

Life

St. John Bosco was born in Italy in 1815. His father died when he was two years old. He was deeply influenced by his devout mother. When he was nine years old, he had a strange dream. He saw many poor boys playing and blaspheming God. A majestic man told him: "With meekness and charity you will conquer these friends"; another equally majestic woman taught him: "Make yourself humble, strong and robust." John believed that this dream was a message from Jesus and the Virgin and decided on his lifelong mission to take care of abandoned children. John immediately responded to this call, went to the market place to watch and imitate clowns, magicians and acrobats, and then on Sunday evenings, performed for the children of the neighbourhood. Before finishing, he repeated to his young audience the homily he had heard from Mass that morning. Everyone accepted him and prayed with him. John hoped to become a priest and began to study while working to support himself. He worked as a tailor, baker, shoemaker, carpenter, etc. He entered the seminary at the age of 20 and was ordained a priest in 1841. He then went to Turin to study pastoral ministry. During that time he went to the streets and even prisons to understand the actual condition of young people. During the Industrial Revolution, factories employed teenagers and children under the age of ten with meagre wages. They were required to work fourteen hours a day, with no opportunities for further education or promotion. The working environment was poor, and they were likely to be beaten when they made mistakes. However, everyday, large numbers of people still flocked from the countryside to the cities in search of a better life. Unemployed and impoverished teenagers and orphans ended up on the streets. Many of them fell into crime and were imprisoned. Don Bosco began to take in orphans and homeless boys and youth, established the Oratorio and boarding schools for them, and later set up his own workshops to give them work opportunities. He promoted the "Preventive System" based on reason, religion and charity, guiding them to know Christ and become zealous believers and good citizens. He once mentioned in a letter: "It is not enough to love the young; they must know that they are loved. This is a home, and we live like a family." It is said that he educated 30,000 young people in his life and also founded the Salesians to continue his work. Don Bosco had exemplary holiness and the gift of healing and miracles. During his lifetime, he was well-known abroad and was admired by people both inside and outside the church. He ran around to raise funds to take care of young people, build churches and set up monasteries. He continued to work even when he became ill from overwork. He died in 1888 at the age of seventy-two. Pope John Paul II declared him the "Father and Teacher of Youth."

Reflection

The Industrial Revolution created a lot of social problem. When Don Bosco tried to improve the situation of youths, he faced many difficulties and misunderstandings. At first, residents were very wary of a priest bringing together a group of ragged "urchins". Hence, for a period of time, the youth center had to hold gatherings in an abandoned cemetery. The pastor complained that Don Bosco made the young men uncontrollable; two priests even tried to take him to a mental hospital. The government and some factory owners were also dissatisfied with Don Bosco's work. He was regarded as a revolutionary and several attempts were also made on his life. But he understood the mission God had given him and never wavered. Let us reflect on whether we care about God's plan for ourselves as much as he did, and whether we can carry out God's will and persist to the end when encountering difficulties and resistance.

Prayer

St. Bosco's mother dedicated him to the Blessed Virgin Mary when he was born. He was an ardent devotee to the Virgin Mary. His favourite devotion was to the Immaculate Conception. He often encouraged young people to seek refuge in the Blessed Virgin Mary to maintain their purity. Later, when the government challenged the church, Don Bosco began to pay attention to the title of "Mary Help of Christians," and prayed to the Virgin Mary to protect the entire church. He also performed many miracles with the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Starting with just eight copper coins, he relied on the Blessed Mother's grace to complete building the "Basilica of Our Lady Help of Christians" in 1868 with a construction cost of 6 million liras in those days. Let us also learn from Don Bosco's reliance on Our Lady and surrender ourselves completely to her.

May we learn from Don Bosco to understand God's mission to us and remain steadfast when encountering difficulties. Saint John Bosco, pray for us.