



**Profiles of  
Thirty-Three  
Salesian  
Coadjutor  
Brothers**

Father Eugene Ceria, SDB

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**PROFILES**  
**OF THIRTY-THREE**  
**SALESIAN COADJUTOR BROTHERS**

Father Eugene Ceria, SDB

translated by  
Father Vincent Zuliani, SDB

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by Father Eugenio Ceria, SDB  
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## INTRODUCTION

By Father Eugene Ceria, SDB

Dear Coadjutor Brothers:

Let me first tell you how the idea of writing these profiles came about, and then I will add something else.

By 1951, I had already completed two projects that had been entrusted to me: *The profiles of the members of the General Council* and also the fourth volume of the *Annals* of our Society. Then I became much like the silkworm of Alexander Manzoni's *Promessi Sposi*. That silkworm kept turning his head right and left, searching for a green leaf to chew on.

Much as I really thought about what to do, I could not figure out what specific project I should pursue.

Then I recalled that Father Philip Rinaldi, our Rector Major, had originally given me the suggestion to write two books that became quite successful. I immediately appealed to Father Rinaldi to give me a clue, an inspiration about what I should do next. He was obtaining graces for so many people, that I figured he might give me an inspiration, too.

Hardly an hour had gone by, when I received the inspiration to gather the deeds and sayings of the early exemplary coadjutor brothers of our Society and to present them as spiritual food for the coadjutor brothers of today.

The more I thought about it, the more I liked it. I first asked myself what kind of work I wanted to do. Because, if I really intended to collect the information I needed from all over the Salesian Congregation, I would have to spend quite a few years doing it. But, considering that I am about to be "shipped off" and *iam delibor*, meaning that I am at the end of the road (I am 82), I have no illusions about what is coming next. And so I decided to limit my research to those coadjutor brothers who had been formed by Don Bosco, had lived with Don Bosco, and had died in Italy.

In a short time, I collected material on thirty-three coadjutor brothers. The last, Brother Joseph Balestra, never met or knew Don Bosco. But his is a special case, as you will see.

Allow me to mention the sources of this work:

1. The existing biographies of some coadjutor brothers,
2. *The Biographical Memoirs of Don Bosco* (mostly),
3. The obituary letters on the coadjutor brothers (when found); they were quite precious and very informative,
4. Oral information provided by Salesian confreres who had been acquainted with these coadjutor brothers,
5. Some documents found in our Salesian archives.

And, finally, I was fortunate to have known twenty-one of the coadjutor brothers about whom I intended to write.

The above-mentioned sources gave me sufficient material to write a book that is not too big, but will certainly prove useful to many people.

When you read these profiles you may be tempted to ask: "Were these Salesian coadjutor brothers so holy that they did not have any human faults? And, if it is true that no human being is without some fault, why is it that Fr. Eugene Ceria has so well concealed the defects of our coadjutor brothers?"

This is my answer. For a book of this kind, I see no use in displaying the defects of others. Another type of work might demand a critical display of "lights and shadows," but in my case, I feel no need to do so.

My intention is to reveal what is good and edifying; all the rest, in my opinion, deserves the wastebasket. I found my inspiration from a great Latin poet, who always followed this simple principle: "*Ubi plura nitent, non ego paucis offendar maculis*," which translates, "when beautiful qualities shine so brilliantly in a person, do not be offended by the presence of some fault."

In this book, you should find positive and practical stories that lead you to draw some practical conclusions, if you want to. This book is primarily addressed to our coadjutor brothers, because they should be aware of the early confreres of theirs. This, however, does not mean that other Salesians are not encouraged to read it. They, too, will benefit from the recollections of the early days of our Congregation.

After all, I am dealing with a subject that was most dear to our saintly founder, Don Bosco, a subject that will always be cherished by Don Bosco's successors; I mean that which concerns our Coadjutor Brothers.

My hope is that this work awakens in Salesians of other nations a desire to do what I am doing for the Italian coadjutor brothers.

I have not forgotten the enthusiasm of Father Joseph Vespignani, a member of the General Council, when he spoke about several coadjutor brothers of Argentina whom he had known. He was preparing to write their biographies when he died. I hope others pick up where Father Vespignani left off. Salesians worldwide should follow his initiative.

Much has been written about our coadjutor brothers and although scholarly, it is not really worthwhile. This has also happened to several writings about Don Bosco and his works. Those who did not have a close or deep understanding of Don Bosco wrote many vague things about him. Those who had a closer and deeper knowledge of Don Bosco were more cautious in making any value judgment about him. Don Bosco seemed quite simple, at first sight. But anyone who knew him in depth would have found several psychological complexities that, at times, were disconcerting. One experiences the same feeling when viewing the vastness of the ocean, as Dante puts it in his **Divine Comedy**:

*Che, ben che da la proda veggia il fondo,  
In pelago nol vede; e non di meno  
È li [evvi], ma cela lui l'esser profondo.*

(Paradise XIX, 61-63)

(Though from the shore he sees the ocean floor, at sea he sees it not; it is there, but the depth conceals it.)

Dear coadjutor brothers, to have a good idea of who the coadjutor brother is, one needs only to know those who were molded by Don Bosco and lived in his environment.

The spirituality of Don Bosco is better understood by knowing these early coadjutor brothers of Don Bosco.

Finally, I am happy to leave this book as a souvenir to our coadjutor brothers. May God bless them, increase their number and make them worthy of their great father, Don Bosco!

Father Eugene Ceria, SDB  
Turin, May 24, 1952.

## **Cavaliere Frederick Oreglia Di Santo Stefano**

At the end of July 1860, Don Bosco went, as usual, to the shrine of St. Ignatius, located above Lanzo Torinese. He had been invited to offer some spiritual assistance at a retreat for lay people. At the time, Don Bosco was not feeling well.

The first evening, before the retreat's opening, Don Bosco passed out in church. Coming to in his room, there was standing by his bed a bearded young man whom Don Bosco did not know. He was in the church when Don Bosco passed out, and he gently carried him to his room near the church.

That spontaneous Good Samaritan had been living a carefree life. He was making a spiritual retreat at his mother's insistence. She promised to pay all his debts if he attended a retreat, and she hoped that this would bring him back to his former way of living.

When Don Bosco learned who the young man was, he called for him, grabbed him by his beard, and said: "Now you are in my hands. What shall I do with you?" The young man was moved by the kindness of Don Bosco. To make a long story short, Don Bosco succeeded in getting him to make a good confession, and he left the shrine of St. Ignatius a new person, willing to give up his dissipated lifestyle.

That convert was Cavaliere Frederick Oreglia di Santo Stefano. He was widely known all over Turin because of his talents, his easy ways of dealing with people, and his noble spirit and strong character. Frederick kept in touch with Don Bosco and, on one occasion, had decided to give up the world and enter a state of higher perfection.

Pursuing a religious vocation, he first stayed with the Rosminians for a short time, leaving because of ideological differences with the Rosminians of Stresa. He preferred to live with Don Bosco and joined the Oratory in 1860 to discern his vocation. He offered himself to Don Bosco for any service.

Father John Baptist Lemoyne knew Oreglia and, in the *Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, he states that Oreglia was willing to make any sacrifice. He was an example of humility and patience to everyone (Vol. VI, 424-425).

Oreglia's way was not a put-on or a show-off; he really was animated by a spirit of good will and followed community life in everything. Life at the Oratory was not easy, but rather difficult, especially for one like Oreglia who was accustomed to enjoy the amenities of life. Everyone, even Don Bosco, called him Cavaliere, but his life was no different from anyone else at the Oratory. All had the same practices of piety, the same food, and the same family traditions.

Slowly, Oreglia came to know, share, and enjoy the feelings of all the Oratory members in such a way that one might easily have said that Oreglia, much like the others, had grown up at the Oratory of Don Bosco. We have a lot of his correspondence, which simply shows how well he got along with the superiors and fellow boarders and the love that he had for the students and artisans of the Oratory.

As his spiritual director, Don Bosco kept an eye on Oreglia. In his kindly way, he helped him to make progress in his love of God and love of neighbor. On May 12, 1862, after carefully observing him for two years, Don Bosco admitted him, along with twenty-one other youngsters, to his first profession as a Salesian for a period of three years. After these triennial vows, Oreglia made the perpetual profession of his vows in the presence of Don Bosco on December 6, 1865.

Don Bosco did not allow Oreglia time for any kind of idleness. Right away he entrusted him with the running of the print shop and the bookstore, and with the administrative work connected with both assignments. Don Bosco also entrusted Oreglia with several legal and business matters that had to be dealt with in town. He was very talented and knew how to deal in these matters. He also appointed him secretary of the lotteries. Aware of his ability to deal with aristocrats and high society, Don Bosco asked Brother Oreglia to act as his liaison when dealing with such people of Rome, Florence and Turin. His own brother was a cardinal, which gave him easy access to most members of the nobility, who also esteemed Don Bosco very highly. However, Brother Oreglia wanted simply to be called a Salesian.

But something unexpected happened. Brother Oreglia was thinking about becoming a priest and living a more quiet and austere life.

After nine years of living and working with Don Bosco, Brother Oreglia thought it best to join the Jesuits, as one of his own brothers had done. One can only imagine the great sadness felt by Don Bosco, who depended on him. And Oreglia had done so much for him and his new congregation. Besides, as reported by Father Lemoyne in the *Biographical Memoirs* (IX, 335), Brother Oreglia was known as a Salesian all over Italy. Most people knew of the great work he had done and the esteem in which he was held by the many people who knew that he was an exemplary religious in discharging his duties; and now... Don Bosco offered this heavy loss to God, as long as it was for the greater glory of God and the good of Brother Oreglia's soul.

Before leaving the society, Brother Oreglia wrote a letter to Don Bosco, which says in part:

*Very Reverend Father:*

*Whether my decision is sound or fanciful, I feel that I must at least test it out. You could not bring yourself to approve of it, but I hope that you will understand and regard it as something I feel bound in conscience to do.*

*You can readily believe how bitter it is for me to leave the Oratory, where I have enjoyed your full affection and confidence for over nine years.*

*On leaving this house, I take with me the cherished burden of all that I owe to you and to my superiors and companions. If I shall not be able to discharge my debt, I will at least be content to show to all that I am forever indebted to you and them. If I can ever be of use to you, the Oratory, the Society, or any member, please look upon me always as your servant, friend, and brother.*

*Lastly, please believe me when I say that, as I leave this house, my heart is most deeply attached to it and, were it possible, even more full of love for it than in the past.*

*Your devoted servant,  
Frederick Oreglia*

He left Turin for Rome on September 20, 1869, the day after he wrote his letter to Don Bosco.

If Don Bosco felt the great loss of Brother Oreglia, it was due more to his fatherly heart rather than to the help that he was losing. Don Bosco was convinced that, when it is a question of God's work, man's work is not really needed.

Frederick Oreglia never lost sight of or contact with Don Bosco. He always loved Don Bosco and kept his esteem and veneration for him and the Salesian Society.

Occasionally, when Frederick knew that Don Bosco was in financial difficulties, he would help him out, with the permission of his superiors.

Brother Oreglia was at the Oratory for only nine years, and during that time the coadjutor brothers were not yet in a position to carry out Don Bosco's initiatives, as they would later on. But there is no doubt that Brother Oreglia's presence had contributed to orderliness and discipline, and to creating prestige for the Oratory of Don Bosco.

Since things at the Oratory were pretty well settled by this time, the departure of Oreglia did not cause any damage.

While realizing that Brother Oreglia left the Salesian Society, at the same time we thought it best to honor his memory, since he, too, had done so much for our congregation and ended his days, not as a coadjutor brother, but as a Jesuit priest.

## Brother Joseph Buzzetti

Joseph Buzzetti was born at Caronno Ghiringhello in 1832, a municipality of Lombardy, subject to Austria at that time. At the age of nine, he came to Turin with his older brother. He was one of those many youngsters who came to Turin as construction laborers, before moving up to a better job elsewhere. Joe found employment right away and, from morning till night, hauled bricks and mortar on his shoulders for the bricklayers or masons.

He was fortunate to meet Don Bosco and was so fascinated by him that he decided to attend his Oratory every Sunday. This was Don Bosco's early "wandering oratory." Joe attended the Sunday Oratory up to 1847. Then Don Bosco invited him to move into the Oratory as a boarder. Joe agreed and began to study for the priesthood, along with three other youngsters. But Divine Providence had different plans for Joe. In 1851, he donned the clerical habit, but shortly after, he shattered his right index finger in an accident, and the finger had to be amputated. The unfortunate incident kept Joe from being drafted into the Italian army but it also prevented him from continuing on for the priesthood, due to a canonical disposition about the right index finger of one's hand.

What was Joe to do? He had no intention of leaving Don Bosco, whom he looked upon and loved like his own father, and Don Bosco loved him in return. Buzzetti was ready to do anything, even to remain a "perpetual" cleric, as long as he stayed with Don Bosco. His relatives made him think about his own future. "What would happen if Don Bosco were to die?" They found him a place in town and insisted so much that he should move that he finally yielded to their wishes.

His decision to leave was also prompted by another reflection. He saw that his classmates were moving on and he was going to be, so to speak, their subject. He did not like that idea, and so he made up his mind to leave the Oratory.

When he went to see Don Bosco to say goodbye, Don Bosco did not object at all to his leaving. As a matter of fact, out of concern, Don Bosco asked him where he was going and

whether he needed any money to meet his first expenses. And when he was about to leave, Don Bosco told him: "Don't forget that the Oratory will always be your home and that Don Bosco will always be your friend. Should you decide to return because you do not like what you are doing, you will always be welcomed here wholeheartedly." Don Bosco said this in such a fatherly way that Joe Buzzetti began to cry and said: "No! I don't want to leave Don Bosco. I want to be with Don Bosco forever!" Don Bosco could hardly free himself from his embrace.

Joseph Buzzetti had made up his mind that he would help Don Bosco in any way possible, and Buzzetti really did become the "Cyrenian" of the Oratory. He found time to do it all. No amount of sacrifice would scare him away from doing what Don Bosco wanted. He worked constantly and said: "As long as Don Bosco is pleased with what I am doing, that's good enough for me!" Don Bosco knew that he could rely on Joe and so, when he did not know whom to call upon for an assignment, he would say, "Get me Buzzetti!" Joe, with his shaggy red beard, would show up immediately and, with a smile on his face, listened to Don Bosco and did what he asked.

Don Bosco knew that Buzzetti was very talented and entrusted him not only with assisting and teaching catechism and finding jobs for the workshops, but especially with delicate assignments. In 1852, Don Bosco began to publish the *Catholic Readings (Letture Cattoliche)*, an undertaking that demanded an energetic and enterprising manager. Don Bosco chose Joseph. At the end of 1860, before the arrival of John Cagliero, the choir of the Oratory needed an overseer. Buzzetti got the job. The Oratory band, made up of Oratory boarders and externs, was not running smoothly at all. Don Bosco asked Buzzetti to look into it and he turned it around. During Don Bosco's fall hikes to the country, it was Joe who looked after the members of the band and never let them out of his sight day or night. "As long as Don Bosco is pleased with what I am doing, I will keep on doing it." That was Joe Buzzetti's refrain. Before the arrival of Cavaliere Frederick Oreglia, Joe ran the bookstore. Don Bosco entrusted business transactions and other delicate matters to him.

Joseph Buzzetti was entrusted with many tasks and assignments, but he could not be called a coadjutor brother. Why? The reality of the coadjutor brother was in its initial planning stage in Don Bosco's mind, much like the Salesian Congregation.

Joe Buzzetti faithfully carried out all assignments given him by Don Bosco. Some of these tasks were difficult and, at times, quite dangerous. But Joe was physically very strong, tall, and robust and had plenty of courage to meet any task. He was like a bodyguard for Don Bosco, especially on those not so rare occasions when people who wanted him out of the way threatened him

The enterprising managerial ability of Joe Buzzetti was especially evident in the running of the lotteries that Don Bosco came to rely on for financial aid for his works. Father John Baptist Lemoyne stated in the *Biographical Memoirs* that, since 1852, Joe Buzzetti was Don Bosco's right hand in running the lotteries, because of his management skills (BM IV, 251-253). We have an idea of how Joe Buzzetti ran the lotteries by observing the last lottery Don Bosco organized for financial help in building the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome in 1884. Clearly, this lottery was not only moving slowly, but it was in a mess. It needed someone to organize it. Don Bosco sized up the problem and then told the director, Father Dalmazzo, that he should no longer worry because he would send him someone to fix the problem.

When he got back to Turin, Don Bosco called on Joe Buzzetti and told him frankly: "I need you to go to Rome and untangle the messy situation of the lottery there. Only you can do it." He left for Rome immediately, assessed the problems, untangled the mess, and the lottery was a success. Don Bosco expressed his gratitude to Joe for a job well done. But Joe left the room without saying a word and returned to work as usual.

But who would have thought that this man, who had given so much of his life to help Don Bosco, this man, who had really loved all of Don Bosco's undertakings, would feel unworthy of becoming a Salesian? But that was the situation. Up to 1877, Joe Buzzetti did not feel worthy to bind himself to the Salesian Society by the profession of vows. Don Bosco, who had a deep understanding of Buzzetti, did not want to

force him to become a Salesian. But in 1877, Don Bosco told Joe that he was afraid he would not be close to him in paradise. "Why?" Joe asked, all puzzled. Don Bosco told him "You see, in heaven I will be with my Salesians, and I will have to look from a distance at those who are not Salesians."

Don Bosco's words touched Joe's heart; he wasted no time reflecting on it and told Don Bosco that he wanted to become a novice in the Salesian Society, which he had already belonged to, although not in name. Don Bosco presented Joe's application to become a Salesian to the General Council, who approved it unanimously. At that time Joe Buzzetti was the oldest living person who had attended the early oratory of Don Bosco.

When he became a coadjutor brother, Joe Buzzetti did not have to change a thing. For almost forty years the Oratory had been his world, his very life, and the Salesian Congregation had been his only ideal to follow.

But very soon, Brother Buzzetti felt that his end in this world was near. He was worn out, not so much because of his age, but because of the enormous amount of difficult work that he had done over many years. Father Barberis writes:

*After Don Bosco's death, Brother Joseph Buzzetti lived on for three and a half years, and it looked as though his mission here on earth had come to an end. He had helped Don Bosco all his life; he had faced all sorts of dangers to protect Don Bosco; he had saved Don Bosco several times.*

*He had fought for Don Bosco's cause in many difficult situations. But with Don Bosco gone, Brother Joe Buzzetti felt that his work and mission in this world had come to an end.*

*The three and a half years Brother Joe was allowed to live after Don Bosco's death seemed like a preparation for his own death.*

*(Barberis, Vademecum, I, 113-114)*

Since his health had worsened considerably, Brother Buzzetti was sent to pass some time at the school of Lanzo Torinese. He liked the idea because it was at Lanzo that Father

Victor Alasonatti, whom he greatly esteemed and venerated, had died some years before. Brother Buzzetti spent his last days in prayer. He was spiritually very much at peace and had great patience when suffering of any kind confronted him. He died on July 14, 1892 at the age of fifty-nine.

It certainly is worthwhile remembering the steadfast loyalty Brother Joseph Buzzetti displayed toward Don Bosco. This loyalty was the manifestation of his gratitude toward Don Bosco who, as Joe used to say, “got him away from bricks and mortar and led him closer to the Lord.”

## Brother Joseph Rossi

It is amazing how much the early Salesians loved the Oratory of Don Bosco. Yet that Oratory did not enjoy the comforts of today's Oratory. In fact, the early Oratory had to endure many hardships and privations.

Simply recall the Salesian coadjutor brother, Joseph Rossi, who had been entrusted by Don Bosco with many difficult and delicate matters on behalf of the Oratory and the entire Congregation. He complained that he was "forced" to be absent from the Oratory for long periods of time. That's how much he missed the Oratory life.

And do you know why? Because both Brother Rossi and Brother Buzzetti loved Don Bosco so dearly from the day they first met him.

Joseph Rossi knew of Don Bosco from reading *The Companion of Youth*. They met in 1859 when Joe was already twenty-four years old. The following note was found in one of his personal writings. "I was greatly impressed and edified by Don Bosco's fatherliness and his kind words in welcoming me. My feelings toward him were as a son for a father."

The General Council of the Salesian Congregation had recently been established. Its members gathered for their first meeting on February 2, 1860, in which they examined the application of the first youngster who wished to join the newly formed Salesian society.

The minutes read: "The General Council of the Society of St. Francis de Sales met in the Rector Major's office to discuss the application made by Joseph Rossi, son of Matthew, from the town of Mezzanabigli (Pavia).

"Prayers were said and the Holy Spirit was invoked and then the Rector Major called for the voting. The votes were cast and Joseph Rossi was accepted unanimously and admitted to the practice of the Rules of the Society."

Joseph Rossi was admitted to the novitiate, professed his triennial vows on September 19, 1864, and his perpetual vows on September 25, 1868. This is how Brother Rossi bound himself totally to Don Bosco's family.

Don Bosco showed Brother Rossi the operations of the Oratory and how to handle its business affairs. He first assigned him to the running of the laundry – apparently an easy job, yet quite difficult and full of responsibility. He was also given the task of taking care of Don Bosco's office and room, a task that he performed with great diligence.

Later on, when Don Bosco had decided to entrust lay collaborators with the running of the workshops, he called on Brother Rossi to handle one of the shops. Brother Rossi was not only concerned about the artisans learning their trade, but especially about their growth as good Christians.

Little by little, Don Bosco began to entrust Brother Rossi with various errands into town. When he saw that he had managerial and administrative ability, Don Bosco began to form him, and he gradually became his trusted "right hand" as the supplier general or administrator of the Oratory.

Don Bosco had a building that stocked the supplies needed for the workshops of the Oratory and the other Salesian houses that he was opening. Don Bosco entrusted the management of that building and all the supplies to Brother Joseph Rossi.

Brother Rossi's activities kept expanding as he used his intelligence and good will to comply with the wishes of Don Bosco. He accepted Don Bosco as a loving father, and Don Bosco in turn accepted Brother Rossi as his dependable and trustworthy son. Don Bosco trusted Brother Rossi to the point that, at times, he gave him *carte blanche* in dealing with important and delicate affairs.

He undertook countless trips on behalf of Don Bosco and of the Congregation, both in Italy and abroad, dealing mostly with confidential matters, known only to Don Bosco, Father Rua, and himself. Other Salesians hardly knew about these trips and what Brother Rossi had been entrusted with; and if they knew anything, it was only by conjecture.

There are two things the reader should know about Brother Rossi during his travels away from the Oratory.

First, he was scrupulously observant of religious poverty. According to an eyewitness, Brother Rossi followed a simple rule – never indulge in anything that was not available at the Oratory.

Second, he never missed any practices of piety. A member of the General Council was once deeply edified by the fact that Brother Rossi had just returned from a trip at a late hour, yet he went immediately to the Church of Mary Help of Christians to receive Holy Communion. Then he saw him leave, take a cup of coffee, and return to church to make his meditation with the community.

Don Bosco's ways of dealing with his collaborators were more family oriented than authoritative. For instance, Don Bosco would facetiously refer to Brother Rossi as "Count Rossi" or "the count," because of the way he carried himself, giving the impression that he was a big shot. At times, Don Bosco would call "Count Rossi" to make his way through the crowd, since he was in a hurry to speak with him. Other times he would say it to get Brother Rossi through moments of moodiness that affected him.

One day, Don Bosco noticed that Brother Rossi was not in a good mood, and to get him out of it he said to the gentlemen next to him, "I'd like you to meet Count Rossi, a great friend of Don Bosco."

Brother Rossi retorted, "Don Bosco is always kidding around!"

"I, kidding around? No way! Isn't it better that I call you by that name than give you a rap in the kisser?"

At times, Don Bosco would use endearing ways to indicate that he cared for his own collaborators and that would open up their hearts to him.

During the First General Chapter, which was held at Lanzo Torinese in 1877, when the topic turned to "business matters," Don Bosco called his friend, Brother Joseph Rossi, from Turin so that he could attend the chapter as a consulter.

Don Bosco did the same during the Fourth General Chapter, held at Valsalice in 1886. The topic to be discussed was technical and professional schools, and Don Bosco relied on the expertise of Brother Rossi. He attended that chapter as a consulter also.

Brother Rossi never used this privileged position as a pretext to be exempt from obeying. Like any of us, he must have had his faults, but it is a well-known fact (and we have a sworn eyewitness) that he was obedient to a fault.

Brother Rossi's attitude toward obedience, especially in his old age, made him so submissive that his superior was somewhat confused when he presented himself and humbly asked for some permission.

Sometimes Brother Rossi appeared in Don Bosco's dreams, notably, in Don Bosco's dream about the missions, which he had at Barcelona on April 10, 1886. At the start of the dream, Don Bosco saw Brother Rossi on his one side and Father Michael Rua on the other. Brother Rossi looked quite serious, and when Don Bosco called him, he gave no answer, only a glance. He seemed overcome by troubling thoughts. Father Rua was seated apart and looked worried and about to fall asleep. Don Bosco called out to both of them, but each one remained silent and pretended not to have heard him.

Father John Baptist Lemoyne sent a copy of this dream to Father John Cagliero in Patagonia. When he thought about the roles played in that dream by Brother Rossi and Father Rua, who were respectively the supplier general of the Congregation and the vicar of Don Bosco, Father Cagliero gave the following interpretation: "Father Rua was worried about the spiritual condition of the Congregation, and Brother Rossi was worried about its financial state"

At any rate, that dream on the missions shows how both Rua and Rossi were very close collaborators of Don Bosco, since they were both concerned about the progress of the Society, each in his assigned role.

Father Michael Rua was the immediate superior of Brother Joseph Rossi and showed him how to carry out Don Bosco's wishes. When Don Bosco died, Brother Rossi put all his trust in his successor and, for twenty years, carried out whatever he requested of him. In turn, the successor of Don Bosco put all his trust in Brother Rossi. While he could, he put himself entirely at the disposal of Don Bosco's first successor, Father Michael Rua.

In 1905 both poor health and advancing age caused Brother Rossi to slow down. He had no choice but to take it easy. However, much like his classmate Brother Joseph Buzzetti, he always remembered Don Bosco and his wondrous life. Brother Rossi had no conversation that did not somehow refer to the sayings and deeds of Don Bosco.

Father John Baptist Lemoyne learned about several incidents and confirmed many facts that he reported in the *Biographical Memoirs* of Don Bosco, just by listening to Brothers Buzzetti and Rossi.

Brother Rossi, now unable to be actively involved, would spend most of his time praying. The Salesian confreres rarely failed to see him in prayer or caught up in recollection in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians.

Brother Rossi's life came to an end unexpectedly after a stroke. But he was aware enough for the reception of the sacraments, which were administered by Father Michael Rua, while the confreres were moved to tears. Brother Joseph Rossi breathed his last, shortly after midnight on October 28, 1908 at the age of seventy-three.

Brother Joseph Rossi was fortunate enough to enjoy the friendship of two saints, much like his classmate Brother Joseph Buzzetti. Because of his loyalty, unselfishness, and spirit of sacrifice, he certainly deserved their friendship.

Brother Joseph Rossi left a legacy for all his Salesian confreres to cherish, namely, his devoted steadfastness to his vocation as a Salesian coadjutor brother.

## Brother Marcello Rossi

Among Don Bosco's rules for the good running of a Salesian school, is the following: "A good doorkeeper is a treasure for an educational institution."

This rule proved true with coadjutor brother Marcello Rossi, who was in charge of, or "ruled over," the entrance of Don Bosco's Oratory for forty years. The phrase "ruled over" was used intentionally, because the Oratory had become like a small world unto itself, with an entrance like a seaport. It needed someone who was more than a simple caretaker.

God did provide Don Bosco with collaborators who, upon being molded by him, were able to carry on his unique mission. Marcello Rossi was one of these collaborators. He joined the Oratory of Don Bosco as a young man at the age of twenty-two. Family circumstances had postponed his response to God's call to become a religious. He came from a poor family and had little formal education. However, he possessed certain spiritual gifts peculiar only to saintly people.

I have no intention of including Marcello Rossi's early childhood in this profile. Father John Baptist Francesia's biography is suited for this.<sup>1</sup>

I will start with Marcello Rossi's life when he first entered Don Bosco's Oratory in Turin on the eve of the feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 7, 1869.

Marcello waged a continuous battle in following his vocation, even after he had finally decided to join Don Bosco as a Salesian. I am sure that it was by this suffering that he obtained from God the gift of perseverance in his religious life and his willingness to respond fully to God's grace.

When he first came to the Oratory, he was assigned by Don Bosco to work in the bookstore, which made him more aware of the need for refinement in his manners.

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<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Battista Francesia, *Rossi Marcello il coadjutore salesiano* (Turin: SEI, 1925). Father Garneri is writing a more substantial biography.

Marcello had an open mind and took advantage of any opportunity to learn, while at the same time Don Bosco taught him to direct all his actions toward the Lord.

Upon completion of the novitiate, Marcello Rossi professed his triennial vows in the Salesian Society. He was not aware that God had arranged that he should also profess his perpetual vows earlier than expected.

Brother Rossi's health was rather poor and, at the beginning of 1873, he became seriously ill. Since he wished to die, as he said, full of God's love, he asked to profess his perpetual vows in the Salesian Society. The request was granted, and he read the formula of religious profession with such a faint voice that the bystanders felt he was going to die before ending the reading. The news was already spreading that Brother Marcello Rossi had died.

But things worked out differently and, the morning after his profession, his physician realized that Brother Rossi was in perfect health.

After his miraculous recovery, Brother Marcello was assigned to take care of the bookbinders. At that time, Father Anacletus Ghione was the catechist of the artisans, and he has stated that Brother Rossi's overall concern was not limited to teaching the artisans, as much as showing them how to be good Christians. Many of his past pupils would later visit him and express their gratitude for his concern when they were young artisans at the Oratory. He had been a true benefactor to each of them.

Brother Rossi had this assignment for a bit more than a year. In this short span, he displayed heroic obedience.

No one today knows how those old typographical machines worked. To get them in motion a huge wheel had to be moved by hand. When the operator left the Oratory, Father Rua replaced him with Brother Rossi. He assumed that, since Brother Marcello, prior to boarding at the Oratory, had worked on a farm, he should be strong enough to handle the workings of the heavy typographical machines at the print shop of the Oratory. But it was not so.

Even though he did not feel qualified to handle that kind of work, Brother Rossi obeyed as he was requested. After a while, others came to realize that this work was not suited to

Brother Marcello's strength, and was assigned once again to the bookbinding shop. But Brother Rossi's willingness to obey Father Rua's order without any excuses displayed his strong spirit.

Even his work in the bookbinding shop proved too difficult for Brother Rossi. He was spitting up blood for almost six days, and it looked as though he were too sick to do anything anymore. Don Bosco became aware of the situation and gave Brother Rossi his blessing.

Brother Marcello knew that Don Bosco, at the very beginning of the year, had predicted that five members of the Oratory would die, and some had. After receiving his blessing, he asked Don Bosco if the time had come for him to join those who had already died. Don Bosco looked at him in a loving way and told him clearly that he wanted him to continue in his work for Don Bosco. Once again, Don Bosco's blessing marked the beginning of Brother Rossi's total recovery from his sickness.

Don Bosco gave Brother Marcello a new and easier assignment, better suited to his condition than any previous tasks. Don Bosco sorely needed someone to take charge of the entrance to the Oratory, a doorkeeper who could properly manage that busy portal, someone conscientious and reliable, since it was the vital entry to his entire works.

Don Bosco considered Brother Rossi as the one best suited for the job of doorkeeper. However, before a definitive assignment, Don Bosco wanted to be sure that he had enough spiritual and physical stamina to meet the challenge of the job.

And so Don Bosco assigned him "temporarily" as porter of the Oratory. That "temporary" assignment lasted forty-eight years. During that time, anyone who might have passed the porter, even only once, would never forget Brother Rossi or Mr. Rossi or, simply, Marcello Rossi, as he used to be called.

He was always sweet and kind. He had a welcoming attitude, and his actions were never "put-on." He wore neat clothes and stood tall with one hand in the other, while displaying his peaceful and penetrating eyes. He had a kindly aura about him and was quite reserved in his manners. Whenever he had to speak to anyone who approached the

doorkeeper's window, he would keep his chin up, listen to the requests, and answer gently and to the point.

If anyone had filmed him surrounded by many people making requests and impatiently waiting for an answer, and Brother Rossi handling each request appropriately with poise, it would have made a wonderful documentary film.

To put it simply, Brother Rossi gave the impression to all that they were certainly entering a well-organized and religious house.

For Brother Rossi every day was the same. He had his practices of piety early in the morning, as soon as the doors of Mary Help of Christians Church were opened at 4:30 A.M.

He would then clean up the entrances to the Oratory, take a seat at his desk and, through a window, respond to any questions raised by those entering the Oratory. Brother Rossi remained "chained" to that desk and office for hours on end.

Did he ever get out of his office for a bit of fresh air? I cannot answer that question. But it was a commonly known fact that Brother Marcello Rossi knew only three things: the ways to the church, the dining room, and his room. He never took a leisurely walk.

The only walks he did take were either to Valsalice or to Lanzo for his spiritual retreat. On that occasion he would wear his wide brimmed hat in place of his French beret. Upon returning, he would put the wide brimmed hat away and put on his French beret. That was his routine.

Any free time he had was spent in praying, reading, or doing odd jobs. This was Brother Rossi's life for half a century. He took his assignment very seriously, because he knew that he was the dependable sentry of the Oratory, its trusted custodian.

There was never any danger of undesirables entering the Oratory. He had a keen nose for these individuals. It is for this reason that Salesians referred to him as *il cane grigio dell'Oratorio* (the gray dog of the Oratory) – a reference to the dog that suddenly appeared several times and defended Don Bosco from his attackers.

At times, Brother Rossi did have to deal with insolent persons who shouted insults at him. In cases like this he would kindly, but gently, show them the way out.

A doorkeeper must deal not only with people who want to enter an establishment, but also with those who want to leave it. Brother Rossi expected everyone to have proper permission to leave the Oratory. If they did not, then nothing could move Brother Rossi to open the Oratory gate.

Brother Rossi always followed one simple rule: the Oratory is a religious house and no one had a standing permit to leave it as though it were a hotel. Besides, Brother Marcello would simply relay the message that he was only obeying "the order of the superior." For this reason he was given several nicknames, like Cerberus (the three-headed dog who guards the entrance to Hades) and many others. But he did not mind, or at least no one ever noticed that he was upset. Brother Rossi was guided by supernatural motives, and he certainly knew how to conceal his feelings on the matter.

One thing is certain. Brother Marcello always had a poised way of speaking with everyone, even though at times he had to be inflexible and, except on rare occasions, always had a smile on his face. Naturally, Don Bosco was pleased with Brother Rossi and esteemed him greatly.

Brother Marcello was exemplary in his spirit of piety, but this did not prevent him from having spiritual problems. Certain expressions used by Father Francesia in his biography of Brother Rossi allude to some of these spiritual difficulties.

At times the Lord does permit His servants to be subjected to spiritual conflicts, if only to purify their souls and lead them to a more perfect way of acting out of love for Him.

However, Brother Rossi was fortunate to have the comforting words of two saintly men, Don Bosco and Father Michael Rua, whether in the confessional or as they passed by the doorkeeper's quarters while leaving. Father Francesia, who was Brother Rossi's spiritual director for twenty-two years, made the following statement: "I was fortunate to have known Brother Marcello Rossi for many years. How spiritually delicate this wonderful confrere was! I can honestly say, under oath, that I do not know what fault he might have been guilty of. I would easily compare him to saints who had achieved the highest degree of perfection."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Francesia, *op.cit.*, p. 57

Brother Rossi was certainly a man of prayer. He prayed in church and during his assignment as doorkeeper. His conversations always had a spiritual touch. He also had a way of leading others to be as prayerful as he was. Those who had a taste for the spiritual recommended themselves to his prayers and, on occasion, they would share their troubles with him and receive his comforting words.

Charity is the hallmark of a true Christian. Brother Rossi was a true Christian and charity was really his hallmark.

What we are about to write may appear to be mere exaggeration, but it is not. It is the plain truth!

Brother Marcello Rossi was endowed with a certain evangelical salt that he used to season his conversations with outsiders so as to enter their hearts for the sole purpose of leading them to God. Whether asked or not, Brother Rossi would give his advice to those who passed through his office, especially when he sensed they needed it. He had acquired a special technique in dealing with light-minded youngsters who needed to be straightened out. The superiors would send him some scatterbrained youngsters on the pretext that he needed their help. Some of these rascals would show up on their own to speak with him. Brother Rossi knew how to win over their hearts and encourage them to discharge their duties in the right way. Some boys about to be dismissed would change their ways, once Brother Rossi had taken good care of them.

There are religious and priests today, who say that they owe their perseverance in their vocation to Brother Rossi, because of his good advice.

For eighteen years, Brother Rossi regularly taught catechism to the festive oratory boys, who profited very much from his teaching and loved him in return.

Due to his post as doorkeeper, he had the opportunity of making several acquaintances whom he engaged to help others in need. For instance, some of the students leaving the Oratory found it difficult to obtain employment. Brother Rossi would use his acquaintances to find employment for them.

At times, Brother Rossi became aware of some poor youngster who needed shelter and boarding at the Oratory. He would look up some benefactors and encourage them to pay either full or partial tuition for the boy's boarding expenses.

When Brother Rossi died, one of the past pupils at the Oratory recalled tearfully that, when he was nineteen and living at the Oratory, he did not want to work in the print shop. Brother Marcello obtained employment for him at the Salesian paper mill of Mathi, where he loved the work and earned a good living.

When word got around that Brother Marcello could meet people's needs, his doorkeeper's quarters became filled with kids, besieging him with requests for help. Brother Rossi had a good memory and infallibly responded to all.

Father Francesia acknowledged that Brother Rossi had done him a great favor by serving his Mass at 4:30 A.M. every morning for forty years.

Brother Rossi never enjoyed good health, which only worsened from 1920 on. Winters were his enemy and affected him more each year. Death finally came after a somewhat brief incident.

During his final day, Brother Marcello spent most of the morning in the Church of Mary Help of Christians, where he served three Masses. He complained that he felt colder than usual, but it didn't stop him from doing his assigned tasks.

Shortly before noon he returned to his office and felt that the end was approaching. As he was being taken to the infirmary, he noticed a poor lady who often got some alms from him. He paused to assist her and then continued to the infirmary. A doctor was called and he diagnosed a progressive paralysis and also the beginning of pneumonia. Brother Rossi received the sacraments of the dying and waited for the Lord to call him. He passed away on March 27, 1923, at the age of seventy-five. With his passing the Salesian Congregation lost one of its most devoted sons of Don Bosco.

When Cardinal Cagliero first saw the monument in honor of Don Bosco, which had been erected in the square of Mary Help of Christians in Turin, he noticed the white-haired figure of Brother Rossi and exclaimed loud and clear, "He is the true monument to Don Bosco!"

Cardinal Cagliero's expression was simply an echo of the feeling of anyone who had known Brother Rossi, and it was only a prelude to Brother's reputation of holiness that is cherished by so many people since his death.

We cannot conclude without a valuable recollection from Father Francesia's biography of Brother Rossi.

Only a few days after the death of Brother Rossi, the servant of God, Canon Joseph Allamano, founder of the Consolata Missionaries and an alumnus of the Oratory, met with Father Francesia and told him: "Brother Rossi was a true son of Don Bosco! If anyone were to gather material for his biography, I believe that they would find enough to make him a model for all doorkeepers. He was so pious! He was so recollected! And most of all, he had a great spirit of sacrifice. Oh! How I wish I had it too!"

Regardless of what the future may hold for him, this conviction is shared by a lot of Salesians, namely, that Brother Marcello Rossi is for the Salesians what the lay Brother Alphonsus Rodriguez is for the Jesuits, for he, too, spent more than thirty years in the Jesuit school of Majorca doing the same job that Brother Marcello Rossi did in the Oratory of Don Bosco.

## Brother Dominic Palestrino

The following is one of those stories that still belong to the Golden Age of the early days of Don Bosco's Oratory.

Don Bosco was showing the Church of Mary Help of Christians to a visiting priest. As they entered the church from the choir side, they were surprised by one of the residents of the Oratory, suspended in mid-air, his knees bent as if adoring the Blessed Sacrament. Mind you, that section of the church did not yet have an altar of the Blessed Sacrament. Stirred by the sound of the two priests, he gently descended near Don Bosco and begged his forgiveness.

"Don't worry!" Don Bosco said to him. "Go about your business as usual. No need of apologies." Then turning to the visiting priest, Don Bosco said, "One would suppose that these things happened only in medieval times, but they also occur in these days."

Father John Baptist Lemoyne reported this incident in the *Biographical Memoirs* of Don Bosco but did not mention the resident's name because, at that time, he was still living at the Oratory. But he was Dominic Palestrino.

Dominic was a fisherman up to the age of twenty-four, in a small town near Vercelli, called Cappuccini. He was fortunate to meet Don Bosco for the first time at the Oratory in 1875. He was immediately caught in Don Bosco's net, as he looked intently at Dominic, much as Jesus looked intently at the fishermen of Galilee, and Don Bosco offered a simple proposal: "Come with me!"

Palestrino had just left his bags a short distance away at the Cottolengo Institute, where he intended to stay. He returned there, picked up his bags and rushed back to the Oratory, which he never left for forty-five years, until his death on November 1, 1931.

Don Bosco admitted Dominic to the novitiate, and he made his perpetual vows at Lanzo Torinese in the hands of Don Bosco on September 27, 1876. Perceiving a great treasure in Dominic, Don Bosco assigned him to take care of the shrine of Mary Help of Christians.

Brother Dominic's two main concerns in life were his own personal sanctification and the proper decor of the shrine of Mary Help of Christians.

He dedicated himself to a higher degree of perfection by means of penance, prayer, and work. However, even before entering the Oratory of Don Bosco, Brother Dominic already had some preparation in reaching these goals by his deeds of love toward his neighbor and by acquiring Christian virtues within his humble family background. Therefore, Don Bosco's task was only to guide and encourage an already bright light of spiritual dynamism. This is how Brother Dominic Palestrino was able to reach a high degree of perfection.

During his entire life Brother Dominic never wanted for penance or suffering. He was continually bothered by poor health, which Don Bosco was aware of. On occasion Don Bosco blessed Brother Palestrino and his health improved. Don Bosco also told him that he would never enjoy perfect health, but would carry this burden of poor health his entire life. This was further compounded by spiritual dryness, so often evident even in the lives of the best servants of God. He bore his sufferings with patience and never complained. This is the conviction of those who knew him over many years.

The physical pain he endured was, at times, so strong that it even affected his social disposition. He would make rash judgments about situations and people. Those who were ignorant of these conditions would take him for a stubborn and hardheaded person. Brother Dominic allowed others to say whatever they wanted about him. He remained composed, and accepted these judgments about him in humility and silence.

Considering his delicate health, some wondered how Brother Dominic could work so hard and steadily with very little rest. Some days he worked eighteen hours. Every day he put the utmost diligence into every task he was assigned, especially during the years when he had no one to assist him.

Worshippers used the shrine constantly. Priests would show up at all times, wanting to celebrate their private Masses at the many altars that needed to be set up and provided with an altar server. There were hundreds of small details that had to be taken care of every day and, seemingly, every hour of the day.

Brother was the first to rise and the last to retire. He made many sacrifices during the forty-five years he took care of the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians. Very few people ever realized what Brother Dominic went through every day, because he hardly spoke to anyone. He kept recollected and stayed mostly to himself.

To make a long story short, Brother Palestrino lived for "his church." The shrine was the world he enjoyed the most. He never needed recreation or relaxation, because his church provided both.

His life of prayer gave him strength and a steadfast zeal in his duties. Brother was a prayerful person. He enjoyed a life of prayer before meeting Don Bosco at the Oratory, and that is why he accepted to be the sexton of the shrine with joy and enthusiasm. The task fitted his disposition to remain close to the Lord and to be at the service of our Lady. This is where Brother Dominic found his contentment and happiness.

Brother had a simple and childlike faith. From Don Bosco he learned how to blend both work and prayer. While in church, he had a serious, devout, and dignified composure to remind others that they were in the house of the Lord.

Brother Dominic could never shed his country looks or his rough farm ways; yet, underneath those country traits, Brother concealed a soul rich in spiritual qualities. This is the impression others had by simply speaking with him. He used a constant refrain that revealed his spirituality: "If it is God's will...! If our Lady allows it...!"

Considering his calm and moderate ways, one could say that he learned it from Don Bosco, who was a source of inspiration that engendered respect and veneration. Brother Dominic's faith was simple and childlike; but it was also strong and fervent. Perhaps no task more easily than that of sacristan could become a mere routine chore, even though it is a sacred duty. This can happen when there is no spirit of faith. But Brother Dominic's zeal for the house of God and of our Lady was always nourished by his fervent faith, and he looked constantly for ways to improve the decor of the church.

Brother was in his own world when he prepared the church for festivities. He would forget about his poor health and work as though he were doing it for the first time.

Brother's zeal was not confined to taking care of the many items needed for the decor of the shrine. No one could imagine the many details that concerned him, were I not to list some of them, at least briefly, especially during the festivities at the shrine of Mary Help of Christians:

- 1- two complete sets of damasked decorations that were woven with beautiful artistic designs: they were used to decorate the entire church.
- 2- two sets of decorations to be used for funerals.
- 3- six complete sets of vestments, three of which could be used only at pontifical celebrations; pendiums and antependiums to decorate the altars of the entire church.
- 4- seven sets of chasubles to be used at the different altars as needed.
- 5- several identical chalices to be used on ferial and festive days; several sets of candelabra, pyramids, and other items needed for celebrations during the year.
- 6- two statues of Mary Help of Christians: one rather richly decorated and the other one less conspicuous. The better statue was used in the procession of May 24 through the streets of Turin

Before the Church of Mary Help of Christians could be granted the privilege of a basilica, the Sacred Congregation of Rites sent a fact-finding team to establish the availability of vestments and decorations suited for a basilica. They found everything in perfect agreement with the required norms and gave its approval for the church to be designated a basilica. Much of this was due to Brother Dominic Palestrino.

Naturally, all the above-mentioned items were quite costly. Just think: one of those vestments alone cost 27,000 lire – a considerable amount of money for those days. Brother Palestrino purchased them all, without the Oratory incurring any debt. Once the needs were made known, he would tap benefactors to pay for them.

It is quite amazing that God should grant a humble yet zealous person like Brother Dominic such an extraordinary ability to purchase these items. Someone suggested that it was

really our Lady Help of Christians who inspired Brother Palestrino to purchase what was needed for the shrine and that she influenced benefactors to pay for the purchased items.

Don Bosco once made this statement: "Sometimes Palestrino speaks to Don Bosco, but Brother Dominic does not understand what he is telling me. But I understand it well: it is the Spirit of God who speaks to me through him." Naturally, Don Bosco had a great esteem for Brother Palestrino.

During Don Bosco's final illness, someone pressed him to beg our Lady Help of Christians to heal him. "If you want Don Bosco to recover his health, have Palestrino pray for it," Don Bosco replied. This person went to Brother Palestrino and told him what Don Bosco had said. Brother's answer was, "God's will be done!"

Don Bosco heard about this and called for Brother Palestrino. He said to him, "Dear Palestrino, I did not tell you to pray for my recovery, but that I may keep my faith up to the very end of my life." Brother Dominic was both moved and confused by Don Bosco's words. He kissed his hand and, without saying a word, left him in a prayerful attitude.

After Don Bosco's death, Brother Palestrino became even more recollected and prayerful. His only wish was to see the glorification of his beloved Don Bosco here on earth. His wish came true, not on earth, but only in heaven. Brother Palestrino outlived Don Bosco by thirty-three years.

He began to feel the impact of the rough winters and came to realize that his end was near. However, he never stopped working until October 27, 1921, when he was told that he should stay in bed.

That morning Brother Dominic decorated the Church of Mary Help of Christians for the celebration of the Month's Mind Mass for Bishop Costamagna. He removed all the decorations that afternoon, going up and down the ladder, perspiring profusely. At the end of the day, he had chills and decided to go to bed earlier than usual.

Father Francesia visited him, and Brother Dominic told him: "I'm glad I took care of everything in church today. Now, if the Lord so wishes and our Lady allows me, I'll take some rest and prepare for my death." Brother had contracted pneumonia. He received the last rites perfectly conscious.

On All Saints Day, November 1, 1921, assisted by Fathers Rinaldi and Ricaldone (Father Albera had died only two days before), Brother Dominic Palestrino breathed his last at the age of seventy.

He certainly had many merits to accompany him as he walked toward his blessed eternity. This is the conviction of those who knew and understood their beloved confrere, Brother Dominic Palestrino.

## **Brother Camillo Quirino**

Camillo Quirino was born at Casorzo Monferrato in 1847. He was a farmer and very intelligent, to the point that he would have been successful in any undertaking. He had neither the means nor the fortitude to enter a life of learning or business. But Camillo did find a way that led him to a beautiful life.

The pastor of Penango took an interest in his family and helped Camillo enter the seminary. But Camillo thought he was unworthy of the clerical state and withdrew. After leaving the seminary, Camillo took up farming and did some studying on his own, when he felt like it. His own natural inclination was toward mathematics and physics.

Camillo's pastor did not give up and wrote to Father John Baptist Francesia, "I believe from personal knowledge of Camillo that he never committed any serious sin in his life!"

In 1870, on the good advice of Bishop Manacorda of Fossano, his pastor took Camillo, now twenty-three, to meet Don Bosco. Initially, Don Bosco thought it best for Camillo to continue studying for the priesthood because he felt he had a good heart and an excellent mind. However, in 1877, Don Bosco allowed Camillo to become a coadjutor brother.

Brother Quirino was assigned two jobs: bell ringer of the Church of Mary Help of Christians and galley proofreader in the print shop of the Oratory. The bells of the shrine of Mary Help of Christians never rang so beautifully – he gave them a professional touch! At dawn he played the Angelus, followed by some popular hymns in honor of our Lady. The pealing of those bells woke up the boarders of the Oratory and filled the air with delightful sounds. On feast days, all were fascinated by the bells as they filled the air with joyful sound.

When the new bells of St. Cajetan Church were to be inaugurated at Sampierdarena, Don Bosco called on Brother Quirino to ring the new bells. It was a smashing success. Since Brother Camillo was mechanically inclined, he had invented some simple and cheap devices that gave the bells unheard of sound effects.

Brother Qurino had a good ear and talent for music, which were very beneficial. He had never played the violin and yet, without the aid of a teacher, he came to master it and played beautifully, to the delight of all.

Brother Quirino had no problem learning his other assignment as galley proofreader efficiently. The Oratory print shop was just developing and was gradually growing in size and personnel. Don Bosco needed someone to proofread quickly and exactly. He called upon Brother Camillo Quirino, who singlehandedly ran that department.

While Brother Quirino worked in the print shop, Don Bosco asked him also to prepare for the comprehensive exams for high school mathematics at the University of Turin to become a certified teacher. Meanwhile, Don Bosco suggested that he should be freed from his assignment in the print shop, but Brother Camillo protested, saying that he could do both, prepare for the exams and work in the shop.

The written comprehensive exams that Brother took displayed such a mastery and originality that the examining team was anxious to meet him for the oral comprehensive exams, in order to ask him what method he had used for the written exams. Brother Camillo was self-taught and he could not explain clearly his own method. The examining team gave him a perfect score, but not a *cum laude*.

During his free time, Brother Quirino started learning languages, beginning with Greek and French, since, as galley proofreader, he had some knowledge of both. Later on, aware of the many foreign visitors to the Oratory, he realized that Don Bosco needed an interpreter. So Brother Camillo decided, on his own, to study several other modern languages. His knack for languages was unbelievable.

On one occasion, an Austrian called on Don Bosco at the Oratory. He had only a halting knowledge of Italian, so it was difficult to communicate. Don Bosco was too busy to spend time with this visitor. He excused himself for a while and entrusted him to Brother Qurino, that he might entertain him until he got back from his errands. Brother Camillo conversed in German with the guest from Austria for a few hours, and when Don Bosco returned from his errands, the Austrian praised Brother Quirino, both for his knowledge of

German and his pleasant conversation. The latter comment struck Don Bosco, because Brother Camillo was by nature not that talkative and was rather reserved with people. But on that occasion, Brother performed well and honored Don Bosco, because he was acting then as his representative.

Brother Camillo used his language skills more than he ever expected, and he rendered a precious service to Don Bosco and the superiors on several occasions because of it.

A few months before he died, Don Bosco received a mysterious letter with unknown stamps and an illegible seal. As he could not understand anything about it, Don Bosco said: "We need Brother Quirino!" Brother Camillo asked for three days to decipher the letter. In three days, he showed up with the original copy and a translation. It seems that a Cossack prince was asking Don Bosco to pray to his Madonna to recover from a serious illness, and wrote the letter in Cossack. It would take too long to explain how Brother Quirino was able to decipher a letter written in Cossack.

In a similar incident, a Russian family called on Don Bosco. None of the Russians knew any other language, so they used signs to make themselves understood. Don Bosco thought of Brother Quirino, who understood exactly what the Russians were saying and became their interpreter for Don Bosco. At the end of the visit, Don Bosco expressed his gratitude to Brother Quirino: "Bravo! You've done a precious service." That "Bravo!" touched Brother Camillo, as he acknowledged when he reported the incident later on.

Neither work nor study prevented Brother Camillo from his practices of piety. He never missed meditation, even though he acknowledged that, much like many other scientists, he was subject to distractions.

Brother Quirino had a deeply prayerful life. One afternoon someone was surprised to see him ecstatically absorbed in prayer in the church's choir loft. He had not noticed the whisperings of some Salesians seated behind him.

He was always apostolic. During recreation after dinner, he would walk in the porticoes or the playground with a tin box full of rolled up pieces of paper. Brother Camillo would ask a boy to choose a paper, which contained a spiritual saying beneficial to all. It was his little apostolic work.

It was enough to meet him to realize his deep union with God. He bore his many physical ailments in a heroic way. This was especially true after 1886, when he suffered arthritic pains in his knee, for which there was no cure. Things were so bad that a specialist wanted to amputate his leg. Brother was admitted to St. John's Hospital, where this specialist was the head doctor. When he understood what the doctor intended to do, he decided to discuss it first with his confessor, which he did and then returned to the hospital in a wheelchair.

The next day, as the doctor prepared him, Brother Camillo listened and appeared very calm and serene. A group of university students were there to observe.

Unexpectedly, the doctor decided to make a further examination of his leg and, to the surprise of all, he cancelled the operation. He concluded that his leg could be taken care of by another procedure. Brother Camillo accepted this second opinion with the same calmness and serenity as when he was expecting to have his leg amputated.

The doctor was curious as to why Brother Camillo was so calm and serene both before and after both decisions. Brother Camillo first hesitated. Then he slowly opened his left hand and displayed a small crucifix. "Doctor, that's the reason for my strength!" he said.

The doctor was an exemplary Christian, and he used the statement made by Brother Camillo to teach an effective lesson to his students. It was not a lesson in medicine.

The small crucifix that he held has a history attached to it. For quite some time Brother Camillo had that small crucifix tied to his finger and held it tight in the hollow of his left hand. By habit, he would present the crucifix to be kissed to anyone he met.

Apparently Father Rua was not pleased with the novelty, especially the kissing of the crucifix. Brother Quirino spoke to Don Bosco, who did not seem to be against it.

Brother Quirino then wrote a letter to Father Michael Rua in which he explained the reason for carrying that small crucifix. We still have the letter in our archives. It reveals the spiritual depth of this good coadjutor brother, living at the Oratory. Here it is in its entirety:

*Very Rev. Fr. Rua:*

*I believe that the few words expressed by Don Bosco approve my holding on to the small crucifix, as I have done for some time now. I am sure you will not be displeased to hear what I have learned from this practice.*

*1- The cross carries the mark of many comforts, honors, and consolations. You'll be glad to know that I enjoy them all!*

*2- Anyone who looks for heavier crosses will find them ever lighter; and since the heaviest cross was carried by Jesus, all others are like roses; and anyone who wants to pick up roses without damaging them, must pick them up by their stem where the thorns are located.*

*3- Happiness is found in the realm of justice, and for sinners justice can be found only in the love for suffering: "O Crux, Ave spes unica!" Hail O cross, my only hope! In my suffering I will say: My supreme love is nailed to the cross for me!*

*Besides, I do not think that I ever lacked respect for the cross, which is glorious in itself; it is rather my shame that tries to conceal it. But I do recall the threat of the Gospel, namely, that Jesus will be ashamed of that person who shames him in front of men. Therefore, I will be better off by disposing of shame, or rather by holding on to it because I deserve it, and then say with St. Paul: "Mihi absit gloriari nisi in cruce Domini nostri Jesu Christi." May I never boast of anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!*

*I do hope the Lord will grant me the grace to love the cross and to carry it the way He wants me to, so that others may love it. As I see many boys pick up a piece of paper and kiss it, I hope that such a kiss comes not only from the lips!*

*Your most obliged son in Jesus Christ,  
Camillo Quirino*

Brother Camillo never had his leg amputated, but he lost the use of both legs. He built his own wheelchair to get to the shop, since he had not yet given up his first assignment, namely, galley proofreader. From then on, all the spiritual maxims from his tin box dealt with the cross.

Eventually, Brother could not use the wheelchair anymore and he decided to work from his bed. The superiors would send him letters either to be translated or to be copied.

Most of the time he prayed or read Latin lyric poets, whom he seemed to understand and enjoy. But habitually his mind was heaven-bound. Brother Camillo heroically put into practice the teaching of St. Francis de Sales, "Ask for nothing, refuse nothing!"

According to the priest who assisted him, the pains that he suffered were atrocious, yet he never complained or uttered a sigh of impatience. Brother Camillo spoke about heavenly things with great fervor. The aspiration he said most frequently was *fiat voluntas tua*. Other spiritual expressions used by Brother Camillo touched the hearts of those who visited him.

Brother's illness gradually became worse, and he looked as though he were wasting away. He could not move on his own, yet he did not want to disturb anyone to assist him. He devised a mechanism by which he could gradually move on his own simply by pressing on some weights.

Since he felt that his end was near, he called Father Belmonte, who was the Prefect General of the Congregation as well as his director. He made his monthly manifestation and asked Father Belmonte to hear his confession. Father Rua was absent from the Oratory.

Brother Camillo received the final anointing, which he followed with attention and fervor, as he did the liturgical prayers that were being read. He was at peace and very happy as he listened to the rite of anointing. As long as he could, he addressed the cross with acts of love, and when he could not do it anymore, he would utter gentle sighs.

He breathed his last on November 8, 1892, at 2:00 P.M. He was forty-five years old and had lived at the Oratory of Don Bosco for twenty-two years.

If anyone were to ask which virtues Brother Camillo Quirino most characteristically displayed, we would have to answer: his humility, his detachment from the world, and his willingness to suffer for Jesus.

A learned priest who had returned after going astray for some time, boarded at Don Bosco's Oratory in 1882. He studied the Oratory environment and, referring to Professor Camillo Quirino without expressly mentioning his name, said:

*"I am sure that in no other school would a mathematics professor ever condescend to accept such lowly tasks as ringing the church bells. But piety helps in everything. This particular teacher is so modest and selfless that it would never dawn on you that he is a very talented professor. Yet that is the way it is with Don Bosco and his school." (BM XV, 469)*

## Brother Andrew Pelazza

Another outstanding Salesian coadjutor brother was Andrew Pelazza, who also had the good fortune to be formed by Don Bosco himself. He was one of the first among the Salesians of the early days of the Oratory of Don Bosco. The May 8, 1863 minutes of the General Council state that Andrew Pelazza, with four other youngsters, was admitted to become a member of the Society of St. Francis de Sales.

Andrew was born at Carmagnola in 1843. He met Don Bosco several times at Valdocco, where he regularly attended the festive oratory. It was here that he considered embracing a more perfect life and decided to entrust himself to Don Bosco and remain with him. At the age of twenty he began to live at the Oratory.

At the beginning of January 1862, Don Bosco gave each member of the Oratory a *strenna*, which was a motto or simple advice to live by during the year. He claimed to have received these *strennas* from our Lady. "For several years I have been asking for this favor, and I finally received it," Don Bosco said. He added, "Do not ask me why, because you would embarrass me." As he finished these words, a rush of kids ran to the rooms of Don Bosco to find out their *strennas*. Don Bosco told Andrew, "Seek a true friend, and when you have found him, do all he tells you" (BM VII, 6). Don Bosco meant by that advice that he should find a regular confessor, and do whatever he says.

Don Bosco had his own peculiar way of knowing his collaborators. He entrusted Pelazza with several tasks. As he had done with Brother Joseph Rossi, he first assigned him to the laundry. He proved to be a good and diligent worker. Some time later, Don Bosco realized that Brother Pelazza had a fine voice and musical talent. He immediately assigned him to take care of the music classes and choir. Brother Pelazza became one of those Salesian singers who vied with each other to perform the liturgical services of the Oratory in a solemn way and to provide cheerfulness at the family entertainments of the Oratory.

Brother Pelazza even received several invitations to appear at shows and was allured by the prospect of a brilliant and financially successful career in show business. He gave the same answer to any such requests: He felt at home where he was and would not change his condition for all the gold of the world.

Don Bosco was convinced of Brother Pelazza's gifts and, when Cavaliere Frederick Oreglia di Santo Stefano left the Oratory and the running of the print shop, in 1870 he looked to Brother Pelazzo to take his place. Initially, Brother felt that he was not really qualified to run a shop of that magnitude. But Don Bosco did not give up and encouraged him to stay on. He did and was so successful that he managed the shop for thirty-five years.

Brother Pelazza was responsible for the continuous expansion of the print shop. By his ability he showed that he was a good and faithful interpreter of the mind of Don Bosco. This shop was dearest to Don Bosco. Brother Pelazza was not only concerned about the professional training of his students but also their Christian formation. Like Don Bosco, Brother Pelazza took care of his students after they completed their training and left the Oratory. He made sure they were settled with work that provided stability for them now and later.

Don Bosco had the custom that, when he wanted to speak more freely with his confreres, he would ask them to accompany him to town. Brother Pelazza was one of those whom Don Bosco frequently called on to accompany him. During the walk he informed Don Bosco of everything that was going on in the shop. Don Bosco in turn would offer Brother not only general tips on how to run the shop, but also personal tips on living as a Salesian. This certainly contributed to that distinctive mark of being formed by Don Bosco.

Brother Pelazza was very kind, sensitive, and delicate whenever he had to inform the superiors about his workers or students. When he had to reprimand anyone, he followed the norms of Don Bosco's preventive system.

For instance, if Brother could not respond promptly to the demands of his impatient clients, he would try to reason with them. He never lost his cool or his poise and acted in a dignified way, as was expected of him.

On one occasion, Brother was not able to satisfy Father Julius Barberis, his former classmate and now master of novices. His *Storia Antica* was about to be printed. Brother tried to make Father Barberis understand why the printing of his book was being delayed: "Be patient and realize that the delay in printing was justified on our part. We are all animated by the same spirit, namely, to do everything for the greater glory of God."

His business letters were seasoned with a spiritual touch certainly worthy of a religious. He had to correspond with authors, editors, and others who were not always easy to deal with. No matter what confronted him, Brother always conveyed his thoughts in a clear way and used the appropriate words to make a point. He stayed in control, especially during controversies. He was courteous with the uncourteous.

On one occasion, a university professor whose book was being printed at the Oratory, felt offended by the way things were going. He wrote a fiery if not brutal letter to Don Bosco complaining about Brother Pelazza. On the advice of Don Bosco, Brother Pelazza, who did not feel offended at all by what the professor had written, humbled himself by writing an apology to the professor. Slowly, the storm abated and things turned around. Had Brother Andrew acted differently he would have made the professor an irreconcilable enemy.

Brother Andrew was impeccable in his bookkeeping and took stock of everything that happened in the print shop. His duties became more complicated when Don Bosco asked him to manage two more print shops, Sampierdarena and San Benigno Canavese. He scrupulously handled all incoming money. He observed the vow of poverty and knew that he was only the manager and not the owner. When he encountered heavy expenses he consulted with his superiors and accounted for all expenses. If at times, as happens, he made a mistake (*errare humanum est*), he would use it to remind himself to be more cautious in his business transactions.

Brother Andrew was not well prepared to handle the management of a print shop, but he was intelligent and had a keen sense of observation. He acquired a sharp managerial and editorial mind so that his print shop, *La Salesiana*, could match any printing firm in town.

In 1878, Brother Andrew was asked by Don Bosco to administer also the paper mill of Mathi that Don Bosco had bought in 1877. Although a difficult undertaking, it was an essential one, because it would provide paper for all the print shops of the Congregation. Don Bosco relied on several coadjutor brothers, who in turn would manage the employees, while a priest would be responsible for the moral and religious life of the Salesians as well as the lay staff. Don Bosco hired a capable technician and entrusted the administration to Brother Andrew, who continued the same work at the print shop of the Oratory as well. He spared no effort to manage both works in a professional way and made sure that the two undertakings met with Don Bosco's approval.

Brother Andrew's activity was hardly noticed, but the effects were quite visible. Let me just quote two instances that illustrate my point.

The first is the work done by Brother Andrew at the Professional National Exhibit of Turin in 1884. The Oratory's *Salesian Booth* at the exhibit caught the attention of more visitors than any other booth.<sup>1</sup>

Visitors could see the entire process by which rags become books: how the paper was processed from those rags, the techniques used to compose and print a book and, finally, the binding of the book. Don Bosco called on Brother Andrew to make the preparations for that Turin exhibit: acquiring the material, setting up the machines, training the artisans to run the machines, and many other details.

Many other collaborators, especially Brother Joseph Rossi and Brother Joseph Buzzetti, helped Brother Andrew. But the running of the whole show was in the hands of Brother Andrew Pelazza, a quiet yet ever so active organizer.

The visitors applauded the exhibit. It had the greatest number of visitors. Naturally, no one knew the amount of preparation that went into such a wonderful outcome. Brother Andrew's leadership was responsible for the success of that *Salesian Booth* at the Turin Exhibit of 1884.

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<sup>1</sup> Natale Cerrato with Michael Ribotta, "Expo '84 and Don Bosco's Peerless Pulp-to-Paper-to-Print Presentation," *Journal of Salesian Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1 (Spring 1993), 87-98.

The second instance that revealed Brother Andrew's organizational and managerial skills was at the exhibition for the Salesian professional schools in 1901, under the direction of Father Bertello and in accord with Salesian Regulations. It displayed our artisans' work, first of Italy and then of the Salesian world. The Oratory print shop received first honors among the other print shops run by the Salesians in Italy.

The judges of that exhibition, technicians well known for their expertise, praised the participants and felt obliged to "single out the distinguished administrator of the Oratory print shop, Brother Andrew Pelazza, who for years had been the skillful manager of the enterprise. The judges also applauded Brother Andrew's tireless and enterprising activity.

Exclude the practices of piety and short recreations, and we see that Brother Andrew spent long hours "nailed" to his desk, as he handled many business transactions. It was here at his desk that he suffered a fatal heart attack. He had some warning signs for several months. He was losing energy and he knew the time to leave this world was getting closer. He worked until September 23, 1905, when the heart attack he anticipated struck him at 11:00 A.M. at the age of sixty-one. He lived only a few hours more, to 4:30 P.M. He received the last rites in the presence of the General Council members. That morning he had gone to the shrine of Mary Help of Christians to make his confession.

Brother Andrew Pelazza passed away peacefully, surrounded by tearful Salesians, artisans, and friends who paid him tribute at the funeral services. His passing left a huge gap at the Oratory.

Brother Andrew was a true son of Don Bosco, whom he loved dearly. He was also one of those outstanding Salesian coadjutor brothers who had been uniquely formed by Don Bosco himself. His enterprising activity, piety, loyalty, and dedication deserve to be imitated.

## Brother Peter Enria

Peter was born at San Benigno Canavese in 1841. His family moved to Turin in 1854, where Peter first met Don Bosco. That was also the year of the cholera epidemic, and Peter and his brother, orphaned by the epidemic, were sent by the municipality of Turin to the convent of St. Dominic.

Don Bosco was asked to take care of the intellectual and moral formation of those poor orphans, and he accepted wholeheartedly. He and his administrator saw the orphanage and planned some actions on behalf of the orphans.

The details of the visit and the welcome Don Bosco received are recorded in the *Biographical Memoirs* of Don Bosco (V, 84-85). Brother Peter Enria related it to Father John Baptist Lemoyne, the author of the *Memoirs*.

*I first met Don Bosco in September 1854 at St. Dominic's where about one hundred cholera orphans were sheltered and cared for through the efforts of a private committee. Don Bosco came to visit us one day, escorted by the administrator. I had never met him before, but he was so friendly that I could not help liking him right away. He smiled at everyone, asked us our names, and inquired whether we knew our catechism or had already been admitted to confession or First Holy Communion. We told him everything. When he came to me, I felt my heart throb, not with fear, but with affection. He asked my name and surname, and then said: "Would you like to come with me? We'll always be good friends and get to Heaven together. How about it?"*

*I answered: "Oh, yes, Father!"*

*He then added: "Is this boy with you your brother?"*

*"Yes, Father," I answered.*

*"Very well, he may come too!"*

*A few days later we both were taken to the Oratory. I was then thirteen and my brother was eleven. My mother had died of cholera, and my father was still stricken.*

*Seventeen years later in Varazze I recalled this incident to Don Bosco who was then sick. "Do you remember, Don Bosco, how your mother used to scold you for always taking in new boys? 'You keep taking in new boys, but who is going to feed and clothe them? We have nothing, and soon it will be winter!'"*

*In fact, the first few nights I had to sleep on a pile of dried leaves with nothing to cover me but a little blanket. "Do you remember how, after we had gone to bed, you and your mother mended our only pants and jackets?" Don Bosco smiled as I reminisced, and he remarked: "How hard my good mother worked! What a saintly woman! But Providence never abandoned us."*

Don Bosco loved Brother Enria, who always returned his love. This is why we have included him in our profiles, though the information is quite scarce. What we relate here comes from the *Biographical Memoirs* of Don Bosco and bits of information received from people who were fortunate to know him.

The first assignment Don Bosco gave Peter was as a blacksmith. He sent him to a blacksmith friend to be trained. Looking to the future, Don Bosco was planning to have a blacksmith shop at the Oratory, and Enria would run that shop. But Don Bosco changed his mind and assigned Peter to work with Joseph Rossi in the general supplies department. Like Buzzetti, Peter took a while before he professed as a coadjutor brother. They were lay interns.

However, by the time Don Bosco changed his mind, Enria had already learned enough of the blacksmith's trade to be useful at the Oratory. He responded to the many needs of the Oratory, saving Don Bosco expensive work by outsiders.

Peter learned to do almost anything. He was unique, a blessing sent by Divine Providence. He could respond to any need at any time. He was a jack-of-all-trades or factotum – music teacher, theater manager, cook, and painter. He was an original member of the famous Oratory band. He created theater props and sang at performances. He inscribed the scriptural quotations underneath the Oratory porticoes and along the corridors.

In the fall, Peter helped organize the famous country hikes with Don Bosco and his boys. He would write skits and make the props to be performed on makeshift platforms, as Don Bosco and his hikers passed through the small towns.

However, an outstanding feature of Peter was his assistance to the sick. He seemed to be an experienced and well-trained infirmarian, and was very patient in winning over the hearts of the sick, even the most difficult.

Like his friend and companion Joseph Buzzetti, Peter also suffered many crises and wrote about some of them.

"One day Don Bosco said to me: 'Dear Enria, I am not pleased with you anymore! I hear so many complaints about you!'"

This was not the first time that Don Bosco addressed Peter in such a way. But on that particular occasion, Peter answered back and said to Don Bosco: "I am sick and tired of hearing the same thing? I am sorry I learned so many trades!"

Don Bosco's answer was a simple one: "Forget the trades you have learned." And he left.

That same year, Don Bosco was absent from the Oratory for about a month. On his return, the boys went to the parlor to welcome him back. Like the others, Peter got close to Don Bosco and moved to kiss his hand. But Don Bosco pulled his hand away as he turned to another boy in the parlor. Peter was terribly hurt. He went to his room and cried the whole day, as he related later.

At the time of the fall outing, Joseph Buzzetti gave Don Bosco the list of the band members to accompany him on the hike. Don Bosco saw Peter Enria's name on the list and crossed it off. All the band members joined the hikers, except Peter, who remained at the Oratory. A few days later, while Don Bosco was still on the outing, Peter received a note from him. "Dear Enria, remember that you should never answer back to your superiors! Don Bosco is always your friend and I remember you in my Mass every day and pray for you!" This note was the balm Enria needed to soothe his troubled heart.

Peter got sick during this time. And when Don Bosco returned, he heard his confession and gave him the blessing of Mary Help of Christians, which gave Peter a lot of comfort. Don Bosco never again mentioned this incident.

Peter lived and worked with Don Bosco for some time. He entrusted his life to Don Bosco, but he never made a commitment as a professed Salesian. Finally, in 1878, on the eve of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, he took his vows as a coadjutor brother in the Society of St. Francis de Sales. His was neither the first nor the last of this practice. In the early days of Christianity, many remained catechumens and were not baptized until at an advanced age. Likewise, some of Don Bosco's closest collaborators, like Peter Enria and Joseph Buzzetti and others, simply lived at the Oratory before they finally professed as coadjutor brothers. Remember that it took many years for Don Bosco to develop the idea of a Congregation, let alone formulate his idea of the identity and mission of the coadjutor brother.

A lot of collaborators were very content to stay with Don Bosco and work for him, even though they did not fully understand what that entailed. Nor did Don Bosco ever force his collaborators to commit themselves as members of the Society, unless they wanted to. Even though Peter Enria and Joseph Buzzetti and others were not *de jure* Salesians, they were truly *de facto* Salesians, though without vows.

Under unique circumstances, Peter got an opportunity to show his commitment to Don Bosco. In December 1871 Don Bosco became seriously sick at the school of Varazze. The superiors realized that the illness would persist for some time. Aware that the confreres of the house were busy with many other commitments, Father Rua telegraphed Peter Enria to take full care of Don Bosco.

Peter made the following statement at the canonical process for the beatification and canonization of Don Bosco: "I left immediately for Varazze and I thanked God for this privileged assignment. I actually prayed that I might have the opportunity to assist Don Bosco during his illness. I was even ready to offer my life for his recovery." Peter related these thoughts because he was aware of Don Bosco's poor health for a long time. Don Bosco may have known this, but he never showed it. As soon as Peter reached the school of Varazze, he went to see Don Bosco, who was bedridden but welcomed Peter with great joy. Peter was saddened by Don Bosco's appearance, who seemed to be more ill than he suspected.

There was at Varazze the cleric Guidazio, who was physically robust and somewhat advanced in age. He taught at the school and was an assistant to the students. He aided Don Bosco during the first days of his sickness. The two planned a schedule, so that one of them was always with Don Bosco at night. Peter stayed until 2:00 A.M., when Guidazio replaced him until 6:00 A.M. They did this for two months.

During this time, Peter wrote regularly to Joseph Buzzetti, his classmate and companion. With specific details he informed him of Don Bosco's condition. These letters were then read at the Oratory and appreciated by everyone. At the same canonical processes, Peter also made the following statement: "When I had to perform some disgusting or repulsive chores, Don Bosco would say, 'Look, Enria, at what kind of predicament I am in! Do it for the love of God!' 'But what are you saying, Don Bosco? This is nothing compared to what you have done for me. How many of my companions would consider it an honor to do what I am doing for you.'"

While Midnight Mass was being celebrated that Christmas, Enria wrote to his friend Buzzetti at the Oratory of Valdocco to express openly his desire to be with them, and for not being able to receive Holy Communion with them. He ended his letter with the prayer that the Lord might grant them the happiness of seeing Don Bosco fully recovered.

Peter wrote to Joseph Buzzetti of both the joy and the anxiety that he experienced while taking care of Don Bosco: "There is no need to tell you the joy that I feel as I pray next to our beloved Father, Don Bosco. But, dear Buzzetti, it is also hard not to cry, when you love a father who is as loving as Don Bosco, and see him so sick for such a long time! It is true that his health is improving somewhat, but ever so slowly!"

On January 14, 1872, a small improvement allowed Don Bosco to get out of bed for a short while. Enria wrote another letter to Buzzetti about that event: "What a joy! What a comfort! Don Bosco is doing much better!"

The news about Don Bosco's health became more reassuring, and on January 30, 1872, Don Bosco left Varazze for the school at Alassio. Father Francesia accompanied Don Bosco to Savona and later wrote to Father Rua, "Don Bosco has continued on with only that lucky Enria at his side."

When Don Bosco reached the Oratory of Valdocco, the first thing he did was to go to the Church of Mary Help of Christians to thank our Lady for the grace of his recovery. Everyone followed him to the church.

After, while Don Bosco was being entertained in the dining room, Enria remained in the church's sanctuary. Joseph Buzzetti went to him and, seeing that he was upset, grabbed him by the arm and took him to Don Bosco, who noticed that his eyes were red from crying.

"Why are you crying? Aren't you glad?"

"I am much too happy," Enria answered, as he began crying again. Even Don Bosco's eyes were wet with tears.

Enria overcame these first emotional reactions and joined the festivities for Don Bosco's recovery. After a few days of rest, Peter Enria went back to his regular assignments. From then on, he left the Oratory only on three occasions for brief periods.

In May of 1872 the city of Mondovì was celebrating the third centenary of the death of Pope Pius V, who had been bishop of that city. The Oratory band and choir were invited to the celebration, about a hundred people. Peter and the famous Charles Gastini were among them, and they were responsible for an event that some at first considered "scandalous." Don Bosco and his group were guests of the city's seminary.

One evening, for entertainment, Gastini showed up in a costume and performed an aria from the operetta, *Il Crispino e la Comare*. Some did not recognize him, but the Oratory boys knew him right away and had a good laugh watching the performance. The superiors of the seminary who were present took a different view. They thought that this guy was crazy and were about to have him tossed out, when suddenly they heard a falsetto voice coming from the crowd of Oratory boys. It was Brother Peter playing the role of the Comare. The superiors had no idea what was going on, and one of them asked: "How is it that this lady is allowed in the seminary? Must we be subjected to such a spectacle?" Soon enough the misunderstanding was cleared up and all enjoyed the skit. Never was there such cheerfulness within the austere walls of the Mondovì seminary! The Oratory boys knew how to show their cheerfulness even outside the Oratory walls.

In July 1872, Brother Peter was asked by Don Bosco to accompany him to the school of Alassio for about two months. Don Bosco felt that he had not fully recovered from his previous sickness and needed rest, as well as the assistance of Brother Peter. Don Bosco was right. The illness returned, and Brother Enria had to spend several nights at his bedside.

Brother Peter also left the Oratory for two months in 1873. An Oratory student, who was loved for his many talents and soprano voice, became seriously ill. When he recovered, Don Bosco decided to have Brother Peter accompany him to the villa of Countess Corsi in Balbo at Nizza Monferrato for a period of convalescence. From the letters sent to Brother Peter at Nizza Monferrato, one can surmise how greatly he was missed and how much all esteemed him. For instance, the young coadjutor brother Joseph Dogliani, who shared Brother Peter's musical ability, wrote a letter to him, in which he mentioned an incident about a piano and then added: "You experienced my fiery temper. But I hope you have forgotten all about it. That time I lost my temper, I greatly admired your sense of prudence in bearing with me." A second instance comes from Father Berto, Don Bosco's private secretary. In a letter to Brother Peter, he says: "Both the superiors and all the musicians are anxiously awaiting your return."

The third instance was contained in a letter written by Father Lazzero, a great singer who was also in charge of the artisans of the Oratory. He wrote about the solemn celebration that was held in honor of St. Cecilia, and then he added: "The only one missing at that celebration was Peter Enria, who in such circumstances is always the heart and soul of the entire company. Your music students anxiously await your return."

Even Baron Bianco di Barbania, a benefactor and friend of Don Bosco, expressed his gratitude to Brother Peter for remembering him and how he appreciates a remembrance.

The Salesian schools often asked Brother Peter for assistance in their celebrations. For instance, Father Bonetti, director of the school at Borgo San Martino, would book Brother Peter way ahead of time for an important show that the students were going to put on and, in a kidding manner, he would say, "You are such an important person that you are not only useful but even necessary for us!"

In 1878, Brother Peter was called upon once again to assist Don Bosco. At the time, Brother Enria was assigned to Sampierdarena. On March 31, while returning from France in the company of Father Michael Rua, Don Bosco stopped at Sampierdarena before going on to the school of Allassio. That first night, Don Bosco got so sick that he was confined to bed until April 21, 1878.<sup>1</sup> During those troublesome nights, Brother Enria never left Don Bosco, who relied on this trustworthy infirmarian and admired his ability and spirit of sacrifice. Brother Peter gave Don Bosco all the help and care he needed.

On April 19, 1878, Brother Enria wrote the following to his friend, Joseph Buzzetti: "Again, I have the opportunity of caring for Don Bosco, as I did in 1871 at Varazze. I am happy to serve a father, who makes himself so loved that one would easily offer his own life on his behalf." When Don Bosco recovered from his illness, Brother Peter telegraphed Father Lazzero, director of the Oratory: "Prayers graciously heard. Father, better. Eating with us. Keep cheerful!"

During the fall of 1878, Brother Peter joined the staff sent by Don Bosco to open a school at Este. He was assistant to the school administrator and taught music. Later on, when illness again plagued Don Bosco, Brother Peter was called back to Turin to assist him.

By 1887, Don Bosco was physically exhausted and, on the advice of his doctors, went to Lanzo, where he stayed from July 4 to August 17. He needed special care and called for Brother Enria's assistance once more. Don Bosco felt that Brother Enria was the only one who totally understood his situation and could provide him with the care he most needed. Every evening, Brother Peter would accompany Don Bosco, who was in a wheelchair, as they crossed the meadow of the school to the edge of the hill, where they could view the Stura

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<sup>1</sup>In the *Biographical Memoirs*, XIII, 422-425, there is a copy of a letter by Brother Peter Enria whose original could not be found. The letter is dated April 17, 1878, while the original, which was found later on, is dated April 1, 1878. The difference in dates caused a serious error about the length of Don Bosco's illness at Sampierdarena.

and listen to the sounds of the running waters of the river. At this time, Brother Enria came to know of many confidential matters, which he disclosed during the canonical processes for the beatification and canonization of Don Bosco.

During Don Bosco's final illness, I can still see the figure of Brother Enria.<sup>2</sup> From October 28, 1887, Don Bosco was confined to his bed. Brother Enria assisted him once more during those long nights of suffering and pain. No one was more attentive than he to Don Bosco's every move or could interpret Don Bosco's signs better.

That first night Don Bosco told him: "Poor Peter! Be patient with me! You'll have to spend several nights with me." Brother Enria appeared almost offended and mortified by these words and responded to Don Bosco that he would willingly offer his life for his recovery, as would many others.

On January 30, 1888, the eve of Don Bosco's death, Brother Enria saw Don Bosco turn his head toward him and, in pain, whisper to him: "Hey! Well! Good-bye!" That was Don Bosco's final goodbye to a devoted son who, unable to do anything more, laid his head on Don Bosco's arm, resting on the edge of the bed, and broke down in tears.

When Don Bosco died, since he had been so great a part of Brother Enria's life and heart, Brother did not allow anyone to touch his face. He claimed for himself, as a final act of affection, the right to shave Don Bosco's face. This was an act of devotion toward a father and benefactor.

For several days after Don Bosco's death, Brother Peter Enria seemed lost and disoriented. He was not his jovial and calm self – no more cheerfulness, no more willingness to jump from one assignment to another. A veil of sadness fell over his face.

Brother Enria lived another ten years after Don Bosco's death. His greatest comfort was to pray at the Church of Mary Help of Christians and occasionally visit the tomb of Don Bosco at the school of Valsalice. Sooner than expected, Brother Peter's health began to deteriorate. He suffered from

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<sup>2</sup> During the period of Don Bosco's last illness, Father Ceria was a cleric at Valsalice, not far from the Oratory. [Editor]

back pains, which worsened in 1897, when he was confined to bed for ten months. The patient endurance he witnessed in Don Bosco in his final illness gave Brother Enria courage, peace and resignation. He put into practice the words he had heard Don Bosco repeat so many times: "Keep on working! Suffer and keep quiet!"

During the canonical processes referred to earlier, Brother Enria repeated those words and added: "During his sickness, since he could not do anything, Don Bosco suffered in silence." Brother tried to imitate Don Bosco even in this.

In 1893, Brother Peter wrote a sketchy autobiography in which he spelled out the special relationship he had with Don Bosco and the bouts Don Bosco had to fight when he was seriously ill. Those handwritten pages are filled with love and gratitude.<sup>3</sup>

Toward the end, Brother Peter could no longer talk. With signs he let the others understand that the only thing he wanted was paradise. The Lord called him to himself on the feast of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, June 21, 1898, at the age of 57.

Brother Peter Enria's love for Don Bosco was not so much one of words as it was of deeds and an extraordinary amount of sacrifices. He certainly deserves the gratitude of all the sons of Don Bosco, present and future.

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<sup>3</sup> Brother Enria's recollections have been published with remarks by Father Michael Ribotta, "Peter Enria Remembers," *Journal of Salesian Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Fall 1992), 93-108.

## **Brother Anthony Lanteri**

The profiles we have written so far are those of our coadjutor brothers who were outstanding members of our Salesian Congregation. I now intend to write some profiles of more modest coadjutor brothers who knew Don Bosco and left some message for all of us to live by. Many coadjutors were entrusted with menial jobs, but they also had the opportunity of meeting Don Bosco more than many other confreres.

One of these is Anthony Lanteri, who was born in 1841 at Realto di Briga Marittima, along the French-Italian border. His family was poor and his father was a shepherd. Anthony had a deep love of prayer and an apostolic zeal that easily won over his companions. He clearly showed a call to a life of perfection. Two incidents bound Anthony to our Lord forever. The first was a miraculous recovery from a fall into a ravine; and the second was that he saw so much evil in the world that he wanted out of it.

The miraculous recovery refers to an incident that happened to Anthony while grazing the sheep. As he ran after a lamb, he lost his footing and fell into a ravine. As he fell, he prayed to God and saw a strange light. He landed at the bottom of the ravine unharmed. When he finally saw the depth of that ravine and realized that he had not been harmed, he realized God's presence and resolved to consecrate his life to God, who had miraculously saved him. The second incident happened in the winter when Anthony would leave his village for the towns. These people upset him. They spoke against religion and good morals, and their own behavior was not right at all. Anthony realized that it was quite difficult for him to keep his resolve to consecrate himself to the Lord by living in such an environment. So he thought about leaving his family and environment to enter a religious congregation.

In September of 1871, on the recommendation of his pastor and other caring people, Anthony went to Turin to meet Don Bosco at the Oratory. Immediately, Don Bosco saw his goodness and simplicity and gave him a fatherly welcome. His recommendation to Anthony was, "Be willing to do good!"

Anthony wanted to study for the priesthood, but Don Bosco, on considering his poor health, advised against it and entrusted him with domestic work. Anthony obeyed with docility. Don Bosco tested him for two months and then sent him to the school of Marassi, which later on was transferred to Sampierdarena. He took care of the Church of St. Cajetan. He displayed deep piety, peace of mind that shone from his eyes, and great diligence in caring for the cleanliness and decor of the house of God. All this and his outstanding charity toward his neighbors endeared him to everyone.

After a novitiate of sorts, Anthony made his triennial vows. He later told us that he wished they were perpetual vows, for he wanted to bind himself to God and the Salesian Congregation forever. After one year at Sampierdarena, his health, as expected, was so bad that his superiors became worried and decided that he should return to Turin, where the air might have been more beneficial to him.

He was to help Brother Palestrino in the sacristy of the Church of Mary Help of Christians.

Brother Anthony Lanteri regained his strength, felt good, and thought he was actually in paradise, while caring for the church of our Lady. But his health began to worsen. He willingly accepted whatever the Lord had in store for him. He took all the prescribed cures, but to no avail. He understood his condition and prepared himself for death.

Brother Anthony spent some months in the infirmary and then, on orders of the doctors, was sent home, hoping that the air of his native land would help him a bit. He left the Oratory, never to return, and died peacefully on August 31, 1875, at the age of thirty-four at Brigue, France. His pastor assured us that Brother Anthony had prepared himself for his passing in a most beautiful way.

Father Julius Barberis, who was his novice master, said of him: "Anthony was a model of interior life. Even though engaged in so many menial jobs, his heart and mind were always with the Lord."

## Brother Louis Falco

Louis Falco was born at Pocapaglia (Cuneo) in 1848 and entered the Oratory in 1866 at the age of eighteen with one intention – to learn a trade and return to his hometown. But Divine Providence changed those plans.

Louis had a cheerful disposition that allowed him to suffer the discomforts at the Oratory during those early days. He always seemed happy, content and cheerful. He enjoyed the company of people and felt very much at home at the Oratory. All these factors convinced Louis to change his mind and entrust himself to Don Bosco's care. Once he understood what the Salesian Congregation was all about, his decision to stay with Don Bosco was the most natural thing to do. Don Bosco accepted Louis wholeheartedly. Having completed his novitiate, he professed his first vows as a coadjutor brother in the Salesian Society.

In 1872, when Don Bosco was so seriously ill at Varazze, Brother Louis showed Don Bosco how happy he was to serve him. Louis had been assigned as cook at the school of Varazze, and he tried his best to prepare appetizing meals for Don Bosco.

Brother Peter Enria, writing to his good friend Joseph Buzzetti, expressed his joy that Don Bosco, who felt uneasy taking any kind of food, was happy to eat what Brother Louis had prepared for him.

In 1876, Don Bosco assigned Brother Louis to the staff of the recent undertakings in the Roman Hills, namely Albano Laziale and Ariccia, a town close by. Brother Louis, with his jokes and endless energy for fun and games, kept the community in good spirit, even though the initial conditions were not that comfortable.

Don't believe that Brother Falco's life was only fun and games and exuberant cheerfulness. He knew how to season his life and his actions with a touch of piety, which he learned from Don Bosco. As a proof we have a letter that he wrote to one of his many friends at the Oratory of Turin.

“I have seen the beautiful and lovely things that Rome has to offer. I have visited several of its churches. But, guess what? Nothing is more inspirational than our church – I mean the Church of Mary Help of Christians. You certainly are lucky to be able to pray to our good Mother whenever you want, in her shrine. Oh! How I envy you!”

However, once again Brother Louis had the good fortune of praying in the Church of Mary Help of Christians. When the Salesians left the region of Lazio in 1874, Brother Louis was reassigned to the Oratory of Turin and prayed at the Madonna’s shrine, as he wished.

We have heard a lot of comments about the work of Brother Louis. It seemed he would never stop working, not even for a moment’s rest. He was busy doing so many things. He scrupulously wasted no time, convinced that it was a sin against the vow of poverty. Even when totally exhausted, he looked for something to do.

However, work took its toll even on Brother Louis’s health, and illness got hold of him sooner than expected. He lost his hearing first, and then gradually wasted away. But he never lost his energy to kid around to the point that sickness, however serious, never proved to be a burden to him or those who assisted him. He joked around to the moment he died. He had a good and clear conscience.

Brother Falco died on October 21, 1882, at the age of thirty-four. On his tomb could have been written the scriptural passage: *Servivit Domino in laetitia*. “He served the Lord with gladness.”

## Brother Cajetan Rizzaghi

At first, I did not even consider writing the profile of Brother Cajetan, but then I realized that he had something special to teach all of us.

Cajetan Rizzaghi was born at Piacenza, Italy, and at a young age boarded at the Oratory, where he was assigned to the wood shop. He was not too bright, but bright enough to understand how lucky he was to be at Don Bosco's Oratory. He soon liked the Oratory and especially loved Don Bosco, whose goodness he experienced and cherished every day. He felt that Don Bosco was like a second father to him and never wanted to leave the Oratory of Valdocco.

As he grew older Cajetan became an aspirant, then a novice, and finally a Salesian coadjutor brother. In 1872, Don Bosco opened up a new undertaking at Sampierdarena – a hospice with a technical school. He asked Brother Cajetan to run the wood shop. Brother Rizzaghi was so used to being at the Oratory with Don Bosco that, when he was asked to leave the Oratory and Don Bosco, it caused him great pain.

Don Bosco reassured him with the following words: "Listen! Your name is Cajetan and you are going to be the head of the wood shop, next to the church dedicated to your patron saint, St. Cajetan. He was a good hunter of souls, and so should you be. He will certainly help you in return." Not without tears, Brother Rizzaghi received Don Bosco's blessing and left for Sampierdarena.

At first, everything went along smoothly. Brother Rizzaghi had placed all his trust in his director, Father Paul Albera. He spared no effort in teaching his trade along with a good sense of piety. Brother Rizzaghi was really happy to share his knowledge of the trade with the street kids and show them the right way to live.

These street kids needed a good "cleaning" – on the outside (their bodies) as well as the inside (their souls). Once their bodies were clean, Brother Cajetan was sure to speak to them about the need of a spiritual cleaning, meaning that they should make a good confession.

But after the smooth beginning came some difficult times. Several changes were made at the hospice that, to all appearances, were humiliating to the coadjutor brothers in general and to Brother Cajetan in particular. He refused to accept these humiliations and became bitter. As he no longer communicated with anyone, dreadful thoughts clouded his mind. He didn't trust his superior. He needed a superior like Don Bosco to whom he could open his heart.

To make a long story short, Brother Rizzaghi decided to leave the Congregation. That certainly was the wrong move, but no one could convince him otherwise. Brother Cajetan later acknowledged that that decision created a "stain" in his life that no amount of tears could ever wash away.

Cajetan Rizzaghi, no longer a Salesian, passed some time in Genoa and later moved around. But he never regained his peace of mind. His pride prevented him from seeing the damage that he was doing to himself. Providentially, he was overcome with remorse and realized that he had made the wrong decision. Overcoming all sorts of obstacles, he finally decided that he should return to the Salesian Society.

Aware that Don Bosco was at Sampierdarena for the annual spiritual retreat, Rizzaghi entered the hospice and asked to speak with Don Bosco. He was told that Don Bosco was hearing confessions and that he should wait. Rizzaghi went upstairs to wait. All was quiet and, the only voice that he heard was that of the preacher, who was dramatizing the story of the prodigal son. Rizzaghi heard the preacher as he described the scene of the prodigal son when he decides to return home to his father. Rizzaghi's heart was broken, as he felt the connection with the scene being dramatized. When the sermon was over Rizzaghi sought out Don Bosco and threw himself at his feet sobbing and crying: "Father, I am not worthy to be called your son anymore. Please, keep me as one of your servants!"

In a fatherly manner, Don Bosco grabbed him by the hand, lifted him up, comforted him, and heard his confession. Don Bosco took Cajetan by the hand and brought him to the director with the recommendation that he should treat him kindly, "because Cajetan was one of his great friends." Don Bosco left Sampierdarana and Cajetan remained there.

Shortly after, Father Paul Albera, on the advice of Don Bosco, assigned him to the house of Mogliano Veneto, where Rizzaghi began his life of penance.

It was on the advice of his spiritual director that Cajetan made the application to enter the Salesian Society as a novice once more. His intentions seemed sincere, and his own behavior had clearly proved that he deserved to be admitted into the Salesian Society.

However, around 1886 Cajetan began to be bothered by intestinal problems. Naturally, he kept working in spite of all his ailments. In 1887, things got worse and Cajetan, on orders of the doctors, was taken to a hospital for better care.

Thinking that he was going to die, Cajetan begged to be taken to a hospital in Turin so that he would be close to Don Bosco and the Oratory. He was taken to the St. Louis Hospital of Turin. But before he was admitted, he begged to see Don Bosco to receive his blessing. When he entered the small room where Don Bosco had long before blessed him and assigned him to the hospice of Sampierdarena, Cajetan could hardly speak, as tears were running down his cheeks.

Don Bosco reassured him and repeated the words he had told him sometime before: "Dear Rizzaghi, I want us to be friends until we get to paradise." Don Bosco blessed Rizzaghi and said goodbye to him: "Good bye, dear Rizzaghi. Pray for me! And remember that you are a son of the Oratory!"

As Cajetan became aware of the doctor's decision to operate, he begged to see Father Michael Rua, for he wanted to take care of his spiritual needs. Father Rua came to see him and blessed him in the name of Don Bosco, who at this time was seriously ill and suffering a great deal. Cajetan opened his heart to Father Rua and, realizing that death was imminent, begged to make his religious profession. Father Rua comforted him and allowed him to make his religious profession as a coadjutor brother.

The operation prolonged Brother Cajetan's life for a month. On March 31, 1887, at the age of thirty-three, Brother Rizzaghi, purified by years of penance and strengthened by the sacraments, breathed his last, full of hope of his eternal salvation.

## Brother John Brigatti

In July 1882 Don Bosco went to the school at Borgo San Martino to celebrate the feast of St. Aloysius Gonzaga. As he entered the school, he was told that one of the domestics was suffering terribly with sciatica. Don Bosco visited and comforted him. Before blessing him, he asked, "Do you have great faith?"

"Oh! Yes, Don Bosco."

"Get up then and kneel down."

He was helped out of bed and knelt down with the assistance of a cane. Don Bosco gave him his blessing, and when the sick man tried to get his cane, Don Bosco stopped him. Then the domestic jumped up by himself. He had been cured and never again suffered from sciatica. Father Secondo Marchisio reported the incident at the process for Don Bosco's beatification.

The cured domestic was John Brigatti. He was a holy man who, along with his advanced age of fifty-seven, brought into the Congregation a desire to grow in sanctity through obedience and hard work. We know of several coadjutor brothers whom Don Bosco accepted in their advanced age and did not live long after their profession, but carried out many menial jobs and left behind for us magnificent examples of religious and Salesian life.

John Brigatti came to the Oratory from Caravaggio in 1882. Don Bosco assigned him to the school of Borgo San Martino as a domestic. He had a great devotion to our Lady and considered it a great grace to be living at the school of Borgo San Martino. The superiors realized soon after his arrival that John was a good Christian and had a sincere interest in religious matters. His piety would inspire anyone. Salesian confreres who lived with him were edified by his docile obedience. John was only too willing to do whatever assignment the superiors asked of him.

The incident of his recovery from sciatica confirmed the opinion the superiors had of him. They did not hesitate to ask him to become a coadjutor brother.

John could hardly believe that such a grace was given to him, and he willingly entrusted himself to his director. He made his novitiate and professed his vows, animated by signs of deep faith. Once he became a Salesian, his life became decidedly heaven-oriented. He felt unworthy to be admitted into the community of the Salesian confreres and felt very humble whenever he had to deal with other Salesians, especially with the superiors.

Brother Brigatti made himself available for any job, at any time of the day, with a great spirit of obedience. He did whatever was asked of him, even though at times the jobs entailed physical sacrifices. He lived among the Salesians only seventeen years. He became seriously ill for several months and endured his pains, convinced that his suffering was a God-given gift of which he was unworthy. He had expressed the desire to die on a day dedicated to our Blessed Mother. His wish came true, as he died on Saturday, September 1, 1900, at the age of seventy-five.

When meeting coadjutor brothers like John Brigatti, we recall the words of St. Augustine: *Surgunt Indocti*, "The ignorant, the unlearned, rise to the top!" Simple, good souls are marching ahead of those who, during their life on earth, were considered outstanding men and received applause from the learned but, unfortunately, yielded to the temptation of pride because of their learning and prestige!

## Brother Francis Borghi

Francis Borghi was abandoned by everyone and was extremely poor. Don Bosco accepted him at the Oratory of Valdocco and assigned him to the artisan's quarters. He found in Don Bosco a fatherly heart. Apparently, Don Bosco must have returned his love and admiration because in 1876, when he was still learning to be a tailor, he and two classmates, Ghilione and Garbellone, were admitted to the conferences of the novices, as Don Bosco describes:<sup>1</sup>

*We know they are good boys. I am glad that they want to take part in the novices' common life. In fact, I'd love to see two-thirds of the boys join in, because in reality whatever we do is just what a good Christian should do, except that the conferences point out our failings more frankly.*

Francis Borghi worked at the Oratory until he was drafted into the Italian army. At the end of his military service he returned to the Oratory, where he was received warmly. He remained at the Oratory a few months beyond his religious profession, when he was assigned first to the school of San Benigno Canavese and then to the Sarrià School in Barcelona, Spain. The trade school of Sarrià was just opening and they needed an expert coadjutor brother in the tailor shop. Brother Borghi was the right man!

Once the school of Sarrià was running well, Don Bosco called Brother Borghi back to Italy and assigned him again to San Benigno Canavese. Don Bosco had made plans to place the coadjutor novices in their own house, and Brother Borghi helped to carry out that plan at San Benigno.

I personally saw Brother Borghi in 1886. He was full of life and always cheerful. He always enjoyed the company of his colleagues. He had a commanding appearance – tall and handsome, full of youthful energy and self-control, always

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<sup>1</sup> BM XII, 280-281.

neatly dressed like the master tailor he was. Father Julius Barberis, his master of novices, stated that he was as docile as a child, and, as a religious, an example to all.

There are several incidents that support these traits. Once Brother Borghi went to his hometown, Viarigi, for a celebration. All were edified by his deportment. He visited his pastor and some relatives and then spent the entire day either with his family or in church. His behavior seemed in great contrast with his external appearance. And the townspeople spoke highly of Don Bosco, who had turned this outgoing young man into a mature adult, possessing an exceptional aura about him. It was amazing to see such an outstanding and distinguished person as Brother Borghi ridding himself of any attachment to the world.

We have another incident when Brother Borghi had to call on a zealous Salesian Cooperator who had been brought back to the Church through the kindness of Don Bosco. When the Cooperator saw Brother Borghi dressed in a stylish way, wearing a chain and pendant in his vest, he thought that Brother Francis had left the Congregation. He soon realized his error. The pendant and the chain were gifts that Brother had received from his students, and the superiors had given him permission to wear them, even though he had expressed the desire to get rid of them.

Don Bosco also entrusted Brother Borghi with the Oratory band, which enhanced the liturgical celebrations both inside and outside the Oratory. Brother met with quite a few occasions to show that he was not in any way victimized by human respect. He instructed and encouraged his musicians to behave everywhere in a pious and respectable way, especially when they were receiving Holy Communion. By his own good example, Brother Borghi was the first to show them how they were expected to act.

Brother Borghi was a master tailor. He had a rare ability of cutting and forming fabric that made him famous. Besides the accolades he received continuously because of his unique talent, Brother Borghi was confronted with offers from outside contacts or businesses with promises of a lucrative lifestyle were he to leave the Oratory and go into business for himself.

Brother Borghi always gave the same answer. He had a great life now, and he would never give up what he surely possessed for something that was uncertain. Even several of his students admired his way of living so much and the way he discharged his duties as a religious, that they followed his example and became Salesian brothers.

Death unexpectedly took away all the prospects of a great and promising future as a Salesian for Brother Borghi. While on an outing, he contracted a very serious skin disease, erysipelas, which was incurable in those days. During his illness, he continuously thanked Brother Joseph Buzzetti, his music teacher, for all he had done for him and was still doing on his behalf. "If you had not been around, God only knows where I would have landed!" He spoke highly of Don Bosco's charity that was so evident throughout his life with him.

Father Louis Nai, his director, visited with him, and expected to find him downhearted. Brother Borghi's answer to his director's fears was a wish that all the Salesian confreres might feel as calm and peaceful as he did. "Tell the confreres and novices of San Benigno that I deserve to be envied and not be the object of sympathy or pity."

When he entered his agony and was not coherent, Brother Borghi would constantly speak of the Oratory, the tailor shop, and his pupils. His death was a lesson for all those looking on. He died on February 18, 1889, at the age of thirty-one, surrounded by the superiors and many of his confreres.

His passing away was greatly felt, not only because Brother Borghi was a dear and zealous confrere, but also because he filled an important position in Salesian technical and professional schools. May many coadjutor brothers follow in his footsteps, imitate his virtues, his zeal, and his faithful response to God's grace.

## Brother Louis Nasi

Brother Louis Nasi was born at Pamparato (Cuneo). He lived in a truly Christian environment in his home until the age of eighteen. In 1878, Louis followed the example of two of his compatriots and relatives and became a member of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco. Aware that Louis had the right intention and had come from a good Christian home, Don Bosco welcomed him wholeheartedly to the Oratory. Louis made his novitiate and professed his vows as a coadjutor brother.

His first assignment was in Marseilles, France, where Father Bologna was director. Brother Louis was the jack-of-all trades there, as infirmarian, provider, cook, barber, and farmer – caring for the cattle so important and needed on any farm. He was gifted with many talents, especially the gift of good sense.

The superiors were always confident that Brother Louis would complete all the assignments entrusted to him. He had the praiseworthy quality of responding right away to any request. His Salesian confreres loved him, and the people he dealt with esteemed him greatly.

Father Paul Albera, who was provincial in France, praised Brother Nasi for his exactness in the performance of the practices of piety, even though he had so many tasks, and his faithfulness in keeping the Salesian Rule.

In 1880 Brother heard Don Bosco make a prediction about acquiring property adjacent to the Oratory of St. Leo in Marseilles. There was a spring of water some distance from the oratory. One day Don Bosco, passing by that spring with Father Bologna and Brother Nasi, said, "At the proper time, the Oratory of St. Leo will reach this water spring!" The two Salesians remembered those words and shared them with several other Salesians. That prediction only came true on May 24, 1932. After several purchases of land around the oratory, the property then reached the spring that had been singled out by Don Bosco.

Even though both Father Bologna and Brother Nasi had already died, there were still a few Salesians who had heard about Don Bosco's prediction. One of them was Brother Fleuret, who confirmed that he heard both Father Bologna and Brother Nasi talk about that prediction.

But there was also another prediction made by Don Bosco that related to Brother Nasi. During February 1882, Don Bosco was visiting Marseilles, and Brother Nasi had the honor of being Don Bosco's barber. He cut Don Bosco's hair, kissed his hand, and then said good-bye to him. Don Bosco told him: "I know that you are expecting a tip from me, but the Lord will give you a better one! Keep helping Father Bologna. You will follow him to several parts of France, wherever he will be called to be superior. But Father Bologna will not die in France; he will die at the Oratory. When you find out that Father Bologna has died, get yourself ready, for you will follow him shortly after."

Father Bologna knew about this prediction made by Don Bosco, and so whenever he went to Turin he would make sure not to stay overnight for fear that he might die. But in January 1907, Father Bologna was forced by circumstances to remain at the Oratory. He died there unexpectedly on January 4, 1903. Don Bosco's prediction had come true.

That left Brother Nasi no room to doubt Don Bosco's prediction. He prepared for his own death, which came on September 25, 1907, at the age of forty-seven, in the Salesian school at St. Genis, France, after suffering a stroke. Brother Louis Nasi was fortunate, for he had spent nine months preparing himself for God's call!

### Brother Peter Lombardini

Adults, who had lived a good Christian life, had no family obligations or ties, and were inclined to join a religious organization, often knocked at Don Bosco's Oratory door and asked to be admitted to the Salesian Society. Don Bosco welcomed several of them, once he knew they were healthy and not too advanced in age. Experience had shown Don Bosco that these adults could adjust easily to the practice of virtue and be useful with their precious services when they entered the Salesian Society. One of these older gentlemen, who for some time had been a zealous Salesian Cooperator, was Peter Lombardini.

He read the *Salesian Bulletin* regularly and on one occasion joined a pilgrimage organized by his town, Ravenna, to take part in the May celebrations at the shrine of Mary Help of Christians in Turin. The year was 1887.

Although Don Bosco was seriously ill, on May 24, 1887, he went down to the church and gave his blessing to the many pilgrims who had come to honor his Madonna. Peter saw Don Bosco seated in the sacristy while countless numbers of pilgrims passed by to receive the blessing of Mary Help of Christians.

Peter, too, approached Don Bosco and received his blessing. He was so deeply impressed by Don Bosco that he could not get his image out of his mind and heart even after returning home to Ravenna. And so one day he returned to Turin to see Don Bosco again. Once there, he remained with Don Bosco's Salesians.

His enterprising activity had guaranteed him a good place in the world, but Peter made his decision to consecrate himself to God in Don Bosco's house. When Peter returned to the Oratory, he could no longer see Don Bosco. He shared the anxious feelings of the Salesians and all of Turin during Don Bosco's serious illness and last days on earth. He witnessed the funeral rites for Don Bosco and was deeply touched by them, making his decision even firmer, namely, to embrace the Salesian life.

Father Michael Rua sent Peter to Foglizzo for his novitiate. Peter was a prayerful man and well balanced. He quickly adjusted to his new environment and showed that he was a hard worker, always available for any task in the house. At the end of the novitiate, Peter professed his perpetual vows. I, the writer of this profile, am one of many who were fortunate to know Brother Peter. I remember his exemplary way of life at Foglizzo.

A short time later, Brother Peter was assigned to the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome. The move from the peaceful novitiate at Foglizzo affected him very much, but he obeyed with docility and generosity and went to Rome.

For five years, Father Arthur Conelli witnessed Brother Peter's diligent work at Sacred Heart Church. In 1893 the Salesians accepted the Leonine Institute of Orvieto. Father Conelli was assigned to the school of Orvieto as its director, and requested to have Brother Peter join his community as the "Master of the House." No coadjutor brother ever had that title, but many had it unofficially. It indicates that their main duty was the general running of the house.

Pope Leo XIII imposed the Leonine Institute on the Salesians. It was a sort of high-class school. Since Brother Peter had experience in dealing with people of the world, even in high places, he was just the man to impress them and foster prestige for the school, which made it famous, even outside Orvieto.

What we have related is from the sworn testimony of those who knew Brother Peter. Unfortunately, we are not able to confirm this with specific deeds because many confreres who might have helped in this regard have died. And we do not have written documentation to support these good deeds and the example left by Brother Peter.

Brother Lombardini was only fifty years old when a freak incident eventually proved fatal. While he was trying to catch a rat, it bit him on the hand. The bite caused an infection that confined him to bed for several months.

At one point it seemed that our Lady had intervened and pulled him from imminent death, because Brother Lombardini regained his health and was able to discharge his duties again. He wanted to make up for all the time he had

spent in bed. But the original infection returned and bothered him to the point that his doctor finally diagnosed the presence of a tumor.

Brother Peter suffered atrocious pains for a long time, but he displayed great spiritual strength and resignation in accepting God's will. The daily reception of Holy Communion helped him a great deal, until he entered the Lord's embrace on October 28, 1901, at the age of fifty.

May this profile of Brother Peter Lombardini help us hold on to the memory of a good coadjutor brother who, for fifteen years as a Salesian of Don Boco, literally fulfilled the words of Holy Scripture: *Explevit tempora multa* – "He gained as many merits as though he had lived a long life."

## Brother Charles Fontana

In 1863, Don Bosco received Charles Fontana into his Oratory at the age of thirteen and assigned him to the print shop as an artisan.

Of his forty-nine years at the Oratory, Charles lived twenty-four of them while Don Bosco was still alive. He loved Don Bosco very dearly. He grew up at the Oratory and was truly formed by Don Bosco himself. Charles formed in his own life two characteristics, so beautifully displayed in Don Bosco – a constant calmness, and serenity even in the midst of hardships. That “constant calmness” to the point of not being upset by anything was a trait that Don Bosco shared with the best of his sons, who always saw him that way, no matter the predicaments he found himself in, perhaps unaware that his own sons copied that same attitude.

Charles belonged to those fortunate youngsters who, as soon as they entered the Oratory, entrusted themselves entirely into the hands of Don Bosco and allowed him to mold them, especially through the Sacrament of Confession.

Don Bosco noticed that Charles was blessed with the gifts of simplicity and a great love for work. He urged him to foster the divine call that he had received, namely, to enter a life of higher perfection. Charles matured under Don Bosco’s guidance and in 1871 made his application to join the Salesian Society, when Don Bosco was still the true master of novices at the Oratory. Charles Fontana made his perpetual profession in 1875.

Brother Charles resumed working in the print shop, but he never thought of himself as a coadjutor brother that was tied only to his shop. He fully understood that the coadjutor brother is called to play a role within the Salesian mission of educating the young. And so he willingly accepted to be the assistant of the artisans in various shops, in the playground, and in the dorms.

Since he had acquired a good background in his trade and a certain amount of culture, Brother Charles became a teacher in his field for several years.

Wherever he served, both the good boys as well as the rascals met Brother Charles with a welcoming attitude. The rascals were his pride and joy, and he devoted all his efforts encouraging them to improve their conduct. He won them over with his kindness, while still correcting them and rebuking them for what they had done wrong.

When the Oratory began to celebrate the feast of Mary Help of Christians with greater solemnity, with great light effects that demanded painstaking preparations because electricity was not yet available, Brother Charles Fontana was one of the most active in offering his services. He prepared and set up the lights in front of the church and in the small lanterns found within the church.

Brother Charles made himself available for anything needed for the various celebrations held at the Oratory and for the academic entertainments performed during the course of the year. His services were such as to foster a cheerful piety, according to Don Bosco's spirit.

As a religious, Brother Charles was outstanding in the virtue of patience, in a willingness to accept the hardships of life, and in avoiding criticism and grumbling. There were signs that things were not going on as well as he would have liked. But he never complained, not even with the superiors.

Brother Charles had learned from Don Bosco himself how to suffer in silence, and he always had a prayer on his lips. He never indulged in criticism, but whenever he heard anyone criticizing, he used kindness to change the topic of conversation. This was certainly due to the spiritual direction he had received from Don Bosco himself.

Don Bosco knew Brother Charles pretty well. That is why he loved him so dearly and gave proof of this love a few months before he died. On July 4, 1887, Don Bosco felt exhausted because of the unbearable heat, and so he asked to be taken to Valsalice for a respite and better air. Coming down the stairs to go to the carriage that awaited him, he stopped at the infirmary door. Brother Fontana was lying there gravely ill with a lung ailment. The day before, realizing that Brother was at death's door, Don Bosco had promised to visit him but did not do so. But he had not forgotten his promise. He did not go into the infirmary but he had someone tell Brother Charles:

“Don Bosco did not come to see you because he did not want to close your eyes. He is expecting you at Valsalice. Go to see him at Valsalice.”

Brother Charles fully recovered from that illness and went to see Don Bosco at Valsalice, during the few days that he was there. He spent no time for convalescing and recovered so well that he lived on for twenty-five more years. He began working immediately and continued on until shortly before his death.

But the day came when Brother Charles realized that he was losing strength and slowing down. Whenever he could not work, he prayed. This was his routine until a week before his death. In April 1912, he contracted bronchial pneumonia and was confined to his bed, fully aware that his final days had already come. As a good religious he asked for and received the last rites. “We should not wait for the last minute to ask for the last rites!” he said. He received Holy Communion up to April 25, just a few hours before the Lord called him to himself. His passing away created a great void at the Oratory. His director, Father Moses Veronesi, immediately presented him as an outstanding example for all the Salesian coadjutor brothers to imitate by renouncing the allurements of the world and by working generously for the salvation of poor youth.

## Brother Louis Bologna

On Easter Sunday, 1872, Louis Bologna, at the age of twenty, went to Turin from Garessio (Cuneo) to represent his family at the First Mass of his brother, Father Joseph Bologna. After his brother's First Mass, Louis was about to bid goodbye to Don Bosco, who asked Louis a simple question: "Who gave you food and shelter during these days?"

And Louis answered: "It was Don Bosco."

"Well then," continued Don Bosco, "if you want to stay with Don Bosco, there will be room and food for yourself and those who will follow you."

When Louis heard this unexpected answer, he turned to his brother, Father Joseph, in a questioning way. Once he got his tacit consent, Louis answered with an assuring smile and, shrugging his shoulders as a sign of acceptance, said: "Don Bosco, you may write to my dad and tell him that I am remaining in Turin."

Louis's father had no objection to his son remaining with Don Bosco. He also allowed two other sons to join Don Bosco – one a priest, the other a coadjutor brother. Two of his daughters became Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

At the Oratory, Louis began what he modestly called "his career." Don Bosco assigned him to Brother Joseph Buzzetti at the bookstore. He delivered the books printed in the shop to various customers in the city. Louis, who was used to hard farm work, was surprised to see that he could earn a living and do good to his soul by doing such an easy job. He was intelligent and, by merely observing the operation of the bookstore, he learned a lot, even though he did not have any special aspiration to be fully involved in it. However, Louis had other aspirations that had nothing to do with books, and they were making inroads into his life. So, what prevented him from becoming a coadjutor brother, carrying out these and so many other duties, while enjoying the trust of his superiors?

The superiors, also, were asking the same question, since they saw that Louis was pious as well as a diligent and hard worker. They admitted him to the Salesian novitiate, and

he professed his triennial vows in 1873 and his perpetual vows in 1876. Brother Louis was very happy and never regretted his decision of becoming a Salesian coadjutor brother.

Brother Louis spent nine years in the bookstore at the Oratory and had acquired such competence that he outdid all others in that field. Because of this, in 1885, the superiors assigned him to administer the bookstore of Sampierdarena, and then the bookstore that had been acquired by the Salesians in Fiaccadori of Parma, which was a temporary assignment because, some years later, Brother Louis was again assigned to the school of Sampierdarena, not to administer the bookstore, but rather to supervise the trade school opened in that city.

During World War I, the shops had little work and, since Brother Louis was not that busy, he was sent to Pisa to administer the archepiscopal bookstore until 1920, when he returned to the school of Sampierdarena until his death.

Brother Louis never claimed to be a learned person. He had a grammar school education and was not well versed in writing. Nonetheless, he had a genial disposition that allowed him to switch conversations easily from lower class people to business clients and shop managers. He represented the superiors and performed delicate assignments even with high-ranking personalities.

On the fiftieth anniversary of his religious profession, one could see how much Brother Louis was deservedly loved and esteemed by both Salesian confreres and Cooperators for fulfilling well all the tasks with which he had been entrusted. A committee was formed to gather information about Brother Louis, as well as the tokens of admiration and affection that he would receive from those who were fortunate to know him.

When Father Philip Rinaldi, the Rector Major, found out about this initiative, he wrote a letter dated June 20, 1923: "I gladly join the confreres who have formed the committee for the festivities in honor of Brother Louis Bologna, and I pray that the Lord may grant our good and dear *Bolognino* a thousand blessings here on earth and the eternal glory of the blessed in Heaven." Father Rinaldi called him *Bolognino*, an endearing term, and also to distinguish him from his brother, Father Joseph Bologna. The nickname was also justified because of his size.

The Honorable Micheli, the minister of agriculture, wrote on the occasion of Brother Louis's religious jubilee: "I am an old friend and admirer of Brother Louis Bologna, from the time he was in charge of the bookstore of Fiaccadori in Parma. I recall the years that he spent with the unforgettable Father Baratta. I would like to convey my most cordial and affectionate wishes and applaud his efficacious work on the occasion of the golden jubilee of his religious profession."

Even though Brother Louis was engaged in so many occupations and assigned so many tasks, he was always eager to be present for the community practices of piety. He knew how to sanctify his work by constantly directing it to God's glory, as he used to say. Brother Louis was always mindful of the teaching he had received from Don Bosco at the Oratory – always to blend work and prayer.

After the festivities of his golden jubilee, Brother Louis realized that his end was near. First, he had a partial paralysis of his tongue and then began to curtail his activity. An unknown weakness sapped him of his strength. Finally, tests discovered that Brother had an intestinal problem that needed surgery. After the operation, the doctors realized that he was affected with a malignant tumor, for which there was no cure at that time.

Shortly, his health worsened and he suffered greatly. Visitors, though, were edified by his serenity and Christian resignation, to the point that he was always radiant, even though he knew that his illness was very serious.

Before surgery, Brother Louis made his confession and, when he realized that there was no hope for recovery, he asked to receive the last rites. On March 21, 1927, Brother Louis underwent a crisis so violent that he could not sustain it. The bystanders hardly realized what was happening, and he died serenely in the Lord! Brother Louis was seventy-six years old and had been a Salesian for fifty-four years.

The Lord gave Brother Louis Bologna a long life to perform good works as Don Bosco had suggested to him; and he allowed him to reap the benefits of those good deeds at the moment of his death.

## Brother John Garbellone

There have been Salesians who were so dedicated to Don Bosco that they would have even thrown themselves into a fire for their love of Don Bosco. In turn, Don Bosco's love for them was highly dynamic and active. St. Gregory the Great wrote, "*Probatio dilectionis exhibitio est operum*" (Love is manifested by deeds). The Salesians trained by Don Bosco felt an irresistible need to show their love for him by their works of dedication.

Brother John Garbellone belongs to those Salesians who would have done anything to prove their love for Don Bosco. No hardship or difficulty would have stopped them from showing their love for Don Bosco. For John Garbellone, Don Bosco was everything!

There were Salesians who thought of Garbellone as a mere showman, a bombastic character always on the edge of exaggeration, because they only looked at his external ways. He did speak pretentiously, and at times exaggerated, but he never acted out of self-aggrandisement. These critics mistook Garbellone's actions for personal ambition. But it was just the opposite. He tried his best to have the band he was directing receive honor; he used his personality, his talents, the "titles" and "honors" that he received, but not for his own sake or out of selfishness. Those who were aware of his naïvete and how he boasted of Don Bosco and the Salesian Congregation never regarded him as vain or pompous. That was his personality, and Don Bosco never thought of changing it. Instead, he helped him use his character by insisting that he always have the right intention.

However, we can easily see that if Brother John had lived in an outside environment, he could have been taken for an eccentric and even a little crazy. Certainly he would have been relegated to his own private world. But Brother John was molded entirely by Don Bosco and displayed a spirituality that was never put-on, but something real. He had learned how to use effectively even his own natural defects and idiosyncrasies to achieve great results.

John Garbellone was born at Crotte, France, in 1859. As a youngster his family moved to Pinerolo. He lived with his mother's relatives and when she became a widow, the two of them moved to Turin. John attended Don Bosco's festive oratory from 1870 to 1873, and met Don Bosco, who would become his benefactor and father. In 1873, he began boarding at the Oratory, and Don Bosco assigned him to help Brother Joseph Rossi in the purchasing department.

In 1876, he made a spiritual retreat at Lanzo Torinese and, following a divine inspiration, decided to "stay with Don Bosco" – an expression to indicate that a youngster wanted to join Don Bosco. John began his novitiate in the fall of 1876 at the Oratory of Valdocco. His decision to join Don Bosco as a coadjutor brother was the result of serious reflection that was evident in a letter he wrote to Don Bosco in July 1877. His exceptional enthusiasm is indicated not only by the way he wrote that letter, but also in other ways. For instance, on the very top of the letter, John glued a small picture of the heart of Jesus; and next to it he wrote, "These words come from the heart!" His letter reads:

*Very Rev. Superior, Father John Bosco: the undersigned, your most humble son, recommends himself to your fatherly goodness and asks to profess his perpetual vows in order to be included among those who have been chosen to leave for the South American missions.*

*I recommend myself to your fatherly goodness that my prayer may graciously be heard, for I know that the Lord is calling me to become a religious to save my soul. I would also like to be included among those missionaries destined for South America. I am nineteen years old and believe that this is the best time to go to the missions. I would not be drafted into the Italian army and, therefore, I would be forever under the mantle of Don Bosco. This would guarantee my salvation.*

*May I graciously implore you to hear my prayer and respond to it effectively? I promise that I will do anything that pleases you, that is, I will do*

*promptly whatever my superiors ask of me, and I will follow, as best I can, the rules of our Congregation. Kindly accept my humble request, Very Rev. Father. I kiss your hand and, please, consider me always as your most humble son.*

*John Garbellone (coadjutor novice)*

Don Bosco read the letter and jotted in the margin: “Father Rua,” meaning that it was to be read and considered by Father Rua, who then passed it on to Father Julius Barberis, the master of novices. We found this letter, as well as many others, among those held by Father Julius Barberis.

From a letter addressed to Father Julius Barberis in 1878 we found out that John had not yet been admitted to his profession as a Salesian. That letter was joined to a four-page examination of conscience written by John and handed over to Father Barberis. The examination of conscience begins:

*Even though I do possess all the defects you have mentioned, dear Father Barberis, yet believe me, my heart is and always will be longing for the Salesian Congregation. I would like very much to belong to this Holy Society. You do not know how much I long to see the day when I am allowed to profess my vows in the Salesian Society.*

And further on in that examination we read:

*Believe me, dear Father Barberis, these are not mere words; they are well thought out and reflected upon; words that come from my heart to save my soul. One thought is always present – to stay with Don Bosco always.*

Before the end of 1878, John made his perpetual vows as a Salesian coadjutor brother, and for thirty-two years he assisted Brother Joseph Rossi in the supplies department of the Oratory.

At times Brother John took care of the supplies that were needed for the various missionary expeditions. Because of this assignment, he made trips to Switzerland, Portugal,

France, Spain, Egypt, and Palestine. He kept reports of these trips in his personal files, which we still have. They are well arranged and include references to his many activities. Brother John was scrupulously exact and orderly in his accounts to the least detail of his assignments.

To give you an idea, I am including the following document, which indicates how exact Brother John was in keeping the Salesian Rules as well as managing his accounts.

*List of donations distributed by Brother Garbellone:*

-to Very Rev. Fr. Rua up to 1909	L.	9,102.10
-to Very Rev. Fr. Belmonte up to 1910		1,104.00
-to Very Rev. Fr. Rinaldi up to 1929		39,228.40
-to directors of the house up to 1929		22,428.15
-to Fr. Pavia for the Oratory up to 1915		3,978.00
-to Fr. Luchelli up to 1919		1,000.00
-to Fr. Alimerito up to 1919		803.35
From 1886 to Dec. 31, 1919	L.	77,644.00
Bequest from Cardinal Richelmy		390.00
Total: September 12, 1920	L.	78,034.00

For fifty years Brother John's major activity was in the festive oratory of Don Bosco, who himself had entrusted that assignment to Brother John. He was the *factotum* of Don Bosco's first festive oratory. He assisted by keeping discipline among five hundred boys, most of whom were real rascals. To keep order, Brother John used some original devices that a casual observer might have called crazy. Though he was tall and thin, as he approached the boys, he would call them to attention with a resounding powerful voice, and everybody hushed! At times, the director had a hard time preaching over the noise of the boys. Brother John would raise his hand to the preacher, hinting that he should stop for a minute. He would proceed to address the troublemakers in Piedmontese dialect, with his own sermonette. Everybody would be absolutely silent, and the preacher continued after a sign from Brother.

Brother John's assignments at the Oratory were to teach catechism, be the sacristan, manage the theater, and take care of the yearly outings with as little expense as possible. Managing the outings meant that he had to see the railroad staff and plead with them for the cause of his kids, in order to

get train passes or to pay the lowest fares possible. He would also appeal to the well-to-do with such arguments that they could not say no.. Brother John never failed to receive some contributions on behalf of his Oratory kids.

For a period of forty years, Brother John directed the band with his own creations. The outfits of both the musicians and their leader were unique and striking. Brother Garbellone stood out like Saul among his troops. Vested in all his regalia, he truly looked like a general, ready to review a parade. His vest was decorated with medals that he had won at various contests, and he wore a plumed helmet on his head. Some had a good laugh at his showy outfit. But his musicians, who came mostly from the lower classes, viewed him with awe as their outstanding and regally dressed bandleader. Brother John got anything he wanted out of his musicians. They followed and obeyed him. Whenever he went to small towns to take part in the religious festivities, his musicians would follow him, even by receiving Holy Communion with him. The townpeople were amazed to see a group of kids behave so well; they were highly edified by their behavior.

Found among the items of Brother Garbellone's files was a photo album containing the names of more than three thousand band members who had displayed their affection and obedience to him. We even found something better than this album. Brother Garbellone had always claimed for himself the right to instruct the children of the festive oratory for their First Holy Communion. Through his entertaining and cheerful way, he would instruct and stir them with his holy fervor so as to give them a memorable and exciting ceremony. All were photographed as groups and individually. He kept a photo album of more than six thousand first communicants with their names. As you go through the pages, you are moved at what Brother Garbellone had done for those kids! In 1922, Pope Pius XI touched and blessed that album.

Father Pavia, director of the festive oratory, never minded discomforts, sacrifices, and humiliations when it was a question of caring for the most needy Oratory boys. Brother Garbellone was never second to Father Pavia. There were many boys that Brother John supported, helped, and cared for in their struggle to lead a decent life. Whenever he was asked

to make some recommendations on behalf of his boys, with his simplicity and shrewdness, he used the names of Don Bosco, Father Rua, and other Salesians to solicit support for his boys. His way accomplished what diplomacy could not.

It would take a volume and not a simple profile were we to write about all the tricks and amazing stunts Brother John used during his life. What we have written gives us a hint of the good that Brother John did on behalf of his boys. His methods made many friends even in high society, people who cherished his friendship and admired his enterprising activity.

Some Salesians have rightly applied to him the words of the *Imitation of Christ* that could serve as his eulogy: *Homo pacificus magis prodest quam bene doctus* – He who has a peaceful attitude can do more good than a learned person.

Three years before he died, the superiors granted him a comforting opportunity. In the holy year of 1925, Pope Pius XI organized a missionary exhibition. A booth was reserved for the Salesian missions, and Brother Garbellone was sent to Rome to be the guide for the Salesian mission booth.

Brother John enjoyed that assignment, as he was able to entertain the visitors with his easy and colorful descriptions. He spoke to visitors about Don Bosco and his undertakings, and seasoned his talks and explanations with personal stories. Many lingered on, listening attentively to what he had to say with great enjoyment. He made friendships with prelates and cardinals. Even the Pope enjoyed him. Whenever he saw Brother John at an audience or other events, the Pope would smile and address Brother John with kind words, much to the envy of those standing by.

While in Rome, Brother Garbellone visited churches and basilicas. He viewed these sacred monuments not only as a tourist, but especially with a sense of piety. The catacombs fascinated him and he was totally amazed by the stories of the martyrs buried there. He was invited to pass some time with the young people in formation at Genzano. He accepted and enjoyed his stay with the aspirants, novices, and other young Salesians in formation. He shared with them stories about the early and heroic days of the Oratory and of Don Bosco.

When Brother Garbellone returned to the Oratory, he realized that his life was near its end. He put everything in

order, wrote some dispositions of what should be done on his passing away, and who among his friends should be informed. He left some moving messages for several people. The only item to fill in was the date of his death.

Brother John was in no way upset at the thought of death and kept discharging his duties as faithfully as ever. But it was easy to see that his strength was waning and his days were numbered.

The first signs of death came in April 1928. April 23 was the beginning of the Month of Mary Help of Christians, and Brother John showed his usual fervor for that occasion. On April 26, he felt sick, and on April 27, he was diagnosed with pneumonia. There was no remedy due to his poor health, which was never his concern. He withstood his illness for twelve days, and on May 6 Brother John left this earth for heaven, where he certainly joined the celebration in honor of Mary Help of Christians.

On the lamp of the table where he worked at night, Brother John had written these words: "How wonderful to be able to work!" Brother made his work wonderful because he sanctified it with the right intention, obedience, and directed it to doing good works. Those who benefitted from his work visited with him during his illness and paid their respects at his death and funeral. It seemed like a pilgrimage, with so many people visiting Brother John while he was ill. His funeral was a true witness of affection and appreciation, because everyone understood the legacy left behind by Brother John Garbellone for all Salesians to see and live by.

## **Brother Paul Bassignana**

The spectacular funeral cortege in Faenza on the evening of February 20, 1924, with people lined on both sides of the street, appeared to be the funeral of some highly placed person. But It was the funeral of a humble Salesian coadjutor brother from a Salesian school, Paul Bassignana, or as he was called for forty-three years, Brother Paolino.

Paul Bassignana was born at Occimiano (Casale) in 1856 and worked at his father's mill until the age of twenty-three. He had everything he needed for a comfortable life. In 1878, however, on a Sunday after Vespers, Paul was speaking with a friend, who told him about Don Bosco's Oratory and Don Bosco's willingness to accept any youngster who really wanted to stay with him.

This news of Don Bosco's work was like a secret call for Paul to leave home and "stay with Don Bosco." After all, Paul's conduct was as exemplary as any good Christian. Paul thought and prayed over it and, in a few days and without any opposition from his parents, who were excellent Christians of Piedmontese stock, decided to go to Turin, meet Don Bosco and "stay with him." Paul used to tell us facetiously that when he arrived at the Oratory, Don Bosco reassured him and made him feel at home by cracking jokes, welcomed him kindly, and then "handed him over" to the administrator who, without any ceremony, assigned him to work in the kitchen.

Such an assignment would not have been welcomed by anyone just arriving at the Oratory if he were not animated by a firm and holy intention. Paul seemed happy with that assignment and began work immediately, after ascertaining the daily schedule so as not to miss any practices of piety. Paul felt that his practices of piety were not sufficient and, during his free time, he would enjoy the services at the Church of Mary Help of Christians and experience a really comforting feeling.

Don Bosco had a special gift of knowing intuitively the hearts of his boys, and soon enough he realized that in Paul Bassignana the Lord had entrusted him with a treasure.

Paul made a short aspirantate, followed by a novitiate under Father Julius Barberis. This was the last year that the novitiate was held at the Oratory of Valdocco. During the fall of 1878, Paul made his perpetual profession as a Salesian coadjutor brother.

In 1879 he was assigned to help in the kitchen at the school of Valsalice. In 1880 he was assigned as doorkeeper at the school of Este (Padua), where he remained for only one year. In 1881 the school at Faenza opened, and Don Bosco gave its first director a "special gift," Brother Paul, who was in charge of supplies and purchasing for the school.

Father Lingueglia, Brother Paul's last director, wrote, "This good Piedmontese from Occimiano, by God's grace and his own drive for learning, was an excellent Romagnolo in the town of Faenza." This is quite true, for Paul could speak the Romagnolo dialect fluently. I witnessed this at the beginning of this century.

Faenza in those days was not the Faenza of today. Today it is a good city. Like all other towns in the Romagna of old, Faenza has its own passionate political parties. However, there is in Faenza a greater religious and political tolerance than in the other towns of Romagna.

When the sons of Don Bosco first went to Faenza, the anticlerical spirit was at its peak. Some concerned priests and lay people called on the Salesians to give religious instruction to their youngsters, who had none at all and were becoming rebellious against God and society. When the Salesians finally arrived there, they realized they had entered a minefield. In spite of this, the Salesians did not lose heart. They were first quartered at the Borgo Urbecco, a poor tenement full of questionable people. Through games and especially kindness, the Salesians gathered a large number of local youngsters. The spirit of sacrifice displayed by the Salesians on behalf of those youngsters won them over, as they also won over the hearts of the townspeople.

Slowly, the number of youngsters increased, as did their trust in the Salesians. At the same time, the anticlerical spirit grew stronger. There were accusations and suspicions springing up constantly from unknown sources, aiming to discredit the Salesians.

The press was relentless in fanning the flames and in holding the Salesians in such contempt that it generated hatred and distrust of the Salesians. Threats and acts of violence were aimed at forcing the Salesians out of Faenza. Nevertheless, the Salesians stayed, working quietly and effectively with Don Bosco's method in training the youngsters of Faenza.

During this stormy period, Brother Paul Bassignana played two roles. Within the Salesian community he tried his best to comfort the director and the confreres by his gracious and humble manner, even though he knew that the community was overwhelmed with anxiety. At the same time, the director and the confreres appreciated Brother Paul's practical wisdom and his love for Don Bosco and the Congregation. They all listened to Brother Paul willingly and gratefully.

Brother Paul's dealings with the outside world gave the impression that he was a truly good, thoughtful, wise, and well-mannered human being. Nobody ever suspected that he was a Salesian brother, since he wore no clerical habit. With complete ease and freedom, he walked through town at a swift pace, briefcase in hand, defending the Salesians with serenity and simplicity whenever anyone disparaged them. Brother Paul repeated constantly: "You talk like this because you do not know Don Bosco. If you knew him...." His kindly approach calmed people, and their malice toward the Salesians soon disappeared. Brother Paul had won them over.

During this stormy time, Don Bosco made a visit to Borgo Urbecco on May 13, 1882. It was a pleasant surprise for all. The Salesians were used to tightening their belts, but on this occasion Brother Paul went all out and prepared a dinner never experienced in that community. Don Bosco saw all that food and with a broad smile said: "What have you done, dear Paul? You have prepared a dinner for twenty-five, and we are only four." Brother Paul was taken aback and said; "Whenever Don Bosco shows up I would willingly prepare a dinner for a thousand people."

One of those present, Father Bartholomew Molinari, would leave for Argentina three years later. Upon hearing of the death of Brother Paul, Father Molinari wrote a letter dated May 17, 1924, from San Nicolas de los Arroyos, Argentina, to Father Lingueglia, the director at Faenza. He reminisced about

the dinner prepared by Brother Paul for Don Bosco and praised his outstanding virtues – love for poverty, observance of the rules, charity, extraordinary poise, fervent piety, docility toward his superiors, and a spirit of constant mortification.

These thoughts of Father Molinari gave me a lead as to what I should write about Brother Paul – events that had been experienced by those who knew him.

Brother Paul was assigned to do the purchasing for the house and had to handle money every day. He approached this task with prudence and as a religious. He kept a careful eye for deceitful merchants, and had a good sense of prices at the market. He knew his business affairs well, but he had an understanding with his superiors as to what he should or should not buy. He never used his assignment to buy personal items or to get personal comforts, even though merchants who were ignorant about religious life graciously lavished gifts on him, as they customarily do. Brother Paul accepted those gifts and handed them over to the administrator of the house. Every evening, even though very tired from his work, Brother Paul would approach the financial administrator with a notebook in hand and give an account of every penny he had received.

When Brother Paul died, his first director, Father John Baptist Rinaldi, wanted to have a memento of him. He could not because Brother Paul had only two things in his room – an old copy of the *Imitation of Christ* and a booklet of the Nine Offices of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Those who knew Brother Bassignana never forgot his meekness, which was used to win over those he met. They all thought that he was goodness personified. Even though by nature rather lively, Brother Paul never lost his patience, except when someone gave offense to God. Once Brother Paul hired a porter to carry bushels of grapes into the house. This porter let out a blasphemous expression. Brother Paul became pale, and tears streamed from his eyes. He was indignant and rebuked the porter: “What does God have to do with what you are doing that you should blaspheme?” Then he paid him, ordering him never to set foot in the school again until he had corrected his bad habit of blaspheming.

Allow me to present some traits of Brother’s charity toward his neighbors, even though they did not deserve it.

Brother Paul had to deal with anticlericals, but he never used their attitude toward God or the Church as a reason to lack charity toward them. His charity was especially evident in his dealings with the employees. They depended on him because of his position and, though they had rough manners, they were hard workers. Brother Paul was kind and almost reverential toward them. He even took their places when he saw they were too tired or sickly. He tried to make them understand that they were lucky because God had given them the good fortune to work in a religious house. He would reach out to them and touch their hearts, helping them to raise their minds from material concerns to heavenly thoughts.

Among many gifts, Brother Paul also had the gift of comforting the afflicted. He used this gift in an admirable way during the First World War, when the school was turned into a military hospital and was filled with sick or wounded soldiers. Any free time Brother had, he spent at the bedside of sick or wounded soldiers. He would comfort them and talk to them about God's mercy.

Whenever he was aware that a soldier was about to receive Viaticum, he would immediately stop everything, go to the chapel and assist the military chaplain by accompanying him to the soldier's bedside, and then return to the chapel, put everything in order, and finally resume his work. He was not obliged to do this, but he acted out of love for his neighbor.

Brother Paul's heroic charity was best demonstrated at the festive oratory, where he spent every Sunday working with the youngsters. He was entrusted to assist and instruct the smallest children. He held his catechism classes on the stage, which was set up by some confreres or bigger boys. He divided the boys by their understanding of the catechism. At the end of class, he would stand on a bench and deliver one of his special sermons. He had no candy to offer, but the boys loved him just the same because of how he treated them.

He also gave a helping hand during recreation and in church. At day's end, he could hardly stand up. His love for the Salesian Congregation, which inspired his love for the festive oratory as the first and primary Salesian work, led him to observe faithfully the Salesian Rule. His observance was not rigid, but something that came from the heart.

Were I to consider how Brother Paul kept his vows, I would have to turn this profile into a biography, and I do not intend to do so. I can say that Brother practiced the virtue and vow of obedience in an outstanding manner, to the point of forgetting about his personal views and wishes and accepting the rules as his unfailing guide in everything. His practices of piety fell within the observance of the Rule. They were never simple routines but rather ways to strengthen the love of God that was uppermost in his life.

Brother Paul dealt with the world on a daily basis. So what can we say about these dealings and worldly attractions? As if they never existed! He was totally detached from them! His relatives were always begging him to visit them. With the permission of his superior, he did pay them a visit. And this is the way he behaved when he went home: he greeted his relatives, had dinner with them, and then spent the remainder of the day in church up to the time of his departure.

His greatest satisfaction was spending time before the Blessed Sacrament, after giving an account of the expenses he had made during the day, *usque ad novissimum quadrantem*, up to the last penny. It was amazing to see how well Brother Paul blended his manifold activities with a deep spiritual and interior life.

Following the lead suggested by Father Molinari's letter, I would like to make some references to Brother Paul's spirit of mortification, hidden within an ordinary lifestyle. He never complained nor called attention to himself. He thought of himself as a great sinner and deserved punishment. Brother accepted everything from God's hands. Whenever he felt ill, which was rather frequently, he suffered in silence or went to the infirmary without asking for any special treatment. The infirmarian testified that whenever Brother was sick, he did not want lengthy cures, nor did he ever refuse any medicine, even though it was not to his liking. He felt that it was part of the mortification he needed to practice. Brother Paul never expressed his likes or dislikes, or what he considered best for himself. It was the infirmarian's conviction that Brother Paul wanted to suffer any discomfort silently. As director of the wine cellar, he never indulged in a good glass of wine even when he might have needed it. He had control of his appetites.

Summing up, we quote Fr. Lingueglia: "Brother Paul was a good soul and gave the least importance to his body."

Observing his physical appearance, one would say that he would go on living for a long time. But this was not the case. At the beginning of 1924, heart problems, which Brother had experienced some time before but never paid any attention to, became more obvious. But Brother Paul continued to work as usual. On February 16, 1924, he went to church as he did every evening, praying for an hour. He supervised the serving of supper and kept repeating, "May the Lord be praised with all his creatures." He recited the prayer after any job. Someone once asked him why he said that prayer. His customary and simple answer was, "That's what Don Bosco taught me."

After supper, Brother Paul went to his room. He did some work in the expense notebook that was to be handed over to the administrator, but he did not show the sum totals. Why? We never knew exactly what happened next. He must have had a troubled night, but he never bothered anyone. He did not knock on anybody's room door, as he could have done.

At 1:00 A.M. he must have felt very bad because he awakened the infirmarian, who was close to his room. Brother Paul walked a few yards and attempted to climb some stairs to the infirmarian's room, only to whisper: "I cannot make it anymore," and then fell to the floor. The infirmarian could do nothing. He had had a massive heart attack and died at the age of sixty-seven on February 17, 1924.

The news of Brother Paul's death shocked everyone, but no one had any doubt or fear about the state of his soul, for they knew that he was always well prepared for death. On the Friday before he died, just like every Friday, he had made his confession. Most people thought, "He left for paradise without disturbing anyone, for this was what he had asked of God." School students, members of the festive oratory, and a huge number of people from all walks of life passed by his mortal remains to pay their debt of gratitude. Brother Paul looked as though he were sleeping. Many tears were shed by those who thought it was not possible for them to see their good Brother Paul anymore, with briefcase under his arm walking swiftly through the streets of Faenza, sharing simple and comforting words with everyone he met.

Father Lingueglia wrote: "His was not a funeral but a triumphant march with many students, past pupils and towns-people crying, as they remembered their dear Brother Paul of olden days. They recalled his goodness and kindness, his fatherly smile and his concern for everyone."

I will conclude this profile with a thought taken from Father Molinari's letter:

*There are many people who make fun of those sons of Don Bosco who dress in civilian clothes and yet live a moral and religious life so different from theirs. But if they could only be enlightened by God and know the joys experienced by a holy conscience and a life spent serving God, they would refrain from showing their pity toward them, for they would all be led, if not to imitate them, certainly to envy them and have great esteem for them. This was the case with Brother Paul Bassignana. He entered the town of Faenza at a young age, when he and his confreres were humiliated and even hated; yet, with Christian and religious virtues, he rightly earned the admiration of all the people of Faenza.*

## Brother Joseph Dogliani

It is thought provoking to realize the intuitive sense Don Bosco possessed as he singled out the talents of his boys at the Oratory – talents that would have remained hidden. Don Bosco had the gift of discovering these talents. He knew how to bring them out and develop them. He enabled boys who apparently displayed ordinary qualities to stand out in such extraordinary ways that they became prestigious within the intellectual world, elite leaders in society and great apostles in the Church. Brother Joseph Dogliani is such an example.

Dogliani entered the Oratory for one specific goal – to be a woodworker. But Don Bosco intuitively understood the innate musical ability of Joseph and had him study music, by which he distinguished himself with prestige and acclaim.

Joseph Dogliani was born at Costigliole di Saluzzo in 1849. He read the life of Dominic Savio written by Don Bosco and on April 15, 1864, at the age of fifteen, he left home to board at the Oratory. Joseph's first impression was a big disappointment. He thought that everyone at the Oratory was like the Dominic Savio described in Don Bosco's book. Far from it! When he began to work in the wood shop, he became disillusioned, as he found such characters that were difficult to get along with. He was about to leave the Oratory for home. Don Bosco had a hard time to convince Joseph of the reality that things were not that simple and that he needed more time to get adjusted to his new environment.

Relying on Joseph's good nature, Don Bosco was successful in getting him to be more understanding and patient with his classmates, who were not as good as Joseph expected. Joseph soon realized that the Oratory of Don Bosco was also a "kingdom" of cheerfulness and music, and decided that he, too, wanted to be part of it.

Every year Don Bosco would send the city of Turin the list of activities carried out at the Oratory. In one of those lists, dated 1864, there were four vocal music classes with eighty-three students under Father John Cagliero, six classes of Gregorian chant under Father Victor Alasonatti, and a class

of instrumental music with thirty students under Brother Joseph Buzzetti. We also found out that, at a certain time each weekday evening, songs and sounds resounded all over the Oratory. Experienced singers learned vocal exercises, and the students of Gregorian chant practiced the scales and sang antiphons and psalms. Members of the band played some symphonic pieces, while beginners learned how to use their instruments, making shrill and indescribable sounds.

During his first days at the Oratory, Joseph Dogliani just listened to that musical noise, but he could hardly hide his own desire to be part of those loud music classes.

In the fall of 1864, Joseph's wish came true. He was admitted to the music classes. It took only two months for Dogliani to be promoted to a member of the band. He played the *genis* (like a small tuba) and then the flugelhorn. Maestro John De Vecchi was so impressed that he even composed a flugelhorn concert, mainly for Joseph to play.

By 1868, Joseph felt qualified to put on a show of his own, which he did. He began to compose music and practice at great lengths. The first march that he composed was entitled *un pastiss qualunque* – a sort of medley. The march caught Don Bosco's attention; he realized how musically talented Joseph Dogliani was. He complimented him and entrusted him to Father John Cagliero, with instructions that he should learn the piano and attend the classes of Maestro De Vecchi for musical harmony and composition. This was the beginning of Joseph's musical career, and it never stopped growing.

Joseph made such great progress that already in 1872 he was called upon to substitute for Father John Cagliero, who was often absent from the Oratory on behalf of Don Bosco. Joseph won over his students and had such an impact on them that, when Father John Cagliero left for South America in 1875, no one was surprised to see Dogliani holding the baton of Maestro Cagliero.

The acid test, if you want to call it so, came in 1876 on the feast of Mary Help of Christians. Some were afraid that due to Fr. Cagliero's absence, the music for the day would not be up to par. All fears and apprehensions proved groundless. Father Cagliero had composed the hymn *Saepe dum Christi*, which described the battle of Lepanto, in which the Christians

defeated the Turks through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians. When it was played for the first time, it was given the name *Battle of Lepanto*. Joseph directed the hymn so well that it seemed that the composer, Father Cagliero, was the one directing it. But Cagliero was already in Argentina.

His love and affection for Don Bosco removed from Dogliani's mind any idea of leaving the Oratory to pursue a career in secular music. The Salesian Society was drawing the attention of many people and the number of those joining the Society was increasing. Joseph also asked to be admitted. He made the novitiate and professed his triennial vows. In 1876, he professed his perpetual vows. In that same year, Brother conducted his orchestra in the Palestrina masterpiece *Missa Papae Marcelli*. With this piece, he not only showed how talented he was, but he also revealed his precocious and artistic leaning toward that music which Pius X inaugurated with the reform of sacred music.

I would like now to mention something of Brother Dogliani's personal relationship with Don Bosco. After Don Bosco's death, Brother Joseph would often reminisce on Don Bosco's family way whenever he dealt with him and all his sons. He mentioned these thoughts often, especially in the last years of his life.

In December 1871, Brother Dogliani wrote a letter to Brother Enria, who was caring for Don Bosco, who was seriously sick at Varazze. Naturally, everyone at the Oratory was anxious to hear about Don Bosco's health. The following are Brother Dogliani's words to Brother Enria: "When Don Bosco is feeling better, please take time to wish him a happy New Year on my behalf. Tell him not to forget that *fox*, who has received so much good from him." Don Bosco had given Dogliani the nickname *fox*, because his coat had a collar and lapel of fox skin. Brother Joseph became concerned because, in his reply, Don Bosco had omitted his name while sending his regards to several other coadjutor brothers. This had never happened before. "I still remember it," Brother Dogliani added. "On other occasions when Don Bosco wrote to us from Rome, I was always proud to see my name mentioned by Don Bosco after Barale's name. I felt no guilt because mine were the feelings of a son for a loving father. But when I realized

that I was not even mentioned by name in the P.S. of that letter...that hurt. Patience! But I know Don Bosco, and he knows me. That is good enough for me.”

In that same letter Brother Dogliani mentioned that many others at the Oratory were concerned about Don Bosco’s health. He concluded by saying: “I could never stop speaking of Don Bosco. Kindly kiss his hand for me and tell him that I too pray for him and hope that he will not forget me.”

Don Bosco recovered from his illness, returned to the Oratory, and continued to receive Brother Dogliani with the same confidence he had in him prior to his sickness. In 1875, Don Bosco asked Brother Joseph to accompany him on a visit to Baron Bianco di Barbania, living at Casale. As they were running late, he told Brother to run ahead and get the tickets at the railroad station. “First or second class?” Brother asked. “Third,” answered Don Bosco.

They boarded the train. When the conductor saw Don Bosco in third-class, he hurriedly escorted the two of them into a first-class compartment. When they were seated, Don Bosco turned to Brother Dogliani and said: “See? If we had bought second-class tickets, they would have left us there. By buying a third-class ticket, we are given first-class.”

Another time, he was again asked to accompany Don Bosco on a trip. Brother Dogliani realized at a certain point that he had lost Don Bosco’s suitcase and felt terrible about it. Don Bosco patted him on the shoulder and told him:

“Don’t worry about it. The only thing to be sorry about is the loss of some papers...” He had barely completed that sentence when a man showed up panting and told Don Bosco: “Here is your suitcase.” Brother Dogliani was greatly relieved.

Brother Joseph was given two assignments – care of the Oratory music program and supervision of the superiors’ dining room. One evening, Don Bosco heard confessions for a long time and arrived at the dining room after the community had already eaten. The cook sent out a dish of overcooked and very cold rice for Don Bosco. Brother Dogliani got upset and told the cook, “But this is for Don Bosco.”

The cook retorted with a curt answer: “Don Bosco is just like everyone else.”

Brother Dogliani felt embarrassed, since he had to give Don Bosco the dish of poorly prepared rice. He moved on without saying a word. But a cleric gave a stiff answer to the cook, since he had heard his curt reply.

Don Bosco gave no sign that he was offended or upset. But, turning toward Brother Dogliani, he only said calmly and slowly: "The cook is right. What he said is true."

I mentioned this incident on purpose because there is another one like it. Once Don Bosco escorted several guests to the community dining room and noticed that the tablecloth was dirty. He complained to Brother Dogliani and was really upset. Don Bosco felt that it showed lack of respect for his guests. Brother Dogliani was upset and, in the evening, he wrote a letter to Don Bosco to apologize, but he also added among other things that it was the first time he had seen Don Bosco angry or upset. Don Bosco humbled himself by reading that letter to the members of the General Council. Later on, when he met with Brother Dogliani, he took him by the arm and mimicked the cook's reply he had heard in the dining room some time before, "Don't you know that Don Bosco is only human like everyone else?"

We found an undated letter written by Don Bosco to Brother Joseph around this time. When he was advanced in age, Brother Dogliani was asked about the possible date of this letter, and he assured us that it was between 1875 and 1876.

It seems that Brother had been terribly wronged by someone and was upset about it. A few days later he wrote a letter to Don Bosco telling him that he had made peace with the person who had wronged him so badly. Don Bosco wrote back to Brother Dogliani and said: "Bravo! I have read your letter. Keep on striving for perfection, and help your confreres do the same. May God bless you. Kindly pray for me. Your ever affectionate friend, Don Bosco."

There was a P. S. that read:

"Say hi to Cavaliere Pelazza, to Marquis Barale and to the poet Cottino."

We have mentioned elsewhere that Don Bosco used special titles like Cavaliere, Marquis, etc., for some of his coadjutor brothers. The last one named in the P. S. referred to an employee who was an outstanding poet.

Don Bosco was the director of the Oratory, and nothing happened without his knowledge. In April of 1876, Brother Dogliani had written two musical compositions and wanted to have them printed. Father Lazzero, the vicar, wrote about Brother Joseph's wishes to Don Bosco, then in Rome. Don Bosco replied on April 24: "Please respond to Dogliani's request and have the *Tantum Ergo* and the polka printed, on one condition – that he behave as well as Barale." Brother Barale was in charge of the bookstore and the print shop.

For some years, Don Bosco was not pleased with some dramatic performances put on at the Oratory. He thought that the plays were much too grand and the theater outfits too expensive, and they did not convey a clear moral message to the audience. Also, schedules were changed and dinners were offered to the actors. Don Bosco did not approve of either.

Don Bosco also said that a Salesian, who would be more dynamic and vigilant about the content of the plays and the theater in general, did not direct the performances. For this reason, in 1876, Don Bosco called on two coadjutor brothers, Barale and Dogliani. They went for a walk and he expressed to them his views and thoughts about the theater. "The plays do not have the spirit that I would like. I thought it best to entrust the running of the theater to the two of you. I would like to have simple plays performed, with a clearly expressed moral message suited to the audience. Most of all, I want to know beforehand what is going to be performed."

The two coadjutor brothers did their best to respond to Don Bosco's requests. And, even though it was not easy to go against the way things were, they both were successful and carried out Don Bosco's wishes. That same year Don Bosco canceled the performance of *I Poveri di Parigi* (The Poor of Paris), even though the parts had already been handed out to several of the actors. He did not like the topic and the way it was being produced.

In January of 1877, when they were beginning a production, Don Bosco wrote to Frather Rua from Rome: "Keep an eye on the theater. Speak to Father Lazzero and be sure that tragic scenes, duels, or sacred words are banned from any stage performance. Perhaps Barale is the best man to help you. He and Dogliani are in full agreement."

Father Rua, who considered Don Bosco's wish as a command, relied on the cooperation of these two coadjutor brothers to carry out Don Bosco's wish.

For many years, even when Father Rua and Father Albera were the Rectors Major of the Society, June 24, the feast day of St. John the Baptist, was a day of celebration along with an academic entertainment. It was the feast day in honor of Don Bosco, whose name was John. It was called "gratitude day." Brother Joseph never failed to have a musical piece written for the occasion. Father John Baptist Lemoyne provided the lyrics. Several of those compositions, like the one performed in 1879, made history and were included in the *Annals of the Salesian Society*. Brother Dogliani found his inspiration from the lyrics written by Father Lemoyne. But his musical composition was an energetic arrangement that depended on many trained voices. He was always successful.

At suppertime, Brother Dogliani supervised dinner for the superiors, who were still served in the community dining room. When the tables were cleared, Brother Joseph approached Don Bosco and kissed his hand. As he was about to leave, Don Bosco grabbed him by the hand, held it tight and asked him to remain in the dining room. The coffee for Don Bosco was brought in – he used to take a cup of coffee when he had a headache. This time the waiter brought in two cups: "Dogliani, pick up that cup and have a drink of coffee with me." Since Father John Cagliero was also present, Brother Dogliani kept an eye on him, as if to say that the cup of coffee was for Father Cagliero. But Don Bosco insisted and filled the cup. Brother Dogliani drank it, thanked Don Bosco, and left. In 1930, Brother Joseph still reminisced on that particular incident and referred to it as "the act of kindness that Don Bosco performed toward him." It touched him deeply.

It has been said and written that Don Bosco was one of the forerunners or founders of schools of music, as well as of many other undertakings. Certainly, the Oratory choir and band got invitations to perform at solemn festivities, even from great distances. Listing the invitations would take too long. However, the choir rendered one performance in 1887, when Don Bosco was in Rome for the consecration of the church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Don Bosco wanted the event to be, not only a feast of faith, but also an occasion to display art and music; and music would play a big role in Rome, the eternal city. Don Bosco wanted the Oratory boys, so dear to him, to enhance the inauguration by their singing. Brother Dogliani, the maestro, brought his full choir to Rome, and for six days his boys sang many inspiring and difficult musical compositions.

Prior to Rome, Brother Dogliani's choir performed in Genoa as a prelude to the performance in Rome. Beginning May 5, 1887, the Oratory choir sang for three days at the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the canonization of Saint Catherine Fieschi Adorno. The choir met with applause from far and wide. The press also reported on it and praised not only the singing of the boys, but also their good behavior. Among many praises, one newspaper, *Il Cittadino*, reported about Brother Dogliani and his choir: "Maestro Dogliani, who belongs to the school of Don Bosco, is responsible for the musical performances as well as the training of the choir; therefore, it is to him that most of the credit is rightly due."

While in Rome, the boys' choir performed Masses and other musical compositions by famous classical authors. The public approved and applauded the performances and all those who took part in them. What really struck music experts was the miracle performed by Maestro Dogliani in preparing those many boys to sing such difficult compositions, and the ability to blend their voices in a manner never heard in Rome before. Apart from the singing, what impressed the general public most was the way the boys behaved, both during and after the performances.

Maestro Dogliani and his choir were granted an audience with Pope Leo XIII, who praised him because, even so young, he had given a beautiful proof of his musical ability.

Here, in the center of Catholicism, he had shown the representatives of the old school of music, who were not that willing to join the movement of reforming sacred music, how music should be performed in church, as well as what kind of music should be sung.

To his credit, Maestro Dogliani began to implement church music reform some thirty years before the directives of Pope Pius X in his *motu proprio* whereby secular music, both

instrumental and vocal, was banned, while Gregorian chant and polyphonic classical music were encouraged. Maestro Dogliani did not make such a fuss about it, but he effectively brought about the music reform within the church. He took his choir to parts of Italy to show how to reform religious music. He was also responsible for creating a new taste for reformed music and for introducing people to the origin of plainchant, which had been used for a long time in the Church. Initially, only a few people were attuned to the Masses sung *a capella*. Some even called him crazy. But he ignored all these negative reactions and was eventually proven right.

Just a month after the festivities held in Rome, the Oratory organized the last great festivity in honor of Don Bosco – his name day, June 24, 1887.

Maestro Dogliani composed a special arrangement for two choirs. One choir was to sing four stanzas, while the second choir repeated as a refrain the first two stanzas of a hymn that had been performed in 1849, on the first celebration of Don Bosco's name day: *Andiamo compagni / Don Bosco ci aspetta / la gioia perfetta / si desta nel cuor* (Friends, let us move on / Don Bosco is waiting for us / perfect joy / has been awakened within our hearts). The beginning and end of Don Bosco's active ministry were thus linked.

After Don Bosco's death, Father Rua succeeded him and with benevolent understanding followed the rising career of Maestro Dogliani. In 1889, Father Rua realized that the band needed improvement and he entrusted Maestro Dogliani with this task. With expertise in vocal and instrumental music, the dynamic Brother Dogliani gave the band a new look. He changed the repertoire and made incredible progress, in spite of the fact that, due to the limited time allotted for rehearsals, not much could be done.

In 1896, there was a band competition at Ivrea. Maestro Dogliani's small band had to compete with old timers and expert musicians. The Oratory band won first prize. And on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of the Oratory band by Maestro Dogliani, his past pupils organized a festivity in his honor to express their gratitude to him.

In 1900, Father Rua wanted the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first missionary expedition to Argentina to be properly

celebrated. The Salesians from Argentina had also planned grandiose celebrations and, among the requests made to Turin, was also that of having Maestro Dogliani honor them with his presence. Father Rua obliged, and Brother Joseph went to Argentina, where the Salesians there gave him little rest. They entrusted him with all the instrumental and vocal music. They asked him to prepare the choir for singing the powerful and fascinating *Passione* by Perosi. He inaugurated three organs that had been made in Turin – first at Bernal, Argentina, at Las Piedras, Uruguay, and at São Paulo, Brazil.

While he was staying at Buenos Aires, the Provincial, Father Vespignani, asked Maestro Dogliani to give music lessons to five band directors; to teach music at the school of Pius XI at Almagro; and to give vocal training lessons.

Brother Dogliani presided at a music convention held at Bernal, Argentina, where he also gave lessons on how to sing Gregorian chant. In reference to this convention, Brother Dogliani wrote to Bishop John Cagliero on March 7, 1901: “I was very glad to do something as a proper response to the brotherly welcome that I was given in America.”

When Brother Dogliani returned from Brazil, there was a surprise that taxed his modesty. In August 1900, he had led the Oratory choir at the funeral of King Humbert I in both the cathedral and the Basilica of St. Maurice with the royal family, ministers, and the aristocracy of Turin present. The performance pleased the entire gathering and especially the royal family. The new king, by a *motu proprio*, honored Maestro Dogliani with the cross of *Cavaliere della Corona d'Italia* – knight of the crown of Italy. This honor was conferred on Maestro Dogliani while he was in Argentina. Father Rua had the medal sent to Argentina with an order that the provincial have an academia in honor of Brother Dogliani and confer the medal on him publicly.

At this time, Father Paul Albera, the catechist general of the Congregation, was at Buenos Aires for the canonical visitation of the Salesian works of South America. He read the royal decree and conferred the medal on Maestro Dogliani before a large audience of outstanding personalities. On this occasion, the vocal and instrumental compositions that were performed were those that had been composed over the years

by Maestro Dogliani. It was a show of appreciation for all his accomplishments in music.

On the eve of his departure for Italy, April 14, 1901, Maestro Dogliani wrote to Bishop Cagliero: "It was a moving and beautiful ceremony. It had only one fault – it was directed to me. When I return to Turin, I will again focus my attention on my assignments, and admire the prodigious undertakings wrought by the Lord through Don Bosco." Indeed, Brother Dogliani saw with his own eyes Don Bosco's works in South America – churches, schools, hospices, and works of all kind – all the way to Viedma in the heart of Patagonia, where Bishop Cagliero had his own residence.

One of Brother Dogliani's greatest achievements occurred two years later in 1903. It was the crowning of Our Lady Help of Christians in her shrine. Maestro Dogliani had a choir of 250 voices that filled the basilica with heavenly melodies. The following report by a music critic appeared in the newspaper *L'Avvenire* of Bologna: "Those who frown on sacred music and enjoy only the music of Vecchieta, should hear the music of the Oratory choir. They would experience an exhilarating inner feeling and witness for themselves the extraordinary effect this gigantic blending of voices produces, to the point of bordering a heavenly sound." On this occasion, the crowd was privileged to hear the antiphon *Corona Aurea*, considered one of the many small masterpieces created by Maestro Dogliani, which was only a taste of what he might have done with his talent had he not been taken up with so many other assignments.

The year 1914 marked the silver jubilee of Brother Dogliani's entrance into Don Bosco's Oratory. His countless past pupils took advantage of the occasion to express their appreciation and gratitude for all he had done. Father Paul Albera warmly approved of the celebration, and on May 5, 1914, wrote: "I heartily applaud the plan that has been thought out by the affection of your past pupils. I myself have witnessed what you have accomplished through your unflagging zeal and tireless activity. I would not and could not but say, 'Please! Go ahead with this celebration.' The band and choir of the Oratory have an uncontested prestige and reputation due mainly to your efforts."

Dear readers of these profiles, what we have written so far about Brother Dogliani is only a small part of what this good brother and maestro accomplished during his life. I must mention two traits that I think characterize Maestro Brother Joseph Dogliani.

The first trait relates to his technique in teaching both vocal and instrumental music. Here I rely on what my friend, Father Albert Caviglia, wrote in the December 1934 issue of the *Salesian Bulletin*:

*We may rightly conclude that Maestro Dogliani has changed the technique of teaching music in general and, specifically, the technique of training soprano and contralto voices; the way of teaching how to read music; and the way to set up and train large choirs (at times 400 instruments with 200 or 300 boys singing).*

*We have an idea of how to evaluate the work of such a good and patient maestro when we realize that with his technique he was able to introduce classical music into our churches and have the boys sing difficult classical musical compositions with great success.*

*Maestro Dogliani relied on the effectiveness of prayer, which gave him the strength to put on such wonderful performances, offered in honor of Mary Help of Christians.*

The second trait relates especially to his Salesian spirit, which was witnessed both by his students as well as the other pupils. For Maestro Dogliani, music classes were only a method of education. Discipline and order reigned in all his classroom activities. How did Brother Dogliani ever achieve such results?

First of all, with poise and his dignified manner, he would remind his students about the way they should behave, more by hints than by words. He spoke little and to the point. He acted the same way outside the classroom. Brother never lost sight of his students, or his band and choir members, and they would surround him during recreation time to chat.

Brother Dogliani knew how to warn his students of their defects. He knew the words to get the guilty to use their brains rightly and behave themselves, as they should. It was this way of dealing with his students that had an impact on them, especially when they had to make a decision regarding their vocation in life. This also explains why, as the years went by, Maestro Dogliani's pupils or past pupils were glad to visit him, show him affection and gratitude, and reverently listen to his advice.

The earthly days of Maestro Dogliani were coming to a close. Finally, at the age of eighty, in 1930, he began to slow down and take some rest.

The magic fingers of Maestro Dogliani, fingers that released wonderful melodies from the piano, were no longer obedient to his commands. Even his ears could not distinguish clearly the various tones and sounds as they used to. And his energy, which had once directed large choirs, was waning.

Brother Dogliani gradually realized that the time had come for him to yield his "tools and weapons" to someone else. The realization that he was losing his strength and ability caused him terrible pain. With regret, he had to remain behind the scene; he hardly crossed the playground except to reach the dining room and to perform his practices of piety.

As for practices of piety, he was a worthy son of Don Bosco. He was very exemplary. At certain times of the day, we would see Maestro Dogliani quicken his step, impeccably dressed in black and always with a smile on his face, which was available to all who only hinted at greeting him as he was going to church or the dining room.

Even some small incidents that occurred to Brother Dogliani are useful to know, for they express his good spirit as a Salesian coadjutor brother. On October 20, 1933, Maestro Dogliani wrote a note to his director: "Yesterday, due to my absentmindedness, I missed your talk. I beg you to forgive my involuntary lapse. I tried to make up for it by having other confreres share with me the main thoughts of your talk."

Maestro Dogliani was such a dear person. He had rightly received much credit for all that he had done at the Oratory and elsewhere, but few of the people who now met him were aware of his glorious achievements and successes.

The world around Maestro Dogliani had entirely changed. This contributed to his feeling of loneliness and of abandonment. He felt sadly nostalgic about the past and, had it not been for his love of Don Bosco that always reassured and encouraged him, he would have been crushed by it.

Brother Dogliani felt that Don Bosco was calling him to paradise, as he had done so many times while here on earth. In the short conversations that he held with anyone who had the chance to approach him, as I did, Brother Dogliani showed no other aspiration than that of being reunited with his beloved Don Bosco. He felt this aspiration even more deeply after Don Bosco's canonization in 1934, at which he was present. Hardly seven months after the canonization, Maestro Dogliani's wish to be reunited with Don Bosco came true. He had a brief illness, which allowed him to receive the last sacraments with religious fervor, and then his mortal career came to an end.

Brother Joseph Dogliani died on October 22, 1934, at the age of eighty-five. He was a Salesian coadjutor brother for sixty-seven years. Everyone far and wide, who had known him or had heard about him, felt Brother Dogliani's passing away.

His memory will never be erased from the minds and hearts of those Salesian confreres who gratefully remember the family traditions initiated by Don Bosco and faithfully kept by Brother Dogliani. His name will always be mentioned in benediction, because Maestro Dogliani, who consecrated his life to the Salesian Congregation, will remain an essential part of the history of our Society, one of the most beautiful glories it has ever enjoyed.

## Brother Peter Cenci

In May of 1882, young Peter Cenci was convalescing from a bout with pneumonia at the Ospedale Maggiore in the city of Rimini. He was an orphan – no father or mother. The superior of the nuns who ran the hospital felt sorry for this poor little orphan and allowed him to stay at the hospital a bit longer. She would give him odd jobs that were suited to his age and poor health.

One morning, the superior had Peter properly dressed in a hurry and took him to the parlor to a waiting priest. The priest was Don Bosco, who had already spent four days in Rimini. The sisters had asked him to visit the sick of their hospital. The superior explained Peter's predicament to Don Bosco and recommended him to his charity.

Don Bosco gave Peter a hearty greeting and spoke a few kind words. He also asked the superior how old Peter was, and she told him that he was only eleven years old. "Well," Don Bosco went on, "too young! He still has to eat quite a few loaves of bread, and if he remains good, we will admit him to the Oratory next year."

The following year, 1883, Don Bosco remembered the promise that he had made to Peter Cenci and had someone write to the superior of the Rimini hospital to find out whether the boy still wanted to join him at the Oratory. The boy was anticipating the letter and felt overjoyed when he heard Don Bosco's invitation.

He readied himself for the trip to Turin, which had a peculiar twist about it. A canon from the diocese of Rimini was entrusted with the boy for a stretch of the trip and then left him with the following recommendation: "When you reach the railroad station of Turin, take your white handkerchief out of your pocket and wave it. You will see a tall and skinny fellow whose name is Garbellone. Follow him, and he will take you to Don Bosco." This is how Peter made his official entry into the Oratory. Don Bosco welcomed Peter and entrusted him to Father Lazzero, recommending that he take good care of him and look after his health.

Peter's first impression was rather good. He liked the Oratory environment, full of cheerfulness and feasts, and he cherished the attention shown him. Only twelve, Peter did not fully grasp the situation of the Oratory and did not understand the complaints expressed by Don Bosco in a famous letter that he addressed to the Salesians and Oratory boys on May 10, 1884. On the other hand, the superiors noticed that Peter had a lively character, was sincere, had a good heart, and displayed a candid innocence. All this bode well for Peter.

Peter was assigned to work in the tailor shop. We do not know what prompted the superiors to place him in that shop, but there was no doubt that it was the right shop for little Peter. The shops of the Oratory had made great progress and were turning the Oratory into a good trade school, according to Don Bosco's plans. The managers of the shops were all Salesians, and they were concerned not only with the technical training of their students, but also about their moral behavior. Peter soon stood out among his classmates for good behavior and diligence in learning his trade. They all liked him. He was a good singer, played an instrument, and acted.

There is a document that shows how he distinguished himself from the others. Don Bosco was named for St. John the Evangelist. So on Christmas Day, 1886, the artisans agreed to celebrate Don Bosco's name day on December 27, the feast of St. John the Evangelist, instead of June 24, the feast of St. John the Baptist, when it was celebrated for convenience. Every shop of the Oratory wrote a letter to Don Bosco, which was signed by all the artisans, the shop heads, and assistants. Everyone who signed also pledged to do something like receiving Holy Communion, making visits to the Blessed Sacrament or visits to our Lady Help of Christians, with the intention of praying for Don Bosco. The tailor shop had twenty-three signatures, and on top of the list was Peter Cenci, who had promised to receive four Holy Communions and make four visits for Don Bosco. Few of his classmates had pledged as much as Peter Cenci had.

Another incident speaks well of Peter. Every year there were artisans, also from his shop, who decided to enter San Benigno Canavese for their novitiate. Peter Cenci thought about this and, sure enough, two years after Don Bosco's

death, we find Peter Cenci's name on the list of the 1891 novices of San Benigno Canavese, where youngsters aspiring to become members of the Salesian Society as coadjutor brothers studied and improved upon their trade in preparation for their religious profession. Peter was assigned to an expert tailor, Brother Felix Merlo, who had joined the Salesians when he was already an expert cutter. Peter Cenci learned from Brother Merlo how to be an excellent fabric cutter and how to manage a shop.

Brother Merlo was assigned to the trade school of Milan when it first opened. He turned over to Brother Cenci the running of the shop at San Benigno. Peter was twenty-six years old and of such frail health that the doctors thought that he was not going to have a long life. But they were wrong. He lived to be sixty-eight and worked with the ardor peculiar to the people of Romagna.

Several Salesian confreres assisted Brother Cenci. His students, a good number of aspirants from all parts of Italy, were preparing to become Salesians. There were some regular students who were under the care of several Salesian confreres, who were doing their practical training.

His shop, though, lacked tools, and the location of the school was not conducive to supplying work for the artisans at the various stages of their trade as needed. Brother Cenci had to travel to Turin, Ivrea, Alessandria, and even Switzerland in search of clients and much needed work for his students. This entailed making many uncomfortable trips, even during the cold and unstable seasons of the year, running up and down stairs to get the measurements of his clients, fitting his clients with the clothes, etc. Brother Peter would leave the school with a bundle of clothes under his arm, and was given the nickname of *Il professore di fagotto*. The Italian word *fagotto* means both "bassoon" and "bundle."

Because of Brother Cenci's enterprising activity, the students had some work and, therefore, they did not need to work on the farm or in the school garden or other places. But to meet the demands of some clients, these student tailors had to work sometime into the night hours.

Since Brother secured many jobs from his clients, his students passed through all the stages of tailoring, acquiring

the expertise they would eventually need when working or managing new tailor shops around the Salesian world. The students were enthusiastic, and they were encouraged to learn their trade by the many awards and prizes their shop won at different professional competitions and shows in Italy as well as abroad. We still have an album with all the awards the tailors of San Benigno won at various competitions. The tailor shop of San Benigno received the best awards and prizes at the Salesian technical and professional exhibits of 1901 and 1906.

As though Brother Peter did not have enough to do, he prepared on his own a manual for his students that was a response to modern needs: *Il Metodo di Taglio* – techniques to use in cutting fabrics. His love for his work and his great expertise helped him through that hard project, which entailed sacrificing free time and even his sleep.

This manual by Brother Cenci not only brought him accolades and congratulations from colleagues and experts in the field of tailoring, but also the deserved title of Professor, and the medal *Cavaliere della Corona* – Knight of the Crown.

After twenty years of productive and continuous work at the school of San Benigno, Brother Peter was called back to Turin in 1911. Even the tailor shop had reached such a level of perfection that it could compete with the best shops of the area. For Brother Cenci, returning as master tailor to Turin, where he had first started as a youngster, meant a burst of new energy and willingness to work on behalf of the motherhouse, the Oratory of Don Bosco. During his twenty-eight years at the Oratory, Brother Cenci had hundreds of students attend his courses and, as they graduated, the best tailor shops of Turin were vying for them. Everybody knew that the students trained at the Oratory were the best.

Brother Peter kept a correspondence with his students far and near and provided them with whatever they needed to make it in the world.

Brother Cenci displayed a peculiar trait that was noticed in all the coadjutor brothers who were formed by Don Bosco – they always vied with one another in doing anything that was necessary or useful in the house; they never said “no” to any request for help. The Salesian houses loved to have such coadjutor brothers.

Even though he wrote for professional magazines and judged various competitions in his field of expertise, Brother Cenci also contributed to the music and dramatics departments of the Oratory. Neither music nor dramatics were generally his field, but he approached them with the zest of a youngster, since he wanted to be of any possible use to the Oratory. This is typical of the coadjutor brothers formed by Don Bosco.

As a religious, Brother Cenci's piety stood out among his many virtues. He never put-on, nor prayed to show off. His was a sincere and truly exemplary piety, which, joined with his prestige as a master tailor, had a tremendous impact on his students.

Brother Peter's relationship with his students was one of total trust. He dealt with them in a familiar way, but never showed any partiality toward anyone, not even for the best and most talented of his students. If he ever showed any preference it was for those students who lacked character or talent or both. He had a moral impact on his students that was more effective than any authoritarian style.

Because of his trade Brother Cenci had to manage large sums of money, especially in his years at San Benigno. The superiors had full trust in him and knew of his fidelity to the Rule. They never imagined any breach of the vow of poverty. Brother Cenci was eager and willing to give an account of anything he had received and spent. He never sought personal advantages or gratifications; he was quite modest in his requests and needs. He left the house only on errands for his trade. He rarely appeared in public and spent most of his time either in the shop, or in his room, or doing something beyond what was expected of him.

Brother Peter looked at the bright side of things. This optimism discounted anything negative in the dispositions made by his superiors. It gave him understanding and patience with his confreres, and hope that certain students could always improve their behavior.

Brother never failed to show that serenity which was a trait from childhood into old age, even when confronted with poor health, which was not rare. He followed in the footsteps of Don Bosco who was an optimist and always serene, no matter what.

From his early childhood illness, no one would have guessed that Brother would live to the age of sixty-eight. He died on December 5, 1939. His last illness was rather short, and he received all the last sacraments fully conscious.

I feel privileged to share something, which I myself witnessed when I went to see Brother Peter the day before he died. As soon as he saw me, he said these exact words: "This is my last hour. How happy I feel! Oh! I am really glad, very glad!"

This was the enviable death of a religious who lived in God's grace and spent his entire life serving the needs of his neighbor for the love of God, and who faithfully discharged the duties that had been assigned to him.

Brother Peter Cenci felt very proud to have provided Don Bosco with some of his clothes when he was still alive, with his clothes for his burial, as well as with his vestments for his beatification. Brother boasted about this privilege more than any other glory or accolade that he had deservedly received for his work as a master tailor.

## **Brother Bartholomew Villa**

Brother Bartholomew Villa most certainly deserves to be mentioned in this book. His personal traits were those of a real gentleman. He had all the qualities of an excellent Salesian brother. He was very attached to the Congregation and full of affection for Don Bosco.

In 1881, at fifteen, Bartholomew was assisting his brother in a pastry shop located in Turin. He knew Don Bosco and had met him on several occasions. But we know of only one meeting – in 1882.

The Church of St. John the Evangelist was about to be consecrated, and a committee of ladies had called upon Bartholomew to take care of the refreshments for the city authorities after the ceremony, and to make a good espresso coffee for the consecrating bishop and Don Bosco. He felt very proud for the honor and did his best to make sure that everything was in order. After the consecration, Bartholomew went back to the kitchen to get the coffee for the bishop and Don Bosco. But to his surprise, the silver sugar bowl had disappeared. “They stole it!” Bartholomew told Don Bosco, all upset. “No,” Don Bosco answered. “They did not steal it; someone just borrowed it.”

Bartholomew returned to the kitchen and, when he found the silver sugar bowl, Don Bosco said to him in a calm and fatherly voice, “Do you see that I was right?”

The consecrating bishop, Archbishop Gastaldi, was in a hurry. He drank his coffee and quickly departed. That was Bartholomew’s first encounter with Don Bosco. But first encounters, however insignificant, are lasting impressions. Brother Bartholomew Villa, even in his eighties, never tired of talking about that incident, displaying a vibrant affection for Don Bosco.

Bartholomew probably never considered that this encounter, though insignificant, was the first step toward his vocation, but it certainly must have helped prepare the ground for that decision ten years later with Fr. Michael Rua, Don Bosco’s successor.

In May 1893, a crowd of pilgrims from Holland was visiting the Oratory. Father Durando called on Bartholomew, whose shop was located near the school of St. John the Evangelist, to prepare refreshments in the school library. He did so promptly and in a professional way. Father Rua was impressed by this and inquired about him. He was told that Bartholomew was the brother of Joseph Villa, who had died in Turin in 1870 and had been on familiar terms with Don Bosco. Father Rua then realized that he himself had written an edifying remembrance of Bartholomew's brother.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the day, Father Rua praised him for his good work and invited him to dinner on the following Sunday. Bartholomew took him up on the invitation and appeared at the Oratory the following Sunday for dinner with Father Rua.

Seated across from Father Rua, he listened to him as he related many delightful things, as he always did when he had guests at table. At the end of dinner Father Rua extended him another invitation to join him whenever he wished. Again, Bartholomew accepted the invitation and returned for the feast of Our Lady Help of Christians, when Father Rua addressed these simple words to Bartholomew: "Listen! Here at the Oratory there is plenty of bread, as well as work for you, too!" These simple words had a great impact on Bartholomew. They caused him to reflect, and he had no peace of mind until he wrote to Father Rua, asking to try life at the Oratory.

Father Rua consented, and Bartholomew, telling no one of his decision, made preparation to leave home. On June 29, 1893, early in the morning, he showed up at the Oratory. He then wrote to his brother and told him not to worry about him, but he did not tell him his whereabouts.

Father Rua entrusted Bartholomew to Brother Joseph Rossi, who was the house provisioner. He in turn assigned him to the supply room of the Oratory. Fifteen days later, Brother Peter Enria saw him there and let his family know his whereabouts. The family tried but could not convince him to leave the Oratory. He had already been won over by Father Rua, his love for Don Bosco, and his new undertaking.

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<sup>1</sup> Father Lemoyne included it in MB IX, 941: omitted in the English edition.

In a few months, Bartholomew proved how good he was. He was sent with the aspirants to make a spiritual retreat at San Benigno Canavese, where he also began his novitiate. In 1894, he made his triennial vows and then returned to the Oratory to resume his previous work.

Many coadjutor brothers were expressing a desire to go to the foreign missions. Brother Villa shared that desire and made his application for the missions. Father Rua's response was a simple one: "Your mission is here, near me. Here, you will find plenty of work and then a good place in paradise." Brother accepted Father Rua's decision and was at peace.

In 1895, Brother Villa was admitted to perpetual profession and then assigned to take over from Brother Joseph Rossi as provisioner. He held this position till 1905, when the members of the General Council asked him to be at their full disposal to carry out delicate responsibilities on their behalf.

Brother Bartholomew was already mature, and the Congregation needed reliable coadjutor brothers, who were qualified to handle delicate business affairs that could not be entrusted to outsiders. Besides, Brother Rossi was not feeling well, and the members of the General Council could no longer rely on his help. They badly needed someone to take his place, and no one seemed better qualified than Brother Villa.

Through the tenures of three Rectors Major, namely Fathers Rua, Albera, and Rinaldi, from 1905 on, Brother acted as their general agent, with many dealings outside the Oratory. He proved that he had both the character and ability to deal with matters of the Congregation, matters that were delicate and at times difficult. Because of their nature, they had to be entrusted to a Salesian, but a priest would have felt very uncomfortable dealing with them. Brother had a distinguished personality. He had excellent manners, a refined touch, exceptional common sense, and an easy way with people.

But the time also came for Brother Villa "to lower his sails and haul in his shrouds" (Dante's *Inferno*, c. 27, v. 81). When asked because of his age to terminate his work for the General Council of the Congregation, Brother remained at the Oratory and performed tasks suited to his poor health and old age. He spent half a century working at the Oratory, and now Brother Bartholomew enjoyed reminiscing about the past

whenever he had the chance to converse with his Salesian confreres. He told many stories and seasoned them with witty remarks. He made them enjoyable, especially when he spoke in his elegant Piedmontese dialect. Brother was only showing his great love for the Salesian Congregation.

Brother Bartholomew had good taste – a desire for decorum in everything – and love of poverty. He could not abide anything broken or out of order or dirty. He would tell the person responsible and have him take care of repairing, adjusting, or cleaning as needed. He was following a good Salesian tradition and stuck with it.

Since he had little to do, he took the opportunity of nurturing his practices of piety and personal devotions. When Brother went to visit the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians to greet his Blessed Mother one final time, he already had a fever and was nearing the end of his life.

For two winters now, Brother had been confronted with bouts of pneumonia and overcame them, but he did not win this one. He was too weak to withstand it. With a serene fervor and devout faith, he received Viaticum and Anointing.

He left some dispositions to Father Peter Ricaldone, the Rector Major. Then he received his blessing and fell asleep in the Lord on November 11, 1946. Brother Bartholomew Villa was eighty years old and had been a Salesian fifty-two years. His memory will always be with us in benediction.

## **Brother John Baptist D'Archino**

After Father Victor Alasonatti came to the Oratory, Don Bosco found some relief and could more easily respond to the requests made by pastors of nearby parishes to preach on special occasions, which he did in many towns around Turin, although we have few documented reports about them. We would never have known of one such engagement when Don Bosco preached at Villa Franca Piemonte, if Brother John D'Archino had not brought it to our attention.

On August 13, 1842, John Baptist D'Archino was born in that town and, at the age of twelve, served two of Don Bosco's Masses in 1854 when he came to preach. Except for hearing his confession in Turin, D'Archino did not see Don Bosco again until thirty-three years later in Rome.

Young John lived at Villa Franca Piemonte until 1872 and served the needs of the parish, learned music, and performed many good deeds. In 1872, D'Archino became a domestic servant of the Ordinary of Bobbio, Bishop Henry Gay, who died in 1880. Then John and his family moved to Rome, where his brothers ran a shop on Via Urbana. It was here that Divine Providence revealed to John his vocation.

His shop was near Castro Pretorio, where Don Bosco was expected to build the Church of the Sacred Heart, at the request of Pope Leo XIII. The Salesians were to administer it as a new parish. D'Archino soon came to know the Salesians of this new area in Rome, while he was delivering bread and other food provisions to them. He liked the Salesians and told his brothers, "When the Salesians start accepting candidates for religious life, I will be the first and I will be accepted."

He prayed to the Lord for enlightenment, and even performed the ritual of climbing the Scala Santa, begging God to show him his vocation. Sure enough, in 1885 D'Archino's dream came true. While delivering groceries, he approached the director of the house, Father Dalmazzo, and expressed his intention to join the Salesians. Father Dalmazzo did not take his request seriously, because D'Archino was forty-three years old and was living in the midst of a bustling business area.

Father Dalmazzo thought he was hallucinating and told him to return the following day, which he did. D'Archino found Father Dalmazzo cold toward him, but he pleaded his case so well that Father Dalmazzo relented: "If this is the case, you may stay with us." And from then on, D'Archino never left the community of the Sacred Heart in Rome. John began his novitiate there on January 1, 1886, and made his perpetual vows on October 2, 1888.

During the years 1885-1886, Don Bosco did not visit Rome. He came for the dedication of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in May of 1887. This was the twentieth and last trip that Don Bosco made to Rome. John had the opportunity to meet and speak at length with Don Bosco. He took notes of all the events while Don Bosco was in Rome.

In one of those events Father Dalmazzo presented John to Don Bosco as a new recruit for the Salesians. John kissed Don Bosco's hand and said: "I last saw you eighteen years ago on December 28 [*sic*], 1869, on the feast of St. John the Evangelist, and I made my confession to you in the church of Mary Help of Christians."

"Have you ever been to confession since then?" Don Bosco asked.

"Yes, sir! Many times! But I could not confess to you because I was too far away."

Don Bosco tried to dissipate the wrong impression he might have left with such a question about confession, and so mentioned that he had raised the same question with minister Crispi. This incident is reported in the *Biographical Memoirs* (XVIII, 266-267). Father Dalmazzo mentioned to Don Bosco that D'Archino was a good tenor. Don Bosco raised another question: "Are you really a good singer?" and also asked him whether he sang good songs.

D'Archino's answer came quickly: "I have always used my voice to sing the praises of the Lord."

"If you keep singing the praises of the Lord, you will go to paradise," Don Bosco responded.

Brother D'Archino kept those words in his heart and followed them always, since he hardly sang anything other than sacred music. Speaking of his voice, Cardinal Cagliero stated that Brother D'Archino had the most powerful and

delightful tenor voice he had ever heard. The Lord allowed Brother John to sing up to the advanced age of ninety.

During his stay in Rome, Don Bosco told Brother D'Archino: "I see that you are a hard worker. Do you have time to perform your devotions?"

"I rise early," was Brother's answer, "and, with my Guardian Angel, I try to take care of everything."

"Take good care of your health. I want you to get old, but without the troubles of youth."

When D'Archino heard these words he was confused and said, "I was a handful in my youth, but I will try my best to be better from now on."

"You did not understand," Don Bosco said. "I meant that I don't want you to have the illnesses peculiar to youth, like headaches and stomach aches."

Brother D'Archino took those words as a prophecy, which came true, for D'Archino reached a ripe old age without suffering any headaches or stomach aches.

Brother John was one of those coadjutor brothers who for years live in their assigned house and work tirelessly for that house. All their days seem the same, and yet they are never monotonous because a great spirit of faith animates their work. We realize how precious these brothers are when they die and then the house seems to have lost one of its supporting columns.

The music composer, Father Raphael Antolisei, lived with Brother D'Archino for several years and wrote:

*Brother D'Archino had a splendid tenor voice. He considered his singing in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart as his mission and as an assignment that Don Bosco himself had given him to discharge. He never missed any celebrations in the basilica, even though at times it cost him a lot. For many years he was the provisioner for the house and walked every morning to the market place, several kilometers away. On feast days he would get up at 4:00 A.M., walk to the market place, do the purchasing, and walk back home to be on time to sing at the 7:30 A.M. Mass.*

*Several years ago, Brother was infected with a terrible bronchitis and was bedridden. Prior to going down to the basilica for the Vespers of St. Francis, I went to greet him, and he broke down and cried because he was not able to discharge his duty to sing in the basilica.*

*Already over ninety, Brother would go to the choir loft and sing the Salve Regina. His voice was no longer as powerful as it used to be, but it still had a marvelous ring to it and moved all who listened. He was not showing off; he was simply using the voice that God granted him, animated by his lively faith and fervent devotion. Brother D'Archino sang with such a vibrant feeling that he moved with awe even artists who had come to listen.*

The *Salve Regina* that Brother D'Archino sang was a composition by Father Antolisei himself.

Those who lived at Sacred Heart in Rome will never forget how Brother John Baptist, at the ringing of the Angelus bell, would go to the sacristy of the basilica with a swift pace, mixed with small skips, and a slight drag in his step. He would go to the sacristy counter, pick up the missal, and walk ahead of the priest who was about to celebrate Mass.

With only slight changes, this was his routine up to 1935. The final year of his life, he could no longer walk to the market place, and so he would go to the basilica and serve as many Masses as he could. He did this up to six weeks before his death. Then while carrying the missal, he fell and injured his head on the steps of the altar of Mary Help of Christians.

He kept his wits to the end and had such a spirit of faith that he wanted to receive the blessing of any priest who visited him. On June 25, 1935, Brother D'Archino died at the age of ninety-three, like an old patriarch. He was a good servant of the Lord and reached his sanctity in the atmosphere that Don Bosco created. He was an authentic glory of his father, Don Bosco, and he is a model for all of Don Bosco's sons to imitate.

## Brother Seraphim Giulianelli

In the 1870's, Don Bosco was already well known in Rimini, where the Ordinary, Bishop Battaglini admired him. Several clergy and even lay people were acquainted with the *Catholic Readings* published by Don Bosco. In 1882, Father Francis Tomasetti, who then was only a young student at the Oratory and later on would be the procurator general of the Salesian Congregation, was told by Don Bosco, who had just returned from Rimini: "Dear Francis, I've visited Rimini, your hometown, and the people were very gracious. They treated Don Bosco like a prince."

Many boys came to the Oratory from Rimini. Some years before Peter Cenci became a Salesian brother, another youngster, Seraphim Giulianelli, came from Rimini. When he was thirteen, Seraphim's parents entrusted him to Don Bosco. Their hope was that their son would become a good priest. He entered the Oratory in July 1879. He was docile and pious. Giulianelli placed himself entirely in Don Bosco's hands and took Don Bosco as his regular confessor.

Seraphim was fascinated by what he experienced at the Oratory, and he was very happy. He understood that he had entered a house blessed by God as he witnessed the feast days, departures of missionaries, prodigious events wrought by Don Bosco through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians, good night talks, and dreams of Don Bosco.

But it was evident that Seraphim was not inclined to study. He preferred, instead, to be involved in practical things. After Seraphim's third year of high school, Don Bosco, who always had a good instinct about his boys, suggested that he get involved in the bookstore. Seraphim relied on this advice and found his call in life. Don Bosco asked Brother Barale to take care of Seraphim and teach him about the bookstore. He displayed such a good disposition toward this work that he decided to "stay with Don Bosco." In October 1886 Seraphim, at the age of twenty, professed his vows and bound himself in perpetuity to the Salesian Society. Shortly after his profession, Don Bosco showed how much he trusted him.

Pope Leo XIII was ordained on December 31, 1837 and celebrated his Golden Jubilee in 1887-88. The Catholic world wanted to celebrate this event with the greatest possible solemnity, which included a Vatican exhibition. Don Bosco decided that the Salesians should also participate in this exhibition with a booth of their own. He gave directives that all Salesian houses, especially those of South America, should present articles and other items of interest. The Congregation contributed publications from their bookstores; zoological, botanical and meteorological items from South America; and weapons and artifacts of native Patagonians.

Don Bosco asked Brother Giulianelli to supervise the Salesian Booth at the Vatican exhibition, and he showed how experienced and qualified he was for the task. He dealt easily with the Vatican authorities and was a master at explaining the items of the exhibit to all the visitors, making sure that nothing was lost, taken, or damaged.

After the Vatican exhibition, Brother Giulianelli did not return to Turin but stayed in Rome, where he was asked to develop the bookstore at the parish of the Sacred Heart as well as the shops about to be introduced into the hospice. Brother Giulianelli used what he had learned while in Turin with Brother Barale. He kept the bookstore private, meaning that he did not advertise. But, little by little, people came to know about it, clients increased in number, and it was successful in providing the house with some financial help. Through energy and enterprising activity, Brother Giulianelli improved the bookstore technically and editorially, especially when the hospice opened a print shop. Brother felt very happy when his work contributed to the financial running of the house, which never saw real prosperity.

Brother Giulianelli's life was not focused only on the bookstore. He also served as manager of the hospice. He was outspoken in the running of the house, which was becoming quite complex with new and multiple undertakings. He had to deal with the civil authorities and handled many extraordinary celebrations at the hospice. Queen Margaret of Savoy paid the hospice a solemn visit on two occasions. Each time, Brother Giulianelli was the honored spokesman, and he always made a good impression.

Even though Brother Giulianelli was involved in such activity, he never lost the sense of family intimacy. He never put on airs; he looked just like any ordinary confrere, easy going, ready to serve the needs of his confreres, always kind, jovial, and witty. Brother Giulianelli never stood for anything vulgar. He willingly substituted for anyone who was unable to work because of illness.

He sang at the academic entertainments and with the orchestra. He was also involved in the dramatics program of the hospice and put on plays and skits for all to enjoy. (The dramatic performances at the hospice were something unique for the entire city of Rome.) For several years, Brother taught catechism at the festive oratory. In brief, Brother Giulianelli had learned in Turin that a good coadjutor brother was bound to do anything, wherever he might have been assigned. He practiced in Rome all that he had learned in Turin. Those who were not aware of Brother Giulianelli's many activities might have thought that he did not have much to do. Not so! He was busy the whole day, involved in so much work.

Brother found great comfort from his piety, learned from Father Rua, and the first disciples of Don Bosco. Brother always tried his best to honor Don Bosco, whom he loved so tenderly. He was faithful to all his practices of piety even though at times, because of his many assignments, it was quite hard to do so. But whenever he was absent from community, he made sure to attend Mass and receive Holy Communion.

It was quite a moving experience to listen to Brother Giulianelli's conversations, as he reminisced about the early days of the Oratory of Turin, and about special events related to Don Bosco. It simply showed how much they had affected his formation.

I lived with Brother Giulianelli for several years, and what I have written may sound farfetched or exaggerated. But, what I have written here is nothing compared to what should be written about this good brother, who personified what a good Salesian coadjutor brother should be.

Finally, Brother Giulianelli realized that his physical strength was waning and he could no longer work as he used to. He began to slow down, but retirement never crossed his mind. He continued to work as much and as long as he could.

Brother Giulianelli suffered from arteriosclerosis and was forced to take absolute rest. As soon as he recovered, he went right back to his work. He eventually suffered a stroke, which was the final blow. His agony lasted thirteen days, during which he was able to receive all the sacraments. He breathed his last on February 2, 1939, at the age of seventy-three. He had been a Salesian for fifty-two years.

May the Lord send to the Salesian Congregation coadjutor brothers as good and effective as Brother Seraphim Giulianelli. He was a worthy son of Don Bosco, gifted with many extraordinary virtues, which, I am sure, gained him the reward of paradise.

## **Brother Francis Mascheroni**

According to Don Bosco, a director, a doorkeeper, and a cook are the three essential people needed for the good running of a Salesian house.

Francis Mascheroni and Joseph Ruffato (next profile) belong to the third category. Both were cooks and spent their lives as Salesian coadjutor brothers working in the kitchen, ready to prepare meals for hundreds of people, without any desire to change their occupation. This is understandable for someone whose livelihood depends on cooking, but it seems extraordinary that, out of obedience, these two brothers would be cooks, if they had the opportunity of doing something else.

At the age of twenty-five, Francis Mascheroni was still living in his hometown of Mariano Comense. Although a prosperous farmer, he never really liked it and was seeking something more rewarding in his life. His constant prayer was to find what God expected of him. One day Francis met a Salesian priest, Father Moses Veronesi, who advised him to contact Don Bosco. Mascheroni went to Turin and met Don Bosco, who noticed that he had all the traits of a good Salesian and advised him to join the Salesian Society, which he did immediately.

Mascheroni had already finished high school and was asked whether he wanted to pursue the priesthood. He said that he did not like the idea of sitting in the classroom and preferred to become a Salesian cook. Don Bosco took him at his word and, in September 1883, he sent him as an aspirant to the new house of Mogliano Veneto to work in the kitchen. He made his novitiate there, professed his triennial vows as a coadjutor brother in 1885, and made his perpetual vows in 1888. He worked as a cook for fourteen years at Mogliano Veneto. Later he was assigned to the newly opened house of Verona, where he remained as cook for thirty years.

Brother Mascheroni's work was not restricted to the kitchen. He also performed in the band and on stage, and was involved in apostolic work among the young. As the school population grew, he had to give up these extra occupations.

Each day day Brother Francis would pay a visit to the Church of St. Zeno in Verona, where he was noticed for his piety and prayerful attitude. Such was his routine until 1926.

Due to the increased size of the school and greater demands on the kitchen, Brother Francis realized that, at the age of seventy, he no longer had the strength to keep up and reluctantly quit all kitchen activity. He was assigned to the community at Castel Gandolfo, where he could easily respond to the needs of the others. He tried his best to conceal the ailments of old age so as not to be a burden to the confreres. In the mean time, he lived on the memory of early events in his life. It was always a pleasure to listen to him as he related the incidents of his early Salesian life in his own witty and kind way. Thus he spent his days, preparing for death, which came on December 7, 1940.

While descending the stairs to attend Mass, Brother Mascheroni had a brain hemorrhage and died on the steps. The confreres immediately responded to him, but to no avail. They realized that he had died quickly. He was given conditional Anointing of the Sick. But he did not die unprepared. He had spent the last years of his life still working, but also praying. The day before he died he told his confreres that he felt ready to join Don Bosco in paradise. Brother Francis Mascheroni was eighty-four years old and had been a Salesian for fifty-five years.

Father Fidelis Giraudi, the economer general of the Salesians, made this statement: "The many confreres who have known him will certainly pray for him and remember his goodness, his spirit of sacrifice, his poise and kindness, as well as the small tokens of affection for those he served as a cook. What a treasure for our Congregation are our dear coadjutor brothers."

## Brother Joseph Ruffato

Brother Joseph Ruffato was two years younger than Brother Mascheroni. In 1876, at the age of eighteen, he joined Don Bosco's Oratory and made his novitiate there. Father Julius Barberis was the master of novices. Ruffato worked in the kitchen and met Don Bosco on several occasions over a period of twelve years.

Born in Feletto Torinese in 1858, Joseph came from a poor family and had very little formal education. Don Bosco and the environment of the Oratory gave Joseph the spiritual impact that was to transform his life and prepare him to reach a high degree of perfection.

At the Oratory, Brother Joseph was a kitchen helper. In 1879, he was assigned as cook at San Benigno Canavese, site of the novitiate. Most people referred to Brother Ruffato with a Piedmontese nickname, like *Giuspin* (*Giuseppino*), which gives us an idea of the kind of man he was – in constant motion, working amidst pots and pans, always poised and as good as bread. Brother showed his concern by demanding that all his helpers take part of the afternoon off to stay healthy, which he also did by working in the garden.

Brother Joseph was assigned as a cook at Rivalta and then at Chieri. His final assignment was at Colle Don Bosco, where he worked in the kitchen. By 1934, the community had increased tremendously. Brother was advanced in age and no longer had the strength to meet the needs of so many people. After fifty-six years in the kitchen, Brother Ruffato was relieved of these duties. However, he never gave up his special apron and continued working at odd jobs to his last days.

Brother Joseph hardly knew how to read or write, and yet he had an ability of accurately assessing people and events that he gladly shared with his confreres.

One could not but notice Brother's simple ways, his innocence, and his spirit of recollection, in spite of the many activities that occupied his time. He spoke wisely and had a keen ability for judging people and events, which his director made known to us.

Merely observing the aspirants for the brotherhood in the Salesian Society, who during his times were quite a few, he could foretell their future success or failure. The same director said that Brother had the gift of appraising a situation and offering suggestions in a spirit of humility for the good running of the house.

Many people traveled to Becchi to see the birthplace of Don Bosco. Brother Ruffato would often relate to the visitors the sayings and deeds of Don Bosco that he personally knew about. He delighted them with stories of Don Bosco's poverty, how he was satisfied with any food given to him, and that he was always smiling and kept his eyes down, never staring into anybody's face. Brother Joseph was meticulous in pointing out details about Don Bosco's life, which revealed his sharp intelligence.

Here is a particular incident. One day, a countess, accompanied by her daughter and other noble relatives, was visiting the birthplace of Don Bosco at Becchi. They heard about Brother Ruffato and his personal acquaintance with Don Bosco. They asked for him, and Brother Ruffato obliged. With all modesty he showed that he was delighted to have been called upon to speak about Don Bosco. The countess and her entourage were so pleased by what Brother told them about Don Bosco that they also asked him to pray for them. Brother was asked to look at their faces so as to remember them, since he had kept his eyes down. In his simplicity he assured them that he would pray for them, but he never looked at their faces. It was a force of habit. Brother was eighty years old and he still wore the candid look and reserve of his youth.

One noticed right away Brother Joseph's great spirit of prayer. If you but saw the way he made the sign of the cross and his humble countenance, you would have said that here is a soul absorbed with God. Whenever he made his visit to the Blessed Sacrament, he was like a contemplative. Many people recommended themselves to his prayers.

Brother Joseph lived to be eighty-two. Then, like an oil lamp, his flame died for lack of oil on December 18, 1939, with the names of Jesus and Mary on his lips. Brother Ruffato had faithfully served God and the Salesian Congregation – a jewel, hidden within the walls of a kitchen.

## **Brother Dominic Zanolotti**

Dominic Zanolotti was a brother of the same stamp as Brother Giulianelli; they even looked alike. Dominic was just as active as Giulianelli and shared his religious disposition and ability to do many things, even though the scope of their activity was different: Zanolotti's projects were more modest.

He was born on February 18, 1851, at Albuzano in the province of Pavia. At twenty-five, Divine Providence disposed Dominic to go to the Salesian school of Borgo San Martino, where he worked at different jobs. His director, Father Bonetti, soon discovered that he was made of the right stuff and fostered his piety.

Dominic heard a lot about Don Bosco and eagerly looked forward to meeting him, which happened on the three occasions when Don Bosco visited Borgo San Martino. Don Bosco's first and third visits were in the month of November in 1870 and 1877. Each time, he came for the celebration of the feast of the school's patron, Saint Charles. Dominic was struck by the enthusiasm of the boys when Don Bosco arrived, and how they flocked to confess to him. Even Dominic opened his heart to Don Bosco as he made his confession to him.

In July 1877, Don Bosco visited Borgo San Martino with a friend, Monsignor Ceccarelli, pastor of San Nicolas de los Arroyos in Argentina. They spoke with great ardor about the Salesian missions and the upcoming third missionary expedition. This increased Dominic's love for Don Bosco, which led him to bind himself in perpetuity to Don Bosco.

In 1878, Dominic made his novitiate at the Oratory, which was the last year that the novitiate was held there. Father Julius Barberis was their master of novices. Dominic made his first religious profession in 1879 and his perpetual vows in 1880. For eight years, Brother lived at the Oratory, near Don Bosco. He felt very happy to see him, hear his good night talks and talks to the staff, and serve him in the dining room. Brother Dominic often went to make his confession to Don Bosco, who regularly heard confessions in the church of Mary Help of Christians, as long as his strength allowed it.

He received assignments from Don Bosco himself – care of the sacristy of the church and stereotyping in the print shop. He contributed his beautiful basso profundo voice to the church's choir. In his last days, he was happy to reminisce about the early days of the Oratory with Don Bosco.

Two years after Don Bosco's death, Brother Dominic was assigned to work in the laundry at the house of St. John the Evangelist in Turin. Six years later he was called back to the Oratory to work in the bookstore. After six years he was reassigned to run the laundry at St. John the Evangelist. He remained there thirty-four years.

When he no longer had the energy to do this work, he never became idle. He kept doing odd jobs and was still a part of the choir, until his hearing failed, and he gave up singing because he could no longer hold a tune.

There was a time when Brother Dominic yielded to the temptation to smoke. At first I was not going to mention this, because smoking for a Salesian is a weakness. But I did it for a reason. During a spiritual retreat he made the decision never to smoke again. He kept that resolution to the end of his life. The reason for possibly not doing his profile actually gave me a reason to include him, because of that decision not to smoke, a decision faithfully kept to the end of his life. Cicero wrote, *Cuiusvis hominis est errare; nullius nisi insipientis in errore perseverare* – Anyone can make a mistake, but only a fool sticks with his mistakes (Phil. 12. 2).

When religious get sick, their true virtue is revealed. Likewise, when religious can no longer work, they show the depth of their interior lives. A superficial religious spends his days complaining about his ailments. But a deeply spiritual religious uses his strength to be helpful to others and lives a recollected life, praying, meditating, and reading spiritual books. How edifying are those old coadjutor brothers who know how to live as good religious, waiting in silence for the coming of the Lord's salvific mercy, *Praestolari cum silentio salutare Dei!* (Lam. 3: 26).

Brother Dominic Zanolotti belongs to these good religious since he constantly prayed and spent most of his free time in the main church or in the chapel of the school, even during some hours of the night.

The ailments of old age bothered Brother Dominic, as did internal sufferings that the Lord allowed him to experience as a way to purify his soul. But his inner strength and serenity came to his aid, because of his spirit of prayer, which never left him and was displayed in an extraordinary manner during his last illness. Brother Zanolotti understood that death was approaching, but he never complained about it; he never had any regrets. Even after he received the last rites, he welcomed visitors with a smile and witty remarks. Brother showed that sense of good humor and cheerfulness which he displayed his entire life.

In September 1936, Brother Dominic was diagnosed with jaundice. The doctors thought they could deal with it. But due to his advanced age – he was eighty-five – he did not respond to their care and easily succumbed to his illness. He died on October 2, 1936, and had lived as a Salesian for sixty years. Brother Dominic Zanolotti was never entrusted with outstanding assignments. However, whatever his assignment, he did it correctly, diligently, and effectively. He met the Lord's judgment with a tranquil conscience.

## Brother Cyprian Audisio

One building at the Oratory was called *Casa Audisio*, which was razed in July 1952. It was built by Don Bosco and named after Brother Cyprian Audisio, who had used it as his general headquarters for years. Brother Cyprian showed a spirit that was in perfect alignment with the ideal coadjutor brother visualized by Don Bosco – one who lived an exemplary life and was faithfully directed by a great love for Don Bosco and the Salesian Congregation.

Audisio was born at Entracque in the province of Cuneo. In 1866, at the age of nineteen, he joined Don Bosco at Valdocco. For five years, Don Bosco assigned him to do odd jobs. He came to know all about the Oratory and the Salesian Congregation. Cyprian was admitted to the novitiate in 1871, made triennial vows in 1872, and perpetual vows in 1875. He had no other aspiration than to be a worthy son of Don Bosco, to whom he had entrusted his entire life.

At first glance, what Brother Audisio or any other coadjutor brother did was no different from what others in the world were doing. But there is a difference. Those brothers were formed by Don Bosco and were solid religious. He achieved this transformation by kindness and by inspiring trust in them. This is why they would do anything he asked. Some coadjutor brothers lived for years doing the same thing, however humble and monotonous. For them it was enough that Don Bosco gave them that assignment, and they would never want to change it.

Such was Brother Audisio. Don Bosco assigned him to work in the laundry of the Oratory, which he did for fifty years, until his death. He worked amid tons of clothes that belonged to as many as nine hundred different people.

What is of real interest is not so much how long he worked in the laundry, but how he worked and carried out his assignment. First, let us make two praiseworthy remarks. Brother Audisio was extremely diligent in guarding every article of clothing, mountains of laundry that he washed every week. He made sure that every article was returned to the right

person and that the clothes of all confreres, students, and artisans were placed into numbered cubbyholes, and properly pressed. He showed great concern for all of his numerous clients. We would also like to point out that Brother Audisio had a fantastic memory. He could remember numbers, names, and cubbyholes of each one and was careful not to lose any article. He paid special attention to the clothes of the Salesians and looked upon all of them as friends, whom he referred to in Piedmontese as *amìs*.

Brother Audisio humbly did this work for half a century. Once he did lose his patience and felt like giving up everything. Through a misunderstanding at the Oratory, he felt like quitting, giving in his keys, and letting someone else take charge of the laundry. He changed his mind when a confrere spoke to him and made him understand the situation. He wept and approached the superior, to whom he had expressed his intention of leaving, and begged him to forgive him. He then returned to the laundry until his death.

It is amazing what Brother accomplished, considering that he never took time off. We were convinced that he never left the Oratory, not even for a few hours each week, as did the other confreres, who could not join the students in their walks. The only time he left the Oratory was when he went for his spiritual retreat at Lanzo Torinese. He spent fifty years of religious life in the laundry, the church, and his small room.

Brother Audisio's work was not only in the laundry. Older confreres still recall that, in the hall where the students had evening prayers, there was a small altar that was decorated according to the festivities of the year. Traditionally, Brother took care of the altar, with plenty of love and dedication.

When Don Bosco accepted more youngsters than the Oratory could hold and did not know where to put them, he would say, "See Audisio, and he will find a place." Brother Audisio improvised small cots in any available corner of the house. With kindness and fatherly words, he would comfort the boys who, given those hard and precarious conditions, felt homesick.

Brother Audisio was dedicated to a life of prayer, and it is from his piety that he received the strength needed to meet the challenge of his very tedious work.

Brother began his day at 4:30 A.M., when he entered the Church of Mary Help of Christians and attended as many Masses as possible. It was his spirit of piety that gave him the strength to withstand the bouts of his physical ailments. He bore with them patiently. Toward the end of his life, a confrere went to see him and thought that he was doing a good thing by talking with him about the laundry. Brother stopped him and said: "This is not the time to talk about laundry. Let us talk about prayer." When brother received the last sacraments, he looked like a seraph.

He was ill only a few days. Before he died, he kissed the crucifix, and the Lord took him to himself on December 18, 1917, when Brother Cyprian was seventy-one. At his death, those who had known him unanimously said, "The Oratory has lost a saint!"

## Brother Alexis Murra

Brother Alexis Murra is a third coadjutor brother who spent most of his life working in the laundry. He was quite modest. He hardly drew anyone's attention, and few people noticed him. Yet he has something to say to us.

Don Bosco had a mysterious influence on those boys who were well disposed to him. In the town of Caselle near Turin, there lived a good friend of Don Bosco, Baron Bianco di Barbania, whom Don Bosco often visited. Caselle was also the birthplace of Alexis, who was one of those drawn by Don Bosco's magnetism. A mutual affection eventually led Alexis to "stay with Don Bosco," as the saying went.

Don Bosco wanted Murra to respond right away, but it didn't happen until Alexis was twenty-five years old. Prior to "staying with Don Bosco," Alexis worked with his father at a paper mill, and for fifteen years he cared for his paralyzed mother. People in town knew and admired Alexis and looked up to him as an example of filial love for his mother.

In September 1880, Murra left home to join Don Bosco, who immediately perceived that the Lord had entrusted to him a young man who had all the ingredients to become a good coadjutor brother. He assigned him to the laundry with Brother Audisio, who helped him understand the spirit of the Oratory with ease. Life at the Oratory in those days was imbued with a spirit of piety and desire for work. Murra had been well seasoned for both while taking care of his mother at home. He was pious and hard working.

The novitiate had already moved from the Oratory to San Benigno, but Don Bosco wanted Murra at the Oratory for his novitiate and entrusted him to the care of Father Rua for 1881-1882. Murra made his triennial vows in 1882 and his perpetual vows in 1883. At the Oratory, Brother Murra was present for Don Bosco's talks to his staff and his good night talks. He would make his confession to Don Bosco in the sacristy of Mary Help of Christians Church. Brother Murra's activity centered around three areas: the laundry, the festive oratory, and the altar boys society of the artisans.

This short profile is insufficient to tell us everything that Brother Murra did in the laundry. It is enough to say that his work there went through two stages. The first stage was while he worked under the direction of Brother Audisio. In 1891, the laundry of the boys was separated. Brother Audisio took care of the students, while Brother Murra took care of the artisans. This was the second stage, in which Brother Murra's enterprising activity knew no bounds, much like his spirit of sacrifice and charity.

When he dealt with confreres, he relied on intuition and caution. With his delicate approach, he responded quickly to their laundry needs, simply and tactfully.

Brother Murra's times were not like the heroic age of the early Oratory, but they constantly felt a financial pinch and there was no room for extravagance in the laundry. He knew how to obtain and properly use the many things that Divine Providence gave them. He checked the clothing of the artisans and made sure that it was always presentable. Whenever he saw that they had torn clothes or broken shoes, he provided them with what he kept in case of an emergency. At the same time, he taught them how to take care of their clothes and did not allow them to wear Sunday clothing on workdays or when they went out for a walk. He knew that he was expected to train the youngsters on how to be orderly and thrifty, as if in a family. A mother could not have done a better job in this regard than Brother Murra.

Brother Murra knew his responsibilities well, and strove to do everything properly. Much like Brother Audisio, Brother Murra was gifted with a sharp memory. Everyone's laundry needs were met promptly and exactly. He had the same kind and charitable disposition for everyone. He never failed to respond to any need.

Brother also had other areas in which he displayed his zeal and charity, namely, the festive oratory. It was here that he showed his apostolic spirit, something unexpected for one who was passed off as not too intelligent. He was not gifted enough to teach catechism, but he was good enough to assist the boys of the festive oratory. If assistance was needed, he responded accordingly. When the assistants were absent for any reason, he took their place until they returned.

Another outstanding trait was that Brother mingled with the boys and noticed the poorest of them. They gained his special attention. The poorer kids surrounded him. He in turn provided them clothing and food, according to their needs. At times, the kids wore such shabby pants that they really needed a new pair or the old ones repaired at once. Brother would take the boys to the chapel and give them an altar boy's cassock to wear until he had fixed their pants or found another pair.

In order to feed his poor friends, Brother would save some of his food for them. He was often seen by his confreres leaving the dining room, dragging his feet and carrying a small pot of food. He shared it with the poor and hungry kids of the festive oratory. And if he knew that some of these kids needed employment, he would find jobs among his friends.

Brother Murra was a good Salesian who concealed his personality in a mantle of humility, which opened doors for him to get what he needed for his poor hungry kids, who later could earn a decent living because of the concern shown to them by Brother Murra. When he died, hundreds of people expressed not only their sympathy, but especially their thanks to a wonderful Salesian, who had taken care of them in their time of need.

Besides the festive oratory boys, Brother Murra had another way in which he distinguished himself – the altar boys. His interest in them grew in 1911, when he was put in charge of the Church of St. Francis de Sales, the church of the festive oratory. He provided the church with rich vestments, statues, and decorations, mainly to foster the devotion of the oratory boys on feast days. He did this as long as he was physically able.

At a certain point the students were separated from the artisans during the services held in the Church of Mary Help of Christians. This separation meant that the artisans had no altar boys, since the students held that privilege. Even as a child in his home town, Brother Murra had shown great interest in church services and cherished being an altar boy, to the point that he became the master of ceremonies at his church services. He could not tolerate the predicament the artisans were in, and prepared some of them to serve as altar boys. Four of them served the community Mass on the feast of

the Immaculate Conception in 1891. He trained a number of artisans as altar boys so that little by little they were able to compete with the students. Ever since then, the artisans have been represented at all the services held in the Church of Mary Help of Christians, to their great spiritual advantage.

Someone might rightly raise the question: How could Brother Murra accomplish all these things, if he had so much work in the laundry? The answer is that Brother Murra gave up his rest and recreation to do this extra work. He rarely took time off for recreation, and the only time he left the Oratory was to go away for his yearly spiritual retreat.

Father Rua, who held a special place in his heart for Brother Alexis, had been ordained at Caselle in the family chapel of Baron Bianco di Barbania and recalled with Brother Murra, who was from Caselle, those days of long ago.

In 1935, Brother Murra contracted pneumonia, but he soon recovered. However, after that he was not the same. He felt weak and had to be confined to the infirmary. He tried not to be a burden to anyone and prepared himself for death. Even though he was quite advanced in age and full of ailments, modest as he was, he never expressed any need and accepted everything with gratitude and affection, always with a smile.

Brother Alexis was diligent in making his monthly manifestation to his director, and when the director visited the infirmary, Brother insisted that he make it then and there.

On the feast of the Epiphany, January 6, 1939, he had another attack of pneumonia. His speech was gone, but he never lost consciousness. He had made his confession the day before and received the last sacraments on January 10, 1939. As he was about to kiss the crucifix, he peacefully closed his eyes, while his soul was surely flying right into paradise, into the bosom of God. He was eighty-three years old.

His memory, like the memory of the many coadjutor brothers we have written about in this booklet, will always remain in benediction, not only at the Oratory but all over the Salesian world. We still remember Brother Murro's humility, hard work, spirit of sacrifice, religious piety, apostolic zeal, love for the greater glory of God and, most of all, his charity.

## Brother Joseph Gambino

St. Francis de Sales wrote that God uses singular and, at times, peculiar ways to call someone to enter religious life. The case of Brother Joseph Gambino proves him right. Joseph was engaged to be married to a young woman from Poirino Torinese, his hometown, when he noticed that she was hunch-backed. He was so upset that he did not speak with her again and thought it best to leave the world for good. His wish came true much later, when he was thirty years old.

Don Bosco had preached in Poirino Torinese several times and was well known there. His *Catholic Readings* were widely read, also by Joseph Gambino. He felt drawn to Don Bosco, and one day in 1877 he went to see him at Valdocco. Joseph decided then and there to put himself totally into the hands of Don Bosco.

Don Bosco was looking for a man like Gambino – a man of good will, with lots of talent and energy. He needed someone to take charge of the shipping department of the Oratory bookstore, which had developed considerably and needed a manager. Joseph was that man. Subscriptions to the *Catholic Readings* had greatly increased. The *Biblioteca della Gioventù*, a collection of books for Italian youth that had been started in 1869, was welcomed into classrooms and Catholic homes. New editions were constantly being printed, and the bookstore was very active. Joseph soon learned to run his department so well that complaints about the slow or incorrect shipping of books were eliminated.

Don Bosco liked Joseph's work and entrusted him with other assignments. In 1876, when the Vatican canonically approved the Union of Salesian Cooperators, Don Bosco began a publication for them, their monthly communication. He called it the *Salesian Bulletin*. Don Bosco saw the need of more staff in the bookstore, especially in shipping. Don Bosco put Brother Gambino in charge of shipping. In 1891, Father Michael Rua made him the head of the entire operation, representing the Salesian Congregation when dealing with the post office, freight companies, advertising agencies, printing

establishments, and the press in general. Brother Gambino's name was listed in several publications with his legal title: *Giuseppe Gambino, gerente responsabile* – Joseph Gambino, general manager.

Joseph Gambino was a marvelous coadjutor brother. He was a passionate worker who was never satisfied simply to give orders, but he himself was also engaged in many works, even in preparing packages and pushing carts full of books to be taken to the post office or to bookstores in the city.

Brother Gambino worked at this post for forty years, in spite of his many ailments, which were painful and made his life a prolonged martyrdom. His extraordinary virtues gave Brother Gambino that extra push and strength to discharge his many duties, even when he had difficulty breathing and could hardly lie down, causing him to pass many sleepless nights. His strong will, supernatural love, and spirit of sacrifice gave him the ability to discharge all of his duties rightly.

He could have passed his Sundays and holy days taking it easy or relaxing in his room. Instead, he was involved with the boys of the festive oratory, where he taught the small children catechism. The boys simply loved him. Brother also assisted during recreation, kept a watchful eye on the entrance of the Oratory, and supervised games. Later, in 1891, Father Rua opened a new festive oratory, dedicated to St. Augustine, in the Martinetto area of Turin.

As long as his health permitted, Brother Gambino willingly gave his services to the director of this new festive oratory, doing any kind of work, even small jobs, just to help. Anyone who has worked in a festive oratory knows of the many small jobs to be done. In all these activities, what stands out most in this good coadjutor brother is his character – not only his tireless zest for work, but also his fortitude and willingness to meet with any sacrifice, often for lengthy periods of time.

But it was his spirit of piety that provided Brother Joseph with the energy he needed to meet the challenge of his post, a piety he had learned from Don Bosco himself. In 1880, he had made his perpetual vows as a Salesian brother, and he never hesitated to allow Don Bosco to lead him by word and example in developing the talents that God had given him.

Brother Joseph Gambino was a good and faithful servant from the very beginning of his vocation to the end of his life. He died of natural causes on January 12, 1919, at the age of seventy-one. He had a happy and holy death.

## Brother Joachim Bona

In 1883, a thirty-two-year old gentleman showed up at the Oratory. He asked to see Don Bosco, who welcomed him and listened to the story of his life. That gentleman was Joachim Bona, who had been born in Castiglione Falletto in the province of Cuneo. A shoemaker by profession, he had lived an exemplary Christian life. Bona was financially well off and yet, for quite some time, he had been disenchanted with the world and wanted to live a life of greater perfection.

Joachim Bona had read in the *Salesian Bulletin* that the Salesian Society included brothers. Bona mustered his courage and asked Don Bosco whether he could be accepted into the Society as a coadjutor brother. Don Bosco perceived the simplicity and the solid religious foundation that Bona had shown and accepted him as an aspirant at the Oratory. He assigned him to the bookstore, which suited him perfectly.

Joachim felt so good at the Oratory that he said "yes" to anything Don Bosco asked of him and spent all his energy for Don Bosco. Bona did so well that, after a short testing period in the novitiate, he professed his triennial vows in 1886 and his perpetual vows in 1889. Brother's spiritual formation began with Don Bosco and continued with Father Rua's help.

On February 1, 1888, while the body of Don Bosco was carried from his rooms to the church of St. Francis of Assisi, Brother Bona had the grace of carrying the holy water. For a month, Brother had been suffering terrible rheumatic pains in his leg, to the point that he could hardly climb the stairs. He silently recommended himself to Don Bosco at the very moment when Father Bonetti was sprinkling holy water upon the body of Don Bosco, and Brother felt immediately cured. The following day he wrote a report of the incident for Father Rua. We still have that report in our archives.

The assignment Don Bosco gave to Brother Joachim called for him to work with Brother Joseph Gambino, who, as we pointed out earlier, was an exemplary coadjutor brother. Bona profited much from his example and worked with him for twenty-three years. They were of kindred spirits and their

relationship had a useful impact on the entire staff of the shipping department of the bookstore.

Much like Brother Gambino, Brother Bona also liked to be involved with the boys of the festive oratory and taught catechism to the little ones. His background of reading helped him relate many stories to get the attention of the small boys as he was teaching them catechism. Brother Bona had an easy way of dealing with people, which helped make his teaching quite delightful.

Brother Bona used special devices to get the attention of the children he taught. For instance, for quite some time he had been collecting used stamps. He would glue the stamps on pieces of cardboard, make some designs with them, and give them out as prizes to the boys he taught. At times, he pocketed the fruit he and other Salesians received at meals and gave it to the boys to attract them to come to the festive oratory every Sunday. In short, he worked hard, using every means to draw youngsters to the Oratory. A few months before he died, Brother Bona told his director that the heavy work he did on Sundays at the festive oratory left him exhausted on Mondays.

Brother Bona also had other responsibilities, such as watching after the lay employees. He knew the ways of the world and certainly was suited to supervise these individuals who had been hired to do menial jobs. But Brother Bona knew how to win their trust and had a healthy impact on them.

The last year of his life, Brother Bona was affected by a throat ailment for which there were no cures at that time. Any attempted cure caused him terrible pain, but also gained him a lot of merit for heaven. It was later diagnosed as cancer of the throat. When he realized the full extent of this condition, Brother Joachim asked to go to the Cottolengo Hospital. He did not want to be a burden to his Salesian confreres. He lost his voice. To communicate with visitors, he would write on slips of paper – mostly requests for prayers.

On the eve of the feast of St. Joseph, Brother Bona wrote a note to his confreres at the Oratory, wishing them a happy feast day. He died the following day, March 19, 1909, at the age of fifty-eight. Brother Bona was called to God and invited to join St. Joseph on his feast day.

## Brother Angelo Andini

We have written the profiles of several coadjutor brothers who became Salesians when they were older, had lived an exemplary Christian life, and answered God's calling by entering religious life. These brothers became exemplary Salesians and have bequeathed to us a legacy of good example by the way they fervently served the Lord.

There is another coadjutor brother who belongs to this category. Brother Angelo Andini is the last of these coadjutors who were received by Don Bosco himself and experienced personally the benefits of Don Bosco's formation.

He was very active in his own parish and helped his pastor, especially in running the festive oratory that had been beautifully organized by the pastor. At the age of twenty-one, at Lecco, his hometown, Angelo heard about Don Bosco as the apostle of youth. This had a special ring and sounded much like the call of Jesus to his apostles, "Come, follow me!" Then and there, Angelo left his town of Lecco and parish work to put himself entirely into the hands of Don Bosco.

As usual, he discerned immediately in Angelo a good soul, sincere in his desire to live a more perfect life and capable of much good. They met in 1883. On October 5, Don Bosco entrusted him to Father Anacletus Ghione, who was the master of novices for the coadjutors. Although they were using San Benigno Canavese as the novitiate house that year, Don Bosco kept Andini at the Oratory and received his first profession of vows in 1886 at San Benigno. Father Rua received his renewal of vows three years later.

When Brother Angelo arrived at the Oratory, Don Bosco assigned him to work in the storeroom of the print shop, a seemingly easy assignment but in fact difficult. It entailed receiving large amounts of paper, assigning the proper paper to be used daily for the six printing presses, and having the paper cut to size. It also entailed drying and assembling the printed materials, and, finally, delivering them to the clients of the Oratory print shop. He worked at this assignment for fifty-three years, from early morning to 7:00 P.M.

Brother Angelo Andini was not only a good worker, but also a good Salesian worker, always striving to be a good Salesian educator. While he was in charge of the print shop storeroom, many youngsters would appeal to him to find some employment for them. Brother Andini would never let them down. He would also give them needed advice or some good tips on how to behave.

For several years, Brother Andini was the assistant of the dorm for third-year high school students. He inspected their lockers and made sure that everything was in order, that no food was stored in them, and that their clothes were neatly arranged. At the same time he never failed to give them some good tips and excellent advice.

A casual observer might have suspected that Brother Andini was rude in dealing with boys and people in general. Far from it! His kindness was such that many of his pupils, who later became priests or coadjutor brothers in the Salesian Society, remembered him and were very grateful to him.

Brother Andini's zeal for the young was especially evident at the festive oratory. He really loved to work with the boys there. Father Pavia was in charge of the festive oratory and assigned him to teach catechism and assist in many other activities. With the bigger boys, Brother Angelo had formed the St. Joseph Sodality, which met every Sunday at 2:30 P.M. The members said the Rosary and had a priest share some spiritual thought with them. This Sodality gave the Salesians several priests and brothers, because of the apostolic zeal of Brother Angelo.

For twenty years, Brother Andini was involved with the theater at the Oratory. God only knows what Brother went through in this assignment! Anyone with experience of school dramatics understands what I mean. However, Brother Angelo never asked to be relieved of this assignment. He knew how important and beneficial the theater was to the Oratory when directed according to the spirit of Don Bosco.

Brother Angelo was assigned to assist the boys in recreation, where he showed his spirit of sacrifice. However cold or hot the weather, Brother Angelo never failed to be present in the playground with the boys, to make sure that they behaved.

Some areas of Turin had gangs called *coche*, youth that caused damage and created disturbances. At times Brother Andini's boys had to pass through those gang areas. Brother accompanied them and, on one occasion, was clobbered on the head by a thrown object.

Many of those festive oratory boys, once married and with children, expressed their respect and gratitude to Brother Andini for all he had done so unselfishly for them.

As I wrote these profiles on the coadjutor brothers, I hardly mentioned how they kept their vows and the Salesian rule, because I would be repeating the same thing over and over. But whenever I felt the need, I did refer to how well they observed the Salesian rules and vows. Brother Angelo loved the Salesian rule, which he kept faithfully. It upset him when he saw that some did not follow the rule, and he did not refrain from correcting them. As for the vow of poverty, Brother Andini's room and wardrobe had only what he absolutely needed. He could not abide wasting bread and would pick up the discarded pieces. He was told to stop this practice because it was unsanitary.

The Oratory did not have a heating system then, in spite of the fact that the winters in Turin are especially cold and damp. The topic of heating was to be discussed at a General Council meeting when Don Bosco interrupted, "Let no one speak of heating systems at the Oratory!" With or without any knowledge of what Don Bosco had in mind about the heating system, Brother Angelo never allowed any heating device where he worked because of the cost. Yet, due to the harsh, cold winters of Turin, Brother Angelo's hands were swollen and roughed up by chilblains. In 1936, three years before he died, the superiors assigned a warmer place for Brother to live and work.

But now Brother Andini began to feel rheumatism in his legs, pains so bad that he could no longer serve the Mass being said at the altar of Mary Help of Christians at 5:30 A.M.

In 1938, writing his Christmas greetings, Brother Angelo said, "What I really long for is to have the grace of a happy death!"

Brother Angelo did not live to celebrate the following Christmas. During the first days of November, he caught a

terrible cold and did not pay much attention to it; he still kept working as usual. On November 8, 1939, after the talk for the exercise for a happy death, Brother could hardly stand up. The following day, Brother Angelo was diagnosed with galloping pneumonia. The last rites were administered immediately, while he was still fully conscious. On November 12, at the age of seventy-eight, Brother Angelo Andini passed on to join the many coadjutor brothers who had preceded him with their life of faith and were now enjoying a well-deserved eternal rest.

As I wrote these profiles of our beloved coadjutor brothers, I recalled one of St. Francis de Sales's thoughts, with which I would like to conclude this profile:

*Even religious who may not be entrusted with an apostolic dignity are good enough to carry on an apostolic service, rendering to God the service of promoting his glory as the apostles did. It should be a comforting feeling to know that God can take advantage of the excellent service to which they have been called. They do not preach, forgive sins, administer sacraments, but they spend their lives witnessing the virtues of their order and displaying those virtues for young people to see, people who, led by their example, may embrace religious life... Oh! What a grace it is that God would allow those religious to become apostolic, not so much with their position, as with what they are doing and the merits they gain. They do not preach, but they never fail to perform apostolic work and are able to share with others their own way of life.*

## Brother Joseph Balestra

In the church of St. Mary of the Angels in Rome, there is a statue dedicated to St. Bruno called *La statua del silenzio*, the statue of silence, because its face is covered with seven seals, to remind us of the silence of a cloister.

Some say that the Coadjutor Brother Joseph Balestra was a living replica of the statue of silence. No matter who he was with or what he was doing, he always gave the impression that he was never distracted from his deep spiritual meditation. The Oratory boys gave him the nickname "the exercise for a happy death," which indicated how he impressed them as he passed in the playground or courtyard.

Brother Balestra never knew Don Bosco. He owed his formation to Father Michael Rua, Don Bosco's successor. Nevertheless, we associate Brother Balestra with the group who had been formed by Don Bosco, because he was such an exceptionally good coadjutor brother. One whom everybody called "the saint" should not be relegated to oblivion.

The testimony left us by those who knew him prior to his becoming a Salesian brother says that Joseph was a well-behaved and pious young man. His hometown was Zoldo Alto in the province of Belluno. Later he moved to Venice, Verona, and Milan as a shop clerk. While he was working in Milan in 1891, Joseph heard the calling of the Lord to become a religious. He attended the church of St. Ambrose, which was administered by the Salesians. He came upon the *Catholic Readings*, which he enjoyed reading during his free time.

Having formed a liking for the Salesians, Joseph met a priest from his own Friuli region of Italy who had seen the Salesian booth at the Turin national exhibition of 1884. The priest told Joseph that he had met Don Bosco, and he related many good things about Don Bosco and his Oratory. Joseph was convinced that he should join Don Bosco's Society.

Joseph was already twenty-three years old and lacked any formal education beyond the second grade. The priest from Friuli suggested that he apply to the director of the Sons of Mary program. The director received his application and

suggested that he enter the Oratory as an employee, study the situation, and then decide. This is what Balestra did.

Joseph entered the Oratory in February 1891. For three months he was assigned to work in the sacristy of the Church of Mary Help of Christians, and then he was assigned to the bookstore. Several years later, Brother Balestra wrote a letter to his provincial saying, "At the Oratory I never asked to enter the study program because I knew I was not fit for it."

But just by observing his piety and humility, one saw that Balestra was a man who was with the Lord and desirous of reaching a higher degree of perfection. Thus, the superiors invited Joseph to enter the novitiate. He accepted, made his novitiate at San Benigno Canavese in 1892, and remained there as an infirmarian until 1894, when he made his perpetual vows and was recalled to the Oratory.

The superiors still remembered the good qualities of Brother Balestra and had the intention of entrusting him with a very delicate assignment. He first worked in the bookstore and helped in the dining room. Then, Father Michael Rua asked him to be his personal assistant. Father Rua's health was rather poor, and he needed a good, mature, serious, and trustworthy coadjutor brother to care for him. Immediately the superiors considered Brother Balestra. They chose well. Brother Joseph was truly that good and faithful servant who cared for Father Rua until his death in 1910.

Then Brother was assigned to work in the archives of the Oratory, which he did for thirty-two years, until his death.

This is only the *curriculum vitae* of Brother Joseph Balestra – what he did. It is certainly of greater interest to know how Brother Joseph lived his religious life.

Brother Balestra considered the eleven years spent at the service of Father Rua both chronologically and spiritually the center of his life. He had taken the assignment with the best of good will and understood how saintly was the servant of God, Father Rua. He cared for him, while admiring his extraordinary virtues and trying to imitate them. Brother Balestra did imitate the extraordinary virtues of Father Rua to such an extent that one detected in him the very figure of Father Rua. He gave Father Rua filial care and silently obeyed any wish expressed by Father Rua.

During the day, he was Father Rua's receptionist. At night, he slept on a cot in a small room next to Father Rua's room, which had been Don Bosco's room. He was prepared to answer any call that might come from Father Rua, even during the night. Among his many duties, Brother Balestra knocked on Father Rua's door at 5:00 A.M. and at the same time called in a loud voice, "*Benedicamus Domino*," to which Father Rua responded, "*Deo gratias*."

During Father Rua's final illness, several confreres had suggested to Brother Balestra that he should allow him to rest and not awaken him so early. Brother would simply shrug his shoulders and say, "But Father Rua told me to do this!"

Brother Balestra never questioned a request, for his attitude was obedience rather than debating about it. Father Rua counted on this blind obedience and, just a month before his death, called Brother Balestra and set up a schedule more suited to his ill health. He dictated the smallest details of that schedule to Brother Balestra, and at the very end added: "Nota Bene: I trust this schedule will be faithfully observed by Brother Joseph Balestra."

This statement clearly indicates that Brother enjoyed Father Rua's full confidence and, therefore, could observe his saintly ways. After Father Rua died, Brother Balestra wrote a detailed description of Father Rua's life for his biographer. Here are some of those details:

*Father Rua was always poised even in the midst of a lot of work; he spoke with simplicity and humility to all equally, no matter their walk in life.*

*I never heard him laugh in a loud way, and he never raised his voice except to be heard.*

*I have noticed in him many similarities with Saint Francis of Assisi. Both were small and thin, modest yet dignified. Each loved poverty, humility, mortification, and penance.*

Brother Balestra's description continued on with the same simplicity. Those who knew Father Rua and his faithful servant, Brother Balestra, might easily detect from these few quotations, that Brother Balestra's lifestyle was a mirror of his master, Father Rua.

There are four outstanding virtues that Brother copied or faithfully absorbed from Father Rua: humility, poverty, work, and piety. Brother Balestra possessed these virtues prior to his assignment with Father Rua. But the example he saw in Father Rua cultivated them to a heroic degree.

As for work, Brother Balestra followed the rule of the masters of the spirit: "Do not let the devil ever find you idle!" His workday began at 7:00 A.M., when he cleaned up his and Father Rua's rooms and office. He would have a cup of coffee in the dining room and then return to Father Rua's office, where he worked up to dinner. He had dinner with the first crew of waiters, because at dinnertime, he was the waiter for the superiors' table. He performed this assignment, which was neither simple nor pleasant, up to 1914. The superiors' dining room was on the third floor of the main building, while the kitchen was in the basement. In his habitually calm and poised way, Brother Joseph went up and down the central stairway, occupying his time by whispering some prayers.

After dinner, Brother Balestra went to the playground for a walk, always by himself and close to the Church of Mary Help of Christians. Anyone striking up a conversation found out soon enough that he wished to be left alone, because he was "speaking with the Lord." Brother was courteous but any conversation he would quickly let die, so that any "intruder" would understand and leave him alone. Later, he would return to Father Rua's office and remain there until supper, when he ate with the first crew, again expected to serve the community supper for the superiors.

After Father Rua's death, Brother Balestra worked in the archives. This work was not new to him because, even when he was taking care of Father Rua's office and room, he did similar archival work. At his desk from morning till night, you can be sure he never wasted any time. If anyone came to his office, he never raised his eyes from his desk. And anyone who looked at him more intently would notice that, whatever he was doing, he was absorbed in something greater than the material things surrounding him.

Brother Balestra had other assignments, which were hard and tiresome, especially in his advanced age. One day, the Rector Major saw Brother as he carried a huge stack of

books. In a fatherly way, he rebuked him and told him that he was no longer young enough to do that work. Without the least show of concern, Brother responded in a subdued way: "For me doing this is a real pleasure! Moving around does me a lot of good."

A similar incident occurred in the last month of his life, during World War II. The magnesium bombs, which were launched prior to the official air raids, were causing fires, even at the Oratory. We were having air raids constantly, and it seemed prudent to move important documents of the Salesian archives to a safer location. And so, they were moved to the basement of the Church of Mary Help of Christians. Brother carried many of those documents downstairs. Confreres who met him along the way kindly suggested that there were young Salesians who could do that job. Brother Balestra just smiled and continued on his way.

Brother Joseph never took any recreation, never went to the theater, never had any amusement and, generally, never took a walk. On behalf of the Rector Major, he would leave the Oratory each Palm Sunday to bring some blessed palms to the benefactors of the Oratory. He carried the palms in such a recollected way that people said he was in a procession. Every Sunday, Brother Joseph went to the Cottolengo, a hospital nearby, to visit some poor patients. He would give them some printed materials, holy pictures, and fruit. The sisters at the Cottolengo treated Brother Balestra with great respect and even veneration. He carried himself as though recollected in church. This impressed them.

This was Brother Balestra's routine for thirty-two years, the time he worked in the archives of the Oratory. He carried out perfectly any order he received from the head of his department, who would often ask him to transcribe certain documents to have extra copies available. Physically, Brother was not very strong, but he was strong enough to do his duties, thanks to his habit of eating and drinking moderately. When he suffered ill health, Brother knew how to deal with it. He kept a light diet and rarely failed to show up at his work desk.

Brother Balestra never had scruples, but he caused others to have them when they saw how he practiced poverty. This was evident in the way he kept his room and the way he

dressed. His room was the very picture of cleanliness and order: it had neither wardrobe nor desk, only a bed, chair, and night table. For many years Brother kept a small statue of the Immaculate Conception in his room, very dear to him, because it was widely believed to have belonged to St. Dominic Savio. But one day he thought that keeping the statue in his room was some kind of a luxury, and he gave it to the infirmarian to preserve as a precious legacy.

It was generally known that Brother Balestra never wore a new suit or a new pair of shoes. He relied on hand-me-downs from other confreres. He had no heavy overcoat or cloak to wear during the winter; he had only a heavy jacket such as was worn by poor people. On one occasion, when he was asked to accompany a priest on a trip, he had to borrow a more decent suit from another confrere. He always walked to town, and in the evening he moved his desk toward the window to save electricity. These may not seem important if taken individually, but when looked at in totality and as done habitually for a long time, then they give us a good picture of how Brother practiced religious poverty. He was so strict with himself that he may have given the impression that he was not concerned about himself; but he was never strict with his confreres, to whom he always showed great appreciation and loving-kindness.

We can pass up many virtues that Brother displayed so beautifully during his life on earth, but we cannot pass up his humility. It seemed that Brother did everything possible to remain hidden and go unnoticed. He thought of himself as the least one in the community; he hardly ever spoke since he thought he might be a bother to others. He seemed aloof. He never made remarks about his own confreres, since he felt that he was the worst confrere of the house and, therefore, should mind his own business. At the same time he never used any expression that might have showed his humility. Once one of his confreres told him plainly: "Brother you are a living saint, and when you die you will go straight to heaven. You have worked so many years for the Congregation, have shown such great piety, served so many Masses, have never lost your temper with anyone." Brother answered, "*Peccatores sumus* – We are sinners!"

When speaking about Father Rua, he would never use his own name as being part of any incident. When someone had a conversation with him, everyone knew it would end quickly, and the reason is that he wanted time for his interior life. He loved recollection and avoided conversations, because he knew they could easily turn to mentioning others' defects.

Besides his humility, Brother Balestra practiced a spirit of piety, which was linked with a constant union with the Lord. Anyone observing him would have said, "Behold a man who constantly lives in God's presence."

Brother ordinarily got up at 4:00 A.M. He served the first Mass at 4:30, attended a second Mass, made meditation, attended community Mass, and, finally, another Mass as a way to make his thanksgiving after Communion.

Having taken care of his religious duties, he got to work. Prayer was like breathing. Being involved in so many activities never prevented him from being recollected. Even those who did not know him, when they saw him at his desk, would observe that he was absorbed with spiritual thoughts.

When he was in church, without putting on a show, Brother Balestra always acted in a dignified manner and kept so motionless, that it seemed to be his natural posture. If he had any free time during the day, he would pray the Rosary.

One evening, a confrere approached him after supper as he was walking in the playground and asked him how many Rosaries he said a day. "Oh! Well...we need to pray also for those people who perhaps never pray." The confrere persisted, wanting to find out the number. Brother Balestra answered: "Oh! Well...more than one!" He always answered the same.

Brother's response to people was always seasoned with kindness and wit. This happened on one occasion when he met a group of Brothers who were debating which airplanes (*apparecchi d'aviazione*) were better, Italian or foreign. "You, Brother Balestra, what do you think? Which machine (plane) do you think is better?" *Apparecchio* means "machine" but it also means a "process of preparation." With this in mind, Brother Joseph Balestra answered in all simplicity: "The best *apparecchio* is the one of St. Alphonsus, *Apparecchio alla morte* – preparation for death."

The *Imitation of Christ* suggests four ways to reach a high degree of perfection: "Do the will of others rather than your own; choose what is least and worst; hold on to the last place; put yourself below others, longing for and praying that God's will and not our will be done" (Book 3, ch. 23). Anyone who studies the spiritual life of Brother Balestra in depth will come to the following conclusion: he relied on those four pillars of the *Imitation of Christ* to build his own spirituality, as he responded faithfully to God's grace. Some confreres are convinced that Brother Balestra, for the last thirteen years of his life, never committed voluntary venial sin.

Brother Balestra's holy life ended unexpectedly on December 3, 1942, at the age of seventy-four. The day before his death, he did not feel well. He was advised to take some rest in bed, which he did. He did not complain about any particular ailment and so, the night before he died, he took some food and fell asleep. The following morning, Brother thought he was able to get up as usual and get down to the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians. But, just as he left his room, which was close to the infirmary, he fell to the floor, uttering some words. The infirmarian heard the noise, as did some other Salesians. Brother was taken back to his room and put to bed. "Thanks!" Brother said. "Now I feel much better."

He dozed off, giving signs that his end was near. The director of the house gave him the last rites and, while he was saying the prayers for the dying, dear Brother Joseph Balestra peacefully passed away. Following the *Imitation of Christ*, Brother Balestra worked to attain his sanctity in *silentio et quiete*, and that is the way he died, taking with him a great number of merits.

Five days after his death, Father Peter Ricaldone, the Rector Major, preached his eulogy. He gave the good night talk on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, saying among other things: "I am convinced that Brother Joseph Balestra was a saint. Did you already recommend yourselves to him? When I learned that Brother Balestra had died, I right away recommended myself to him, and I do hope he will graciously hear me. I urge you to recommend yourselves to him."

Fr. Ricaldone's words voiced the feeling shared by everyone at the Oratory: a saint had died.