

A CAMINO WITH DON BOSCO

Novena in Preparation for the Feast of St John Bosco

Fr Gerry O'Shaughnessy SDB

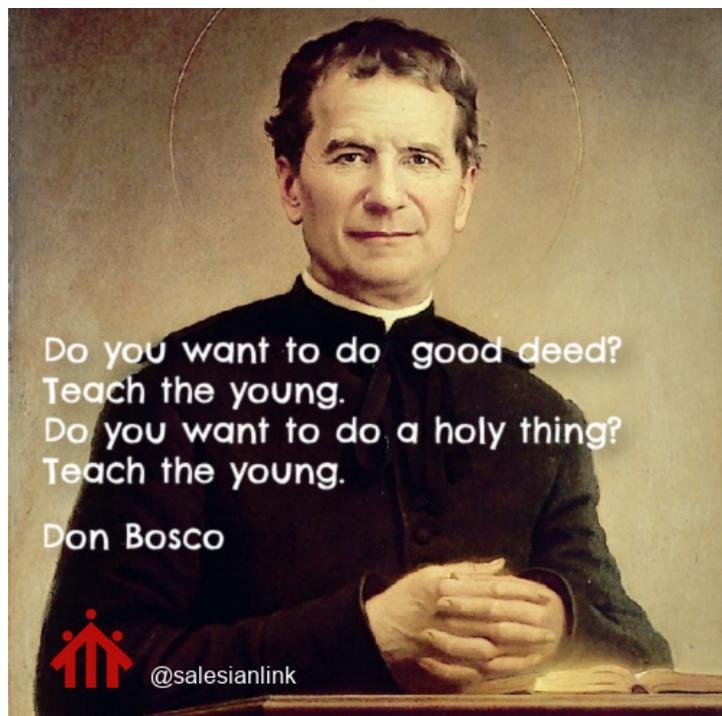


Don Bosco's Dream by M Borgani via sdb.org

Recommended reading: *Jesus and Young People* by Fr Michael Winstanley SDB, Don Bosco Publications, Bolton 2020

Welcome!

One of the great traditions of our Catholic Church is the idea of NOVENA. With a name derived from the Latin for 'nine', this a nine-day period of prayer that leads up to some great celebration. For us, in the wider Salesian family, our novena for Don Bosco is special; it prepares us to celebrate the feast of this great man. As the picture on the previous page shows, his idea for helping and supporting young people came from a dream that he had when he was just nine years old—a dream that would lead to his work with the most difficult and needy adolescents. It is a dream that we all share in today: a desire to make the world a better place for our young people. In these difficult times of waiting for a return to some semblance of normality, we pray that walking with Don Bosco will help us chart new and exciting paths, as we walk the Camino of life together. We pray that this novena will help us to appreciate and understand the gift to the world that is John Bosco.



Day 1: Friday 22 January 2021

The Gospel of today's mass recounts the appointment of the Twelve Apostles by Jesus. According to Mark they were:

- to be his companions—we need friends in life and Jesus is no different. We are presented with a list of twelve very different characters: some we know well such as Peter, James and Judas, while others like Simon the Zealot and James, the son of Alphaeus remain obscure. If you are on Facebook and you look at your friends' list, you will see some who are dear to you—central to your very existence; other 'friends' may occasionally 'like' you on social media, but that is the extent of your 'friendship'. Jesus needed companions for his Way, just as we need friends to see us through life. John Bosco was a friend to so many.

- Sent out to preach—the mission of the follower of Christ is to preach always, ‘using words where necessary.’ Paul VI often said that this modern world needs witnesses rather than teachers; our actions will speak much louder than our words. This was certainly the case for Don Bosco, as he tirelessly worked, to the point of mental and physical exhaustion, for those he was ‘preaching to.
- Given power to cast out evil—as we have entered this new year, we are encouraged to make a resolution that is going to make us a better person. The Apostles soon discovered that all they had to do see evil vanish, was to bring light and love into the lives of those they lived and worked with. Don Bosco saw the evil working practices of Turin, in the height of the Industrial Revolution; he saw that young people were being exploited and abused by a system that does not care. His light and energy overcame the darkness of evil for so many young people.

Today: reflect on how you can help your friends and be a light of strength to them

Watch: The Dream of Don Bosco at the age of nine.

<https://youtu.be/mud2EiRzDBo>

Day 2: Saturday 23 January 2021

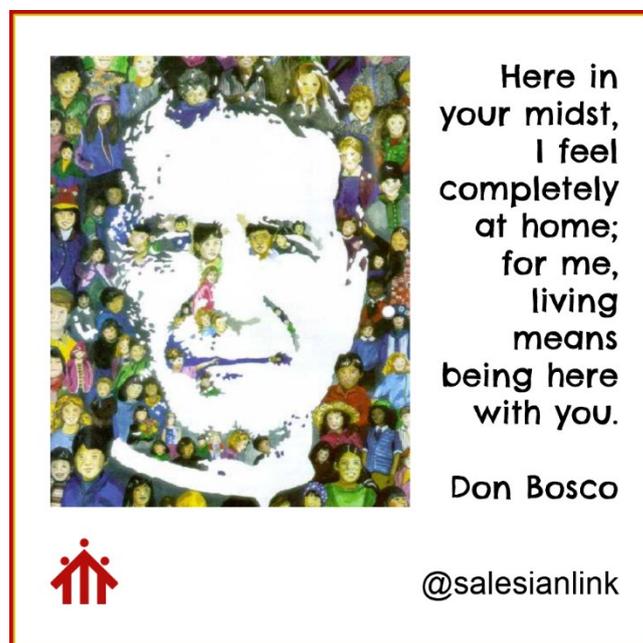


Even as a child, John Bosco had an amazing gift of gathering his friends together; he worked at his magic and acrobatic skills not to show off, but to talk to them about the gospel and following Jesus. He was firm believer that Christianity should be fun and not boring; he wanted to emphasise the GOOD in the good news he was proclaiming. That sense of humour and fun followed him throughout his life and became essential to the Salesian spirit.

In the gospel of the day, Jesus was so busy that he **‘could not even have a meal’** (Mk 3: 20); his relatives came to care for him so that he would not go mad! Mark presents a graphic picture of burnout in ministry—something that Don Bosco experienced. In our dedication,

care and enthusiasm to proclaim the Gospel, we can never forget that it is essential to take care of ourselves: well-being is not selfish, it is sensible and needed. The graveyard is full of people who thought that they were irreplaceable. Sometimes the emotional or physical pain of burnout is prolonged. It can continue for weeks, months, even years. This pain can be intense. We may hurt so badly that even those who try to bring comfort feel the pain.

If you are going through a tough time, take heart. The Lord is sovereign, and He controls all adversity in our lives. That's why it's imperative that when we are going through a time of trial, we remember how much God loves us. Thank God for those who take care of you; those who phone up to check in on you; those who send a funny cartoon or text; those who take you out (when we can go out!) for a coffee, a 'cheeky cuppa' or a pint; those who invite you to a party or a to share a game of monopoly. Thank God for those friends who keep you sane.



Today: reach out to a friend or family member who is in difficulty

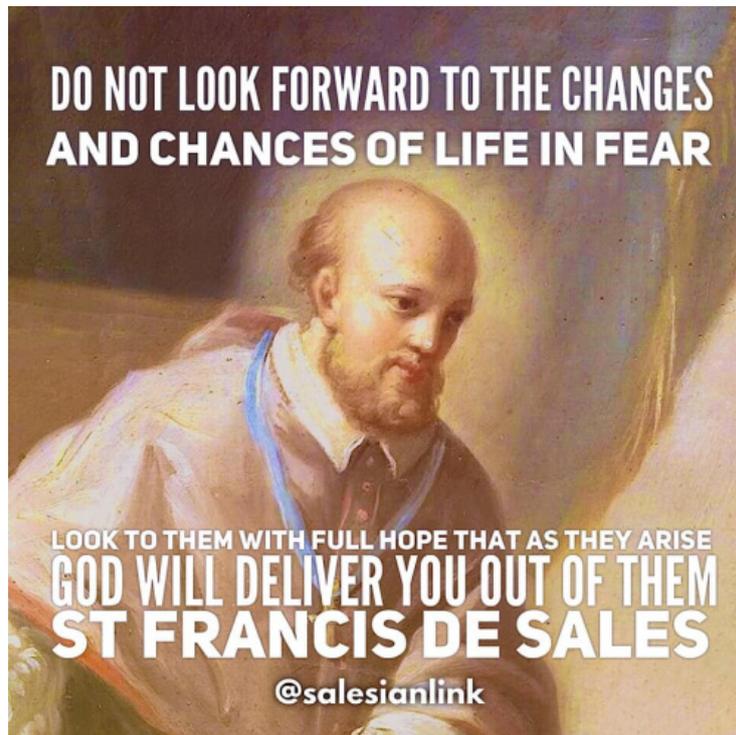
We pray:

Heavenly Lord, may the words of your gospel be always in our hearts. As we work together in Salesian ministry, help us to work with all our might, but also help us know when we have to step aside, in order for you to step in and work in a mighty way. Help us to have wisdom to know how to abide in you. Help us to avoid burnout by letting you be you. Thank you so much for the trust you have given us, may it bear much fruit for your Kingdom. Amen.

Watch: You've Got Friend, James Taylor <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ryMn7mYI1c>

Day 3: 3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time, 24th January 2021

Sunday of the Word of God; Feast of St Francis de Sales, our Patron



The various communities will find their own ways to mark this Sunday with a certain solemnity. It is important, however, that in the Eucharistic celebration the sacred texts be enthroned, in order to focus the attention of the assembly on the normative value of God's word. The Apostolic Letter *Aperuit Illis* of Pope Francis

There is so much to be thankful for on this particular Sunday, when we are invited to place even more focus on the first part of our liturgy, the Liturgy of the Word. It is a day to honour our lectors, those entrusted to proclaim God's word to us, a day to remember, with gratitude, our Deacons. These past few months have been more than a challenge to us as we tried to juggle online worship with trying to attend a rather sterile liturgy in person. We are fully aware why the precautions had to be in place, but it did not make it any easier as we craved for a deeper human-divine contact that lies at the heart of our worship. These past few months would have been an ideal time for a solid and impressive catechesis on the Liturgy of the Word, especially for those who could not receive Holy Communion by worshipping online. Covid-19 gave us an opportunity to help us realise the richness of scripture—good can be found in the most amazing of places. It is good to also remember that we are in the week of prayer for Christian Unity; while we still have doctrinal issues about sharing the Eucharist, today is an ideal time to celebrate the scriptures that we share with our Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant companions on this Camino. Rejoice in the Word of God and proclaim it gladly.

In the Gospel today, Mark presents the IMMEDIATE response of those called: '**at ONCE they left their nets and followed him**' (Mk 1: 18). Mark does not waste any time with details and

nuances: Jesus needs disciples, Simon, Andrew, James and John step up to the plate and get the job done. Today is a call to each of us to see what our response is like: are we willing and able? Are we rather lukewarm? Do we reject what God is asking of us? As parents, grandparents, teachers, and pastors, please challenge the young people in your care: what is God asking of you? We need good and willing priests and religious sisters and brothers if the work of God is going to continue; it is all too easy to think that we can rely on clergy from Africa or Asia to meet our needs. Does that not smack of selfishness or, God forbid, imperialism? There are vocations to priesthood and religious life in our own families, in our schools and in our parishes—be brave and challenge our young people, as their generosity is amazing. Don Bosco began his work with adult collaborators, many of whom let him down: unlike his mother, Margaret, they found the work too hard. Increasingly, he saw the need to rely on his older students like Michael Rua and John Cagliero. These young men became his first 'Salesians', named for the saint of gentleness and kindness, Francis de Sales. As Bishop of Geneva in the bitterness of the Reformation, Francis was always charming, cultured and kind to those he met. This simple care for people, regardless of their creed, moved many to share his faith, and Bosco wanted his followers, his Salesians, to show that same attitude of loving kindness in their care of, sometimes, the most difficult of young people.

Is God calling you to this way of life? Do you enjoy fun and laughter? Are you prepared to work with young people? Today, can you be like that group of four in the Gospel and make that response to follow Jesus more closely?

Today: pray deeply and ask God what he is calling you to do with your life.

We pray:

Called through my gifts

Lord, I thank you for the gifts you have given me, especially for life, love, family and friends. Help me to know myself better and to know my talents, as I pray, study and decide on my life's work.

Help me to see and understand the path you open for me.

Help me choose a life's work that will be in response to my potential and your love for me.

If I am being invited to follow you as a Salesian, give me a generous heart to respond to your challenging call and the strength to follow you, wherever you lead me.

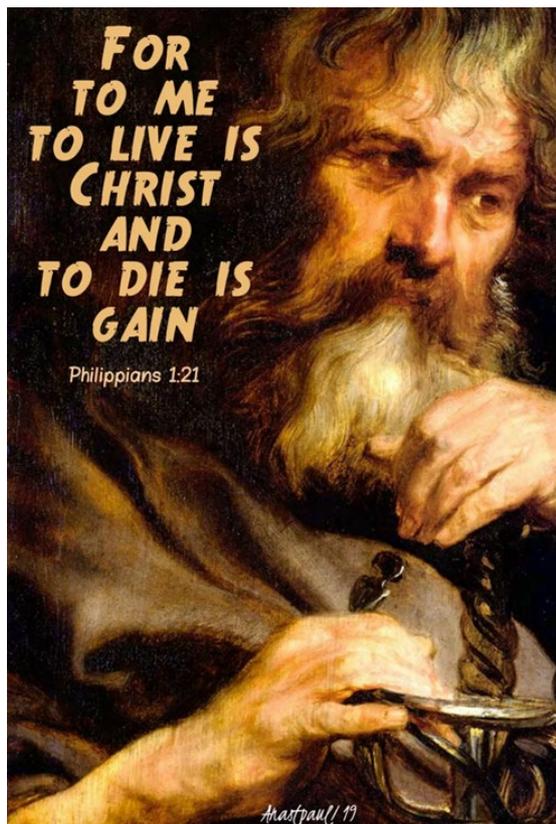
Amen

If you are interested in a Salesian vocation, or know someone who might be interested, please go to: <http://www.salesianvocations.co.uk/>



Image: sdb.org

Day 4: Monday 25 January 2021—Conversion of St Paul



Today we are presented with the change of heart that Paul experienced in his conversion: his transformation is legendary. The Acts of the Apostles is quite clear about his virulent anti-Christian stance; he was there at the stoning of the first Christian martyr, Stephen, and was on his way to Damascus to root out the Christians he would find there. Our second reading today shows that dramatic conversion experience that few of us really go through: we are content to plod on with our faith quietly and without pretension. However, this pandemic year has, I suspect, shaken our faith. Some of us have endured trauma, hurt and pain during this past year, that we never knew existed. While Covid-19 has brought upset and problems to us all, it has also revealed a strength and power that many of us never knew we had. I pray that this year has been an opportunity for a deeper conversion; I pray that it has helped us to be

open to the amazing possibilities that do exist. Paul changed his life and became the first great Christian missionary, tireless in his zeal and conviction in the Good News of Jesus. Conversion made demands on him, eventually calling him to that same fate as Deacon Stephen—transformation can hurt!

Don Bosco could have quite easily moved into a profession that was going to make him money—his academic brilliance meant that a career in law or medicine was easily accessible to him. Instead, he took to heart the Easter message of Jesus that Paul responded to with an equal measure of faith and love: **‘Go out to the whole world; proclaim the GOOD NEWS.’** (Mk 16: 15). Don Bosco saw that the young people of world needed to hear good news; they needed to be affirmed and not bullied; they needed to be encouraged and not ignored; they needed to be loved and not abused; they need to have fun and laughter in their lives and not misery. The same is true today and you can so easily lift up the life of a child you know with a simple word of encouragement and friendship.

Today: share some GOOD news with your family, friends, or colleagues

We pray: *O God, who taught the whole world through the preaching of the blessed Apostle Paul, draw us, we pray, nearer to you through the example of him whose conversion we celebrate today, and so make us witnesses to your truth in the world. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. AMEN.*

Watch: Watch: Conversion of St Paul <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fMFHC1hXbUQ>

Day 5: Tuesday 26 January—Feast of St Timothy and St Titus



Saints Timothy and Titus were close companions of Paul, especially in his missionary journeys; both received letters from him to help in their pastoral mission. Timothy, in Ephesus, and Titus, in Crete, share Paul's wisdom and vision through these epistles that form part of our New Testament.

I have always found today's Gospel reading a little hard to fully understand; Mark tells us that Jesus' family arrive and want to see him; he looks around the room that he is in and says quite plainly, **"Here are my mother and my brothers!"** (Mk 3: 33). I wonder what message that was sending to Mary and his family waiting outside? As I said earlier, Mark's gospel was written for a Church in a hurry to get on with preaching the good news; he gets straight to the heart of the message in presenting the ministry of Jesus. This must not be seen as a snub to Mary, rather an intentional broadening of the family circle that lies at the heart of Christianity. Mary is central to the Gospel message and we see her strength at Golgotha, silently supporting her son in his most painful passion; Mary is ready to take the rough with the smooth, as she walks her Christian path.

We have our blood family, and we may or may not get on with them: family issues can get blown out of proportion and relationships break down. I pray that you have good, solid family ties that help to ground you—never forget where you have come from and the home that gave you life. However, we also find that we have dear friends who have 'become' family to us; they are the big brother or little sister that we might never have had. They understand us and they respect us; they are there in those moments of life when we need support most. They are not fair-weather friends: they are with us through the ups and down that life throws at us. I hope and pray that you have had at least one such friend, during the past year.

Don Bosco saw that his young people needed friendship and support in a world that could easily marginalise them. In this, he was true to the Jesus of the Gospels whose ministry was dedicated to those so easily ignored by his society: the sick, the foreigner, the women, and the children. In Matthew's account of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fish, we are told that **'those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.'** (Matt



14: 21). Matthew does not count them, whereas Jesus will always see the need to include the contribution of those on the side-lines. The message of Don Bosco is that our young people do count—they are part of our family and they have a voice to share. Don Bosco saw the importance of true ‘family values’; not the soundbites that populist politicians like to proclaim in their flashy brochures. The family values of Jesus are inclusive: they listen to everyone. Today we need to ensure that our young people have a voice in the Church and are given a chance to use it. This is the Jesus of family

values. We are offered Jesus’ body and blood every single time we come to the altar. We can meet his family every time we turn to share the peace, even remotely and at a safe distance, and every time we pray with another believer. Let us make our own families places where we learn about and share in the love of God and let us ensure that our family values are inspired by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Don Bosco calls us to live that Gospel fully as we share, with our young people, the insights, and challenges that Jesus offers to all of us in the Christian family. We are invited to share the reality of incarnation, as Michael Winstanley SDB reminds us:

In his actions and parables, Jesus comes across as someone very much in touch with the reality of his local world and culture, facing real situations, problems, and experiences. Reflecting on the various episodes and the words of Jesus introduces us to such a wide spectrum of issues ... many of the quality of children are highlighted like generosity, openness, keen perception, wonder, spontaneous expressions of joy; and many needs are exposed: the need to be listened to and taken seriously, guided, supported, accepted and encouraged. (‘Jesus and Young People’ M. Winstanley SDB)

Today: Listen to and **encourage** a younger member of your family

We pray: *Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for giving each of us something that we can give back to You. Help us to give cheerfully knowing that, no matter how small our gift may seem, you can turn it into a miracle. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

Watch – for sheer fun: ‘You Give a Little Love’, from Buggy Malone,
https://youtu.be/sA_Ocvd1EUM

Day 6: Wednesday 27 January 2021



The Sower, Bernadette Lopez via Qumran2.net

Today's gospel speaks of the sower: it would have been an image so familiar to those listening to Jesus. Mark presents a picture of a huge crowd, so big that Jesus has to get into a boat and preach from the Lake itself. We are familiar with both the simplicity of the parable itself and the extra lesson about the '**secret of the kingdom of God**' (Mk 4: 11) given just to the twelve apostles. How did Jesus reveal secret of the kingdom of God? Through the teachers of the law? Through the temple priests? Maybe even through the history channel? No! It was through parables. Jesus took the word of God and made it understandable even to small children. We do not know how those crowds gathered around the shore of the Lake received the parable, we do know that Jesus had to do some extra classes with his special friends. There is no need to explain the Parable of the Good

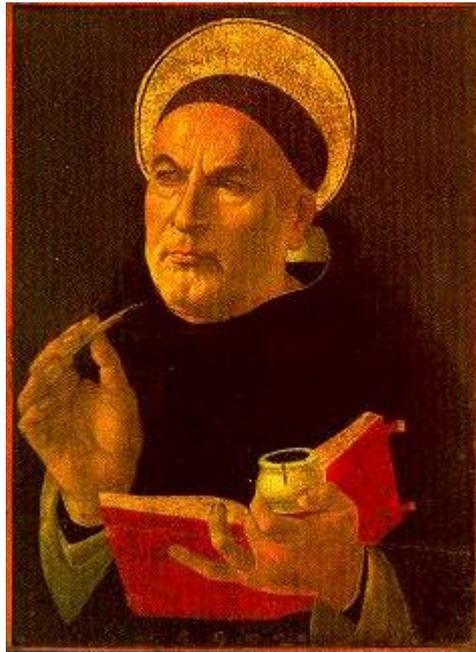
Samaritan, as each action speaks for itself: of all the upright and good people of Israel, only the despised foreigner comes forward to offer practical assistance to the man attacked by robbers. The parable of the Sower speaks for itself too, but Jesus wants to make sure that they get the message—with no confusion, as they will be the sowers of good news in their upcoming ministry.

Don Bosco wanted to sow those same seeds of life with the young people he served; he was all too aware of those situations that kept his youngsters from following the gospel path. His care and attention made them open and receptive to the gospel message; supporters like Mamma Margaret and Don Cafasso ensured that his Oratory of St Francis was a real home where they felt relaxed and safe. Today you can sow seeds of peace, love, and joy as you move around; it does not take much: a friendly smile, a quiet word in the ear, or a listening heart. Be that one who will listen and not condemn; be the one who tries to understand and not ignore; be the one who is present to our young people today.

Today: sow seeds of happiness and joy among those you live and work with

We pray: *Whatever we are today, whatever the mix of path, rock, thorns, or soil, help us to aspire to become the good soil in which an abundant harvest may flourish. Help us to challenge ourselves to become courageous advocates for truth and justice, to stand up for those on the margins of society, to be a voice for those who are rarely heard. Help us to face our own challenges, whatever they may be, with inspiration and courage so that we may succeed in all that we set out to do. Amen.*

Day 7: Thursday 28 January 2021—Feast of St Thomas Aquinas



*St Thomas Aquinas, Template: Sandro Botticelli,
Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons*

*Thomas came from a rich Italian family who resisted his desire to become a Dominican. He was an inspirational philosopher and was able to make the teachings of Aristotle and the great Greek philosophers accessible to a general audience. His classic textbook, the *Summa Theologiae* that presented a straightforward, common-sense grasp of philosophy and Thomist thinking remains central in the Church to this day.*

In today's gospel, Mark presents the image of the household oil lamp—so common among the people Jesus spoke to. The parable needs no explanation as it obvious: the lamp is not hidden under the table; it is there to give light in the darkness. With the aid of the lamp, people can see their way forward. As Christians, we are invited to make that light visible today; as the preacher Charles Spurgeon, a Baptist contemporary of Don Bosco, once said:

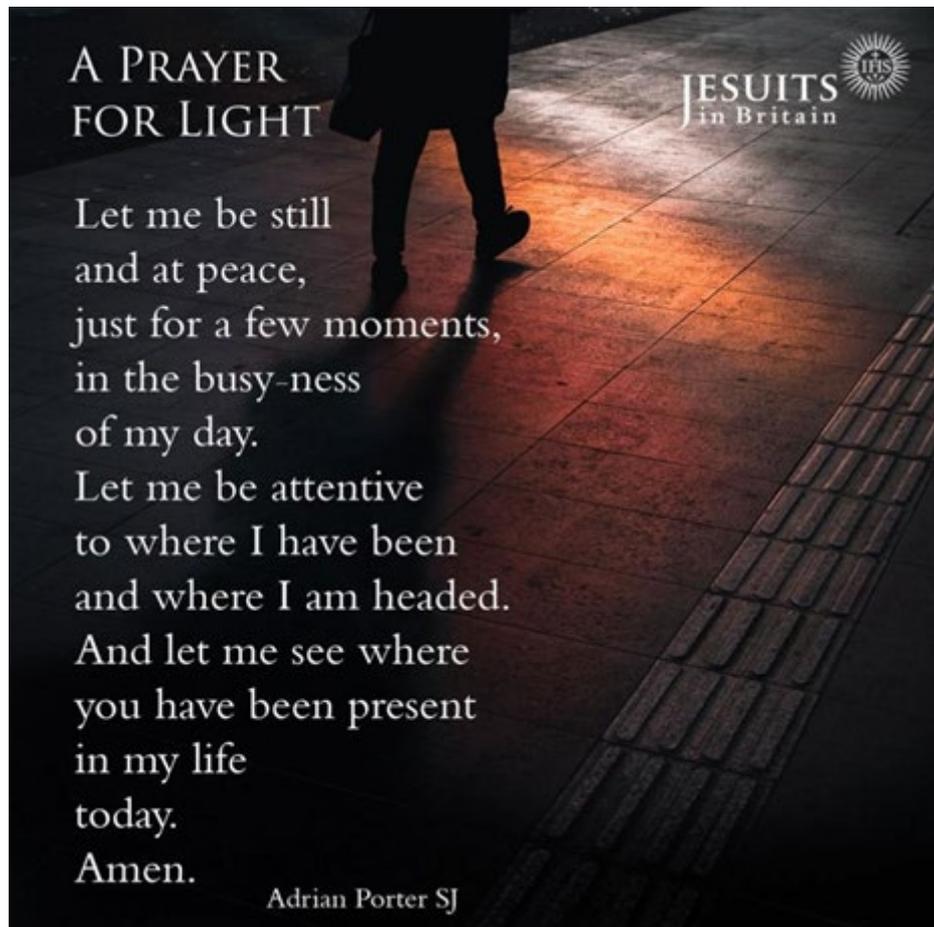
The Bible is not the light of the world, it is the light of the Church. But the world does not read the Bible, the world reads Christians! You are the light of the world. (Baptist Review)

Those who have received the light of the gospel are not to conceal it; rather they are to let it shine through them for others to see. Throughout the Bible, light is used as an object lesson for many things, such as truth, holiness, the spiritual life in Christ, the gospel message, and Jesus Himself. Again, the point is, Jesus does not want you to hide what He has done in your life. Don Bosco had an amazing gift of connecting, even with the most difficult of young people; it was a talent that he used and encouraged in others. Society can so often put people down—perhaps we can be jealous of the light and gifts others. Don Bosco was happy with young people just trying to do their very best in sport, drama, academics and their faith. He was aware that these young people did not always reach their potential and that they made mistakes and bad choices, but he never gave up on them or dismissed their efforts. He saw the light, no matter how dim it was and encouraged them to burn with the

faith and light of God. That still happens today in Salesian parishes, schools and youth centres across the globe: we still proclaim and celebrate the good that young people can bring to the world.

Today: offer encouragement to those you live, and work with-be a beacon of hope.

We pray: a prayer from the Jesuits in Britain by Fr Adrian Porter SJ



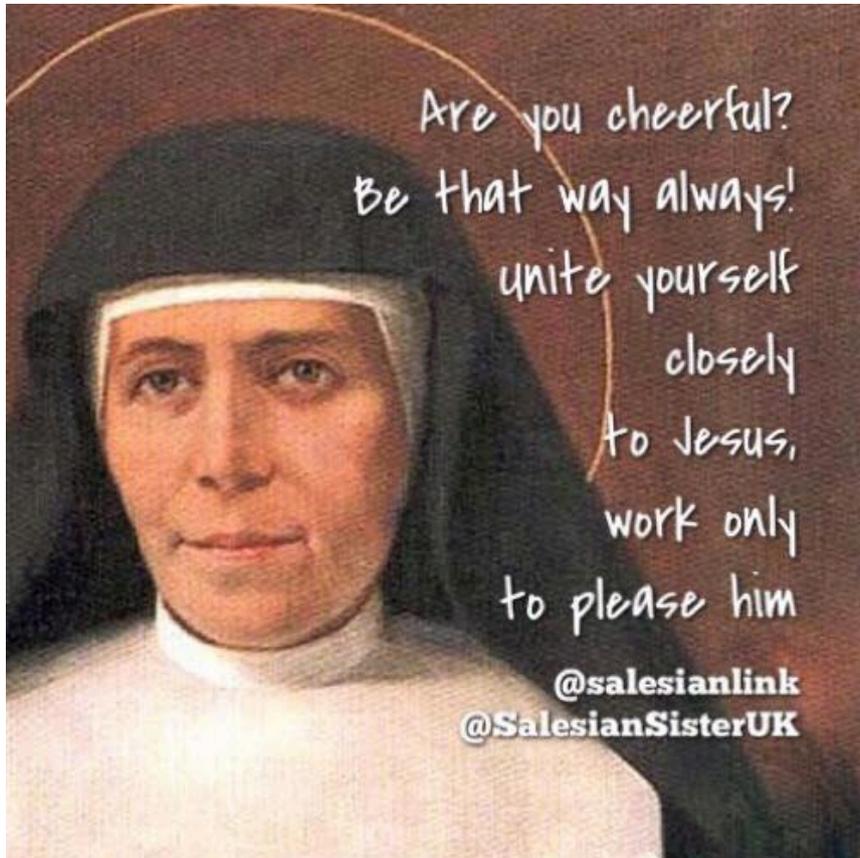
Watch: All have the RIGHT to shine brightly! *Rise and Shine*, from BBC Songs of Praise with HCPT in Lourdes in 1996, to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the Pilgrimage

<https://youtu.be/RS9TfsyOkml>

Day 8: Friday 29th January 2021

In the Gospel today we have two parables that need no explanation: the first talks of the seeds silently growing in the silence of the ground, while the second talks of the tiny mustard seed that grows to a huge tree '**so that even the birds of the air can shelter in its shade**' (Mk 4: 32). Mark also makes it clear that Jesus had to explain things to his disciples '**when they were alone.**' (Mk 4: 34)—they still did not get it! I think it is good today to reflect on the more contemplative dimension of the Salesian vocation in the life of Mary

Domenica Mazzarello. While Don Bosco wanted his followers to be 'contemplatives in action', we have perhaps concentrated far too much on the active side of the Salesian vocation, as if we were divine youth workers. The pandemic lockdowns have certainly given us a chance to connect with a more prayerful and contemplative side to our lives that we ignore at our peril. It is precisely by tapping into this aspect of our Salesian lives that we can do all the work that the vocation demands.



Together with her parish priest, Mary led a group of caring women called the 'Daughters of Mary Immaculate' working quietly in her home village of Mornese. Contemporary reports tell us that her magnetic personality attracted young people and laid the foundations of the 'Daughters of Mary Help of Christians' or the 'Salesian Sisters'. As an expert seamstress, Mary was able to pass on her skills to young people in a loving and gentle way—in this way they had a trade and were kept safe from the dangers of street life. She gives a real spirit of contemplation to the whole Salesian family; like that seed hidden in the depths of the earth, she was quietly encouraging and helping young people to grow and achieve their God-given potential. We lost a wise and loving Salesian when she died aged only forty-four on 14th May 1881; we give thanks to God for her inspiration and the gift of the 'Salesian Sisters' in the Church today.

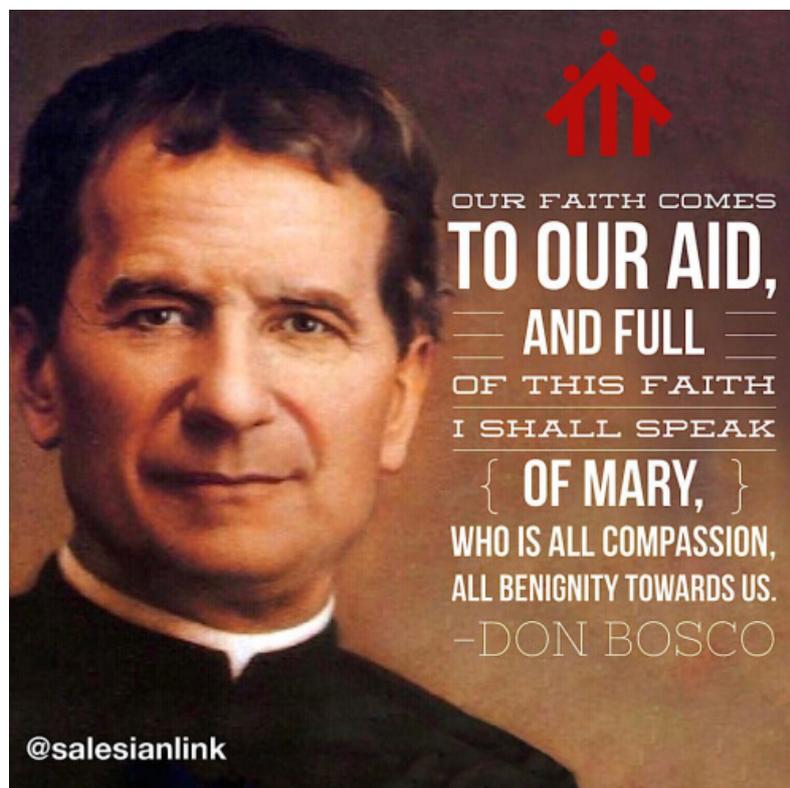
Today: please pray for the ministry of the 'Daughters of Mary Help of Christians'. If you are interested in the work of the 'Salesian Sisters' or know someone who is, please see: www.salesians.org.uk/salesian-sisters

We can pray for Salesian Vocations:

Good Father, you guide your people each day, desiring to bring us to springs of living water. Help me to hear your voice more clearly in my life, so that my heart may be filled with your love. Through the intercession of Saints John Bosco and Mary Mazzarello, call members of your flock to become signs and bearers of your love to the young and the poor. Inspire many people to offer their lives to you, so that your love may be made visible in them. Raise up many good and worthy shepherds to serve you as Brothers, Sisters and Priests in the Salesian Family of the British Province. Give them the strength and grace they need to respond generously to your call to give their lives in the service of others. I ask this prayer through your Son Jesus Christ, who is Lord for ever and ever. AMEN

Watch: St Mary Mazzarello – House of Happiness. https://youtu.be/tsP0yIHzi_w

Day 9: Saturday 30th January 2021



In today's gospel from Mark, we see Jesus on his missionary journey as he crosses the Lake; it is all too easy to stay where you are known and are comfortable—the challenge is to move on! In this movement of action, Jesus is content and so rested that he falls asleep; in the crisis of a storm, the apostles wake him as they are scared: 'do you not care?' they implore him. Of course Jesus cares and, at once, the storm is calmed because 'even the wind and sea obey him.'

In the troubles of life, especially in these pandemic days, we need to have faith and trust, which is not always that easy. Don Bosco sought to offer the young people, in his care, a place of sanctuary and real safety in the storms and problems of their lives. The Salesian family today is committed to supporting young people: your prayerful support and care means that young people are not forgotten. You will be their advocates, especially when a media world can so easily blame them. Don Bosco was always a realist and saw that not everyone has the time to become Salesian Sisters, Brothers and Priests, thus we offer different programmes, from volunteering, to the Salesian Cooperators.

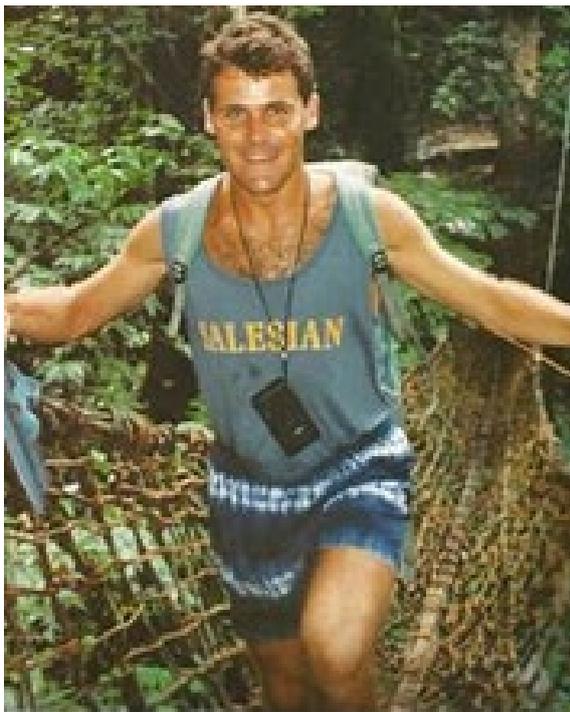
Sean Devereux was a past pupil of Salesian College, Farnborough and a charismatic teacher at Salesian School, Chertsey. He wanted to give something back, and spent some time as a volunteer in the Salesian Mission in Liberia. To this day, he is remembered for his kindness and care, as he moved on to support the UNICEF food programme in Somalia. Immersed in the storm of a civil war, Sean faced up to the evils of the warlords and challenged them to feed the poor—especially the children. For his bravery in facing evil head on, Sean, the prophet, paid with his life and was assassinated.

As we come to the end of our Camino, we realise that the way of Don Bosco brings so much happiness and real sanctity; Don Bosco wanted his followers to be SAINTS. The way to being an authentic saint, in the Salesian tradition, is a way of fun, laughter and games. Don Bosco deals with the reality of the world, with all its storms and problems; Sean Devereux stands as a constant reminder that we can all become saints through laughter and games—with Sean there were always fun times.

For more information: <https://www.seandevereux.org.uk>.

Please watch: Sean Devereux: Working for Africa

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXNEeCWmVtc>



“While my heart beats, I have to do what I think I can do – and that is to help those that are less fortunate.” *Sean Devereux, 1964 – 1993*

"In adverse and often dangerous circumstances, Sean showed complete dedication to his work. Sean was an exemplary staff member and gave his life serving others. Sean was a real soldier of Peace."

UN Secretary General, Dr Boutros Boutros-Ghali

Today: enjoy a joke or laughter with the young people in your family

We pray the daily prayer of Salesian Cooperators:

O God, you inserted the power of the Gospel into the world like leaven and called many of us to follow your Son as Salesian Co-operators with each of us living out that call according to our personal circumstances in life. Grant that we might be on fire with St John Bosco's ardent spirit, so that with Mary, Help of Christians as our guide and inspiration we may seek to help those in need, especially our young people, and help build a better world. Amen.

Is God calling you to live your life by the Salesian values as a Cooperator? Find out more:

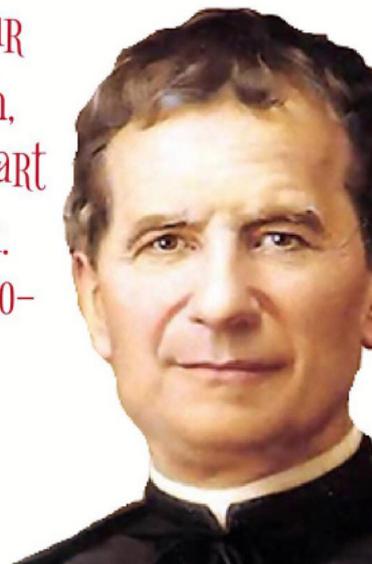
<https://salesiancooperators.uk/>

31 January 2021 – Fourth Sunday of the Year, Feast of St John Bosco

Walk with your
feet on earth,
but in your heart
be in heaven.
-St John Bosco-



@salesianlink



In the Gospel at mass today we see Jesus the teacher, **'who taught with real authority'** (Mk 1: 22); even in our short walk together, we have seen that Don Bosco was an educator in the same mould. Like Jesus, his teaching is authentic: on this feast we are called to be witnesses to TRUTH. We are invited to walk a Camino with the young in our families, parishes, youth clubs, sports' teams, and schools. We can all make a difference in the lives of the young: you might want to start with your own family.

Today: it is such a special feast, so please celebrate with something special; please enjoy your day.

We pray with Don Bosco: Let us carry our crosses with Love. Let us see that they do not become a burden to others; but let us help others carry theirs. Amen.

Thank you for praying our novena with us. Happy Feast!

