



Bontà - a spirit of 'goodness'

'It was at the age of nine that I had a dream. In this dream I seemed to be near my home in a fairly large yard. A crowd of boys were playing there. Some were laughing, some were playing games and some were swearing. When I heard these evil words, I jumped immediately amongst them and tried to stop them using my words and fists. At that moment a dignified man appeared, a nobly dressed adult. He wore a white cloak and his face shone so I could not look directly at him. He called me by name, told me to take charge of these children and added these words. 'You will have to win these friends of yours not by blows but by gentleness and love. Start right away by teaching them the ugliness of sin and the value of virtue.'



Image: Don Bosco Brunswick

Don Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*)

In his dream at nine years of age, Don Bosco was told that he had the traits and skills to conquer the unruliness of these children and to make them his friends. This made a profound impression on him and throughout his life in all that he did, he never failed to see beneath the layers of dirt, the rags, the uncouthness of the young person, to the spark which a little kindness and encouragement would fan into a flame. You will have to win these friends of yours not by blows but by gentleness and love. This is the secret of Don Bosco, this is the spirit which animated his Oratory and this is the secret of Bontà!

Don Bosco exuded Bontà/Goodness; this was the first impression that people had on meeting him. He was the personification of goodness, especially for the poor. His whole life was based on this goodness and kindness.

Take a moment and ask yourself:

Am I always able to do this in my work, family etc?

For Don Bosco, the environment was the vital element in the development of each person, because he believed that by creating the right environment, we could assist the young people to get closer to their full potential. His first dream underlines the importance of a warm and friendly environment in nurturing young people towards the fullness of life. He was to overcome the wildness by creating an atmosphere of gentle constant kindness. Don Bosco could make a difference and behaviour could be changed if he could create an atmosphere of reasoned kindness.

Don Bosco saw the environment not simply as a physical space that was safe and resourced, but also a network of relationships marked by constant kindness. He created teams of people, who focused on gentleness, optimism and reasonableness for everyone, a truly friendly presence. This was all held together by an invisible spiritual dimension based on the awareness of the mystery of God, present in every moment, in every person.