DON BOSCO AND CHEERFULNESS

Don Bosco was acclaimed as a saint of gladness. What brought about this gladness? By nature, John Bosco was enterprising, active, energetic, calm in facing difficulties, warm in his dealing with people, scornful of what other people think attitude and mainly he was cheerful, ready for a joke or a good funny story. As a matter of fact, cheerfulness never left him. Even when the going was very tough and sufferings were piling up at his deathbed, he said to Viglietti, “Give me some ice-coffee but it must not be cold.”

Even a casual reading of the life of Don Bosco cannot but impress the reader what a good-humored man he was. This does not mean he went about with a mechanical smile on his face or an inane look but was aware of everything that he did in his life. In his childhood days, Don Bosco had many things to suffer: the death of his father, famine in piedmont and abject poverty. In these circumstances his family remained joyful and trusted in the Lord. As a young lad he always wanted to be cheerful. Like all other children he went to fairs, village festivities and markets not only because he liked to see so many nice things in display but also to feel the excitement and joy of watching side shows and the wandering entertainers. He watched them attentively and mastered their skills and became a village entertainer for entertaining village folk and led them to church.

One day a young sickly boy named Camillo Gavio entered the oratory. He was sad and lonely. Dominic approached him and asked him about his health. During the conversation, Dominic saw the goodness in the boy and said to him: “Here sanctity consist in being cheerful. Detest sin as something that risks us of God’s grace and makes us unhappy inside and lastly “Servite Domino in Laetitia” serve the lord with gladness.”

Don Bosco would go around the oratory joking and calling the humble workers by noble names of European nobilities. Sometimes while travelling he would take his co-workers and getting down in a inn he would address the co-workers, “have you had a pleasant journey, my dear count?” Aren’t you tired Marquis? What would you like to have for supper dear baron, don’t expect the sumptuous meal you are used to! My dear friends you will have to satisfy with what can be found in these out of way places.” Naturally Don Bosco was joking, but the innkeeper who knew none of them would be worried of how to please these great personalities.

Don Bosco was active and agile and so he easily made friends with whatever rank and file of society. He found himself with the rich, the poor, the working class, professional people, politicians and even if the nobility including the members royal house of the savoy. All these contributed to the list of benefactors. Once through the recommendation of Fr. John Bosco, a building contractor Felix faja by name, received a decoration from the government. To mark this event, faja threw a party for his friends, Fr. John Bosco among them. When the guest had eaten and drunk and became a little noisy, somebody remarked: “Don Bosco, I notice that the statue of Madonna outside the church if Valdocco is somewhat weather beaten. It needs a good gliding job. The two angels nearby look bright and shinning but the Madonna…”

“Do you hear that gentleman?” Fr. Bosco stood up and asked the guests: “I’m told that the angels are dazzling but the Madonna needs some beaty treatment! Such a state of affair cannot go on, gentleman. What say you all chip in and help me buy her some cosmetics?” There was a great laugh and nods of agreement all around. “wonderful gentleman” continued Don Bosco and looked at the anatomy professor among the guest and told “now I ‘ll leave it to you anatomy professor, Dr.Fissore, to apportion the parts among you for gilding.

Not only was Don Bosco a friendly man and full of good humor but was a natural born conversationalist. For this reason, he was frequently invited to dinners and socials hosted by nobles of Piedmont and Rome. “How can I dine in high class when my poor boys have scarcely anything to eat.” This was a remark often made by Don Bosco. His first concern was always the poor boys and it is a fact that he would accept no dinner invitations unless they would result in some financial benefit to the boys. The nobility realized this and they, with their invitations gave something for the boys.

We could read joy in his shining and deep eyes and on his face which was invariably attractive, unforgettable and smiling. This joy was evident in his pleasant remarks, full of good humor and wit. After an attempted assassination which fortunately did not harm him, he exclaimed “Poor cassock, you have been the victim.”

Cheerfulness comes from being aware of God’s presence and experiencing his loving relationship in our lives. It is a conviction that we live and move with and for God. Cheerfulness is an antidote against sin and gives strength in the difficulties of life. Cheerfulness is maintained by ordinary prayers and exercises of piety, which serve as a bark of spiritual tree. It is renewed, strengthened and grown into maturity with the help of sacraments of reconciliation, Holy Eucharist and spiritual direction. Devotion to Mary also plays a very important role in attaining happiness.

So, my dear listeners, our founder though he had more than his share of tribulations, disappointments, oppositions and worries, though he was persecuted and often misunderstood, though he was always busy trying to find food and work for his boys, was always cheerful. he knew that a sad saint is a sorry saint. As the followers of Don Bosco, let us also imbibe this quality of cheerfulness. He knew that a sad saint is a sorry saint. As his followers, let us not be a sad saint, but a cheerful saint.

Thank You

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