

DON BOSCO AND HIS DREAMS

In the book of Sirach chapter 34 we read about dreams, not something intriguing but under the title 'Dreams mean nothing.'

*“The senseless have vain and false hopes
And dreams give wings to the fool.”*

Was Don Bosco a senseless man? Or a fool? There was a time when he was considered as an eccentric, but no. Fr. Lemoyone places Don Bosco's dreams in the context of his life and works. And says, *“Don Bosco's life was an intricate pattern of wondrous events in which one cannot but perceive direct divine assistance. Hence we must reject the notion that he was vain and deceitful.”* Looking back to the life of Don Bosco and the Salesian traditions we understand that dreams are not just dreams.

The early Christian church viewed the dreams as one of the most significant and important ways in which God revealed His divine presence and His will to human beings. Dreams were understood to give people access to a reality that was difficult to contact, (in other words) it is a wonder world of dreams where the favored people of God in the history of salvation, such as Joseph of old and Joseph of new were visited from on high through the medium of dreams. St. John Bosco is very much of that context and his dream-visitations are an integral part of his life.

Some 153 dreams were written down during the life of Don Bosco. Some were about his oratory boys, some about the church and other individuals, future predictions and some educational dreams. A lot of dreams had to do with what God wanted him to do. What we conclude here is- 'it all began with the dreams'

In most academic and popular intellectual western culture, the dream is viewed as an essentially meaningless experience, thrown up mechanically, without any kind of order before sleep consciousness that rewind itself for another day's activity. In Modern Science, the dream is seen as a practical means to understand and treat various kinds of illness. Added to that few researches have demonstrated that dreams are so important to mental health that simply being deprived of them can cause mental breakdown and even psychosis. In Physiology, it's explained as the period of temporary cessation of waking state. The dream is formed from anything may be a single picture or an object vividly perceived into an elaborated story in just a moment of flash. Considering in an ecclesial perspective God in His mercy, is wont to point out by means of some special signs the vocation of those whom he destines to do great things for the salvation of souls. In the life of Don Bosco the signs of his vocation are clearly manifested from his childhood. In this manner he- the great educator- saw that he had to oppose the continual work of evil with a front-battle to be fought without respite. *“I'll rest when the devil stops working”*. He used to say even when he's tired and weary at the end of the day.

The 153 dreams of Don Bosco, written down during the life time of Don Bosco proves that how much importance was given to these dreams by others and of course by Don Bosco himself. This may be because, the repeated ideas of these dreams had something strong to convey. Many books which were written about understanding and interpreting his dreams exhort the necessity of keeping a record of it. For, we may be missing something of great value if we don't listen to them. What if St. Paul didn't consider his vision on the way to Damascus? Or if Don Bosco were to ignore all his dreams he would've remained as a shepherd or a tailor

Don Bosco and the word 'dream' are correlative. It is truly astounding that how this phenomenon went on in his life for almost 60 years. For a better understanding of the specific character of these

dreams, we should note the logical and purposeful development of these dreams. For it is something unusual in dreams. Because dreams are composed in a confused sequences of images following one after the other without any rhyme or reason. For Don Bosco on contrary there is always a serious and basic order to the dream sequence. And the development whether it is simple or complicated proceeds in an orderly fashion, moreover, any strange images appeared he identified them and upon inquiry he received a satisfactory explanations. All this shows that the world of common dreams has been transcended.

Going back to the entry of John to the seminary we see, the repeated doubt he had on his vocation and seeking for spiritual advice and guidance; he even came closer to join the Franciscans in 1834. There the dream intervened and lead the path to his destiny.

Over the period as the Salesian Congregation was formed and was developing he realized and reminded not even a smallest event in the history of the congregation was of human effort but was all the work of God through Mary.

Now how are these dreams are applicable to us? Let's see.

At San Banigno Canavex, today one can still see the room and bed where Don Bosco had one of his dreams. Such is the desire to keep it alive in mind. It is not an over statement to say that Salesians used dreams for meditations, spiritual formation and revision of life. His dreams are authentic explanations of the life for the future generations-the daily fare of Salesian formation. He has well-tuned his dreams into the most authoritative sources of Salesian spirituality, the Constitutions, the General Regulations and the Authentic Salesian Traditions. All these sources are enriched by the essence of his dreams and so these dreams must be repeatedly referred by everyone who wills to embrace it. Therefore Don Rinaldi thought provoking in this regard tells us the model presented by the dreams. He says, " **It should be studied and elucidated in daily meditation, every opportunity should be used to speak of it, it should enlighten every angle of our perspective. Provincials and Rectors are asked to base their conferences on it, and retreat preachers should use the material in their instruction and impress the confreres with the beauty of Salesian spirituality**". It not only exhorts us to know dreams but also to realize its relevance in the everyday life.

He inspired lot of people around him to work for the mission he dreamed. The Salesian family is nothing but living out his dreams. It is not so surprising then that Don Bosco's work, spirit and spirituality quickly spread throughout Italy, then Europe and South America soon after his death. Today there are more than 30,000 Salesian priests, religious and Nuns and tens of thousands of Lay people working in every continent and they continue to spread the spirit and mission of Don Bosco. This is what he exactly dreamed of, the vast horizons.

Let us leave behind all what the modern science interprets, Physiology and Psychology say. For Don Bosco our father and founder it was a revelation entrusting a great mission that has a great significance. The dreams could be called visions. For God used this means to reveal his will for Don Bosco and for the boys of the oratory as well as the future of congregation. Therefore the objective of our vision is double, that we beautifully portray in the statement – Good Christians and upright citizens.

It all began with dream at the age of nine, where he realized his mission and worked for it without delay. As we examine his life we see every opportunities he got, he made a good use of it and acquired much of skills be it any acrobats, abilities, works etc., everything he mastered, treasured to give away with younger generations.

Upon becoming a priest Don Bosco realized how he should live out his vocation. The industrial revolution was spreading to Italy. There was great deal of poverty, desolation, turmoil and revolutions

on the streets of every city. The situation was as great as the scope of Don Bosco. Young people had been abandoned and lived in hopelessness. Don Bosco the young priest became completely focused on his vocation when he entered the prisons. He wrote, **“To see so many children from 12-18 years of age, all healthy, strong, intelligent, lacking spiritual and material food, was something that horrified me.”**

In the face of such situation he made his decision: ***“I must by any available means prevent children ending up here.”***

Don Bosco saw how his dream was working out. He knew a new approach that was required. The dreams of Don Bosco were a guiding principle for DB himself throughout his life among the young. It is a same guiding principle for his sons too. As we see in the dreams of little pastures, it shows how we could continue his spirit and zeal to ensure continuity to his mission.

Yes dear friends, dreams are not just dreams but they are the basic reasons by which it all began. It is the cause that made John Bosco the Friend of Youth.

The words of Sirach go like this: **“Empty and false are the hopes of the senseless, and fools are borne aloft by dreams. Like man who catches at shadows or chases the wind is the one who believes in dreams. Divinations, Omens and Dreams all are unreal. What you already expect, the mind depicts. Unless it be a vision especially sent by the most high”.**

This is very well and to the point. We are not venturing into an opinion. For, all what he had, wasn't some kind of vague dreams. Considering these dreams at that time, of course it was confusing, seemingly foolish, and now, standing in the present turning our back to the future it is real.

Don Bosco lived for us. Even his scanty sleep was for his children. Now the sons of Don Bosco begin to travel the vast horizons.

There is a hymn on Don Bosco's dream- *‘Little John Little dreamer.’* A familiar hymn for all of us, a few lines go like this,

***“When someone like you dreams of me
It's never just a dream.
If there is something I can do
Let me live the dream for you.”***

We are here being part of his dream. As we follow Jesus in the Don Bosco way let us also live this dream for him!