of the faithful of the many favours that Mary, invoked under that title, has shared with those who are devoted to her. On the second Sunday we celebrate the Virgin Mary's motherhood reminding Christians that Mary is our mother, and that we are all her dear children. Today, the third Sunday, we celebrate her purity, the virtue that makes her so great in God's eyes, and the virtue that made her the most beautiful creature that ever came from the Lord's hands.

Given that you have heard me speak for the last two Sundays about the glories of the Virgin Mary, this evening instead of speaking to you about Mary Most Holy, I would like to speak of this beautiful virtue, showing you the esteem not just that the Gentiles had for it, since they greatly venerated those who preserved this virtue, but I would like to show you the esteem that God himself had for it. Oh how happy I would be if this evening I could fill your tender hearts with love for this angelic virtue! So pay attention and I will begin.

What is the virtue of purity? Theologians tell us that by purity we mean a hatred, an abhorrence of everything against the sixth commandment. Any person, each in his own state, can preserve the virtue of purity. This purity is so pleasing to God that in every age he severely punished the vice that is contrary to it, and rewarded those who preserved it with wondrous deeds. From the earliest times in the world, when human beings, though not so numerous, had already descended into disorder, corruption, as the Scripture tells us: "*omnis caro corruperat viam suam*" [Gen 6:12], God had rewarded purity. Enoch who was the only one to have kept his soul pure for God, was believed by God to be unworthy of remaining amongst such a sinful people, so God sent two of his angels who took Enoch away from the company of men, carried him to another place where he was then brought to Heaven by Jesus Christ after his death.

Let's move on. Once mankind had multiplied on earth, they forgot about their Creator and gave themselves to carnal pleasures, the worst vices, the vice of dishonesty, impurity. God was so outraged by such iniquity that

he promised to wipe out the human race with a flood all across the land. Noah, his wife, their three sons and their wives were saved from this universal extermination. Why this preference for them? Because they had kept this beautiful and inestimable virtue of purity.

Let's move further ahead. After the flood the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah gave themselves over to all sorts of foul deeds. God decided to eliminate them not with a flood of water this time, but with a flood of fire. But what did he do first? He cast his gaze on that unhappy city and saw that Lot and his wife had preserved their purity. He then immediately sent an angel to tell them to flee, because God wanted to incinerate all the people. As soon as they had left the city a sea of fire, with terrible thunder and lightning rained down on that poor city and on all its inhabitants. Lot and his wife were saved from the fire, but his wife, out of curiosity, did not escape God's wrath. The angel had forbidden them to look back when God's punishment rained down on the inhabitants, but Lot's wife, hearing so much noise that it seemed that all of hell had been provoked, could not resist turning around; and at that very moment she was turned into a pillar of salt. So though God had saved her from the common slaughter for her purity, he nevertheless wanted to punish her for the immodesty of her eyes, to show us that we need to be modest with our eyes, not satisfy every curiosity, otherwise we will be its victim, not only in our body as was Sarah, but also in our soul since our eyes are the portals through which the devil enters.

Let's move on yet again. Go back in your thoughts to Egypt, and there you will see a young man who, because he did not want to consent to an infamous and immodest action his mistress wanted to force him into, suffered a thousand punishments and even prison. Who was he? Would God even allow Joseph to perish? No, wait and you will see him come out of prison and in an instant ascend the throne of Egypt; you will see that he alone with his advice saves not only Egypt from death, but Judah, Syria, Mesopotamia and a thousand other nations. But where does such glory come from you will ask me. From God, who wanted to reward Joseph's heroic deed in not heeding blandishments. He wanted to reward his love for the beautiful virtue of purity,

wanted to reward his constancy in preserving his heart chaste and pure at the cost of persecution and prison itself.

I would never finish if I wanted to recall all the deeds of this kind, and of Judith, because of whose purity God saved Judith from an entire army, or the chaste Susannah lifted up to Heaven, and of Esther who saved the Hebrew nation. But why did God work so many wonders for them? For their purity. Yes, the virtue of purity is so beautiful, so pleasing to God who at all times and in all circumstances never left those who preserved it without protection.

But let's keep going, since this is not enough. The much awaited time had come, the one whom the people had waited so long for, the Saviour of the world. But who was she of whom the Son of God, Creator of the Universe wished to be born? God turned his gaze on all the daughters of Zion and found one with whom he fell in love. Who was she? Mary most holy. The Saviour of the world was born of her, not through the work of man but through the work of the Holy Spirit, since God wanted to accomplish a wonder never done before and that would never happen again. Why so many privileges? To reward Mary's purity. She was the purest, the most chaste of all creatures.

What do you believe would be the reason why our Divine Saviour loved to be with children so much, wanted to embrace them, if not because they had not yet lost the beautiful virtue of purity? The Apostles wanted to chase them away because of all their noisy chatter, but the Divine Saviour, calling them back, commanded them to let them come to him, *sinite pueros venire ad me* [Mk 10:14]; telling them they would not enter the Kingdom of Heaven unless they became simple, pure and chaste like those children. Our Divine Saviour raised up a young boy and girl, but why? Because, so the Fathers interpret it for us, they had not lost their purity.

Why did Jesus Christ show so much predilection for St John? Did he want to go up Mt Tabor for his transfiguration? He wanted St John with him. Did he want to go fishing with his apostles? Well then, he preferred to get into St John's boat. He went to Gethsemane, to the garden, but he wanted John with him. Hung upon the cross, he turned to John and said: "Son behold

your mother; woman behold your son.” But why did Jesus entrust John to his mother, the greatest creature that had ever left God’s hands, and no greater would there ever be? Why such preference? Because, my dear boys, John more than all the other apostles had preserved the beautiful virtue of virginity, of purity. He allowed John to rest his head on his divine breast, why? Because John had preserved and possessed the beautiful virtue of purity. If Jesus loved all of his apostles with a particular love, he loved John more than all; the others believed that John would not have to die because Jesus had told Peter: and if I want him to live until I come, what is that to you? In fact St John was the apostle who lived the longest. It was he whom Jesus Christ had made to see in spirit the glory enjoyed by those in Heaven who had preserved the beautiful virtue of purity in this life. He left it written in the Apocalypse that, entering the highest Heaven, he saw a crowd of souls dressed in white, with a girdle of gold and carrying a palm in their hands. These souls made a crown for the Lamb and followed him wherever he went. They sang such a beautiful hymn, so sweet that he could not comprehend such beautiful harmony and was outside of himself, and turning to the angel accompanying him, said: “Who are those surrounding the Lamb singing such a beautiful song that all the other blessed do not know how to sing?” Then the angel told him: “They are the ones who have kept the beautiful virtue of purity, *isti sunt qui cum mulieribus non sunt coniugati*” [Rev 14:4].

O what fortunate souls are they who have not yet lost the beautiful virtue of purity! Redouble your efforts to preserve it. You have such a beautiful treasure, one so great that even the angels envy you. You are, as our Redeemer Jesus Christ says, like the angels.

And for those of you who have unfortunately lost it, do not lose courage, do everything possible to recover it. It is true, you will no longer be virgins, you will no longer have the good fortune of being in that group which has a place apart from all the others in Heaven; you will no longer be able to sing that hymn that only the virgins can sing, but that does not matter - there is still a beautiful place for you in Heaven, so majestic that the thrones of the richest emperors, the richest kings that have ever been or could be on this earth, pale by comparison. You will still be surrounded by so much glory

that neither human nor angelic tongue could explain. You will still be able to enjoy the beautiful company of Jesus, Mary, that good mother of ours who anxiously awaits us; the company of all the saints and angels who are always ready to help us so long as we want with all our heart to preserve the beautiful virtue of purity.

210. The snake and the Hail Mary

ASC A0080302 *Cronaca dell'Oratorio* 1862, ms. by Francesco Provera²¹, pp. 1-6
(cf. MB VII, 238-239. 241-243).

Wednesday 20 August 1862

I would like to tell you a dream I had a few nights ago (it would have been the night of the Feast of the Assumption). I dreamt that I found myself with all the boys at Castelnovo d'Asti at my brother's house. While everyone was out playing, one came up to me (I don't know who), and called me to go with him. He led me to the field near the playground, and pointed to a snake lying there in the grass, about 7 to 8 metres long. It was a very big one. Horrified at the sight, I wanted to run away.

"No, no," the man said, "Don't run away. Come here and see."

"What?" I gasped, "Don't you realise that monster could spring on me and gobble me up in no time?"

"Don't be afraid, no harm will come to you. Come with me."

"Nothing doing; I'm not crazy."

"Well then," he continued, "stay there." Then he went and fetched a rope and brought it to me there where I was, and said:

²¹ Francesco Provera (1836-1874), native of Mirabello Monferrato, entered the Oratory at Valdocco when he was 22 years of age, in 1858; he was one of the founding members of the Salesian Society (18 December 1859). In 1863, still a cleric, he was sent with Fr Michael Rua to open the first Salesian Institute outside of Turin in Mirabello (his home town), and was given the job as prefect and bursar; the following year he went on to Lanzo Torinese with the same role and was ordained priest that year. He died of an ulcerated foot, which turned into cancer, at 38 years of age.

“Take this rope by one end and hold it tightly in both hands, and I will take the other and go on the other side and we will dangle it over the snake.”

“And then?”

“And then we’ll snap it across its back.”

“Ah! No, for Heaven’s sake! The snake will leap up and tear us to pieces.”

“No, no; let me do it.”

“There, there! I have no intention of risking my life for a thrill like this.”

Again I tried to run away. Again he insisted that I need not be afraid, that no harm would come my way. I agreed to his plan and stayed put. Meanwhile he went round to the other side, we stretched the rope and then snapped it across the snake’s back. The snake leaped up and struck at the rope, but instead of breaking the rope it got ensnared in the noose. Then the man shouted:

“Hold it tight, hold it tight and don’t let it escape from the noose.”

And he ran to a pear tree nearby and tied the rope to it. Then he came to me and tied my end to the iron grating of a window in the house. The snake kept furiously struggling to free itself, writhing, thrashing and flailing about. In its fury it tore itself to pieces, scattering its flesh over the area, till it was slashed to a mere skeleton.

When the snake was dead the man untied the rope, coiled it up and then said:

“Now watch!” He dropped it into a box and closed it, then opened it again. We were amazed. The rope was no longer coiled up, but arranged in the shape of a Hail Mary.

“How did that happen?” I asked. “The rope was thrown into that box and now it looks so orderly.”

“Well,” he said: “the snake is a symbol of the devil and the rope is the Hail Mary, or rather the rosary which is a succession of Hail Marys with which we can destroy all of hell’s demons.”

Up to here is the first part of the dream. There is another part which is even more curious and interesting for everyone. But it is already late so we will put it off until tomorrow evening. Meanwhile let's keep in mind what that man said about the Hail Mary: let's say it devoutly when any temptation comes, assured that we will always be victorious. Good night.

Thursday 21 August 1862

Given that you have been pestering me I will tell the second part of the dream, and even if not all of it, at least what I can tell you about. But I must place two conditions first. The first is that nobody should write or talk about it outside: you can talk about it amongst yourselves, laugh, do what you want, but just amongst yourselves.

Now while we were talking about the rope, the snake and what they meant, I turned around and saw some boys who were picking up pieces of snake flesh and eating them. I immediately cried out:

"What are you doing? Are you mad? Don't you know that meat is poisonous and will do you harm?"

"No, no," they said, "it's really good."

And yet no sooner had they eaten it than they fell to the ground, swelled up and then hardened like stone. I was helpless, shouting at one, then another; I even slapped one, punched another, trying to stop them eating, but in vain. As soon as one fell to the ground, another would start eating.

So I called the clerics to help me and told them to use whatever means they could to stop any more eating, but to no avail. [Questioned afterwards privately about the clerics, he answered that in fact some of the clerics began eating and collapsed like the others]. I was beside myself, seeing such a huge number of boys lying on the ground. I turned to the man and said:

"These boys know that this meat will kill them, yet they eat it. Why?" He answered:

"You know that *carnalis homo non percipit quae Dei sunt*" [1Cor 2:14].

“But isn’t there some way of saving these boys?”

“Yes, there is.”

“What is it?”

“Only a hammer and an anvil.”

“A hammer and an anvil? what should we do with them?”

“We need to use them on these boys.”

“You mean put them on the anvil and hit them with the hammer?”

Then the man explained, saying:

“Look, the hammer symbolises Confession and the anvil is holy Communion. We need to use these two means.”

I set to work and found this helpful, but not for everyone. Many came back to life and recovered, but for some it didn’t work. These were the ones who hadn’t made good Confessions.

211. The storm in the sinner’s heart

ASC A0000309 *Piccole locuzioni del molto R.do don Giovanni Bosco*, Quad. IX, 1876, ms
by Francesco Ghigliotto²², pp. 3-7 (cf. MB XII, 131-132).

Tuesday 14 March 1876

I have visited various houses in Liguria and have seen that there is much to be done. Yes, there is much good to be done, and if all of you listening to me were ordained priests and were true labourers of the Gospel, you would all have good to do. ...

Arriving on the coast, I was able to see how stormy the weather was. For about five days there had been a storm at sea, but especially in one part. I had already heard it spoken of, but had never seen it, but I can tell you that

²² Francesco Ghigliotto (1859-1900) was a novice that year and had received from Fr Barberis, the novice master, the job of writing down Don Bosco’s talks to the boys and the novices.

it made me wonder. The waves were as high as our house, running into each other, and they made such a powerful, terrible noise together as if four canons were going off. This collision of waves produced white foam that went so high that if there had been a building amongst all those waves it would have been tossed into the air so high that if people were in it, they would have died before they hit the water. But there was no building there of course. I found myself about thirty metres from the shore and often wanted to pull back further so I wouldn't get drenched. Observing this spectacle I admired God's power in it. When he wanted to he could make the sea peaceful and calm and could walk on it. And then with just one word he could make it turbulent again, making it terrible to witness. If parliamentarians and senators were to go and shout at the sea to stop, well, we'd see what they could do about it.

Looking at this sea I thought of the sinner who is constantly in a storm like that sea was then. His conscience is always gnawing away at him and he never has peace and tranquillity. Sometimes he has a bit of recreation, and then pulls aside, sad. His friends invite him to enjoy himself, but his shoulders slump and he has no will to do so, because his heart is reproaching him, telling him: "You are no friend of God's." He goes to lunch and tries to be cheerful, trying to chase away all the thoughts gnawing at him, but meanwhile his heart tells him: "And if you should die now, while you are eating, you would be excluded from paradise and hell would be ready for you". He goes to bed in the evening and tries to put aside the sad but just remorse of his conscience, telling himself: "I want to go quietly to sleep; at least I would be free of all these tormenting thoughts." Indeed that evening he did not say his prayers in order to repress the remorse he felt. But all in vain because his heart tells him: "If you should die this evening you would go into eternity, disgraced before God." So, he has no peace and tranquillity but is always caught up in a storm.

These thoughts went through my mind seeing such a stormy sea. Good night.

212. Everyone is called to work in the Lord's vineyard

ASC A0000408 *Conferenze e prediche di D. Bosco 1875/1876*, Quad. XIX, ms by Giulio Barberis²³, pp. 63-78²⁴ (cf. MB XII, 625-631).

Sunday 19 March 1876

One day the Divine Saviour, walking through the countryside near the city of Samaria, looked around him at the plains and valleys, and saw that the harvest everywhere was abundant. He invited his apostles also to enjoy the view of this wonderful country scene, but they quickly became aware that despite the abundance of the harvest there was nobody to gather it up. So alluding to something higher, he turned to his apostles and told them: "*Messis quidem multa operarii autem pauci* [Mt 9:37], the harvest is great, but you see how few workers there are." This is the agonising cry of the Church and the people over the ages: the harvest is great but the labourers are few.

Our Divine Saviour, and you understand it well enough, meant by the field or vineyards around him, to speak of the Church and everyone in the world; the harvest is the salvation of souls, since all souls must be gathered up and brought to the Lord's granary; oh how abundant is this harvest; how many millions of people there are on this earth! How much work there is to be done to see that everyone is saved; but *operarii autem pauci*, the labourers are few. By the labourers working in the vineyard of the Lord is meant all those who in some way work for the salvation of souls. And note well that labourers here does not only mean priests, preachers and confessors, as some believe,

²³ Giulio Barberis (1847-1927), intimate confidant of Don Bosco's, had been appointed by him as first master of novices for the Congregation (1874), a role he kept for 25 years. His work in formation was decisive for the spiritual consolidation of the Congregation. He was a member of the Superior Council and, from 1910, Spiritual Director General of the Congregation. His *Vade mecum for young Salesians* (1901, 2 vols.; 2 ed. 1905, 3 vols.) is considered the first systematic text on Salesian spirituality.

²⁴ Fr Barberis introduces the text with this note: "Conference given by Don Bosco on the evening of St Joseph, 19 March 1876, after prayers in the small chapel to all the professed, novices, aspirants and those who wanted to be aspirants at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. Publicly invited to the Conference were all those who belonged or wanted to belong to the Congregation, and including adults, there were 203 present. It had a great effect." (A0000408 *Conferenze e prediche di D. Bosco...*, p. 63).

who certainly are put there to work and are directly involved in gathering the harvest, but they are not alone, they are not enough.

The labourers are those who in some way work for the salvation of souls; like those who work in the fields are not just the ones gathering the grain but all the others as well. Look around a field and see the variety of labourers. One is ploughing, another turning over the soil; others are using a hoe; someone has a rake or is breaking open the clods and flattening them; others are sowing seed, others still covering it over; somebody is weeding, pulling out dandelion, grass, vetches; one is hoeing, another uprooting, another one cutting; others are watering just at the right moment and pressing the seeds in; others instead are reaping, making bundles of sheaves,²⁵ there are others loading the cart and pulling it; one is spreading out the wheat while another is beating it; one is separating wheat from chaff; others are cleaning, using a sieve, putting it into sacks, carrying it to the mill to make flour; one is sifting,²⁶ another kneading, another baking. So you can see, my friends, what a range of labourers are needed before the harvest can fulfil its purpose of giving us bread from Heaven.

As it is in the field, so it is with the Church; all kinds of labourers are needed, all kinds; No one can say: "Although my behaviour is irreproachable, I would be no good working for the greater glory of God." No, nobody can say that; everyone can do something. The labourers are few. Oh if only there were so many priests to send everywhere around the world, to every city, town, village, countryside, and convert the world. But it is impossible to have so many priests; so others are needed. How could priests be free for their ministry if they did not have people to bake the bread and cook their meals; if they had nobody to make their shoes and clothes? The priest needs to be helped; and I believe I am not mistaken if I say that all of you here, priests and academic students and trade students, working boys and coadjutors, all of you can be true labourers for the Gospel and do good in the Lord's vineyard. How? In many ways.

²⁵ *Borla*, the word Don Bosco uses, is Piedmontese and means a bundle of sheaves (cf. C. ZALLI, *Dizionario piemontese, italiano, latino e francese*, Carmagnola, Barbiè, vol. 1, p. 151).

²⁶ *Burattare* is Don Bosco's word here; an archaic word for sifting.

For example you can all pray. Certainly there is no one who cannot do this. Oh you see, you can all do the main part that the Divine Saviour spoke of there; after saying that the labourers are few, he added: “Pray then that the master of the harvest sends labourers into his harvest, *Rogate ergo dominum messis ut mittat operarios in messem suam*” [Mt 9:38]. Prayer touches God’s heart; God becomes obliged to send them. Let us pray to him for our towns, for far away towns; let us pray to him for the needs of our families and cities; and let us pray to him for those who are still caught up in the darkness of idolatry, superstition, heresy. Oh let us pray with all our hearts, pray much to the master of the harvest.

One thing everyone can also do, and it is of the greatest help and real work in the vineyard of the Lord, is to give good example. Oh how much good one can do this way; good example through encouraging words for others to do good, good advice, good counsel. There might be someone who has doubts about his vocation; or there is another who is about to make a decision that will bring him harm forever; if people like this are advised, comforted in doing good, how much advantage they can draw from it! Often just a word is enough to get someone to stay on or to take the right path. St Paul told the faithful to try to be a *lucerna lucens et ardens* [Jn 5:35]. If only we could see ourselves in this light! May everybody be edified by our words. But that is not enough: may there also be works. May we be inflamed by a charity that makes us disregard everything else so long as we do good to our brethren; if only there could be that perfect chastity that has us claim victory over all other vices; if only there could be that meekness that attracts the heart of others! Oh, I believe that the entire world would be drawn into our net.

Something else that we can all do is to be regular with our religious duties, practices of piety, taking part in things that can promote the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls. Speaking well of the Church, ministers of religion, especially the Pope, and the arrangements of the Church. These are things that anyone from the oldest to the youngest can do; and amongst us here in the house, speaking well of superiors, the Congregation, the house, the things we do.

But even this is not enough. Something that everyone can do is to help pull out the weeds, rye grass, bermuda grass, the vetches and all the other weeds that only do harm; I am trying to say that when there is some sort of scandal, don't tolerate it; whoever in the house can get rid of it, do so, and do everything to stop it; if you can't don't ignore it, speak about it to someone who can and not just once, but two or three times; just so long as the scandal is avoided.

If you hear someone complaining of things at table, you can all correct him; someone might be intending to go out without permission or complaining because he can't go out, but you can all encourage him, and patiently advise him. One kind of weed you can all stamp out is scandalous talk. It often happens that there is something going wrong in the house and the superiors do not know about it and therefore cannot correct it; it is absolutely necessary for you to speak up about it, make them aware of what is wrong; you are in close contact with them while the superiors are somewhat distant.

Another way of rooting out weeds is fraternal correction. It happens while you are here or at home with your parents in your village that your friends might inadvertently, in your presence, talk about things that are not proper for a young Christian; they write letters with unchristian thoughts and expressions that can make us angry or give us bad thoughts. So? Answer them kindly: "Look, you say such and such, but you know, these words do not sound nice in the mouth of a young Christian. I know that you are my friend and that you write without thinking about it; but because you are my friend I believe you will not be offended if I correct you for one thing or another." Or: "I'm sorry, but I can't accept what you are offering me because they do not measure up to how a young Christian should be living." Often a friendly correction done like this produces better results than a sermon in the hearts of your friends and companions, and it can happen that they begin to serve God or love their religion more just because they found this courteous way of finding out about religious practice.

And unfortunately it often happens that one needs to practise this kind of charity with one's own parents, instructing, correcting, advising them. We

need fortitude and we need this; be courageous about it, but always do so charitably, kindly, with the gentleness that St Francis de Sales would have used if he were in our house. All these and a thousand others, are ways that each one, priest, cleric, lay of any age or status, can use to work in the Lord's vineyard. You see then that everyone can work in the evangelical harvest in many and various ways, so long as each one is zealous for God's honour and the salvation of souls.

Now someone might ask: "But Don Bosco, what are you alluding to? What are you trying to tell us? Why are you telling us this this evening?" Oh, my dear friends! That cry "*operarii autem pauci*" was not only heard in ancient times, in centuries gone by but we, we in our own times hear it more and more demanding. The Salesian Congregation's harvest is daily growing beyond proportion so that I can say that we no longer know where to begin or how to organise our work. It is for this reason that I would like to see you all be labourers in the Lord's vineyard, quickly! Requests for colleges [boarding schools], houses, missions are arriving in extraordinary numbers both from around Italy, or France, or foreign parts. From Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria in Africa, from Arabia, India, China and Japan in Asia; from Australia, the Argentine Republic, Paraguay, Gibraltar and one could say from all over America there are requests to open new houses because everywhere there is such a lack of labourers for the Gospel that it frightens anyone who observes the amount of good that could be done and that has to be left undone through lack of missionaries.

From the Argentine Republic we have particularly distressing news from Fr Cagliari. When they come to Confession, you mostly don't ask: how long since your last Confession, but: how many times have you been to Confession? And it is not an unusual occurrence for men and women not to have been for thirty or forty years. It is not that they hate the Church or Confession, no. This happens because they haven't had the possibility. And just imagine how many, oh how many on the point of death who want to at least have a priest to confess their sins to and receive absolution, but not even that is granted them because they rarely find a priest to satisfy that need for them!

However my aim is not to invite you to go to such far-away places; some can do this but not everyone, partly because the need here is so urgent, and also because for various reasons not everyone who feels called to the Salesian Congregation would be ready to go such huge distances. But in view of so many needs, such a lack of labourers for the Gospel, noting that all of you here, in one way or another can work in the Lord's vineyard, could I just stay quiet and not manifest the secret desire of my heart? Oh how much I would like to see you encouraged to work like the apostles! All my thoughts turn to this, all my concerns, all my efforts. and that is why we get you through your studies, make everything possible for you to take up the clerical habit, set up special schools.

Could I stay silent in view of such pressing needs? And while they are calling on us from everywhere and it would seem to be the voice of God manifested in so many mouths, could I just pull back? After the manifest signs from Divine Providence of the great things he wishes to achieve through the Salesians, could I remain quiet and not try to increase the number of evangelical apostles?

Now I have just one more thing to say and it is the most important. While I am inviting you all to remain constant and to join the Salesian Congregation, I would not like someone without a vocation to try to enter. I see the great good we can do; I point out to you how great the harvest is before our eyes, how we need many people to cultivate the Lord's vineyard if they hear an inner voice saying: in the Congregation you could more easily do good for the health of your soul and the soul of your neighbour; you know how things are and it is easy to join up. But I want all the others to follow their own vocation. What I want and what I insist on is this, that wherever you may be you be, as we read in the Gospel, "*lucerna lucens et ardens*".

I am not against a young man who wishes to go to the seminary and become a secular priest. What I want and what I insist on and will insist on while I have the breath and voice to do so is that whoever becomes a cleric, becomes a holy cleric; he who becomes a priest becomes a holy priest; that he who wants to be part of the Lord's inheritance by embracing the ecclesiastical

state not get caught up in secular things, but aims only to save souls. I require everyone, but especially the ecclesiastic, to be a light which enlightens people around him and not darkness which is a snare for those who follow.

This light is not only manifested through words: it is to become deeds. Let each one try to adorn his heart with the charity which urges him to give his life to save souls; and this means not looking to any bodily interest when it is a case of doing good, and saying with St. Paul that worldly interests and things of this earth are filth by comparison with gaining souls for Jesus Christ "*omnia arbitror ut stercora ut Christum lucrificiam*" [Phil 3:8]. That means not being dominated by gluttony, intemperance which unfortunately wrecks so many young lives, and let us also say, the lives of many ecclesiastics. The one who wants to work with fruit in the Lord's vineyard, in whatever state of life he chooses, must also know how to be moderate and practise mortification, especially with wine.

The true labourer of the Gospel, wherever he finds himself, is one who willingly takes part in religious practices, promotes them, and celebrates them solemnly. If there is a novena, they are happy about it; they also have some special practice and invite others to join them.

To be a true labourer for the Gospel one need not to waste time, but to work: a bit here, a bit there; someone studying, another assisting and teaching; someone looking after material things, and others in the pulpits or confessionals; someone working in the offices or similar. But keep well in mind that time is precious and anyone who wastes it or does not keep busy, can never be a good labourer for the Gospel.

So, my dear sons, here are the things I wanted to tell you about being a good Gospel labourer. Oh if only we would do all these things in every detail! Let's take a look: are these things practised in our Congregation? Oh, if I could but say that these things really happen and are practised in detail. I would be so lucky, I could really go around proudly. If the Salesians would really practise religion in the way St Francis de Sales understood it, with the zeal he had, led by the charity he had; moderated by the zeal and gentleness he

had, yes I could really go around proudly and there would be reason to hope for immense good in the world. Indeed I could say that the world would back us and we would be its masters.

There is still one thing that I believe is of extraordinary importance and that we look to see if we have it now and always preserve it. This is fraternal love. Believe me, the bond that keeps the Society, the Congregation united is this fraternal love. I believe we can call it the bond, the fulcrum around which ecclesiastical Congregations revolve. But what degree should it reach? Our Divine Saviour told us: *Diligite vos alterutrum sicut et ego dilexi vos* [Jn 13:34]. Love one another as I have loved you. And in the Scriptures we find this requirement to love one another at every step. But for this love to be as is requested it must be such that the good of one is everyone's good and what is going wrong for one is going wrong for everyone. We need to support one another and never criticise the other; never any jealousy. "Let him do that, I won't"; "Everyone sees him in a good light while no one takes any notice of me"; "Look, if something good can happen it happens to him but nobody thinks about me". No, I forbid these jealousies, the good of one has to be everyone's good. And what is going wrong for one must also be felt as going wrong for everyone. Is someone being persecuted? We should all feel persecuted and suffer with him and help him. Is someone sick? We should feel bad as if it were us. So attempt good things together and let the initiative come from whoever. We know that not everyone has the same ability, studies, means. So great fraternal love. If we do, do you know what will happen? It will happen as it happened for the Church. Some were apostles, but besides the apostles there were 72 disciples. Then there were deacons, people who worked for the Gospel. But they all worked together, all worked together with great fraternal love and so they succeeded in what they did, which was to change the face of the world. We can do the same so long as we save souls and above all save our own soul. We have need of it.

All these things will only be obtained at the price of great sacrifice, by suffering something. We never achieve great things without great efforts; and that is why we have to show we are ready for everything.

Yes, let everyone join the Salesian Congregation, but let him say: I want to take this path only to save souls; and this includes that while saving other souls I first want to save my own. And so this will require sacrifice? Well, I am ready to make any kind of sacrifice. I would like to follow Jesus Crucified; if he died on the cross suffering terrible pain, I who wish to follow him must show myself ready for any suffering, even dying on the cross with him.

Besides, look! In the Gospel I find it written: blessed those who are troubled and never: blessed those who are enjoying life. So, if I have to suffer? Blessed am I, this way I can more closely follow in the steps of the Divine Redeemer. Those who enjoy this world just enjoy the moment and their enjoyment will be small, indeed, nothing is worse than nothing, as far as eternity is concerned. Those who are troubled instead might suffer somewhat, but this does not last long and every suffering will be changed into a precious stone up there in Heaven and console them for eternity.

I finish with what St Paul says, “*Vos delectat magnitudo praemiorum; non vos deterreat magnitudo laborum*”: do you take delight in the great reward of paradise? Then do not be afraid if you have to suffer something on this earth.

213. Faith, Temperance, Idleness

ASC A0000301 *Conferenze e sogni*, Quad. I, 1876, ms by Giacomo Gresino²⁷, pp. 1-9
(cf. MB XII, 349-356).

Sunday 15 June 1876, Corpus Christi

I seemed to find myself in the midst of the courtyard heading towards the exit surrounded by my boys, some greeting me, others telling me something, as usual. Then from the trade school boys' side I heard: “Help! Help!” and I saw them running full pelt from there, many going through the gate at the back of the courtyard. Then the students too began shouting out, thronging around me. I wanted to go and see what had so scared my boys but they kept

²⁷ Giacomo Gresino (1859-1946) was a novice that year and had received the job of writing down Don Bosco's talks from Fr Barberis, the novice master,

telling me not come any further forward, that there was a monster that would devour me, and they held me fast in their midst.

While I was wondering what to do, behold this awful monster appeared and came right up to us. That animal or devil or whatever it was, was so ugly, disgusting, terrible, enormous that there wasn't anything else like it on earth. It was something like a bear, but with a small rump compared with its other parts; it had enormous shoulders and a huge stomach, with an enormous head and grotesquely disproportionate mouth with two large tusks like swords sticking out.

All the boys, terrified as they were, crowded around me for advice; but I was also afraid and not a little embarrassed. I told them all to stay together under the porticoes and kneel down and pray to the Blessed Virgin. We were all on our knees quickly, praying with more than the usual fervour to Mary Help of Christians, asking her to free us from the monster, who meanwhile was slowly advancing towards us as if it was going to attack us.

We were there for some minutes when, I don't know how, but we all found ourselves in the clerics' dining hall which had recently been extended and seemed all lit up. And in the middle we could see Mary, similar to the statue above the porticoes or like the one on the cupola, or the church, I can't remember; however, there were rays of light coming from it, and it was surrounded by the Saints and the Blessed so that the dining hall looked like Heaven itself. Wonder replaced fear, and we were all attentive to and focused on Mary who seemed to want to say something to us; she reassured us: "Do not fear, have faith; my Divine Son is only testing you."

I then carefully noted those who were around the Virgin and I recognised Fr Alasonatti, Fr Ruffino and Bro Michael of the Christian Schools, my brother, and others who used to belong to the Congregation but were now in Heaven. Then one of them said in a loud voice: "*Surgamus*." We were already standing and we did not know what to say. And then the same voice said, but louder: "*Surgamus*"; and since we were already standing we wanted to see how things were going to finish. I was about to ask for an explanation when Our lady began to speak, her voice wonderfully strong: "But you, as a priest, should

understand *surgamus*: when you celebrate Mass and say: ‘*Sursum corda*’, what are you saying? Do you mean stand up, or do you mean raise your minds and hearts to God?”

So then I said to my boys: “As best as we possibly can, let’s make an act of love and repentance before God.” And all kneeling again, we began quietly praying. A moment later again we heard “*Surgite*”, and we all stood up. Then we heard Mary singing St Paul’s hymn with such harmony: “*Sumite scutum fidei*” [Eph 6:16], so clear, full and melodious that we were in ecstasy because in just the one voice we could hear all the notes from the lowest to the highest; it sounded like a choir of a hundred voices all united in one voice.

While we were there in ecstasy listening to that concert, we all found ourselves raised off the ground by some supernatural force, one holding onto a spike, another to a frame. I was holding on to a window frame, and was amazed we had not fallen to the floor where I could see countless beasts of all kinds and all of them wild running around the dining hall eyeing us suspiciously, and it seemed that they might leap on us at any moment, but had not yet done so.

While we were listening to that heavenly singing, many graceful boys came down from around Mary; they had wings, and approaching us they placed a shield on everyone’s heart. It had a steel centre, a ring of silver near the steel centre, another on the outside of diamonds then one of gold. When we all had a shield and the singing had finished, then we heard this voice: “*Ad pugnam*”; we saw the animals stir, hurl leaden balls, arrows at us, but they either did not reach us or hit our shields; after a long battle we were left unscathed. Then we heard Mary say: “*Haec est victoria vestra, fides vestra*” [1 Jn 5:4], and we found ourselves all on the ground, the animals had gone.

Immediately afterwards were heard an agonising cry in the courtyard: they were our boys that seemed to have been torn apart by those wild animals. I wanted to leave the dining hall to see if I could in some way bring them relief. They did not want me to leave, afraid that something terrible would happen to me. I took no notice of their fear and said to them “I want to go and see what has happened, even if I should die with them.” I went out and saw a

terrible sight: all the animals were pursuing our boys, injuring them, tearing them apart. But the animal that was creating the most frightful scene of all was the one that had first appeared: he was piercing the boys on both sides of their chest, in their stomach, in the heart, right and left with those two big tusks, and many fell to the ground, some dead, some wounded. When I appeared I ran at the monster, but he could not hurt me or the others who had followed me out, because our shield defended us.

I looked carefully at the monster's two swords, and what a mess they were making of my boys. On the point of one of them I read *Otium*, and on the other, *Gula*. Then I understood, but found it hard to explain why my boys were sinning through idleness, or gluttony, because it seemed to me they had been working or studying when and where they should be, and they were not wasting time in recreation; and regarding gluttony, they had not seemed intemperate to me.

I went back to the dining hall very sad, and I asked someone who was with Mary to explain it to me, and he answered: "Ah my good friend, you are still a novice in these things, and you think you have had lots of experience. Know that by idleness we mean not only not working or keeping busy or not just time spent amusing oneself in recreation, but we also mean time left for fantasy to roam free, leading to harmful thoughts; odd moments not properly occupied and especially in church. As for gluttony, you need to know that we can sin by lack of temperance even with just water and when we eat and drink more than we need; that is always intemperance. If you can get your boys to be temperate in these little things, they will always overcome the devil; and with temperance comes humility, chastity and the other virtues. If they are always busy doing their duties, they will never fall into the devil's temptations and will live and die as holy Christians."

I thanked him for such a beautiful instruction and went up to Brother Michael and the others I knew, to find out if what I had seen and done was real or just a dream. But while I was trying to shake their hand, I seemed to be quite beyond myself. Seeing my amazement one of them spoke to me: "You should know, and you have studied this, that we are pure spirits and to be seen

by mortals we have to take on our former likeness until the final resurrection when we will get our bodies back but with all the gifts of immortality.” Then I wanted to get up close to Mary who seemed to want to say something to me, but when I found myself almost up close, I heard a noise from outside and awoke.

214. Spiritual Fervour

ASC A0000310 *Discorsetti di D. Bosco*, Quad. X, 1876/1877,
ms by Giacomo Gresino, pp. 4-6 (cf. MB XII, 557).

Friday 27 October 1876

The Novena for All Saints is in progress and I am hoping that someone will become a saint, or at least do miracles: maybe someone is already like this but I have not yet become aware of it. At the time of Dominic Savio, Besucco, Magone they made these novenas with more commitment; we could not have wanted anything better. I am not saying that you make them badly now, no, there are good boys; but there is no longer that commitment. I do not know why things are like this now. Perhaps it is me, for not speaking to my boys, not getting them to understand; or maybe it is them, not wanting to understand me; or it could be both. However, I don't see that general fervour any more like in the times I was telling you about where there were sixty or seventy boys and every morning sixty or seventy communions. But there is still time. I say this because, things being as they are, a match just takes a moment to light a fire in a haystack and we get a huge fire, a bonfire. Each of us can do this. Let each one think of Heaven; some have brothers, sisters, friends and companions, others their superiors or inferiors who are enjoying the rewards of their virtue. They were flesh and blood like us; and we are away from danger, can easily practise our religion, adjust matters on our conscience: so if they became saints, why not us? — But, you say, we need God's grace! I assure you the Lord gives us his grace. — So what is missing? A little bit of good will is missing. and if you do not have good will, if you cannot do it alone, ask the Lord, ask him insistently, and he will do it for you. And if your own prayers are not enough, turn to the saints who are ready to help us just at this time,

and especially to Mary most holy: ask them to give you a burning divine love, constant love; and the Lord, if he does not grant it for you, cannot deny so many saints. Good night.

215. Grow up quickly and become apostles

ASC A0000302 Discorsetti di D. Bosco, Quad. II, 1876, ms by Emanuele Dompè²⁸, pp. 7-9
(cf. MB XII, 557-558).

Sunday 29 October 1876

Today we have had a group depart for Rome, not a decisive step yet to go to America, no, but to set up a small college/boarding school in a town near Rome called Albano, where Alba la Lunga once lived. Then in three or four days time there will be another small group departing to set up another small college in Ariccia; then another to set up a small one in Trinità. In the meantime let's pray for those travelling tonight perhaps until two in the afternoon tomorrow. Now we are making the Novena to the Saints and we need to remind ourselves not to waste any of these days, pray for those who have to leave for America. Let the priests also remember them in their Masses. This time 24 will be leaving, I am not sure if all at once, but at most one or two weeks apart. We do not want the number in our army to decrease. Now that the older ones are leaving we need the other smaller ones to grow and take their place. So we need these little 'loaves' which we 'bake' here under the protection of Mary Help of Christians, to grow bit by bit, a metre long. We need you all to grow up into big boys! But let's trust in Divine Providence and I hope with the Lord's help, and a little bit at a time, we will make it. Meanwhile let me remind you that tomorrow evening, perhaps around five thirty, as I have already told you, there will be a conference for members of the Congregation, and I am telling you here publicly so you can all know about it. Meanwhile let's stay with the Lord who guides all our actions; and let's behave in such a way that he will not have to reproach us on judgement day when he comes to judge us. Good night.

²⁸ Emanuele Dompè (1860-1926) was a novice that year and had received the job of writing down Don Bosco's talks from Fr Barberis, the novice master.

216. At the beginning of the school year

ASC A0000302 *Discorsetti di D. Bosco*, Quad. II, 1876, ms by Emanuele Dompè, pp. 18-21 (cf. MB XII, 565-567).

Thursday 2 November 1876

The regular timetable begins tomorrow. Some were already complaining: too much recreation, too many outings, too little time for study. So at least tomorrow when the regular timetable starts, everyone will be happy. But the timetable alone is not enough; you also need to study; so starting from tomorrow put every effort into avoiding idleness. If only you knew how precious time is! The sages tell us that time is a treasure, so someone who loses a minute of time loses part of that treasure. So we need to begin right away, so that at the end of the year we won't regret time lost. True wisdom comes from the Lord alone: "*Initium sapientiae est timor Domini*" [Ps 110:10]. Therefore we must first of all adjust our consciences well. "*Sapientia non introit in animam malevolentem*". This was written on a poster hung up in the study hall; I don't know if it is still there or not. Fr Durando can hang another one up there. And now I have the same advice that I usually offer at the beginning of the year: frequent Confession and frequent Communion.

As for frequent Confession, the Fathers recommend every week, fortnight or once a month. Saint Ambrose and Saint Augustine say weekly. I haven't got special advice on that, just that you go to Confession when your conscience is worrying you about something. Some can go ten days without offending the Lord, others fifteen and others twenty. But some can only go three or four days then suddenly fall into sin; they should go more often, unless it's a case of little trifling things.

As for frequent Communion, I don't want to prescribe the time, but just remind you of a little something. Looking at my watch I see it is not too late: it is only eight minutes past nine. I can tell you this in five minutes. There was once a man who used go to Confession to St. Vincent de Paul. He did not like going to this confessor because he used to recommend frequent Communion. So he thought about changing advice and going to another

confessor and told him: “I used to go to Father Vincent, but he asked me to go to Communion too often, so I have come to you to receive your advice.” This priest worked out his answer and said: “My son, start with something small: go every week, then every fortnight, then after you can go once a month.” The poor man followed his advice and after a short while he discontinued going for communion and went only for confession. Then he began going to the theatre, dancing, etc. Then he stopped going both for confession and communion: he began to live a dissolute life. Some time went by and he was no longer as happy as he used to be, his faults were bothering his conscience, and he went back to St. Vincent and said: “I see that by letting go of holy communion I have also let piety go and become worse; from now on I want to follow your advice and go to holy communion frequently.” I recommend the same to you; do this to keep your conscience clean and acquire true wisdom from the Lord. Good night.

217. Lanzo dream, or the dream of the Salesian garden

Critical ed. in Cecilia ROMERO, *I sogni di Don Bosco*. Edizione critica. Presentation by Pietro Stella. Leumann (Torino), Elle Di Ci 1978, pp. 40-44²⁹.

Friday 22 December 1876

A plain like a perfectly calm sea, but made of shining crystal. The eye gets lost over the vast surface.

So many plants, grasses, flowers, vineyards, little woods, all kinds of flowers covering the surface. Wonderful lanes, magnificent buildings were an extra adornment. Everything was like on earth, but beautiful, unutterably so.

Instrumental music that sounded like thousands of instruments, each with a different sound, higher or lower, but all in perfect harmony. The same can be said for the voices. A huge number of people could be seen enjoying listening

²⁹ This is a much-valued dream in the Salesian tradition. The saint writes in simple, no stilted language. The version in the *Biographical Memoirs* (MB XII, 586-595) is a more elaborate one, made after the oral account at a goodnight on December 22, 1876.

and taking part in singing and playing. The more one listened the more the desire grew to listen and everyone was yearning to hear more.

At a certain point all the music stopped and then many of the listeners turned to me. I was not on that marvellous plain, but nearby on a small hillock. I knew many of them. The ones who came closest were Dominic Savio, Fr Alasonatti, Fr Giulitto of whom I had thought much during the day. They were close enough to touch my hand. I was trembling and did not dare speak. The others looked at me with smiling faces as if they had wanted to say something, but nobody said a word.

Dominic Savio was dressed thus: a white tunic studded with diamonds covered him; a red sash edged in gold encircled his hips. His face was ruddy, shining, as beautiful as an angel's. In one hand he held a garland of flowers as if to give it away. I noticed a lily, rose, violet, sunflower, perennials, a stalk of wheat, gentian and others, but beautifully interwoven and of indescribable beauty.

With his free hand Savio made a sign for me to listen and began to speak like this:

"Why are you feeling afraid here where everything should inspire courage?"

"I am afraid of where I am and what I do not know; and I do not know what all this is or who I see."

"The earth you are on now, if cultivated, will become a floor of precious stones in Heaven. These are the Lord's servants who had faith in him and now enjoy the fruits of their labour."

"But why are you alone speaking and not the others?"

"Because I am the one who has been here longest."

"What is this white tunic you are wearing?"

Savio went quiet and the others sang as a chorus: "*Dealbaverunt stolas in sanguine Agni, ideo sunt ante tronum Dei*" [Rev 22:14].

“Why this sash?”

Fr Alasonatti, Fr. Chiala and others answered, singing: “*Habuerunt lumbos praecinctos, virgines enim sunt, ipsi sequuntur agnum quocumque ierit*” [Rev 14:4].

“Is this garden the Heaven that you are enjoying?”

“Not at all. It is nothing other than material beauty; any mortal who saw supernatural light would fall dead. Would you like to see a small ray of supernatural light? Close your eyes then quickly open them again.”

As soon as I opened my eyes I saw a light from which a tiny ray like lightning flashed towards me, but so bright I cried out involuntarily as if my eyes had been pierced. A little later I opened my eyes and everything was as before.

“This,” said Savio, “is still all natural light, that is, it is formed by material substances and is a hundred million times less resplendent than the smallest ray or rather a shadow that is separated from matter. Man, as long as he is alive on this earth cannot see even a ray of diving light. The reason is this: material creatures cannot appear and survive in front of the infinite Creator who is the purest spirit. Only the soul, separated from the body, can fly to contemplate the inaccessible light of God and see God as He is in Himself.”

“What I see of you is body or spirit? So saying I put my hand on his. But I did not touch anything and felt as if I were touching a shadow.”

“It is useless to try to touch me. What you see is nothing else than the form or shadow of my body, and God conserves these features for souls till the day of the universal resurrection, when each one will put on immortality reunited to the body one had before dying.”

“But tell me why this visit of yours, and first of all tell me if I am awake or dreaming.”

“Neither one nor the other. You are about to receive a strict command from the Lord and woe to you if you do not put it into practice. Some things refer to the past, others the present, and not a few to the future. Regarding the

past, it is lack of faith, being too timid. Look how many souls the Oratories have brought to Heaven and we can see multitudes of them. There would have been a hundred thousand more had you had the faith that the minister of the King of kings should have.”

“But this frightens me too much: tell me something of the present.”

“For the present you have here a *bouquet* of flowers; take it, and give it as a gift to your sons of any age and condition, and you will ensure the Kingdom of Heaven for them.”

“But I don’t understand what this means.”

“I will give you a hint: the rose is charity; the violet humility; the lily is chastity; the sunflower obedience; the perennials are for perseverance; the ivy, mortification; the stalk of wheat is Holy Communion; the gentian is penance. Each of these things must be duly and fully explained, and you will give your Salesians a finite treasure that will lead them to an infinite reward.”

“Tell me something for the future.”

“I will not say more, but the merciful God alone knows it and says this: ‘Next year you will lose six and then another two people very dear to you’; but who must be transplanted from the earth into a place of delight, the paradise of the Eternal One.

A bright dawn of glory will come forth from the Congregation to the four corners of the earth. Battles and triumphs there will be, but the soldiers will increase by many unless the leaders allow the chariot on which the Lord is seated to go off course. The time is near when good and bad alike will be astonished by the marvels that will quickly occur, but it is all mercy and everyone will be consoled.”

“What is the actual state of my boys?”

“You have to guide the children of God whom he entrusted to you and for which in time you will have to render account. Take these three sheets of papers and on each you will see what is needed.”

I took the sheets and on each of them was written as follows: *Note those who are currently on the right path to heaven*. And I saw many names I knew and many which in fact I did not know. The second was entitled: “Vulnerati” and it was a large number also; but not like the first. On the third one it said this: “*Lassati sumus in via iniquitatis*” [Wis 5:7].

“You can see the names of the first two and they can be seen by the spirits. But not those of the third group. Those in Heaven, although pure spirits, would have to put up with an unbearable stench just seeing them. If you want to know the names and see them turn the page over.”

I turned the page and saw, not the names, but individuals, doing the most abhorrent things. There was a voice like thunder that deafened me: “*Execrabiles viae eorum coram Deo et coram omnibus viventibus*.”

And just then with that noise, I awoke. I looked up, but everything had become dark, I could not see anyone and only then I realised I was in bed, but so battered and so worn out by that dream that I could neither rest, nor think of anything else but the dream, which still torments me day and night.

218. A tranquil conscience

ASC A000303 *Conferenze*, Quad. III, 1877-1878, ms by Giacomo Gresino, pp. 10-13
(cf. MB XIII, 427-429).

Tuesday 21 August 1877

Holidays are approaching, both for the academic students and for the trade boys: one lot to give their heads a rest, the others their shoulders and arms; but everyone will go on holidays. I need to give you some advice for these holidays. The advice I give is one only and it is that you be really free, maybe play up a bit, but to do this go to a place where God cannot see you. You all know such a place: home, bell tower, the cellar. But I don't think anyone would be such a fool as to believe that there is such a place where the Lord does not see him. And this thought of God's presence should go with us all the time, everywhere and in everything we do. Who would have the courage to do something wrong, offend the Lord, if he knows that the one he wants to

offend can, right that moment before he can utter a word, dry up his tongue, or paralyse the hand that has thought to commit that sin?

You don't need to think of the Lord as all justice, inflexible. No, in fact he is all mercy, kindness, love. And just as the one who offends should fear him, so the one who can say: "I have nothing on my conscience" can be happy. And I say to this individual: go to sleep in peace, enjoy your recreation, live happily. If the one in harmony with God leads a happy life, the one who cannot say he has a good conscience ought be afraid lest God take away the time (to repent). Yesterday for example the assistant priest at Lanzo was walking in the garden with the parish priest, praising the sermon he gave; and he was happy about it because he had satisfied his listeners. Then all of a sudden the priest saw that Fr Oggero was no longer beside him and he saw him lying on the ground: "Fr Oggero, Fr Oggero!" No answer. He went and shook him: "What's the matter? Are you ok?" He was already dead. This priest had nothing to fear. He was from the Oratory and already a holy individual, but it says that one can die going for a walk, or eating, sleeping or at any moment. Likewise, not long ago, near Fr. Cagliero, at San Nicolás, the priest died. He was a parish priest who was here, visited the Oratory and I remember him. I speak of these two, but I could talk about many who have died suddenly and in all sorts of ways. So tomorrow when you leave, it could be that one of us does not come back. "Who died?" "Don Bosco." "Oh, how come?" "He is no longer." And what could happen to Don Bosco could happen to any one of us. If anyone is not prepared, let him do something about it, adjust matters. When someone has a tranquil conscience he can be cheerful, sleep peacefully and have peaceful dreams because he need not fear God's judgement. Good night.

219. Cleaning your clothes when you come back from a trip

ASC A000303 *Conferenze*, Quad. III, 1877-1878, ms by Giacomo Gresino, pp. 24-26
(cf. MB XIII, 438-440).

Sunday 29 October 1877

The reason I have called everyone together here is to welcome you and tell you some news after your holidays. One of the latest items, just come

in from Fr Ronchail, is the opening of a new house at Cannes, not far from Nice. We will soon be opening others in other places and we will continue as far as America. So we will be opening at La Navarre, Tonon, Marseilles, Bordeaux ... then on to Barcelona etc. All along the coast, and then two weeks of continuous voyage by steamer to Rio de Janeiro. But I need you to become good priests and good teachers.

But what I wanted to tell you is that after a journey you always end up with clothes covered in mud or at least dirt. So, although there mightn't have been any mud during these holidays, there will be at least some dirt on your clothes or a splash of mud. You have more or less all been on holidays so you need to think how, after you come back from a trip, to clean your clothes. Now you have an opportunity on this Feast of All Saints to go back over your conscience; to prepare well I thought we would have a triduum with a short sermon each evening. Try to put into practice what you will be told. What I would suggest over these days which the Church dedicates to the souls of the faithful departed, is to try to do something in suffrage for them. Those who can go to Communion, let them do so. You can all pray and pray much, and apply indulgences you have gained to them. This is one of the most beautiful ways of making suffrage for their souls. Do this for them as an act of charity, especially for the souls of your family, and you all have some family members, recently or in the past, who have died. These prayers, this good that you can do for the souls in purgatory, is really good for you too; it is like food which you give to someone who likes it but in reality it nourishes the person who takes it.

So spend these days well, reflect on your conscience, and offer up all the good you do for the souls in purgatory; so when we present ourselves for eternity we will find ourselves well prepared, and the good we have done will preserve us from the flames of purgatory and open to us the gates of heaven. Good night.

220. “Cleanliness and Exactitude”

ASC A000303 *Conferenze*, Quad. III, 1877-1878, ms by Giacomo Gresino, pp. 27-30
(cf. MB XIII, 417-419).

Wednesday 28 November 1877

So, Don Bosco welcomes you all back and brings you good news. The Novena to the Immaculate Conception begins tomorrow. Our boys have always had a special devotion to Mary Immaculate. There is a Sodality by that name, begun by Dominic Savio when he was alive, along with the regulations he and his friends wrote for it. Many of you belong to this Sodality (only those who are outstanding in virtue).

I recall how at the beginning of the Novena to the Immaculate Conception, Dominic Savio made the resolution to do it well; he came to me and wanted to make a general confession (he had not previously done so as far as I know); and then he kept a clean conscience throughout the novena so he could go to Holy Communion every day. As the Church earnestly wants all Christians to do, and, I would add, all the boys at the Oratory, they should act well in such a way that they can approach the Eucharistic table every day.

What advice can I give you for this novena as a memento? Two things: Exactitude and cleanliness. They rhyme [in Italian: *esatezza e pulitezza*] and they go well together. Exact observance of all the rules of the house, all without exception. Exactitude in church and study, eating and sleeping. Exactitude in everything. The other thing is cleanliness, not by polishing our shoes, but keeping our conscience clean. It is also good to keep clean like you should, but if someone feels a little niggle in the heart and looking back over his confessions sees the same things all the time: same lies, same wasting time, same faults, sins and confession, confession and sins; well, let him talk about these things, and if he believes he should, make a general review or general confession or mainly on the points he believes necessary. Someone else will feel a little niggle in the heart and will say: “But I’m afraid I once made a bad confession and I am not in a good state; it is true that I forgot that sin but I did it on purpose”. He too—and there are some of these—should speak to his director about it and put it all to him. And another one might say: “I

have been worried for some time, and am afraid my conscience is not in a good state.” Let him confide in his spiritual father and if he wants also make a general confession since this is just the right time for that. And the same can be said for everyone who is aware that his confessions lack something by way of sorrow or resolution or preparation.

So remember always, but especially for this novena: exactitude and cleanliness. Be exact in everything and keep your conscience clean so you can go to Holy Communion. Just like I recall Dominic Savio doing in such an exemplary way during his last Novena to the Immaculate Conception, making himself a worthy imitator of St Aloysius; worthy of a boy who at seven and a half years of age at his first Communion, resolved: death, but not sin. And if we do this, Mary Immaculate will do a favour for all of us that will be of most advantage to our soul. Good night.

221. How to make the retreat

ASC A000303 *Conferenze*, Quad. III, 1877-1878, ms by Giacomo Gresino, pp. 31-35
(cf. MB XIII, 752-754).

Sunday 2 June 1878

A word after about six months! See how long it is since I have given you a good night. But if I didn't come in person, I was mentally here with you all the time. While I was in Rome and while I was on my way to Nice or San Pier d'Arena, I was thinking of you at Mass in the mornings, and in the evenings my thoughts went irresistibly back to you. But I have been back for a while now and I hope I will not be going away again too soon. We are here for your spiritual and also temporal advantage.

What I have come to tell you however is that tomorrow evening we will begin the students' retreat, and then immediately afterwards for the working boys. Everything I usually recommend for the retreats can be put in a word: pay attention and put into practice what you hear in the sermons or read. How do we put it into practice? In all the sermons, the readings, there is always something for us: it may be our examination of conscience was not

well done or we have been lacking in sorrow or good resolutions; or we may have forgotten the confessor's advice etc. We can think about how things were, are, will be; whether there is something in our past actions to be fixed up; or if we are on the right road that Jesus Christ points out to us, and what we need to do in future.

This is the best time to think of your vocation, because in solitude *Deus loquitur*, and the retreat days are for drawing back and being alone. The trade and working boys too need to think of their vocation, because some need to think whether God wants them to stay here and work in the Congregation and be part of it or if they are being called to something quite different. Everyone needs to take a pause for some days from the usual occupations to apply themselves exclusively to matters of their soul.

Consider that we do not receive great graces so often; and being able to make a retreat is a great grace. How many were here last year listening to these same words and now they have passed on to the next life. I believe everyone made the retreat well last year, but if they hadn't, would they still have had time? And who can promise us that we can still make the retreat here another year? I cannot assure you of that. Only God can tell us that, and in fact he says the contrary: "*Estote parati, quia qua hora non putatis filius hominis veniet*" [Lk 12:40], and he shows us through experience that we can also die young. If this is how things are, let us always be ready, so whenever death comes we can present ourselves tranquilly before the gates of heaven.

So now that we have the opportunity, let's make this retreat well. Since the Lord tells us: "*Ante orationem praepara animam tuam*" [Sir 18:23], so I tell you: "before the retreat, prepare your soul", that is, before starting have the intention of drawing profit from it.

And given that I think of you day and night, during these days of retreat I am consecrated completely to your spiritual advantage. In my Mass I will always pray especially for this, that the retreat goes well—and what I say on my own behalf I say on behalf of all those with me and those coming especially for this occasion. These evenings I hope to speak again with you and so I don't keep you too long let's conclude these words with this beautiful

conclusion: being able to make a retreat is a great grace which we don't always have; therefore we must make it well; to make it well we must put into practice what we hear in the sermons and readings; and since all favours come from heaven, I for my part and you for yours, let us ask God that we can gain the best result possible for our souls. Good night.

222. Discerning and deciding on our vocation

ASC A000303 *Conferenze*, Quad. III, 1877-1878, ms by Giacomo Gresino, pp. 35-40
(cf. MB XIII, 807-808).

Tuesday 18 June 1878

For all the Solemnities of Our Lady that have been or are to come, the Feasts of the Consolation, St Aloysius and St John, St Peter and others before the end of the year, one thing that would be of great importance is to think about your vocation. Some will have already thought about it and are waiting some weeks, some days to make a final decision. That is why every year I usually offer some time for someone who wants to talk about this and this year I would be happy if the boys from 5th and 4th Year and others too who want to talk about their vocation, would come to my room any time after Vespers.

But we can also say something in general now. When we become aware that we are called to the ecclesiastical state, it is also of major importance to see whether it is better to become a secular priest or join some congregation. Whoever wants to embrace the ecclesiastical state must have a right and holy intention: that is, if he wants to save his soul. And could he not also support his family? It is a right and just thing to help our family; so you can be businessmen, shoemakers or whatever you want and then help your family and others with what you like from your earnings. But a priest no, he can give them alms like to anyone else, if they should find themselves at that point, but no more than that. And then you hear the usual objection: "But many priests, this one, that other one have done this, bought that; they have become wealthy, made their families wealthy etc." So have they all done badly? I do not want to judge anyone, I only note what the Divine Saviour says and the holy Church. Jesus Christ says it explicitly: whoever wants to be God's

minister should not be concerned about temporal affairs; indeed not only should he not be concerned, but “*non implicet se*”, Scripture says precisely, “do not get involved, not get mixed up in: *non implicet se in negotiis*” [2 Tim 2:4]. The words are clear. Saint Ambrose or Saint Gregory says that whatever the priest has is the patrimony of the poor: not his, you see; it belongs to the poor. His labours are for God, the means are God’s and also the earnings must be God’s and also belong to the poor. The priest must only be interested in saving souls: that means a holy purpose.

What I can also tell you is that someone who does not feel called to the ecclesiastical state should not even think about becoming a priest, and would get nothing good out of it. Whoever does not feel he can preserve the virtue of chastity is not made for the priesthood, and should turn to something else, since as a priest he would only do evil to himself and others. I tell you this so you can have time to think about it and do things well. Good night.

223. The lambs and the storm

ASC A000303 *Conferenze*, Quad. III, 1877-1878, ms by Giacomo Gresino, pp. 41-48
(cf. MB XIII, 761-764).

Thursday 24 October 1878

I am happy to see my army of soldiers again *contra diabolum*. Although in Latin, even Cottini can understand it! And I have so many things to tell you, this being the first time I am speaking to you after the holidays, but for now I only want to tell you a dream. You know that we dream when we are asleep and that we don’t have to put much faith in them; but if it is not wrong not to believe, sometimes there is nothing wrong either with believing them and they can also instruct us, like this one for example.

I was at Lanzo for the first of the retreats and I was sleeping, as I said, when I had this dream. I found myself in a place and did not know where it was, but I was close to a town where there was a garden and near this garden was a very large meadow. I was in the company of some friends who invited me to come into the garden. I came in and saw a huge number of lambs gambolling,

running, and prancing around like they do. Then a gate opened onto the field and the lambs scampered out to graze. But many did not want to go out. They stayed in the garden and went around nibbling some grass here and there and grazed that way, though there was not as much grass there as there was outside where the larger group had gone.

“I want to see what the lambs outside are doing.” We went out and we saw them peacefully grazing; and then almost immediately, the sky darkened, there was lightning and thunder and a storm was brewing. “What will happen to these lambs if they are caught in the storm?” I was saying; “let’s bring them in and save them.” And I started calling them. Me on one side, my companions on the other, we tried shepherding them back into the garden, but they did not want to know about it. We chased them here we chased them there; ah but they had faster legs than us. Then it began to spit, then rain but I couldn’t get them in. One or two though came into the garden, but all the others, and there was a lot of them, stayed out in the meadow. “Well, if they don’t want to come, bad luck for them; meanwhile, we’ll go back in.” And we went back into the garden.

There was a fountain there on which were written in red letters: *Fons signatus*, sealed fountain. It was covered. And then it opened, the water shot up, and made a rainbow, but shaped like this arch. We and the lambs in the garden with us got under it and the rain and hail couldn’t reach us. “But what is this?” I was asking my friends, “And what about those poor lambs outside?”

“You will see.” they answered. “Look at the foreheads of these lambs. What do you see?” I looked and on the forehead of each lamb was written the name of a boy at the Oratory.

“What is this?”

“You will see, you will see.”

Meanwhile I couldn’t hold back any longer and wanted to run out and see what the poor lambs left outside were doing.

“I will pick up the ones that were killed and send them straight to the Oratory”, I was thinking. I got wet as well and I saw those poor little lambs

collapsed on the ground struggling to limp into the garden but they couldn't walk. I opened the gate but all their efforts were useless. The rain and hail had so battered them and they were a pitiful sight as it continued to do so. One was hit on the head, another on the face, another on the ears, another the legs, others elsewhere. The storm had ceased meanwhile.

"Look," those near me said, "at the foreheads of these lambs." I looked and on the forehead of each lamb was written the name of a boy at the Oratory.

"But," I said "I know the boy by this name and to me he seems like a little lamb". "You will see, you will see."

Then a golden jar with a silver cover was presented to me, and I was told: "Dip your hands into this ointment and touch the lambs' injuries with your hand. They will recover." I began calling them:

"Baa! Baa!"

Nothing. Nothing happened. I tried approaching one and it ran away.

"It doesn't want to, so bad luck for him!" I went to another and it ran away. And this useless game went on.

I finally reached one whose eyes were hanging out of its sockets, so badly had it been struck, poor thing. I touched it with my hand and it recovered and went into the garden. Many others were no longer afraid and allowed themselves to be touched and healed, and went into the garden. But there were still many left, mostly the worst off, and it was impossible to approach them.

"If they don't want to be healed, then that's their problem; but I don't know what I can do to get them back into the garden."

"Let them go," one of the friends with me said "they will come, they will come."

"We will see."

I put the jar back where it was before and returned to the garden. It had all changed, and at the entrance I read: *Oratory*. As soon as I went in, the lambs

who did not want to come entered by sneaking in and were playing hide and seek; not even then could I approach any of them. There were a few of them unwilling to be given the ointment which then turned into poison for them and instead of healing them made their injuries worse.

“Look, do you see that standard?”

“Yes, I see it. I was reading this word in huge letters: *Holidays*.”

“So, this is the result of the holidays”, one who was with me explained, because I was already beside myself with grief. “Your boys go out to pasture with good will, but then come the storms, the temptations; then the rain which is the devil’s assaults; then comes the hail when they fall into sin. Some go to confession and are healed, but others either don’t make a good confession or don’t go at all. Keep it in mind and never tire of telling your boys that holidays are like a devastating storm for their souls.”

I was looking at the lambs and I saw terrible injuries on some; I was looking for a way to heal them when, as I said, I was sleeping and Fr Scappini made a noise in the room next to me while getting up and I awoke.

This is the dream, and although just a dream, just the same it has a meaning that will not do harm to anyone who puts his faith in it. And I can tell you that I noted some names amongst the lambs in the dream and comparing these with the boys, I saw that these behave just like it happened in the dream. However things are, during this novena for All Saints we should respond to God’s loving kindness. He wants to show us mercy and through a good confession purge the wounds on our conscience. We then should all agree to fight the devil and with God’s help we will be victorious and receive the crown of victory in Heaven.