

3. SPIRITUAL ADVICE FOR FRIENDS, COOPERATORS AND BENEFACTORS

Don Bosco's correspondence with the Cooperators and friends, lay and clerical, always contains detailed and substantial spiritual suggestions aimed at proposing a way of interior life along with devotion and spiritual fervour, the practice of virtue, charity, loving and faithful fulfilment of the duties of one's state in life.

Our saint's Salesian inspiration emerges from these letters, in harmony with the teachings of St Francis de Sales in the Introduction to the Devout Life and letters of spiritual direction.

There are twelve items of correspondence here which document the range of Don Bosco's relationships and the concrete nature of his spiritual 'school'.

274. A lay person seeking perfection

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 525-526.

Turin, 24 September 1862

Dear Sir,

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ always be with us.

It is some time since I received the two letters you were kind enough to send me, but I did not answer because I was uncertain of where you were staying.

I am including the red ticket [for the lottery], indeed two, so you can win two prizes. The tickets I sent were not so much just for you to sell off but something you could have to help poor Don Bosco give bread to his poor boys with.

Going back over things in your first letter, I very much admire your heart's desire to blindly follow the advice of a poor priest like me. It is something difficult for both of us, but let us try.

“What do I need to do to lead a life,” you asked “detached from the world and that binds my heart to the Lord in such a way that I may constantly love virtue?”

R. Good will assisted by God’s grace will produce this marvellous effect. But to succeed you must try to know and taste the beauty of virtue and the joy that someone who loves God experiences.

Then consider the emptiness of worldly things. They cannot give us the least consolation. Put all your journeys together, what you have seen, enjoyed, read and observed. Compare all this with the joy a man experiences after approaching the holy Sacraments, and he will see that the first is nothing, while the second is everything.

Once we have established this base then we come to the practice. You told me: “1. Mass and meditation each morning. 2. After midday a little bit of spiritual reading. 3. A sermon and benediction every Sunday. 4”. ... “Slow down”, you say, “a little at a time”. You are right; begin putting into practice what I write in passing and if you keep up with me, I hope with the Lord’s help to be able to lead you to the third heaven.

When you come to Turin we can discuss some bigger projects. Meanwhile do not forget to pray for me. I warmly wish you everything good from the Lord. I am,

Your friend and servant,

Fr John Bosco

275. To a religious woman

Critical ed. in E(m) II, p. 276.

Turin, 22 July 1866

My good lady,

Lukewarmness, when it is not backed by our will, is totally devoid of guilt. In fact I believe that this lukewarmness, which takes the name of dryness of spirit, can be worthy of merit in the Lord’s eyes. Nevertheless it takes matches

to get some sparks going and I find these in brief prayers or a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, kissing a medal or crucifix. But more than any other thing the thought that occasional tribulations, pains and spiritual dryness are also sweet-smelling roses for eternity.

I will not fail to recommend you to the Lord at Mass and, while recommending myself and my poor boys to the charity of your prayers, I have the honour of sincerely and gratefully professing myself to be,

Your humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

276. To Marquis Ignazio Pallavicini

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 423-424.

September 1867

Your Excellency,

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with us. Amen.

Here I am speaking with Your Excellency as I would with my brother. What I wrote to you in August was neither a threat nor a passing whim; it was something loving and preventive. That said, you should consider three things: *yourself – your household – your own affairs.*

Self. Take a look at resolutions made in Confession and not kept; advice given to avoid evil and do what is good, but forgotten. The great defect of not being sorry for sins committed. This can be remedied through meditation and an examen of conscience in the evening or at some other more appropriate time. Right now God wants you to be more patient in your dealings, especially in the family; more confidence in the Lord's kindness; more peacefulness of spirit, and never ever be afraid of death surprising you by night or at some other unexpected moment. Make an effort to practise the virtue of humility and trust in the Lord and fear nothing. For the future, go to Confession and Communion in such a way that you become a model for everyone who knows you.

Your household. See that your dependants fulfil and have the time to fulfil their religious duties, and arrange things in their regard in such a way that in death and after death they will have reason to bless their master. In the family, charity and kindness with everyone; but never miss an occasion to give advice or counsel that can help as a rule in life and as good example.

Your affairs. A lot needs to be written about this. On Monday I need to go to Alessandria and there I will make a visit to Mombaruzzo, where I hope to write or speak to you more calmly. What God especially wants of you is for you to foster veneration of the Blessed Sacrament and devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary as much as you can.

May God help you to take the road to Heaven. Amen.

I gratefully profess myself to be Your Excellency's,

Humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

277. To Cesare Callori

Critical ed. in E(m) II p. 426.

Turin 6 September 1867

Dear Mr Cesare,

This time it is not Cesare but Don Bosco confessing his guilt.

I have been off here, running around there and meanwhile I have not done my duty by sending you the book our Cesare offered to translate for our *Catholic Readings*.

Now let's fix a few things up within the family. One pamphlet for you, the other for Gloria; and since I have been late in sending it, thus you will adjust or better still make up for the time lost with special diligence and solicitude to get the work done.

How impertinent Don Bosco can be when giving orders! It is lucky he is dealing with kind and obedient people, otherwise you would leave me singing and carrying my cross.

But while blaming myself I would like to ask you, rather, recommend two things for you about which we have already spoken.

As you divide up your time try to go to confession every fortnight or at least once a month. Do not let a day go by without a bit of spiritual reading... But enough, let's not turn this into a sermon. Well then, let's conclude.

Many greetings to mother and father and all your good family. Give me some good advice. I wish you every heavenly blessing and I am, with heartfelt gratitude,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

278. To the mother of a family

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 133-134.

11 September 1869

I received your enormous sum of fr. 10,000 from Sr Filomena's hand. You offer this out of charity in honour of Mary Help of Christians to be used for various and serious needs of this new building. I was not able to stop and speak with Sister except in passing and so I could not give her my grateful thanks to bring back to you. Now while I am fulfilling this duty of gratitude I assure you I will continue to pray our common special prayers every day for you at the altar of Mary Help of Christians and I hope that the grace you ask of Her will be granted without delay.

You tell me that it has not been granted so far; you tell me that it is a problem in the family, one that I do not know about, but here is something positive I can tell you: continue to pray and resign yourself to the divine will. This problem will soon come to an end. Some things that look like thorns

now, God will change into flowers. A glance at the crucifix and a *fiat voluntas tua*, is what God wants from you.

Meanwhile accept this advice: family sores have to be medicated, not amputated. Gloss over what annoys you, speak with everyone and advise them in all charity, and firmly. This is the remedy that will heal everything. Pardon me for taking this liberty: I would give lessons to Minerva, I would even give her sympathy.

Tomorrow (12th) I will celebrate Mass and my boys will go to Communion for your intentions. May God bless you and all your family and grant you all a long and happy life with the precious gift of final perseverance.

I am gratefully yours and profess myself,

Your humble servant,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

279. To a suffering woman

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 211-212.

Turin, 28 May 1870

My dear lady,

I was honoured to receive your letter and it gave me true pleasure.

I see from it that your heart has been torn apart by the loss of your beloved husband, but has now become more calm and given way to being resigned to the divine will which, whether we want it or not, we need to submit to. Do not fear that your husband's affection for you will be diminished in the next life, indeed it will be perfected very much more. Have faith; see him in a much better position than when he was amongst us. The best thing you can do for him is to offer your every worry to God for the repose of his soul.

Now give me some freedom to say something. It is of our faith that we enjoy an infinitely better life in heaven than on earth. So why be so sorrowful

if your husband has gone to take possession of it? It is of our faith that death for us Christians is not separation, but a deferral of the moment when we see one another again. So when someone goes before us—patience; he goes to prepare our place.

It is also of our faith that at any moment through works of piety and charity you can do good for the souls of the deceased: so why not rejoice in your heart if God has given you the chance to survive? Then, helping children, comforting your *bon père*, practising your religion, spreading good books, giving good advice to someone who needs it: are these not all things that must bring the Lord's blessing on the years he still gives you?

There are still other motives that for now I judge best not to say.

So, let us adore God in everything, in consolations and afflictions and let us be sure that He is a good Father and will not permit us to be afflicted beyond our strength. He is all-powerful and therefore can lift us up when he wants.

Meanwhile I have always recommended you and your family to the Lord at holy Mass and I will continue to do the same, as well as in the prayers that we say together at Mary's altar.

May God bless you and your efforts; pray for me. I profess that I am,
Your humble servant,

Fr J. Bosco

280. To a committed Catholic

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 227-228.

Turin, 13 July 1870

Dear Sir,

May God be blessed in everything. Do not be worried because you cannot do much. Before God, the one who does his will in little things does much. So take the inconveniences you are subjected to as coming from the Lord's holy hand, do the little you can and be at peace about everything.

In these times we feel the serious need to promote good press. It is a vast field, but each one doing what he can, can achieve a lot.

I will not fail to pray for you and your friends. I revere them so much in the Lord. Pray for me too. With real affection I profess myself to be,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

281. To a priest friend

Critical ed. in E(m) V, p. 142.

Rome, 8 May 1876

My dear Fr Perino,

I am so happy about your promotion to parish priest of Piedicavallo.

You will have a much wider field to win souls for God. The basis of a successful parish is taking care of the children, being with the sick, loving the elderly.

For you: frequent confession, some meditation each day, exercise for a happy death once a month.

For Don Bosco: spreading the *Catholic Readings* and coming to lunch at the Oratory every time you come to Turin. The rest we can speak about when we meet.

May God bless you, your efforts, your future parish and pray for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

282. To a priest who is tempted

ASC A1780133 *Orig. aut. recently found, Fassinio*. Critical ed. in E III, pp. 271-272.

Rome, 12 [January] 1878

My dear Fr

God has allowed you to have a great trial, but you will have a great victory. Prayer will overcome everything. Work, temperance especially in the evenings, do not lie down for a rest during the day, never more than seven hours in bed, these are all very useful things.

Principiis obsta; as soon as you are tempted, start working if it is daytime; start praying if it is night time; do not stop praying until you are overcome by sleep. Put these suggestions into practice; I will pray for you at holy Mass, God will do the rest. Courage, dear Fr . . .; seal your heart, hope in the Lord and go ahead without being worried.

Pray for me. I will always be, in Jesus Christ,
Your affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

283. To Right Rev. Edoardo Rosaz, Bishop of Susa (blessed)

Critical in E III, pp. 293-294.

Rome, 7 February 1878

Dear and Reverend Bishop¹⁰⁹,

I received news from Turin then from your dear letter, of how the great Pontiff Pius IX thought of you in fatherly terms and appointed you as Bishop of Susa. I was not a little amazed, because I know how humble you are and how you must take up a new approach *verbo et opere*. But I soon blessed the

¹⁰⁹ Arch. Edoardo Giuseppe Rosaz (1830-1903), founder of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters (1874) for the education of poor and orphaned girls, was appointed bishop of Susa in the consistory on December 31, 1877.

Lord, because I was and I am convinced that the Church has gained a bishop according to God's heart and that you will do much good for the diocese of Susa.

I am very happy about it and with all my heart I offer you all the houses of our Congregation for whatever service they can render you or the diocese that Divine Providence has entrusted to you.

I do not pretend to lecture you, but I believe that you will soon win over everyone's heart if:

1. You take special care of the sick, the elderly and poor children.
2. Go slow in making any changes to personnel already put in place by your predecessor.
3. Do what you can to win the esteem and affection of some who held or still hold high positions in the diocese; those who feel they were overlooked while your Lordship was chosen.
4. When taking strong measures against anyone amongst the clergy, you go slowly and as much as is possible listen to the one accused. For the rest I hope that in March we can speak personally.

Today, around three thirty, the Supreme and incomparable star of the Church, Pius IX, has died. Newspapers will give you the details. Rome is in consternation and I believe the whole world as well. Within a very short time he will certainly be on the altars.

I believe that your Lordship will always allow me to write with the confidence of earlier times; I pray to God that he will enlighten you and keep you in good health. I recommend myself to the charity of your prayers and with the greatest veneration I profess myself to be,

Your Lordship's affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

284. To a scrupulous woman

ASC A1780410 *Let. orig. recently found, Armelonghi*. Critical in E III, pp. 388-389.

Turin, 26 September 1878

Esteemed friend in Jesus Christ,

With regard to your conscience, consider:

1. Never going back over past confessions.
2. Thoughts, desires and internal things are never subject for confession.
3. Confess only deeds, conversations that the confessor could judge blameworthy and nothing else.
4. Blind obedience to your confessor.

Be tranquil of conscience and pray for me. I remain always, in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

285. To a discouraged parish priest

ASC A1940605 *Copies of orig. Ed.* in E III, p. 399.

Turin, 25 October 1878

Dear Fr,

I received your good letter and the 18 Francs enclosed. Thank you. May God reward you. It is manna that falls to help us in our difficulties.

Be at peace. Do not talk of leaving your parish.

There is work to do? I will die working, *sicut bonus miles Christi* [2 Tim 2:3].

I am not very good at this? *Omnia possum in eo qui me confortat* [Phil 4:13].

There are thorns? When the thorns have become flowers the angels will weave a crown for you in Heaven.

Times are difficult? They always were, but God's help was never lacking.
Christus heri et hodie.

Are you asking for advice? Here it is then: take special care of the children, the elderly and the sick and you will become master of everyone's hearts. For the rest, when you come to pay me a visit we will speak at length.

Fr John Bosco