

# Monthly Commemoration of Don Bosco (#7 - August)

## PRIDE BEFORE THE FALL

When Don Bosco - as people now called him - was ordained he was invited to preach at a distant parish. Given the distance, to get there he had to choose between hiring a carriage or riding a horse. He chose the horse for, ever since his student days, he had considered himself a good horsemen.

He himself tells a story of what happened along the way: "I had already covered half the distance at a fast clip when suddenly a flock of sparrows swished up in front of me. My horse took fright and dashed off across the fields, taking hedges and ditches in his stride.



"To my horror, the saddle kept slipping until finally the belly band broke, the saddle fell off, and I was thrown on a pile of stone, landing on my head. I laid there for sometime, unconscious and unable to move. Fortunately for me, someone had seen the fall. From a nearby farm house a man ran out and with the help of friends brought me to a house and laid me on a couch.

"Where am I?" I asked when I came to.

"You're among friends," the man reassured me. "The doctor will be here soon, so don't worry".

"I don't think there is much wrong with me," I said. "At most I may have a broken collar bone for I can't move my arm. But, tell me, where am I?" "You're in the Brina farm house," answered the man, "so take it easy. I've been around and more than once have needed a little help myself. You've no idea of the things that can happen to a man going to the fairs."

"While we're waiting for the doctor," I suggested, "why don't you tell me about some of them."

"I remember one autumn I went to buy stores for the winter," he began. "On my way back I was coming over hilly country when my poor beast fell in a ditch. I tried to drag him out but he was in too deep and it was useless. Midnight came and a bitter wind blew across the hills. Worse still, it began to rain. I was desperate for I couldn't see how I was going to get out of such a mess. The only thing left was to say a prayer and call for help.

"Although I had very little hope of anyone coming to the deserted spot in the middle of the night, I started to shout for help. Imagine how I felt when I saw several lights bouncing up and down in the darkness! Someone had heard my call for help!

In a very short time they had unloaded the beast, dragged it out of the ditch, and brought both of us to their house. I was half dead and splattered with mud but these people helped me clean up, gave me a hot meal, and to top it off made me sleep in the best bed in the house! The next morning I thanked them and asked how I could repay them for their kindness.

"The best way to repay us," said one of them who told me he was in the seminary, "is to help the next man you meet who needs it. Maybe one day even we ourselves might want help from you."

When I heard the story, I was so moved that the man noticed it. "Are you alright?" he asked.

"No, No," I assured him. "It's not my wounds that are affecting me. It's the story, you've just told me. Do you, by any chance, remember the name of the family?"

"Bosco I think," he said, "Bosco it is! And if that seminarian is still alive, I'll bet he's a good priest today."

Again I could hardly control my feelings. "My friend," I told him before he could become upset, "the Seminarian who helped you then is the priest you're helping now!"

The man could scarcely believe his ears but I had no trouble proving to him that I was indeed that person. When the rest of the family heard the story they were all deeply moved. It was an excellent lesson to everyone in Christian charity.

In the midst of all this the doctor arrived. He pronounced me whole, although he advised me not to move for a day or two. A few days later when it was time to go I felt as if I were leaving my own relatives.

Besides the lesson in charity, that accident taught me a still more important lesson. It taught me that when I went out to preach I should put aside my own ambition and have at heart only one aim:

the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

## LET US EDUCATE AS DON BOSCO DID – 4

Fr. Adolph L'Arco SDB

### **Let your authority become friendship.**

Fr. John Bonetti, one of Don Bosco's first clerics, was going through a rough period in 1864; he was physically and morally exhausted. It was then that Don Bosco wrote to him a letter, full of tender motherly concern.

*My dear Bonetti,*

*As soon as you get this letter, go straight to Father Rua and tell him frankly to cheer you up. Forget about your Breviary until Easter; in other words, you are forbidden to recite it. Say your Mass slowly so as not to tire yourself. You are also forbidden to fast or practise self-denial. The Lord is preparing work for you, but He does not want you to start it until you are perfectly recovered, especially as regards your cough. Do this and you will be doing God's will. You can make up for everything with short invocations, offering your pains to the Lord and giving good example.*

*I almost forgot something. Get yourself a good mattress and fix up your bed just as a genuine lazybones would like it. Keep well covered, both in and out of bed. Amen.*

*God bless you.*

*Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ.*

*Fr. John Bosco.*

Don Bosco's authority, in its entirety, had its source in the heart of Christ, just as light has as its source the sun. Therefore, it was exquisitely evangelical. Authority that derives from God is a love that serves. Just as petrol is consumed in a flame, so evangelical authority is consumed and dissolved in love. Just as in petrol that which is not consumed is nothing but carbon waste, so is dross all that is not charity in authority. The dross of authority is called: egoism, arrogance, vanity. Don Bosco's authority was pure charity without a trace of dross.

The charity-authority of Don Bosco was both paternal and maternal: really, it was more maternal than paternal, as can be seen by the above letter. In general, a father's love is conditioned by the success of his child: if the child succeeds but little, his father loves him but little – if he is very successful, then his father has a great love for him – if he is a complete failure, his father is tempted to cast him aside. (Of course, there are noble exceptions). On the other hand, maternal love is unconditional and is eternally the same, whether the child succeeds or not. As water satisfies thirst, so a mother's love seeks to satisfy the needs of her children. Paternal love is governed by merits, maternal love by needs. It is easier for a father to say: No! – for a mother to say: Yes!

When Don Bosco had to say 'no', he said it without beating about the bush, as a father should, but it had so

much graciousness about it that it took on many of the aspects of a gentle 'yes'. This lover of virtue knew very well that moral permissiveness is moral suicide, and so knew how to say 'no' just as a surgeon knows how to use a knife.

If we compare love to a flame, the central point could be called friendship. In fact, the most mature and personalised form of love is friendship. As authentic love grows, it gravitates towards friendship and this to the degree that it learns how to dialogue and to understand the other person. Maternal love reaches its perfection when the children become friends of their mothers. Don Bosco's love, which was fundamentally maternal, climbed the heights of love and reached friendship. To his past pupils-sons he could well repeat with Christ: "I have called you friends."

From the letter written to Father Bonetti it is evident that the pupil has now become a friend, yet still loved with the love of a mother. It must be understood: the style of life that Don Bosco created was extremely virile, and it was lived out in a manly way. It could be said of him that which Sacred Scripture points out: "gentleness has its source in fortitude."

The word 'authority' is derived from a Latin word 'augere' which means 'make grow'. It aims at the fullest development of the student or of the children, and so is positive only insofar as it promotes growth. If authority does not help people to grow, it either dies or degenerates into egoism or tyranny.

From all eternity God has planned out for each one of us a course we must follow to reach Him; this is the course that authority must help each to follow and not make everyone follow the course he is himself following. God alone is the architect of the human person, and the divine architect constructs our ego with certain natural bents that He makes a part of us.

To educate means just this: to free a person from those internal and external obstacles that might prevent him from following that course. To want to impose our course instead of the one God has written in the natural bents of the child is to arrest growth and betray a vocation. Don Bosco kept St. Francis of Sales' advice well in mind: "Be what you are and be it with love." A wise educator helps the child to be at peace with himself.

Authority may be compared to the stake that you put alongside a plant to help it grow straight: the sooner it becomes superfluous the better.

Authority is destined to die either a noble or ignoble death. It dies an ignoble death if it degenerates into despotic egoism, and dies a noble death if it bears the delicious fruits of friendship. Don Bosco's authority was born of virile paternity, matured in maternal dedication and died in evangelical friendship.

The most fortunate students and the happiest children are those who find in their teachers and parents authentic friends.