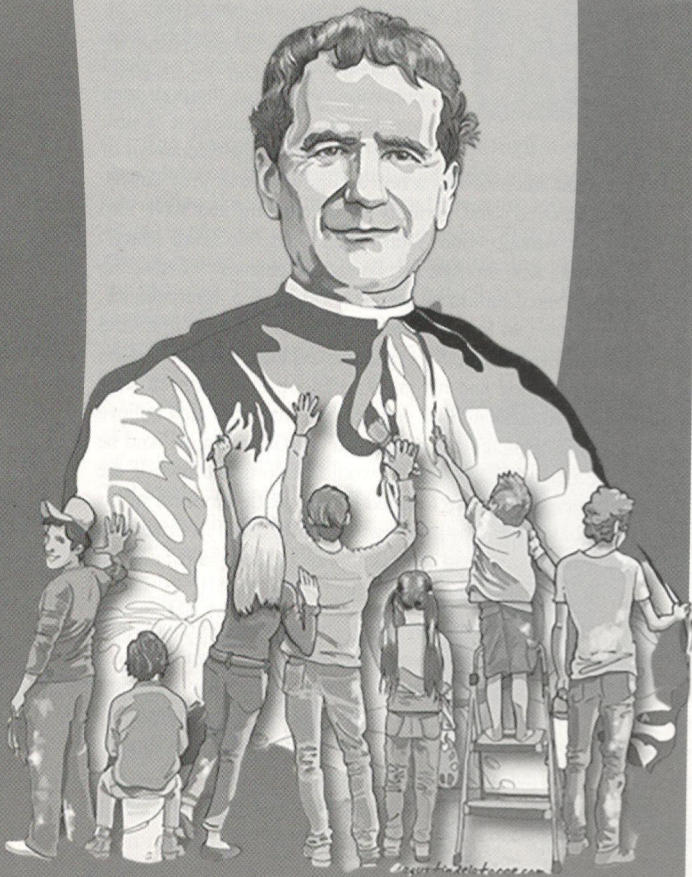




SALESIAN SPIRIT

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THE SALESIAN JOY



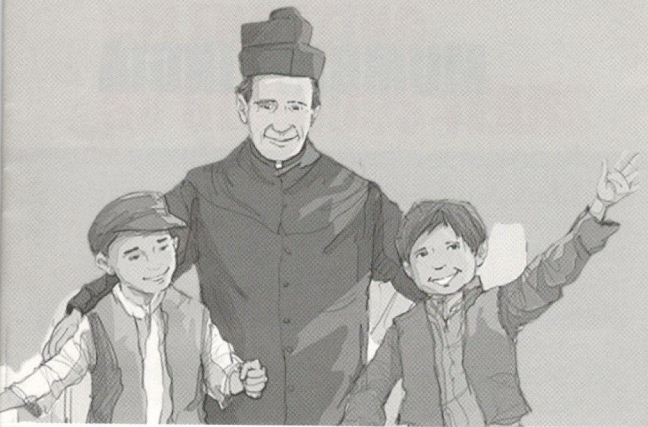
Joy: Habitual cheerfulness

The Salesian is cheerful. Don Bosco is our model for this. Don Bosco was habitually cheerful and smiling, instilling into those who came to him courage, cheerfulness, and comfort. He was seen to be more cheerful than ever when in difficulties! His biographer writes: "When means were lacking and other difficulties arose, Don Bosco looked even more cheerful than usual and told more jokes. If he appeared to be in a lighter mood it meant that he really had troubles. ... He was convinced that after putting him to the test, God would help him as He had done before." He was cheerful also in his illness as Bonetti reported, "Seeing him invariably cheerful regardless of ailments spurs us on to accept serenely even the sharpest pains."

Don Bosco asked his Salesians and collaborators to be cheerful always. In 1878 he told the Salesian sisters at Valdocco, "Remember that to do good to these girls, you must always be cheerful; you must love and respect them all, even those who may not deserve it." Again on another occasion he told the Salesian sisters: "The Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians shall always maintain a cheerful attitude toward their sisters, laughing and joking, but always as angels would do."

The Salesian creates a cheerful atmosphere in the Salesian house. The Salesian promotes cheerfulness through games; music and singing; theatre and outings; periodic celebrations. Once again Don Bosco is our model for this. John Villa who attended the Oratory from 1855-1866 testified that Don Bosco promoted noisy games: "I noticed that Don Bosco made a point of allowing the boys to be active and enjoy their games in order to attract them. The more noise they made at play, the happier he seemed to be. Whenever he saw us looking lonesome or not quite as lively as usual, he would leave no stone unturned until he had cheered us up again with new games and new ideas."

Don Bosco readily joined games to promote cheerfulness: "Strongly opposed to secretiveness and hidden corners, during playtime he wanted his boys to exercise physically and to practise vocal and instrumental music. He himself eagerly joined them to open the eyes of some who, ill advisedly, shied away from such activities." Don



Bosco affirmed that cheerfulness was one of the secrets of the success of the Oratory.

Don Bosco asked the Salesians to promote cheerfulness. He wrote to Fr. Bonetti, Rector of Mirabello, "I recommend that you keep all your boys happy;" and to Fr. Francesia, Rector of Cherasco, "I want all your boys to be happy." Such were his frequent exhortations to the Salesians.

The Salesian knows that genuine cheerfulness is not possible if the heart is not at peace with God. So cheerfulness is an invitation to be in that state of sinlessness: "I recommend holiness, health, knowledge and cheerfulness! ... Remember that the Devil fears cheerful people; he will try to discourage you because of all you have to do." The biographer identified the cause of cheerfulness in holiness: "Oratory life was a blend of a reverent fear of God with untiring zest for work and study, all animated by holy cheerfulness. This admirable combination put almost everyone into an environment of joy, enthusiasm and indescribable delight."

And so, Don Bosco gave great importance to frequent confession and communion: "Frequent reception of the sacraments gave his boys the strength to follow the path of obedience serenely and joyfully. A zestful, free, and easy manner, a lively participation in games, a fervent piety, a great love of purity, and a persevering diligence were characteristic traits of Oratory life." And the boys understood this mantra. Dominic Savio told Camillo Gavio,

"Several officials used to come to Valdocco personally to inquire about boys they had recommended and to watch him in the midst of his youngsters, a sight quite different from the usual one seen at other institutions. The Oratory was a living proof that genuine cheerfulness and joy can be found only in purity of life, peace, and tranquillity of conscience."

a newcomer to the Oratory, who was found alone without joining the games, "Here at the Oratory we make holiness consist in being very cheerful. Our only worry is sin, the great enemy of our souls that can rob us of God's peace and grace. We try to carry out duties diligently and to pray willingly."

And this was the differentiating element that was noticed even by visitors: "Several officials used to come to Valdocco personally to inquire about boys they had recommended and to watch him in the midst of his youngsters, a sight quite different from the usual one seen at other institutions. The Oratory was a living proof that genuine cheerfulness and joy can be found only in purity of life, peace, and tranquillity of conscience." No wonder Don Bosco kept repeating St. Philip Neri's maxim to boys: "Run, jump, have all the fun you want at the right time, but, for heaven's sake do not commit sin."

Joy: Fruit of sacrifice

Cheerfulness demands a price to be paid from the Salesians: sacrifice, mortification. Cheerfulness is sustained through sacrifices. In the dream of the pergola of Roses, the Salesians, to the envy of the onlookers, were walking on the carpet of roses! But the Salesians alone knew the prick of sharp thorns beneath the roses. The Salesians were told to wear shoes! And Our Lady explained the meaning of the shoes: "You must wear shoes, a symbol of mortification. The thorns on the ground stand for sensible affections, human likes and dislikes which distract the educator from his true goal, weaken and halt him in his mission, and

hinder his progress and heavenly harvest. ... But you must not lose heart. Charity and mortification will enable you to overcome all difficulties and lead you to roses without thorns." So cheerfulness is fed by sacrifice. The Salesian should accept sacrifices as something quite normal without playing the martyr.

CONCLUSION

Salesians should be optimistic, trusting in God and in the capabilities of the youngsters. At the same time, he should have his feet firmly on the ground and take all the efforts to bring to completion all ventures. The Salesian should be cheerful, a cheerfulness born out of being at peace with God, a cheerfulness which is contagious! The cheerful atmosphere is the natural environment for the preventive system of education. ■