

Cheerful and Humorous Saint John Bosco

In the history of Church God has raised up numerous saints according to the signs of the times and has gifted each of them with unique characteristics. St. John Bosco popularly known as Don Bosco is the Saint of the young. If any one of you asked me what is so special about DB, I would defiantly say without any hesitation that it is his smile and the cheerfulness, that he radiated during his life time, which won over thousands of young people and which radiates even today many lives around the globe to holiness.

But from whom did DB take this quality and inspiration. It is nobody else but Jesus our Lord and Saviour. We see Jesus as the greatest humourist in the Gospel many places. Jesus is present as a humorous, witty and cheerful person. We can be deadly serious about his words and miss out the humour in them. Jesus talked about the necessity of communicating his message. For example, in the Gospel of mark 4-21 "Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lampstand?" just think for a while can you keep lit lamp under the bushel basket? Obviously not! Therefore, to grasp the humour in the Gospel we need to change our mind set. After knowing such humour of Jesus, I have not discovered any saint who has inherited such humour and cheerfulness of Jesus, as St. John Bosco, a man of God deeply human and deeply holy.

Jokes, humour, joy and happiness are the part and parcel of every human person. Pope Francis, addressing to all the consecrated, told about the necessity of joy and cheerfulness in religious life. He says "very idea of joy and happiness is mistaken. People go in search of wealth, money and pleasure of various kind to find joy and happiness of life." But joy is not a useless ornament. It is God who created us to be happy and joyful. It is a necessity and the foundation of human life. Saints like don Bosco teach us to live the values of real joy in our daily lives.

Cheer up lad! Was a frequent expression of DB whenever and wherever he met his boys. DB used to say cheerfulness, study, and piety are the programs of action that will bring you happiness and great spiritual merit. And we see in his own life. The saint of good humour was very keen in observing the humour side of a situation. He always loved jokes. His joviality was a very essence of his character. Though asceticism, commitment to priesthood and his untiring zeal for work were the real focus of his life, but cheerfulness and humour never left him.

Like Eugenio Ceria the author would always agree, that he was a master entertainer from his childhood. By nature, DB was enterprising, active, energetic, calm in facing difficult situations and prudent in choosing means for ends; but this does not mean that the saint went about with a mechanical smile on his face. He was also full of vibrant energy; he was a lover of life and people. In his youth he learnt magic, tricks, acrobats, tight rope walking and juggling. Once he had mastered such skills, he then entertained those who lived near his home town. He put all these knowledge and skills to good use. His cheerful spirit and good humour brightened many hearts around him. In 1832 he began the boy's club to acquire the spirit of cheerfulness; on the other hand, anything gloomy was to be excluded. One of his main aims was to conserve the spark of cheerfulness among boys.

Some of the testimonies on the humour and cheerfulness of DB. There are several incidents, which show us that good humour and cheerfulness was a personality of DB. Charles Gastini barber who lived 18years in the house of DB said "DB was always the first to get the game started. He was without doubt the soul of every game." Peter Pons once said "Db was always calm and smiling. His two eyes seem to look into the person before him." One of his past pupils narrated following impression of DB. "His constant good humour and the fact that he never punished the schoolboys. It does not mean that we were faultless but it was because the holy priest was so good that even a reproving glance sufficed as a punishment to us."

Cheerfulness is equal to holiness. DB did every ordinary thing in an extraordinary way, even the serious things in the most cheerful manner, and this is what he taught his boys too. As DB himself was cheerful he wanted cheerfulness in his house.

Domonic Savio to whom DB was a potter said these following words, here at the oratory we make holiness which consists in being very cheerful. You can start right now and take as your motto “serve the Lord in gladness.”

If we think that the cheerfulness of DB was the result of easy and comfortable life then we would be making a grave mistake far from the reality. Because for St Paul “joy is a fruit of the spirit”. And according to Eugenio Ceria “life of DB was shown with sharp thorns. That was strengthened by trials and tribulations. Trials and temptations were a constant feature of DB’s life. From early life itself he encountered the thorns of the loss of his father at a very young age, poverty as a stumbling block to his priesthood. In fact, works were done but how many difficulties were there? How many headaches? Amidst difficulties he never lost his serenity, calm and cheerfulness. Because DB’ s cheerfulness was a constant echo of the presence of Jesus and Mary as his teacher.

Every trial and difficulty were an occasion for DB to raise himself to God in prayer. His eyes fixed on Jesus, who leads us in our inner faith and brings it to perfection. BB said remember that “the devil fears cheerful people.”

I would like to conclude this short reflection by saying what others consider about cheerfulness and Salesianity. DB considered cheerfulness and joy as formative elements in the life of sanctity. He wished that cheerfulness and good humour always reign in a Salesian house. Serve the lord in cheerfulness was the eleventh commandment in the house of DB. St Philip Neri called sadness the eighth-capital sin. This is the same idea that pope Francis tries to convey by saying “a joyless community is the one that is dying out, community rich in joy is a genuine gift from above.” As Salesians and consecrated people in the church we need to wear God’s smile just like that of DB and radiate this joy to men and women of our time who are waiting for words of consolation, the availability of forgiveness and joy. And let the world know that true joy comes only from the Lord and joy without trails is not a true joy. So, my dear fathers and brothers let us cultivate this virtue of cheerfulness and joy and live our Salesian lives with great enthusiasm and zeal.