

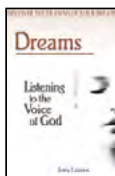
St. John Bosco: The Dreamer



Pope Pius IX ordered Don Bosco to record and preserve his dreams, resulting in a collection of about 153 dreams, many of which benefited the children he cared for.

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COMMONLY KNOWN AS Don Bosco, St. John Bosco (1815-1888) was an Italian Roman Catholic priest who studied his dreams for 63 years. At age 9, he had a dream in which the Blessed Mary and a man we may conclude to be Jesus appeared. Don Bosco stated that this dream “left a profound impression on me for the rest of my life.”

In the dream, Don Bosco jumped into the midst of a bunch of unruly boys and tried to calm them by swinging wildly and shouting at them. Then a man appeared, clad in a white flowing mantle with his face radiating with light. He called Don Bosco by name, told him to lead the children, and said: “You will have to win these friends of yours not with blows, but with gentleness and kindness.” Immediately the fighting, shouting, and cursing stopped and the crowd of boys gathered around the man. Then, Don Bosco was told to lead these children. This dream set the stage for his life’s mission: to transform the lives of destitute children.

In 1841, at age 26, Don Bosco was ordained to the priesthood in Turin, where he encountered downcast and downtrodden boys on the streets and in prisons—an awful outcome of the Industrial Revolution. Without parenting and proper guidance, many of them were troubled and lost. Remembering his dream, Don Bosco began to befriend them. While growing up, Don Bosco had a temper, but he had listened to his dream’s counsel and turned his temper into gentleness and kindness. It’s this attitude, as modeled by the radiant man in the dream, which endeared the children to him.

Moved by the deplorable state of the children, without any backing from the church or having a blueprint, Don Bosco began guiding and leading them—as empowered by his dream. He met and took care of the first boy on December 8, 1841. Three days later, there were nine. Three months later, 20. By summer, there were 80. Don Bosco’s first benefactor and helper was his mother who sold her wedding ring, earrings, and necklace to buy food for the boys. Known as Mamma Margaret, she stayed with the boys, taking care of them until her death in 1856.

Soon, Don Bosco had another dream: “I saw myself as a priest wearing surplice and stole. I

was sitting in a tailor’s shop, not sewing new clothes, but mending old ones torn and full of patches.” Good clothes need no repairs, only those that are torn or damaged. Don Bosco was shown to take “broken” children and mend them to have a better future, one child at a time. Remarkably, he guided and strengthened each and every child under his care.

Later, Don Bosco built residences to house the children and trade schools to train them in vocations: shoemaking, tailoring, book-binding, carpentry, printing, and mechanics. He met with prospective employers and found work for the boys. He convinced the employers to treat them with fairness and dignity, instead of the beatings that were characteristic of the time.

Don Bosco was a visionary and a leader who founded three congregations. These congregations serve in more than 132 countries. The Don Bosco educational institutions are well known and well respected. They continue to serve destitute children.

Pope Pius IX ordered Don Bosco to record and preserve his dreams, resulting in a collection of approximately 153 dreams. Most of his dreams had a guide, in varying personages, with the Blessed Mary as the mainstay. Astonishingly, these guides explained the symbols and images in his dreams, often through conversations. Many of these dreams benefited the children he cared for. He shared the dreams as “good night talks,” using them to provide guidance to mold them into loving, caring, and capable individuals.

While in school, Don Bosco often saw his test questions in his dreams. He would so quickly turn in his answers that the teachers wondered if he answered at all. To their amazement, all the answers were written out in their entirety. When he was questioned by his teachers on more than one occasion, he candidly answered: “I dreamed it.” Thus, his classmates nicknamed him: “The Dreamer.” And what a dreamer he was.

Note: The Salesian Congregation of the Catholic Church in Bangalore, India, commissioned me to write a book on St. John Bosco’s dreams. The book, *Saint John Bosco—Dreams: The Guiding Voice*, was published in September, 2015, in India, to coincide with the saint’s bicentennial birthday celebration. 