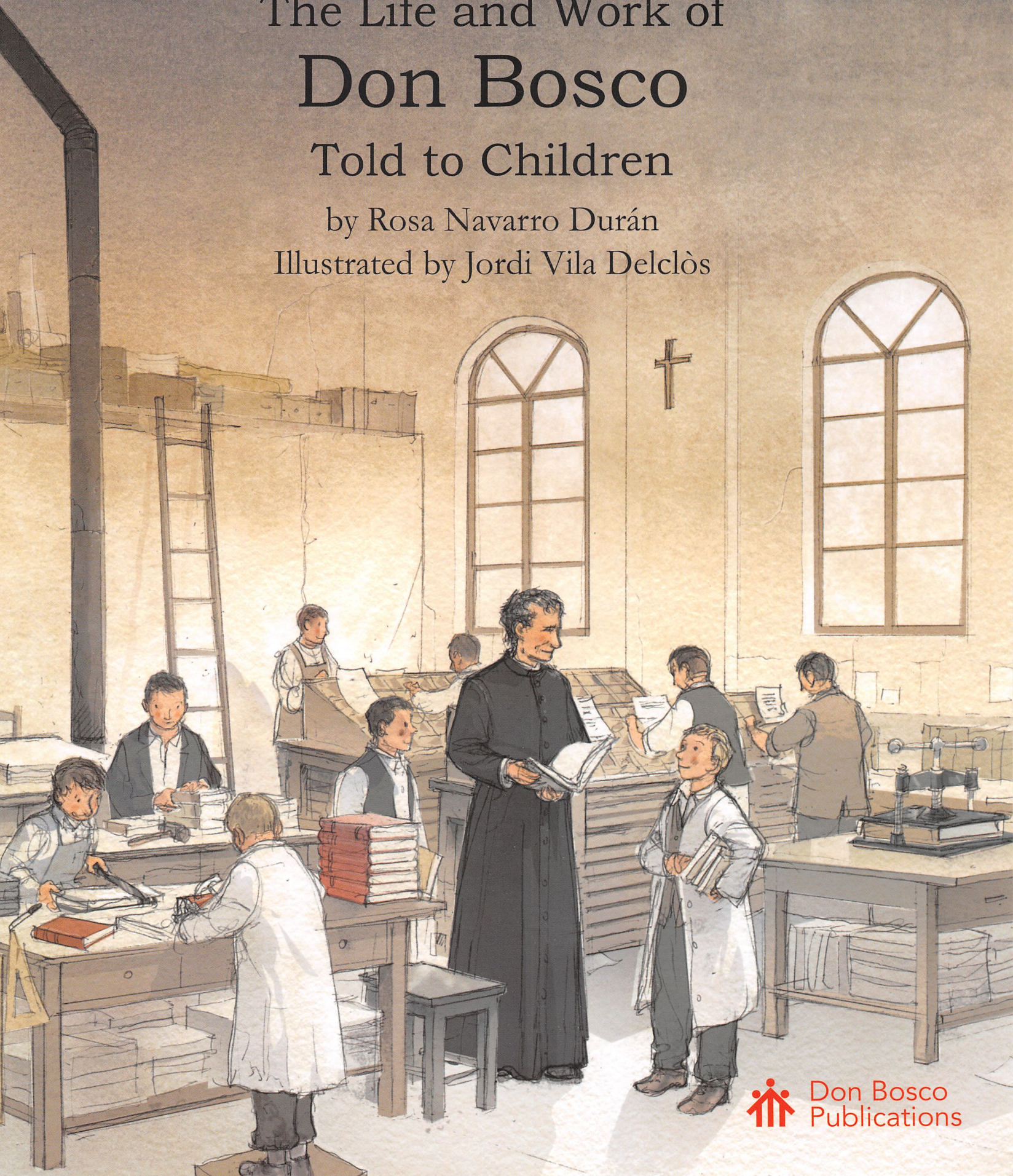


The Life and Work of Don Bosco

Told to Children

by Rosa Navarro Durán

Illustrated by Jordi Vila Delclòs



Don Bosco
Publications

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‘La vida y obra de Don Bosco contada a los niños’

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“Everything and everyone
is won by the sweetness
of our words and works.”

St John Bosco

Just a Small Village

John Bosco was born on 16th August 1815 in a small village in Piedmont, Northern Italy.

He would dedicate his life to helping and educating poor young people, showing them right from wrong, giving them means to live an honest life and teaching them how to talk to God.

In 1934 Pope Pius XI would declare him a saint, and in 1989 Pope John Paul II would give him the title of Father and Master of the Young.

But let us start from the beginning.

Margaret, a Strong and Gentle Woman

In a small and humble house on a hill surrounded by woods and vineyards, a farmer, Margaret Occhiena, is holding her second son, John, who has just been born. It's a beautiful summer's day and his two-year-old brother, Joseph, stands looking at him. Slightly further away is his stepbrother, Anthony, who is seven years old.

Margaret was a woman of great strength, with strong ideals and a pure heart; she was devoted to Our Lady. She would soon be head of the family, as just two years after the birth of her son John, her husband, Francis, passed away.

"Daddy's not here anymore," she said to young John. These words stuck with him as his very first memory. They were said with great sadness, and so he cried bitterly with her, but the boy did not yet understand what they meant.

It was a terrible year in which the cold and drought destroyed Piedmont's harvest, leaving all the families hungry. Margaret didn't have anything to feed her children, but she did not fear. Before dying, her husband had told her to trust in the Lord, and so she did.

She killed their last calf in order to feed her family, then she began to work both in the house and in the fields. She cooked, cleaned, and worked on the lands, reaping, sowing and digging the weeds out of the vineyards. She had rough hands for working and soft ones for looking after and holding her sons; she was tenacious and caring.

"God can see you," she would say to each of her sons. His mother was a humble, hard-working and dignified woman, and John knew he had to learn this lesson very well.



The Unforgettable Dream

John was nine years old when he had a dream that he would remember forever. He dreamt he was next to his house in an open space where a group of boys were playing. Some were laughing and playing but others were fighting and using God's name in vain. Upon hearing these horrible words against God, he tried to make them stop by hitting and insulting them, when suddenly a smartly-dressed man appeared. His face seemed to shine so bright that John could barely look at him. He called John by his name and said: "Not with blows, but with love and kindness will you change those boys. You must teach them how wrong it is to misbehave and how wonderful it is to be good."

This all seemed too much for John; he was just a boy! However, he saw how the boys stopped fighting and gathered round the wondrous man.

The man said, "You will succeed by being obedient and learning the best ways to teach others."

"And how will I learn these ways?" John asked.

"I will provide you with a master who will teach you."

John, a little afraid, asked who it would be. The man replied, "I am the son of the one your mother praises three times a day."

At that moment, John saw a majestic lady standing next to the man. Her veil shone like the sun. Suddenly, looking around him he no longer saw young boys but wild and savage animals: dogs, cats and even bears!

The lady explained, "This is where you are needed. Be humble but strong. Watch what happens to these animals. You have to do the same for my children."

And with that they were no longer ferocious animals but merely sweet lambs who stayed close to the man and the lady, content to be in their presence.



Still dreaming, John began to cry. He didn't understand what the lady was asking of him. She put her hand on his head and told him, "It will all become clear when the time comes."

When he awoke, he went straight to his brothers to tell them about his dream, but they laughed at him. "It just means you'll be a shepherd," said his brother Joseph.

"No, I bet you'll be the head of a band of thieves!" replied Anthony.

"What if it means you're going to be a priest?" his mother suggested. She too had heard John describe his dream.

His grandma, however, ended the conversation with: "Dreams mean nothing, pay no attention to them!"

But John and his mother were both convinced that his dream was telling him something, and he would never forget it.

The Poverty of the Bosco Family

The Bosco household was the poorest in all their town of Becchi. Fortunately, as the whole family worked in the fields, they were lucky to never go hungry. At only eight years old, John was working just as hard as his brothers, busy with cutting the grass, digging in the fields and milking the cows. He soon learned how to be a good farmer, the first of many professions he'd go on to learn in his life.

Even though they were poor, anybody who came to their door asking for food was always given a bowl of soup and some bread, regardless of their race, background or class. This was something else John would learn from his mother: we must educate and feed everyone, for all are souls that must be saved. He called this approach 'the politics of the Our Father', highlighting that all colours of a nation disappear once we look inside ourselves.

In the summer of 1824, John started going to school in Castelnuovo, a town five kilometres away from his house. Walking this far every day was very hard, and more so in the snow. Fortunately, as his aunt, Mariana, was the housekeeper for the priest and teacher Don Lacqua, John was able to stay in his house for three months over the winter.

This was where John discovered the joy of reading and a real love for books. Little did he know that he would be a writer himself one day! In the summer, he would take the cows out to the field, sit under a tree and read all afternoon.

Anthony, who was now seventeen years old, didn't want his brother to be studying while he was out working in the fields. One night, he saw John with an open book next to his plate while he was having dinner. Anthony shouted at him, saying that he himself was the only one who really worked, that John was lazy; he even threatened to throw John's book in the fire. Despite knowing how to defend himself, there was nothing John could do to spare himself from his brother's fit of rage.



His mother spent all night thinking about the argument, and the following day she told him: "It's best you leave home, John."

On a cold February morning in 1827, he set out with just some shirts, two books and some bread. John was only twelve years old. His mother had told him where to ask for work but nobody wanted a young boy to help them.

A young farmer named Luis Moglia and his wife, Dorothy, took pity on the boy when he started to cry after being told that there would be no work until March. They took him in as their stable boy at their farm just outside the town of Moncucco, where he worked for three years. Every night he would light a candle and read for an hour, and every Saturday he'd ask to leave bright and early to go into town where he would go to Mass with the parish priest, Father Cottino. John told Father Cottino how he wanted to be a priest himself, and so he gave John some Latin readings and many other books to study.

The Journey Begins

Father Calosso was quite an elderly priest of around seventy years old. It was 1829 at this point and he had only just moved to Morialdo. He was walking home one day when he saw a young boy: it was John Bosco. They were both coming from a sermon given by some missionaries. The priest asked if John had understood everything considering they had used lots of Latin words, to which John replied, “It was all crystal clear!”

Impressed, Father Calosso asked who he was, where he had studied and what he wanted to be when he was older. When John said he wanted to be a priest, Father Calosso said that his mother ought to come and see him, as he could help them. “Your son has a fantastic memory; he must study at once!” he told Margaret.

Father Calosso taught and supported John and advised him on everything. At night John would return home to sleep in Becchi as it wasn't far. This also meant that when there was lots of work to do in the fields, he could easily visit and help his family.

Sadly, Father Calosso died a year later. At just fifteen years old John found himself alone once more. He wept bitterly. Again, it was Margaret, his wise mother, who came up with a solution. She split the house and the fields in two, giving half to Anthony in order to avoid arguments. With the money she made from selling off their property and land, John could continue studying.

First, he went to the school in Castelnuovo. He stayed with John Roberto, who was a tailor and a musician. His mother paid for his keep with farm produce. It was here that John learned to be a tailor and to play the harpsichord. As well as this, to earn some extra money, he worked as an assistant blacksmith—picking up this trade too! How useful all these skills would be one day!

One day that summer, he woke up feeling amazed; he had had the dream again! For a second time, he saw the flock of sheep and Our Lady, shining brightly saying to him: “Be humble and strong. It will all become clear when the time comes.”

At this point he began to feel sure that he must become a priest and look after the young. He smiled because he knew that Our Lady would not abandon him, nor would his mother, Margaret. He placed all of his will at the service of her great intelligence, ready to learn a great deal of valuable lessons.

He later left to study in Chieri, a small city ten kilometres from Turin, where he stayed in a widow's house. Lucia Matta lived with her son, and again, John's mother paid her with flour and wine if not money. John also helped with the chores and helped her son to be a better student. To earn extra money here, he worked as an assistant carpenter. Another skill for the list! Everything he did, he did with great joy because he knew he was in God's hands.

He was an excellent student with strong willpower and a fantastic memory. A Jewish bookseller gave him the Italian classics for just five cents each, and John would read an entire book nearly every day.



Doubts about His Chosen Path

When he was about to finish his Humanities studies, John was almost convinced that he would become a Franciscan priest, although he was unsure as this meant he would be unable to help his mother.

Margaret, who knew this, came to see him and, despite being just a farmer, what she told him changed John's life: "John, think about it calmly and clearly. When you make a decision, go your own way and don't worry about what others say. The important thing is that you do as God wills. Don't worry about me, I expect nothing from you—I was born poor, I've lived poor and I'll die poor."

To help him reflect and decide, a friend of his recommended that he go to Turin to talk to Father Joseph Cafasso—a twenty-three-year-old priest and a master of discernment. Cafasso was finishing his studies in Theology but he also used to visit prisoners and the elderly.

"Finish your studies and come to the Seminary," Cafasso advised him. "Divine Providence will show you what God wants from you. And don't worry about the money for becoming a priest; someone will help you."

And that's how it would always be.



John Bosco Decides to Become a Priest

In October 1835, John was twenty years old. For the first time, he put on his cassock in the church at Castelnuovo. Many people from the neighbouring towns had come to be with him as they all knew him. Again, his mother said something to him which he would not forget:

“John, here you are wearing a priest's cassock but remember that it is virtue, not the cassock, which gives you honour. If you ever doubt your vocation, for God's sake do not dishonour the cassock, just take it off. I would prefer to have a poor and honourable farmer as a son rather than a priest who has forgotten his purpose. When you were born, I offered you up to Our Lady. When you started studying, I asked you to love her greatly. Now I ask that you be hers in all you do.”

Those first years were not always easy. He learned to speak simply to people, using comparisons so that they could understand what he was saying. Even as a boy he could tell the most engaging stories, but being a priest wasn't about showing off with fancy sermons; saying things simply and effectively was far more valuable.

One day, John was ill and exhausted. His mother was at his side looking after him. She believed that food was the best medicine and so John, wanting to make her happy, forced himself to eat some bread. He slept for two entire days and the following night!

When he woke up he felt completely cured. At this point he was a deacon, which is the last stage before becoming a priest. He wrote in his notebook his rules for living:

- Keep yourself busy
- The gentleness, kindness and patience of St Francis de Sales is my guide

John did not know this, but it would in fact be the church of St Francis de Sales where he would celebrate his first Mass on 5th June 1841.

The following Thursday on the feast day of Corpus Christi, he was going to Mass in his town. The bells could be heard from all over and the church was full to the brim. They were all so very happy for Don Bosco—a new name for him, as in Piedmont they called their priests ‘Don’. He felt so loved. That night, his mother spoke to him once more, leaving him with more words he would not forget: “You're a priest now, John, and you're closer to Jesus. I can't read, and I haven't read books like you have, but don't you forget that when you begin to say Mass, you begin your penance. Think only about saving souls, do not worry about me.”

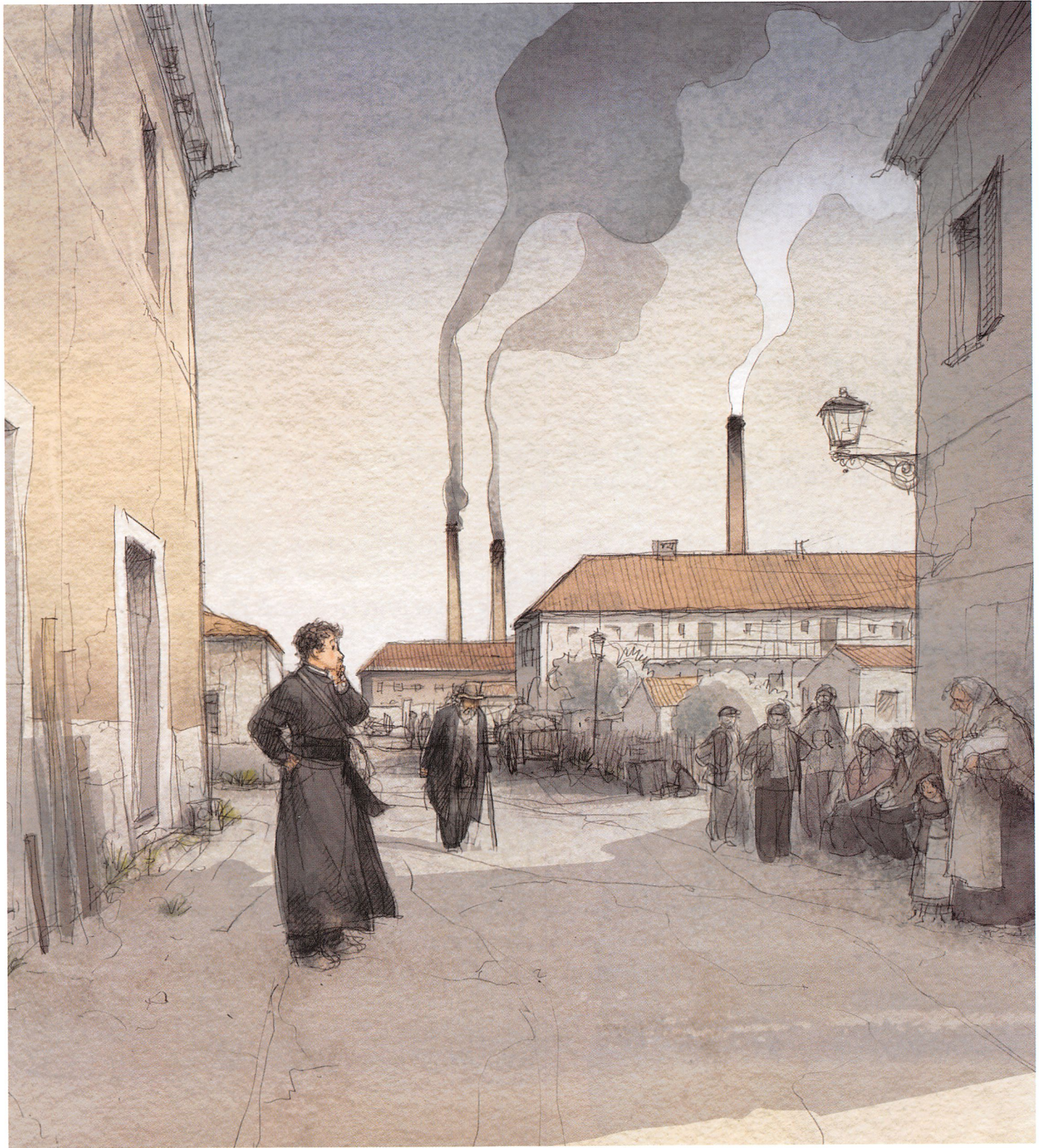
Which way would Don Bosco go now? He was intelligent and keen to start working. He could become a counsellor or a town priest, or absolutely anything!

He went to see Don Cafasso, who guided him once again: “Come here to Turin and finish your training.” By 'here' he was referring to a centre next to the church of St Francis of Assisi where they trained young priests to minister more effectively in society. Every morning and evening they had class with Don Cafasso and a theologian, Luis Guala. For the rest of the day they helped in the city: they went to prisons, gave sermons in church, helped the sick and elderly, and gave confirmation classes to the young.

Don Cafasso was a short and thin little man who never stopped for a second! He taught, he heard confessions, he attended to the sick, he visited prisons and he preached. As of 1841, he was Don Bosco's spiritual guide and support.

During his time here, Don Bosco learnt what true poverty was. It was not the poverty he had experienced in the countryside where he still had food from the fields to rely upon; poverty in the city was very different. There were young, desperate and hungry beggars who, having no job, hope or faith, often turned to crime in order to survive. Don Bosco realised that he had seen these boys before... in his dream! Fighting and blaspheming, they were just like the wild animals that were then transformed.

One day, Don Cafasso visited a prison with Don Bosco who saw the long dark corridors, the damp, black walls and the sad, gaunt faces of the prisoners. Some of them were so young, about twelve years old. He was absolutely horrified, and so he decided to fight for these homeless boys, to show them the way to salvation and to help them find work so that they could survive. He started thinking about an idea: he had to create a place where young people could find a friend who could help and advise them.



Don Bosco's Oratory

It was 8th December 1841: the day of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Don Bosco was about to start Mass in the church of St Francis of Assisi when he saw a boy in the corner with his jacket covered in plaster from the walls.

The boy was an apprentice builder and an orphan of just sixteen years old. Everybody laughed at him. But Don Bosco saw him for what he was—a defenceless young boy. He knelt by his side and said a Hail Mary. “Don't be afraid. You're my friend now and no-one is going to hurt you.”

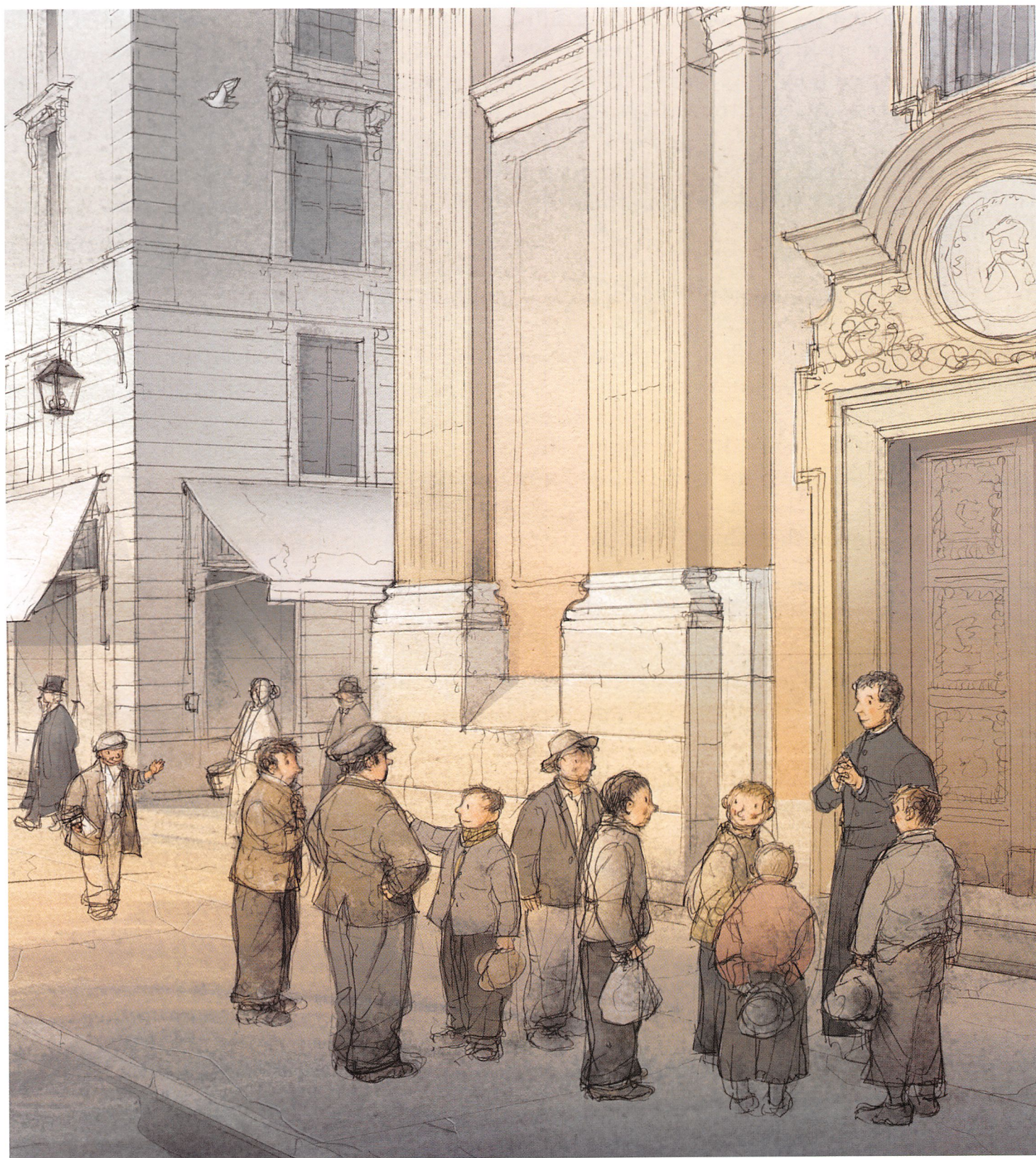
The boy couldn't help him as an altar boy as he had no idea how. He couldn't read nor sing, but he could whistle, just like Don Bosco!

Don Bosco taught the boy, whose name was Bartholomew, how to make the sign of the cross and told him to return the following Sunday with some of his friends. The next Sunday, nine young adolescents came to the sacristy, and so began Don Bosco's Oratory.

Don Bosco knew very well what he wanted to do: help young people, teach them to pray and to read and to give them something to do in their spare time ... but where?

For three years, the courtyard next to the church of St Francis served as a playground for the boys from the Oratory, but more and more were coming every day—by the summer there were eighty of them! He took them all for a walk down to the river, wondering what he would do come winter.

The boys in his group were made up mainly of apprentices in the building trade, many from far away towns; they couldn't return to their houses each night. Others didn't have jobs yet and some had only just been released from prison. They didn't just need teaching but clothes and food, too.



Don Bosco looked for jobs for those that didn't have one, and he spoke to the bosses of the apprentices to ensure they were treated well. Throughout the week he would visit the workshops to see how they were getting on. The boys saw that he really cared for them, and the owners saw that these boys were not alone.

On Saturdays, he took fruit and bread rolls to the prison and encouraged the young thieves to be better people, telling them that when they left prison he would be waiting for them.

What did Don Bosco have that made him so popular with the young?

He was goodness personified, so friendly and cheerful and he only cared about others. He was intelligent and he knew each and every one of his boys, what they liked and what they were capable of doing—this was how he was able to help them so well. He always shared everything he had with them. He was devoted to Jesus' teaching of absolute kindness. He would tell his boys: "How happy we will be when we're all in paradise!"

Don Bosco believed that God didn't create paradise for it to be empty.



The Dream about the Strange Flock

For some years, the Oratory had no fixed place. Eventually they were to move from St Francis' Church courtyard to a new space in Valdocco, a village on the outskirts of Turin. A rich and caring lady, the Marchioness Barolo, was having a women's hospital built next door. She agreed to give Don Bosco a salary in return for his counselling services to the suffering women she received.

It was the night of 12th October 1844, and Don Bosco was trying to sleep; he was worried. In the morning, he had to tell the boys that they were moving to Valdocco.

He had another dream in which he saw a group of wolves, foxes, rams, dogs and birds. He wanted to run away, but a lady dressed as a shepherd told him to follow the strange flock, and she led the way. They stopped three times, and each time more of the wild animals were changed into sheep. Don Bosco was tired and he wanted to sit down, but the shepherdess told him to continue.

They came to a large playground with shelter round the edges and a church at one side. There was suddenly lots more sheep with more shepherds looking after them, but they soon disappeared. Then, a miracle happened! Some of the sheep transformed into shepherds themselves and began looking after the others. The shepherdess then told him to look to the south. At first, he saw just a field, but then he saw a great and magnificent church with an inscription inside which read: 'This is my house, my glory will flow from here.'

Don Bosco woke up, and although he didn't fully understand his dream, he knew that he must continue fighting for his boys until he reached the place he had witnessed in his dream.

Difficulties Along the Way

In Valdocco, almost two months later, they had two rooms in the house ready to use. All the better as it began to snow heavily!

Don Bosco gave the house a name: ‘The Oratory of St Francis de Sales’, partly because an image of St Francis was painted on the doorway and also because he needed this saint's patience and good will for the task ahead of him.

He started to give classes to his apprentices. Their faces were dirty with plaster and soot, but their souls were clean and they were willing to learn to read, count, pray and be good people.

Don Bosco needed books, clothes and food, and these things weren't cheap. He didn't have any money, but rich people did. He never liked asking for these things, and it shamed him to do so, but he did it anyway—not for himself but for his boys. Little did he know that all would be right in the end.

Nevertheless, the number of boys kept growing—there were three hundred of them now—and there was hardly any space for them. Neither the neighbours nor the authorities wanted them around.

They moved all over the region, and it was in one of the many chapels they used that Don Bosco met one of his future fundamental collaborators. At that point, he was just a pale little eight-year-old boy who wore a black bracelet on his left arm as his father had passed away two months before.

Don Bosco was handing out medals to the boys until there was none left, but there was one more boy, who was sitting in the corner, without a medal. Don Bosco went over to him, holding out his left hand while making a halving gesture with his other. “Here, Michael, have this. You and I are going to share everything.”



His name was Michael Rua, and he would later become Don Bosco's successor of the Salesian congregation.

What did Don Bosco see in him at that moment? Little Michael didn't understand what he meant, but what he did know was that he felt safe and happy at Don Bosco's side.

Pinardi's House

Don Bosco was creating something new, and new ideas aren't always accepted so easily. Some people thought he was crazy and that he was wasting his time and trying to achieve the impossible, but he knew that hard work and persistence pays off. He was working hard for the benefit of his boys, which was more than worth it.

Unfortunately, so much hard work began to take its toll. Don Bosco's lungs were bad and all he could do was rest.

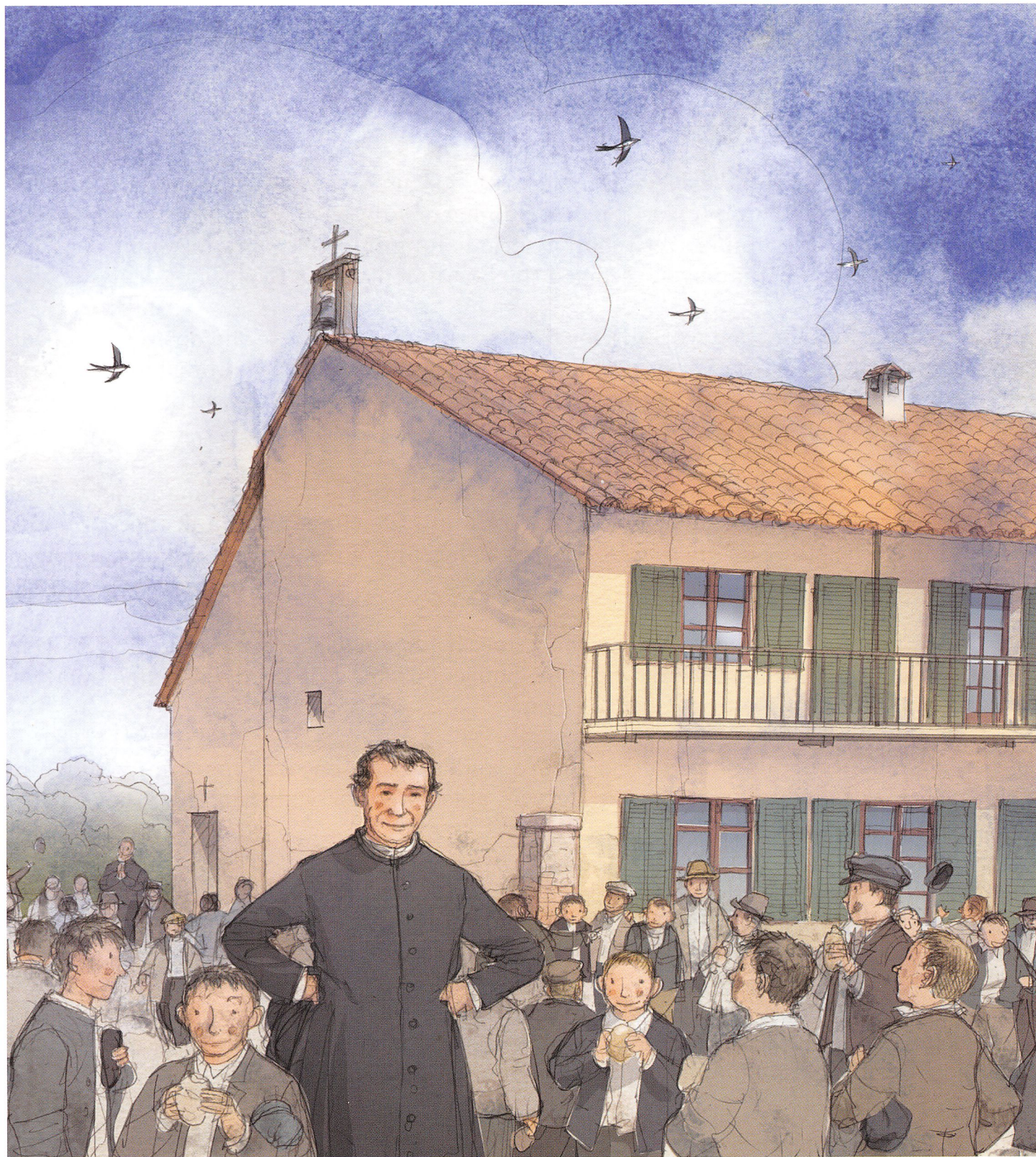
He started to write books for his young people. Don Bosco always wanted to teach, and so his words were simple and he taught everything he knew to his students. He was dedicated to them both in his actions and his words.

He went on to write some memoirs, yet he never wanted them to be made public as they revealed his sadness and his loneliness at that time. He even doubted his dreams at some point, though he never abandoned them.

He dreamt of a house near the meadow where his boys played. Soon after, he went to meet a man called Francis Pinardi, an honest man who was willing to rent a small hut to Don Bosco for his 'laboratory'. Don Bosco explained to him that he wasn't looking for a laboratory; he just wanted a space for his Oratory. They made a deal anyway, and so Pinardi's house became the first official location of Don Bosco's Oratory.

On the morning of 12th April 1846, the bells were ringing for Easter morning as Don Bosco was saying the first Mass in the new chapel. The courtyard and the meadow were full of young people all listening in silence with complete devotion.

After Mass, they quickly took the bread the priest gave them, and, happier than ever, they began to jump around—for once they had a home!



A Request to Mamma Margaret

Don Bosco always gave everything he could for his boys with all his might. But one day his strength failed him. It was the first Sunday of July 1846 when he fainted. He was coughing and spitting up blood. He had a serious lung infection, and for eight days his fate was uncertain—he had even received the Sacrament of the Sick.

When the boys had finished working for the day they would run to the doors where Don Bosco was resting to cry and pray. The doctors had prohibited any visitors, but they were convinced that Don Bosco was at their side. Outside his room, they took turns praying to the Virgin Mary, sure that she would hear their prayers.

On the last Sunday of July, supported by his walking stick, Don Bosco managed to visit the Oratory. The boys were overjoyed! They ran into the chapel to thank the Lord, and in absolute silence they listened to Don Bosco as he said: “I owe you all my life, and as of today it will all be yours.”

The doctor ordered that he rest for a long time if he wished to get better, and so Don Bosco decided to go to his brother Joseph's house. Joseph still lived with their mother, Margaret, and now had four sons of his own.

The fresh mountain air, his mother's care and the presence of his family did him well and he was regaining strength. He was able to go for walks in the vineyards in the evenings.

One evening in August he walked to the next town, Capriglio, and on his way back he heard a threatening voice: “Your money or your life!”

“My name is Don Bosco, and I have no money!” he replied, terrified.

He looked at this bearded man, who was hidden in the bushes, brandishing a knife... and recognised him! He was one of the young prisoners with whom Don Bosco had made friends in Turin's prison. “What's all this about wanting to kill me?”

When the young man recognised him, he nearly fainted. All his aggression disappeared at once and he said: "Forgive me, Don Bosco, I am a disgrace."

Upon leaving prison, everyone, even his own mother, had turned their back on this man; he couldn't find work anywhere and was dying of hunger. Don Bosco heard his confession and invited him round for dinner. The following day he gave him a letter of recommendation for some of the more welcoming business owners in Turin, giving him a warm hug before he left.

During these little evening walks of his, he spent a lot of time thinking about his future project. When he returned to Turin, he would live in the rooms he rented from Pinardi, and from there he would welcome in boys from the street who had nowhere to go. However, it wasn't really the nicest of places for a priest to live alone; there were lots of drunkards and all sorts of bad people around there at night. What would they say about him? He would have to ignore what others say if he wanted his house for homeless boys to be a reality.

Don Bosco thought about it and found a solution: his mother could come with him! But how could he ask her to make such a great sacrifice? Margaret was 58 years old and happily living in Becchi surrounded by her grandchildren. One evening, he finally found the courage to ask her. "Mother, would you like to come and live with me for a while? I'm poor, I have lots of doubts and the neighbourhood is not a proper place for a priest to live alone... could you help me? Could you be a mother to my boys?"

Margaret, who was not expecting this request, stood silently for a moment. She then said to him: "If you think it is God's will, I will come with you."

The Return to Valdocco

It was Tuesday November 3rd and two figures were walking to Valdocco: Don Bosco, with a prayer book under his arm, and his mother, Margaret, with a basket full of clothes and food. A priest, who was a friend of Don Bosco, saw them arrive exhausted and covered in dust. “Welcome, my dear Don Bosco, how are you? How come you have walked all this way?”

“I am better now,” Don Bosco replied. “I’ve brought my mother, and we’re going to live in the Pinardi house. We had to walk because we have no money. Divine Providence will help us from here.” The priest, moved by his words, took his watch out of his pocket and gave it to Don Bosco.

Margaret entered her new house. There were three little bedrooms, two beds, two chairs and some extra furniture in the kitchen. She rested for a while then started making dinner. Don Bosco hung a crucifix and an image of the Virgin Mary on the wall, then he started making the beds.

Outside, a boy who had seen them in the house went running to tell the others: “Don Bosco is back!” What a party they had the following Sunday! The boys were so happy to see their protector, friend and master again.

Don Bosco's first priority was to get the night classes started again. They gave classes all over the house—even in the kitchen! At night you could see from far away all the rooms lit up and full of boys sitting in the pews, books in their hands, carefully taking notes. Some would even be on the floor trying to scribble notes on some paper.

Like many other good friends of Don Bosco, the Marchioness Barolo continued to support them financially until she died. Thanks to his numerous benefactors, he was able to pursue his incredible dream.

At this point, he realised that some of the boys had nowhere to go once they left Pinardi's house. They used to sleep under bridges or in shabby hostels, so, naturally, Don Bosco decided to share his house with them.

One day he let six young boys sleep in the stable attached to the house, but in the morning, they had disappeared, taking with them the blankets that Margaret had lent them. He let them stay another night, only this time they also took the straw.

One rainy afternoon in May, someone knocked at the door. It was a boy who was about fifteen years old, shivering from the cold. "I'm an orphan and I'm a builder but I can't find work; I'm cold and I don't know where to go..."



Don Bosco invited him in to sit by the fire, dry himself off and have some dinner. Would this boy also steal their blankets? But they couldn't turn him away on such a miserable day. "I'm poor but I've never stolen anything," he told them. He slept in the house, and Margaret taught him some prayers, telling him the importance of working hard and being loyal and devoted. This little sermon of hers was the model of the 'Salesian Goodnight' which Salesians still practise today.

That boy was the first orphan to stay in the house, and by the end of the year there were seven of them, and the number kept growing. Don Bosco converted two bedrooms into dormitories with eight beds, a crucifix, an image of the Virgin and a plaque that declared: 'God can see you'. In the morning, Don Bosco would say Mass and the boys would listen and pray the rosary. Then they'd go off to work for the day. They would have lunch and dinner back at the house, and so after a while money began to run short again.

They sold another piece of their land and a vineyard to make some money. Margaret asked for her wedding dress to be brought from Becchi so that she could make table cloths and vestments with it. Over time, other good people helped Don Bosco and he was able to hire more space to continue expanding his house, his Oratory.

Grigio—the Dog that Protected Don Bosco

Don Bosco wrote because he knew that he could reach many more people this way. He started three newspapers and wrote books; his magazine, 'Catholic Readings', was very popular. Nevertheless, there were still people who did not like what he was saying or doing—some even tried to kill him!

His wine was poisoned, but he didn't drink it. He was called to the house of a dying woman who needed her last confession, then when he arrived at the house, the lights went out and he was attacked; he protected himself with a chair and managed to get away with just a few scrapes. But now he feared walking to or from Turin, especially as between the Pinardi house and the city there was only large open countryside with no houses.

One dark night, he was walking alone through these fields when a giant dog came towards him. At first he was a little frightened, but when he stroked the dog it then followed him all the way to the Oratory. From then on, Grigio—as Don Bosco called him after his grey colouring—often walked home with him.

However, one rainy and misty night Don Bosco was walking alone. He noticed that two men were walking some distance behind him, and when he slowed down, they slowed down too, and if he walked faster, they too walked faster. He wanted to turn back to the city, but it was too late. Suddenly they ran towards him, throwing a blanket over his head. He wanted to shout but he couldn't.



At that moment, Grigio appeared out of nowhere, howling furiously. He bit one of the men attacking Don Bosco and lunged at the other's face. The men ran away and Grigio accompanied Don Bosco all the way home.

Grigio looked like a wolf: he had a long nose, straight ears, grey fur and was about a metre tall. The last time Don Bosco saw him was one night in 1866. He had walked with Grigio over to the Moglia family's house, where the faithful dog sat and waited in the corner. After dinner, they looked all over the house, and even though no-one had opened any doors or windows, Grigio had gone.

Don Bosco never discovered what happened to Grigio or how he got out, later writing in his memoirs: "I only know that that animal was a real blessing for me in many times of danger."

The Apprentices' Workshops

Don Bosco personally worried about how his apprentices were treated by their masters, as it was not uncommon for them to be taken advantage of or mistreated. At that time there was no institution to defend their rights. Don Bosco was a real pioneer in improving working conditions, and every week he would visit his boys in their workplaces to check that their masters were keeping their sides of the bargain. If Don Bosco saw that this was not so, he would leave, taking the boy with him.

But his revolution was much greater as Don Bosco eventually became the founder of vocational training. In the autumn of 1853, a new building was completed at the Oratory, which included some workshops built into it. The first two workshops were for shoemaking and tailoring. Don Bosco sat with the boys and showed them how to sole a shoe, and he himself then taught the boys how to cut fabric and sew just as he had learned back in Castelnuovo—even his mother became a master seamstress!

Around the beginning of 1854, he opened a bookbinding workshop. It was at the start of this year that Don Bosco told his four closest collaborators that they would be known as the ‘Salesians’: “The Virgin Mary wants us to start a society. I've decided we will be called ‘Salesians’ in honour of St Francis de Sales.”

The following year, Michael Rua knelt before a crucifix and made his Salesian vows in a simple ceremony in Don Bosco's room. A new religious congregation had been born. A year later, Don Bosco opened another workshop for carpentry, and in December 1861, another (and personal favourite of his) for printing. The last one, a metal workshop, was opened in 1862. The success of the workshops wasn't complete until he found his own following of Salesians who could be teach the apprentices.

The Oratory was a house of personal education, ensuring the young could learn how to talk to God, relate to others and learn a profession—essentially teaching them how to be good Christians in society.



Margaret Passes Away

In November 1856 Margaret fell ill with terrible pneumonia. She struggled to talk to her son and advise him, and even asked him to leave; she didn't want him to see her suffering as she knew how hard it was for him. "Pray for me," she told him.



At sunrise on the 25th of that month, she passed away.

The Salesian congregation no longer had the spiritual force and beauty of this woman who had sustained them every day with her hard work, love and common sense.

Oh, how Don Bosco cried as he realised that he and his boys were now without a mother and that only the Virgin Mary could take her place.

The Wonderful Garden

In 1864 Don Bosco told his first Salesians about a dream he had experienced many years before in 1847.

The Queen of Heaven appeared to him and showed him a wonderful garden. He saw a beautiful arch leading to a shelter of flowers. Roses covered the ground he walked on. The Virgin Mary said to him: "Take off your shoes and walk under the arch, it is the path you must take."

He did as he was told, happy that he didn't have to squash the roses with his shoes. But he soon realised that the roses had hidden thorns which were painful to walk on.

Don Bosco could no longer continue and so he stopped. "I need my shoes to walk here," he told his guide.

"You're right," she replied, "you need good shoes." Don Bosco put his shoes back on and carried on walking, along with some friends who had asked to come with him.

Everywhere he looked, there were roses covering the branches and the ground. They scratched his legs as he walked. When he moved branches to pass by, they scratched his arms and hands. All the roses were hiding their sharp thorns and they pierced him all over until he was bleeding.

Yet when others looked at him, they said: "Don Bosco is always walking on roses, everything is going great for him!"

They couldn't see the thorns nor the blood. Some of those who walked with him who did see his scratches said: "You tricked us!" They thought he had been walking on roses with no thorns. They left him and he was there alone.

"Must I walk this route all by myself?" he cried out.



But soon he saw many more priests, deacons and boys prepared to follow him. Leading the way, Don Bosco arrived at a beautiful garden. His followers were now pale and covered in blood. A slight breeze brushed by, replenishing them with fresh air. A stronger wind picked up and, as if by magic, he was suddenly surrounded by huge crowds of young boys and priests. They stood by his side, ready to teach and guide the young.

The Virgin Mary then said to him: “The road through roses and thorns that you have walked reflects the care you will need to look after the young. You will have to walk with penance and bear the thorns of many difficulties, disappointments and hardship. But do not give up. With charity, penance and patience you will overcome everything and you will reach the thornless roses.”

On the 1st March 1869, a decree from the Holy See officially accepted the Salesian Society. Pope Pius IX really appreciated Don Bosco, and thanks to him, in April 1847 the Commission of Cardinals also accepted the Salesians Constitutions which were being examined at the time.

Don Bosco's Dreams and Realities

In the dream about the strange flock, a shepherd had told Don Bosco to look to the south. In doing so, he had seen a field of corn, potatoes, cabbages, lettuces and other crops. He had then seen a magnificent church. Well, he would one day see that very same meadow right next to his Oratory. He would buy it himself and call it the 'field of dreams'. It is there that he would build the church he had seen and dedicate it to Mary Help of Christians. To start off with he had just forty cents, so he asked for donations from the rich, sent round collections and put on raffles—and he did indeed raise the money! The Sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians was consecrated on 9th June 1868.

Some years later, Don Bosco was dreaming of a savage and unknown land. It was difficult for him to find it, but he did. It was Patagonia, and it was there that he sent his first missionaries to the south of Argentina in 1875. Don Bosco went on to organise ten more expeditions to Patagonia.

The Salesian congregation reached America, where their evangelising work helped many thousands of young people.

Seeing as Don Bosco had both dreamt of, and succeeded in, building a church for the Virgin Mary, the new Pope, Leo XIII, asked him to build the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome. A request from the Pope himself was a direct order for Don Bosco, but he had no money. How was he supposed to raise one and a half million lire?

It was then, in 1883, that Don Bosco started 'The Way of the Cross of the Sacred Heart'. He began a long journey to France, stopping and asking for money in every city. His body was exhausted but his soul remained strong.

This poor rural priest was welcomed into the towns. In Avignon a crowd was waiting for him at the station; in Lyon all the churches were full; and with only five weeks left, in Paris he was always surrounded by followers. The newspapers were all talking about him and about the crowd of people following him.



He raised lots of money but he still needed a lot more to finish the church. In Marseille, a well-respected doctor visited him and said: “You’re past your prime. You’ve been working too hard, and the only way to keep going is to take a back seat: rest.”

This was the only medicine that Don Bosco was not prepared to take.

The following year, in 1886, Don Bosco went to Barcelona.

A Salesian community had started their work in Spain in 1881 in Utrera, Seville, and in Sarrià, a town on the outskirts of Barcelona, twenty orphans and poor boys had already been learning essential skills at Salesian workshops for over eighteen months. They were supported by Dorothy Chopitea, a rich and caring lady.

Everybody was excited about Don Bosco's visit. He was in the city from the 8th April until the 6th May 1886, and every day he was busy giving out medals and blessings, receiving visitors and having audiences with lots of important people. He had hardly any strength left, but he received so much love and sympathy that he gave all he could for those good people who loved him so. For this reason, they granted him some land on the mountain today known as Tibidabo for him to build a sanctuary dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said to his contributors, “you are instruments of Divine Providence. With your help, upon that mountain there will soon be a majestic sanctuary dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.”

And it was so.

He then continued his journey, but there was not much left of his path in this earthly life. On the 14th May 1887 he attended the blessing of the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome. The following day he wanted to celebrate Mass at the altar of Mary Help of Christians. In doing so he started crying. “I was thinking of my first dream when I was just nine years old. I saw my mother again and my brothers arguing over what my dream had meant. It all makes sense now!”

Just as the Virgin Mary had told him, all his sacrifices and so much work had been worth it, and all for his boys! He had saved so many souls!



“I'll Wait for You All in Paradise”

In September 1887, Don Bosco became very ill. He was in the mountains in Valsalice doing some spiritual exercises with the young. He was suffering from a fever and had terrible headaches; he knew that he had little time left.

On the 2nd October, Don Bosco returned home to Valdocco. Monsignor Cagliero returned from America to say goodbye to him; Father Michael Rua had sent a telegram informing him how seriously ill Don Bosco was.

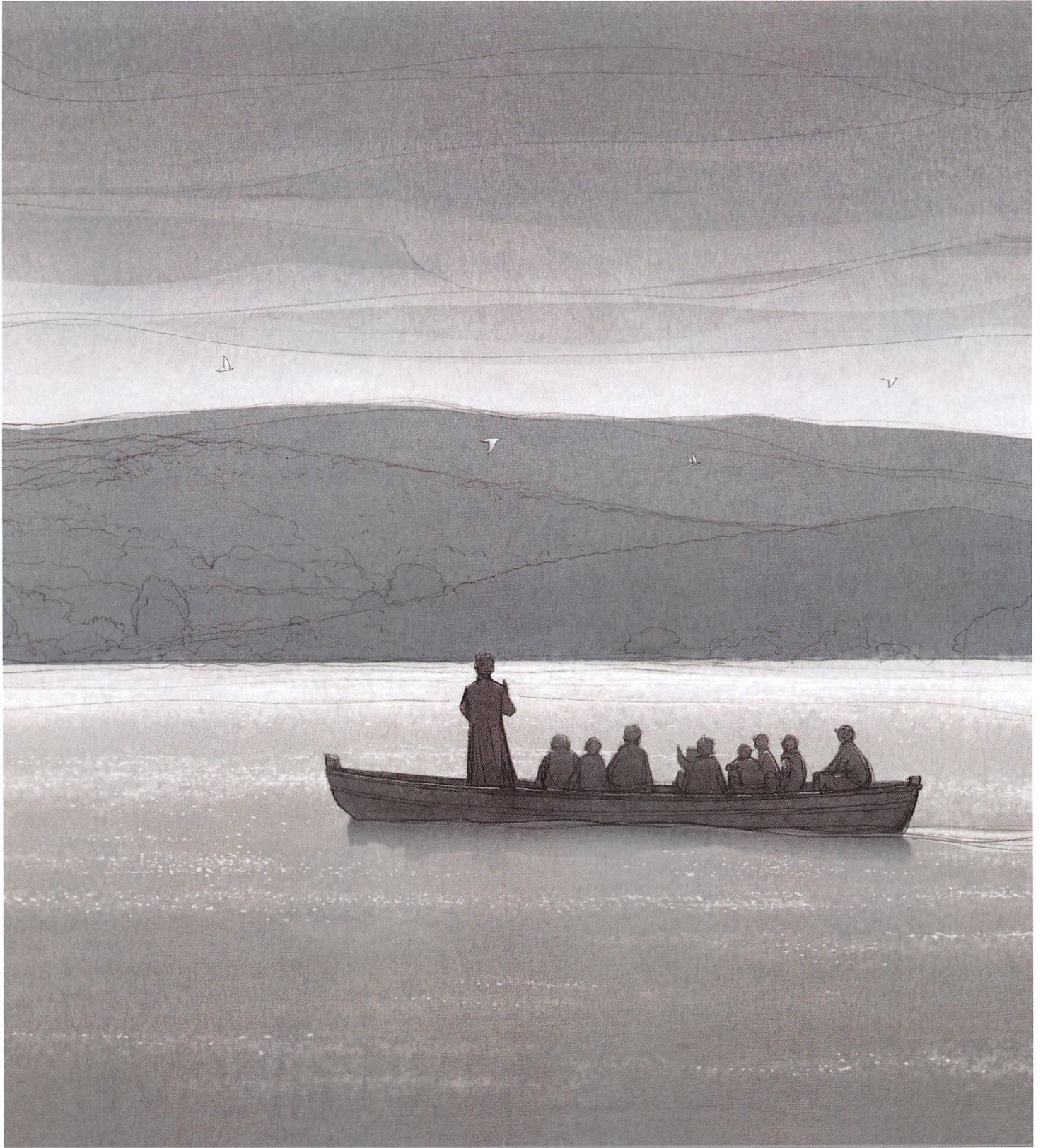
At the end of December, he said to them both: “I'm at the end of my life. It's your turn to work now; you have to save the young. You have to love them like brothers and support each of them unconditionally. The Lord and Mary Help of Christians will always be at your side.”

Almost a month later, on the 28th January he murmured to them: “Tell the boys I'm waiting for them all in paradise.”

At sunrise on the 31st of January, Don Bosco passed away. In his dreams, he was sailing with some boys in a boat through a world where water had flooded everything. He landed on a beautiful island of marvellous forests with a light that shone brightly with serenity and indescribable peace. The boat landed on the shore at the foot of a beautiful vineyard.

“Don Bosco, can we get down now?” the boys asked him.

“Come off the boat, it's time now. We are saved!”



Classroom Activities

1) Complete the book details

Title:

Author(s):

Publisher:

Place of publication:

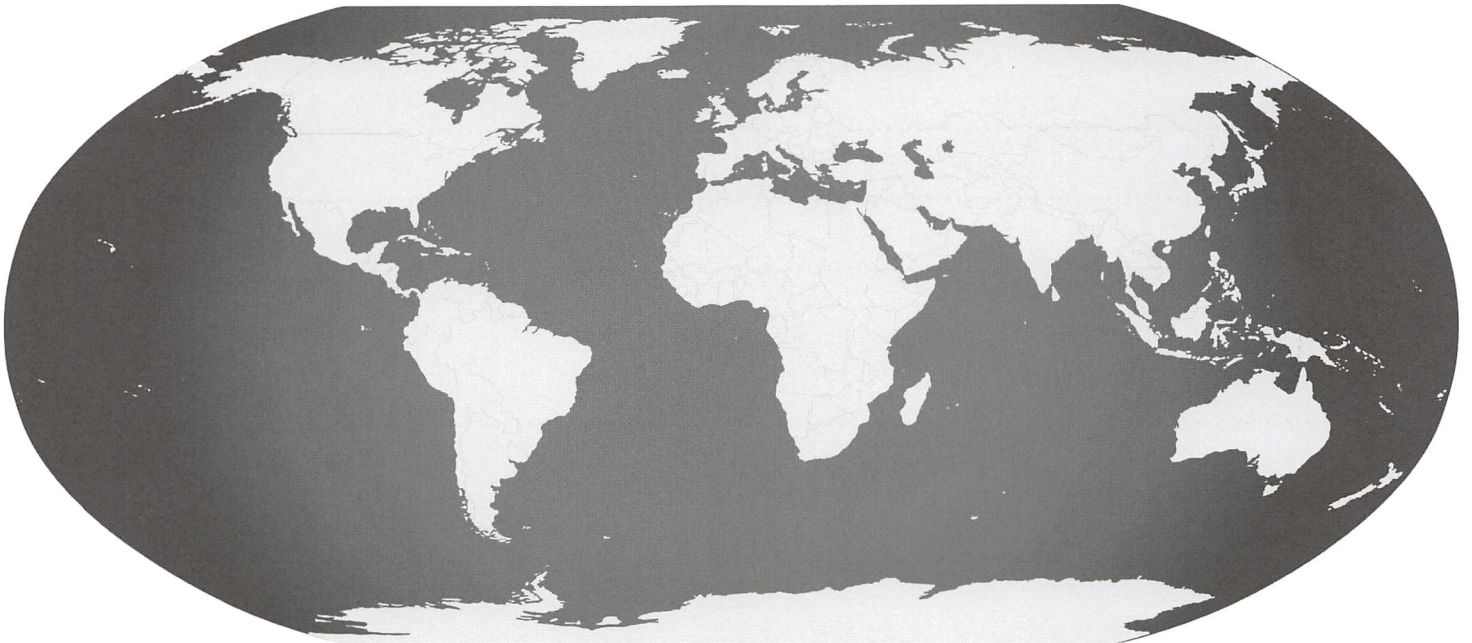
Year of publication:

ISBN:

Number of pages:

Just a Small Village

- 2) Show on the map below where Don Bosco was born. Write the name of the country and colour it. Then, show on map where you were born. Write the name of the country and colour it.



A Strong and Gentle Woman

3) John Bosco's mother was very important to him. Let's get to know her...

- a) What was her name?
- b) How many children did she have?
- c) What were their names?
- d) Write three adjectives that describe her.
 - i)
 - ii)
 - iii)
- e) What phrase did she always say to her children?

The Unforgettable Dream

4) In your own words, describe the dream that John Bosco had when he was nine years old.

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What do you think it means?

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The Poverty of the Bosco Family

- 5) Don Bosco spoke of the ‘politics of the Our Father’. What is this?
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.....
.....
- 6) John Bosco’s mother asked him to leave home because of the arguments he was having with his brother.
- a) What do you think about her decision?
.....
- b) Why do you think his mother asked him to leave?
.....
- c) How do you think he felt at the time?
.....
- d) How would you feel if something like this happened to you?
.....

The Journey Begins

- 7) Use a dictionary to find the meaning of the following words that appear in the book:
- a) Sermon:
- b) Missionary:
- c) Priest:
- d) Deacon:

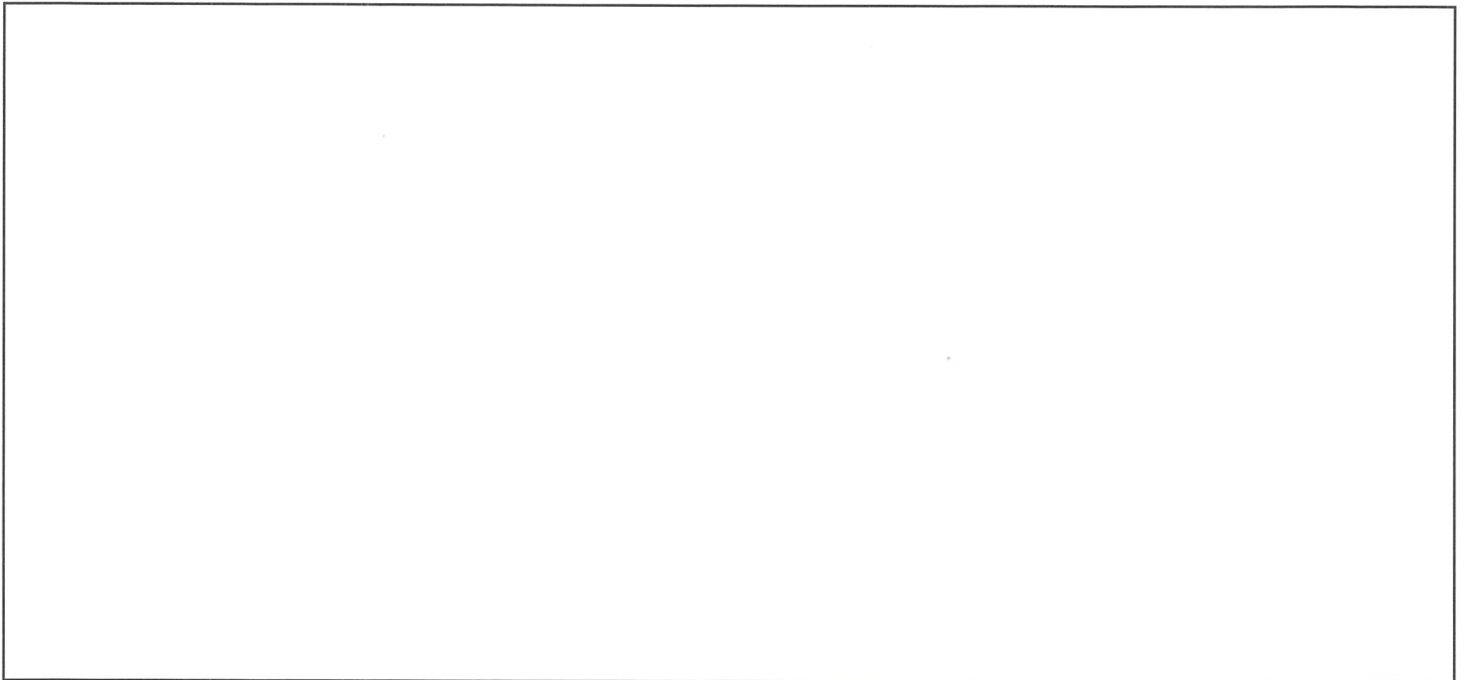
Don Bosco Decides to Become a Priest

8) State whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F).

- ☐ John was 20 years old
- ☐ The first years were very easy for John Bosco
- ☐ He wore the cassock for the first time in the church of Castelnuovo
- ☐ As a child, he told the stories so well that everyone listened to him
- ☐ His sermons were long and with complicated vocabulary

Don Bosco's Oratory

9) What do you think Don Bosco's first Oratory looked like? Draw a picture below with your ideas.

A large empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a drawing or illustration.

- 10) In the wordsearch below, find the names of five important people in the life of Don Bosco.

G	E	T	M	F	A	R	D	G	G	N	H	I	Y	F
B	P	X	J	A	G	C	A	J	K	Z	C	M	K	T
U	G	J	D	U	R	D	C	A	F	A	S	S	O	E
C	N	Y	Y	T	C	G	M	O	M	B	E	G	X	U
P	V	D	B	J	X	X	A	T	T	C	O	H	J	L
A	D	E	N	U	A	Y	C	R	Y	K	N	Z	N	U
B	A	R	T	H	O	L	O	M	E	W	Y	Y	Y	F
M	Z	F	K	G	B	L	G	G	I	T	T	W	J	M
T	B	O	C	A	L	O	S	S	O	I	W	Q	M	W
V	N	W	S	O	J	M	I	C	H	A	E	L	J	C

Bartholomew Cafasso Calosso Margaret Michael

Write the name of a person who is very important to you and explain why, what they have done for you and what relationship they are to you.

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Don Bosco's Dreams and Realities

- 11) In the dream of the strange flock, a shepherdess told Don Bosco to look south. There he plans to build the church he had seen in his dreams and dedicate it to Mary Help of Christians. Find information on the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians and complete the following:

Location

Year of construction

When the feast is celebrated

Who is buried there?

.....

What's in the crypt?

Name of the chapel within the crypt dedicated to Don Bosco' dream

- 12) Below are some of Don Bosco's phrases. Complete the missing words using the code. Each number corresponds to one letter.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
P	A	Y	D	T	H	S	B	R	E	K	N	C	I	M	U

11 10 10 1 **yourself** 8 16 7 3

.....

5 6 10 **Lord and** 15 2 9 3 **Help of Christians will always** 8 10 **at**
your 7 14 4 10

.....

The 13 6 2 9 14 5 3, **gentleness and** 1 2 5 14 10 12 13 10 **of Saint**
Francis de Sales will be 15 3 **guide**

.....

Tell 15 3 **boys that I wait for** 5 6 10 15 **in** 1 2 9 2 4 14 7 10

.....

The Apprentices' Workshops

13) Look at the image below and write a description of which point in Don Bosco's life this is taken from.



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14) Don Bosco also worked in Spain. In 1886, he travelled to Barcelona.

Where was the first Salesian community in Spain? In what year

.....

What was there on the outskirts of Barcelona in the town of Sarrià

.....

Where were they given some land?

.....

What did he build there?

.....

- 15) Match the year with the corresponding event in the life of Don Bosco in the following table:

Year	Event
1815	
1824	
1835	
1841	
1846	
1854	
1856	
1869	
1888	

- The Salesian Society is approved
- Don Bosco dies
- John starts school
- John wears the cassock for the first time
- John Bosco is born
- John says his first Mass
- Bookbinding workshop opens
- John becomes unwell
- John's mother, Margaret, dies

16) Identify the themes that you believe are dealt with in this book and provide some examples.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Respect for others | ☐ Personal development |
| ☐ Family relations | ☐ Fear |
| ☐ Helping others | ☐ Love of God |
| ☐ Friendship | ☐ Trust |

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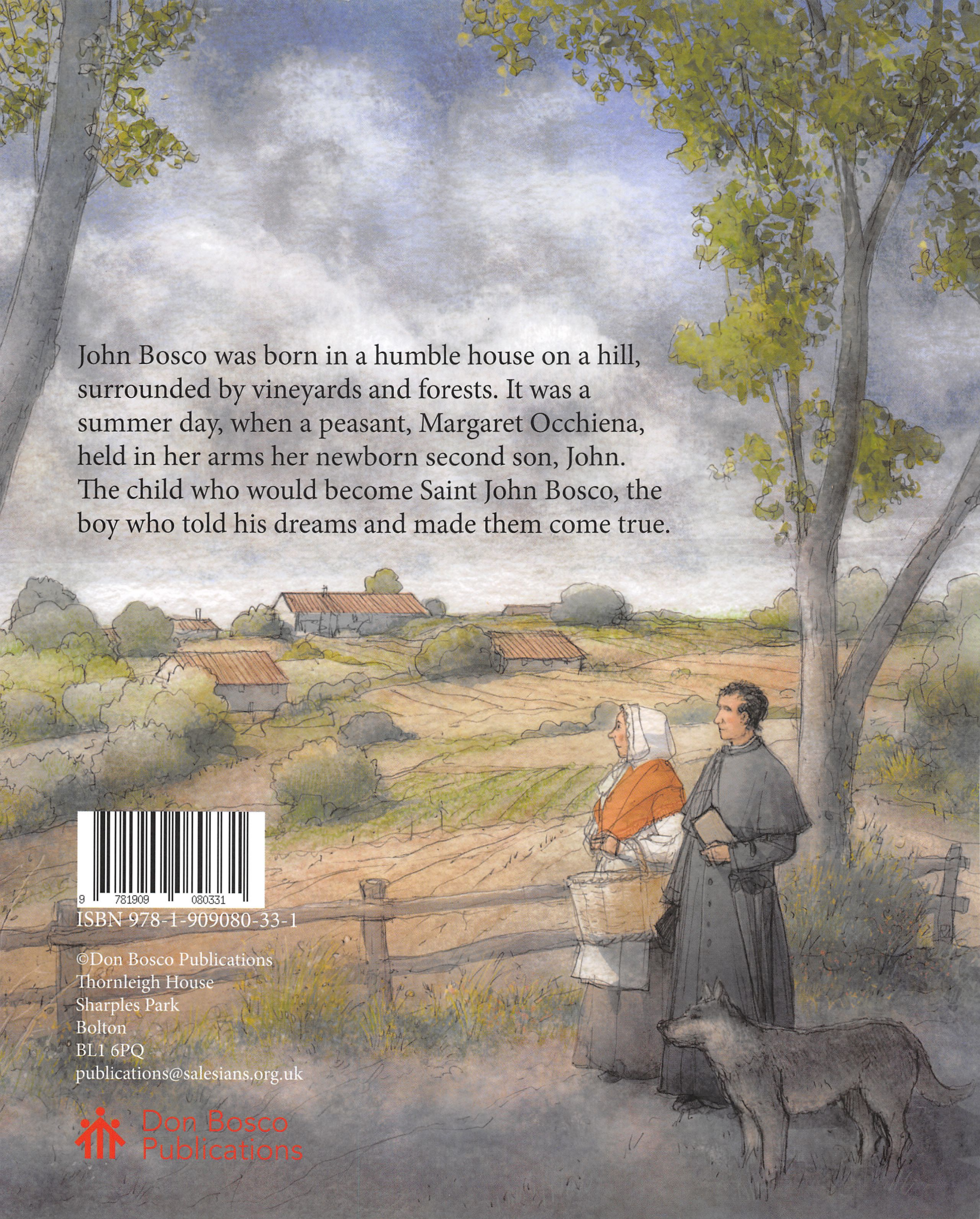
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John Bosco was born in a humble house on a hill, surrounded by vineyards and forests. It was a summer day, when a peasant, Margaret Occhiena, held in her arms her newborn second son, John. The child who would become Saint John Bosco, the boy who told his dreams and made them come true.



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