

FORTY DREAMS OF ST. JOHN BOSCO

*“And I will give you pastors according to
my own heart, and they shall feed you with
knowledge and doctrine.”*

—Jeremias 3:15



St. John Bosco 1815–1888
Founder of the Salesian Order
The Apostle of Youth

FORTY DREAMS OF ST. JOHN BOSCO THE APOSTLE OF YOUTH

From the Biographical Memoirs of
St. John Bosco

Compiled and Edited by
Fr. J. Bacchiarello, S.D.B.

*“But they that are learned shall shine
as the brightness of the firmament; and
they that instruct many to justice, as stars
for all eternity.”* —Daniel 12:3

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“The teacher who is seen only in the classroom, and nowhere else, is a teacher and nothing more; but let him go with his boys to recreation and he becomes a brother.”

(Pages 217–218)

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Some of these dreams have been reprinted from pamphlets published by the Salesian House of Tirupattur (North Arcot); others are from Father Motta's books printed by Tang King Po School (Hong Kong); others are new translations. Don Bosco's vision of St. Dominic Savio is copied from a translation by Rev. Father Terence O'Brien, S.D.B. in his book *Dominic Savio, Teenage Apostle*, Part II: Appendix.

For greater details about Don Bosco's dreams, consult the chapter on "Dreams, Visions and Ecstasies" in Fr. Ceria's book *Don Bosco with God*.

Preface to the 1969 Edition

Dear Readers,

This second edition of *Dreams of Don Bosco* comes to you ten years after the first edition, which went out of print seven years ago.

At the request of many friends, I have revised and enlarged this new volume by the addition of many more dreams of special interest and utility to you.

A word about the dreams of Don Bosco: God spoke to Don Bosco in dreams. Who would ignore *dreaming of dreams* which the prophet Joel counts among the gifts that were to gladden, by a generous effusion of the Holy Spirit, *the latter days*, that is, as St. Peter explains, the days of the Messiah? (*Acts* 2:17). Don Bosco's hearers gathered more than 150 dreams.

Some of Don Bosco's dreams are prophetic, others are pedagogical, and some are parables. Some concern the Church, some the nations, others the Salesian Congregation, the missions, the Oratory (the first Salesian institution), etc.

Most of Don Bosco's dreams are certainly supernatural events. Here are some proofs:

1. Sometimes he said that "it was a dream in which one can know what one does; can hear what is said, can ask and answer questions." This does not happen in ordinary natural dreams.

2. He usually had a guide and interpreter. Who was he? Sometimes Dominic Savio or Louis Colle or an Angel, or St. Francis de Sales, or someone else. Their explanations are always precise and instructive. This does not happen in usual dreams.

3. Often he saw the secret things of conscience, and the test proved it always to be true; the foreseen future events (including deaths) did actually occur. This Don

Bosco considered “*an extraordinary grace granted for the benefit of all the children of the Oratory.*”

4. Don Bosco used to narrate his dreams with a very great spirit of humility, thinking only of the spiritual benefit of his hearers. The good effects were evident: especially a greater horror for sin, better Confessions, General Confessions, more frequent Communions. It was, as he sometimes put it, “*The Devil’s Bankruptcy.*”

5. In natural dreams there is no logical order. All the opposite happens in the dreams of Don Bosco. Images and words are so well connected that one seems to hear things seen with open eyes.

6. Don Bosco’s dreams contained clear and exact revelation of events to come. As many prophecies as he had made of all kinds of things came about before or after his death. Innumerable examples can be read in the *Biographical Memoirs* (twenty large volumes).

7. On the 17th of February, 1871, Don Bosco candidly told some Salesians that “*these things are certainly singular and must be spoken of only among ourselves (in the Salesian House), because if they were told to anyone outside, these people would certainly dub them as fables. But we have always this as our norm that, when something turns out to the good of our souls, it certainly comes from God, not from Satan.*”

In the 11th volume of the *Biographical Memoirs*, page 239, we read: “Don Bosco’s dreams had become like a ‘domestic institution’ at the Oratory. The expectation of new dreams was ever present. News of another dream aroused anticipation among young and old alike: its narration was eagerly listened to; its salutary effects were not long in coming.”

May the reading of the following selection of dreams bring even now similar benefits.

God be with you.

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THE FIRST DREAM

(*Biographical Memoirs*, Vol. I, page 94)

JOHN BOSCO, born in 1815, passed his earliest years in the happy liberty of the fields of Becchi, a small village in Piedmont, Italy. As a little shepherd boy, he would play with his young companions, drawing them away from evil and leading them on to virtue.

In 1823 he wanted to go to school in the town of Castelnuovo, a few miles away; but his ignorant twenty-year-old stepbrother prevented him, because he wanted hands to work in the fields and vineyard.

But during the winter of 1824-1825, when in Piedmont there is no work in the snowy fields, John Bosco's mother sent him to school in a nearby village. There a priest of great piety taught him to read and write, and above all taught him his catechism and prepared him for his first Confession. Under the guidance of this priest, the young John Bosco learned the means necessary for preserving God's grace in the soul by *prayer and mortification*.

Once able to read, John would often be seen with a book in hand, even while watching the animals in their pasture. On one occasion, some other shepherd boys wanted John to join their games, but he refused and they beat him. He might have paid them back. But forgiveness was his revenge. He told them: "I cannot play, because I must study; I want to become a priest."

After that, they left him in peace. Admiring his patience and meekness, they became his friends, and so John Bosco would instruct them in catechism and teach them to sing hymns to our Blessed Mother.

Then, when John Bosco was nine years old, he had

a dream which revealed to him his future vast and providential mission for boys during his laborious life. He himself narrates this dream in his *Memoirs of the Oratory*.

John Bosco wrote his *Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales* after an explicit order from the Holy Father. After a short preface to the manuscript for his Salesians, he narrates the following dream:

Part I. Jesus Commands

When I was about nine years old, I had a dream that left a profound impression on me for the rest of my life. I dreamed that I was near my home, in a very large playing field where a crowd of children were having fun. Some were laughing, others were playing and not a few were cursing. I was so shocked at their language that I jumped into their midst, swinging wildly and shouting at them to stop. At that moment a Man appeared, nobly attired, with a manly and imposing bearing. He was clad with a white flowing mantle, and His face radiated such light that I could not look directly at Him. He called me by name and told me to place myself as leader of those boys, adding these words:

“You will have to win these friends of yours not with blows but with gentleness and kindness. So begin right now to *show them that sin is ugly and virtue beautiful.*”

Confused and afraid, I replied that I was only a boy and unable to talk to these youngsters about religion. At that moment the fighting, shouting and cursing stopped, and the crowd of boys gathered around the Man who was talking. Almost unconsciously, I asked:

“But how can you order me to do something that looks so impossible?”

“What seems so impossible you must achieve by being *obedient* and by *acquiring knowledge.*”

“But where? How?”

“I will give you a Teacher under whose guidance you

will learn and without whose help all knowledge becomes foolishness."

"But who are you?"

"I am the Son of her whom your mother has taught you to greet three times a day."

"My mother told me not to talk to people I don't know, unless she gives me permission. So please, tell me your name." "Ask My Mother."

Part II. Mary, His Teacher

At that moment I saw beside Him a Lady of majestic appearance, wearing a beautiful mantle, glowing as if bedecked with stars. She saw my confusion mount, so she beckoned me to her. Taking my hand with great kindness, she said:

"Look!"

I did so. All the children had vanished. In their place I saw many animals: there were goats, dogs, cats, bears and a variety of others.

"This is your field; this is where you must work," the Lady told me. "Make yourself humble, steadfast and strong. And what you will see happen to these animals you will have to do for my children."

I looked again; the wild animals had turned into as many lambs—gentle, gamboling lambs—bleating a welcome for that Man and Lady.

At this point of my dream, I started to cry, and I begged the Lady to explain what it all meant, because I was so utterly confused. She then placed her hand on my head and said:

"In due time everything will be clear to you."

After she had spoken these words, some noise awakened me; everything had vanished. I was completely bewildered. Somehow my hands still ached and my cheeks still stung because of all the fighting. Moreover, my conversation with that Man and Lady so disturbed my mind that I was unable to sleep any longer that night.

In the morning I could barely wait to tell my dream.



St. John Bosco's first dream-vision, which took place when he was nine years old. In this dream, Our Lord called John Bosco to teach young boys that virtue is beautiful and sin is ugly. Our Lord also promised to give His Mother to John Bosco as a guide and helper.

When my brothers heard it, they burst out laughing. I then told my mother and grandmother. Each one who heard it gave it a different interpretation. My brother Joseph said:

“You’re to become a shepherd and take care of goats, sheep and livestock.”

My mother’s comment was: “Who knows? Maybe you will become a priest.”

Dryly, Anthony muttered: “You might become the leader of a gang of robbers.”

But my very religious, illiterate grandmother had the last word: “You mustn’t pay attention to dreams.”

I felt the same way about it, yet I could never get that dream out of my head. What I am about to relate may give some new insight into it. I never brought up the matter and my relatives gave no importance to it. But in 1858, when I went to Rome to confer with the Pope about the Salesian congregation, Pius IX asked me to tell him everything that might have even the slightest bearing on the supernatural. Then, for the first time, I told him the dream that I had had when I was nine. The Pope ordered me to write it in detail for the encouragement of the members of the Congregation, for whose sake I had gone to Rome.

This dream came back to John Bosco over and over again for a period of eighteen years; but with each repetition there were always many new additions. With each new vista, he was able to envision more clearly not only the establishment of his Oratory and the spread of his work, but also the obstacles that were to arise, the stratagems of his enemies and the way to overcome them.

JOHN BOSCO DREAMS THE MONTHLY TEST

(*Biographical Memoirs*, Vol. I, page 190)

DURING his high school years, John Bosco, in addition to his intelligence and memory, had yet another talent, which was extraordinary and very valuable. Here is one of many incidents:

One night John dreamed that his teacher had given a monthly test to determine class rank and that he was taking this test. The moment he awoke, he jumped out of bed and wrote out the test, which was a Latin passage, and began translating it with the assistance of a priest who was a friend of his. Believe it or not, that very morning the teacher did give a test, and it was the same Latin passage John had dreamed about! Thus, quite quickly and without needing a dictionary, he translated it as he had done after waking from his dream. Of course, the result was excellent. When the teacher questioned him, he candidly told him what had happened, to the teacher's amazement.

On another occasion, John handed in his test so quickly that the teacher seriously doubted that the boy could have managed all its grammatical problems in such a short time. So he went over John's test very carefully. The teacher had prepared that test only the night before. It had turned out rather lengthy and therefore the teacher had dictated only half of it: yet in John's composition book the test was written out in its entirety, to the last word! How could it be explained? John could not have copied it overnight, nor could he possibly have broken into the teacher's house, which was a considerable distance from where John lived.

What then? He confessed: "I dreamed it!" It was for this reason that his schoolmates nicknamed him "The Dreamer."

THE DREAM OF THE SHEPHERDESS

(*Biographical Memoirs*, Vol. II, page 190)

JOHAN BOSCO was ordained on June 5, 1841. The sacred ministry was the ideal of his whole life; the long-desired goal had finally been attained. He was twenty-six years old. He spent the first few months of his priesthood in his native Castelnuovo, with his beloved pastor, Father Cinzano. About those months, we read the following in his memoirs:

In that year, 1841, since my pastor was without an assistant, I served as one for five months. I found great pleasure in this work. I preached every Sunday, visited the sick and administered the Sacraments, but I did not hear Confessions, as I was not yet authorized to do so. I conducted funeral services, kept the parish records in order and issued certificates as required. But my greatest delight was teaching catechism to the children, passing the time with them and talking to them. They often came from Murialdo to visit me, and whenever I walked home, they thronged around me. Also in Castelnuovo the youngsters began to make friends with me and seek my company. Whenever I left the rectory, I was escorted by a crowd of boys, who followed me wherever I went.

Don Bosco had three offers of appointment with generous stipends. In order to understand God's will, he went to Turin to seek the advice of Fr. (now St.) Joseph Cafasso, his spiritual guide, who was a lecturer at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico*, an institution for the training of young priests in pastoral life. Fr. Cafasso advised him

to enroll at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico*. It was from there that Don Bosco began his Sunday Catechism for poor children on December 8, 1841. For several years it was a wandering Oratory; nobody wanted to be disturbed by the shouts of hundreds of boys at play. So Don Bosco and his boys had to change location several times. (Cf. *Biographical Memoirs*, Vol. 2, Ch. 6 and 7.) But a wonderful dream disclosing future events came to him and comforted him. Let us narrate this dream in his own words from the pages of his memoirs:

On the second Sunday of that year (1844), I was to tell my boys that the Oratory¹ was being transferred to the Valdocco area. I was, however, truly worried because I was uncertain about the exact location, the means and the people to help me. On Saturday night I had a new dream, which seemed to be a sequel to the one I had had at Becchi when I was about nine years old. I think it best to put it down literally.

I dreamed that I was in the midst of a multitude of wolves, goats, kids, lambs, sheep, rams, dogs and birds. The whole menagerie raised an uproar, a bedlam, or better, a racket that would have frightened even the bravest man. I wanted to run away, when a Lady dressed as a shepherdess beckoned me to follow her and accompany the strange flock she was leading.

We wandered aimlessly, making three stops along the way, at each of which many of those animals changed into lambs, so that the number of lambs continually increased. After a long trek, I found myself in a meadow, where those animals were grazing and frolicking, making no attempt to bite each other.

1. Don Bosco called his Sunday gatherings of boys "Oratory," i.e., a place of prayer, because of its primary purpose, namely, to teach them to go to church and pray. Its objectives were the practice of religion and virtue, the boys' moral education and, consequently, the salvation of their souls. Recreation, entertainment, singing and schooling, which followed in due time, were only the means. (For more information about this, see Volume 2, Chapters VII and XI of *Biographical Memoirs*.)



St. John Bosco's dream of the Shepherdess (Our Lady), who pointed out his vocation to educate and care for boys.

I was exhausted and wanted to sit by the roadside, but the Shepherdess invited me to keep walking. A short distance away, I came upon a large playground surrounded by porticoes, with a church at one end. Here I noticed that four-fifths of those animals had become lambs. Their number was now very large. At that moment many young shepherds came to watch over them, but they remained only a short time and walked off. Then a marvelous thing happened . . . many lambs turned into shepherds, and they took care of the flock. When the shepherds became too many, they parted and went elsewhere to herd other strange animals into pens.

I wanted to leave, because I thought it was time for me to say Mass, but the Shepherdess asked me to look to the south. On doing so, I saw a field in which maize, potatoes, cabbage, beets, lettuce and many other vegetables had been planted. "Look again," she said. I did so, and I beheld a monumental church. In the choirloft I saw choristers and musicians who seemed to be inviting me to sing Mass. On a white streamer inside the church there was emblazoned in large letters: *HIC DOMUS MEA; INDE GLORIA MEA*—"This is my house; from here my glory will go forth." Still dreaming, I asked the Shepherdess where I was and the meaning of all this walking, the stops, that house, the church and then another church. "You will understand everything," she answered, "when with your bodily eyes you will behold all that you now see in your mind." I thought I was awake, and so I said, "I see clearly, and with my bodily eyes; I know where I am going and what I am doing." Just then the bell of St. Francis of Assisi Church rang the "Ave Maria" and I awoke.

The dream lasted nearly the whole night, and there were many other details. At the time I understood little of it because, distrusting myself, I put little faith in it. As things gradually began to take shape, I began to understand. In fact, later on, this dream, together with another, formed the basis of my planning while at the Rifugio.