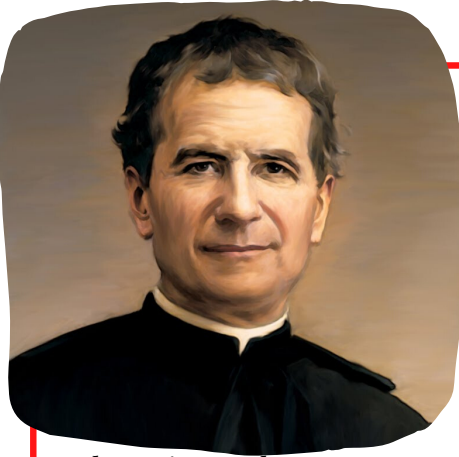


St. John Bosco



Early on a December day in 1841, a young priest was about to start a service in a church in the Italian city of Turin. From the back of the church, he heard the rough voice of the church's caretaker.

"What are you doing here if you don't want to come to Mass?"

The priest heard a timid boy's voice reply, "It's cold outside."

The priest, whose name was John Bosco, called to the caretaker, "Joseph, what are you doing? Call him back."

With a few bad-tempered mutterings, Joseph went outside and eventually persuaded the nervous boy to come back. Shivering the boy stood in front of John Bosco. "Stay for Mass," the priest said gently, "and we can talk later."

The youth's name was Bartollomea Garelli. He was sixteen, an orphan, and he was helping a bricklayer in return for a few coins a day.

"Where do you live, Bartollomea?"

"In an attic."

"Alone?"

"With some other guys."

Can you read and write?"

The boy shook his head. "I don't know anything," he said.

He had been a farm boy and had never been to school. His parents had both died, and he'd come to the city looking for work. John Bosco knew there were thousand of boys like this in Turin. The lucky ones (like Barlollemea) had somewhere to sleep. The others slept in doorways.

"Bart, would you like to learn to read if I were to teach you?"

"I suppose so."

"When you come, bring your friends."

This had been John Bosco's dream for a long time. He wanted to help, feed, and teach the street boys of Turin. By February, twenty boys were coming to his classes. By March, thirty. Two years later, there would be four hundred. Meanwhile, it was hard to find suitable meeting places.

They tried meeting in a public park where they could play and talk and then go to a service in a nearby church. Local people complained about the noise and called the police, saying that John Bosco was creating a disturbance. Then people started saying, "Don Bosco must be mad." ("Don" was a title often given to priests.)

"Why don't you cut down the number of boys?" asked another priest named Don Borel. "Limit yourself to twenty or so of the best behaved ones."

"Don Borel, you speak of twenty boys when I see thousands. I dream of a huge school with beautiful buildings, large courtyards, a magnificent church. I picture classrooms;

training shops where the boys can learn a trade. I even see some of them becoming priests themselves."

Word then spread that Don Bosco was indeed going mad. He would be taken away for a few weeks' rest in a mental asylum. Two priests went in their horse-drawn carriage to his house.

"Join us for a ride, Don Bosco," one of them said.

"Willingly," Don Bosco replied. "But first," he went on, "I have a plan I should like to discuss with you." And he began to tell them his dream of starting an order "a bit like the orders" in which monks lived) for the boys.

"Let's talk about this while we're riding around the city," said one of the priests craftily.

"Of course," Don Bosco replied.

"Get into the carriage then," they said.

"You first, please. You're more important than I am," he replied. No sooner were they seated in the coach than he slammed the door shut and called to the driver. "To the asylum, at once! These two gentlemen are expected there!"

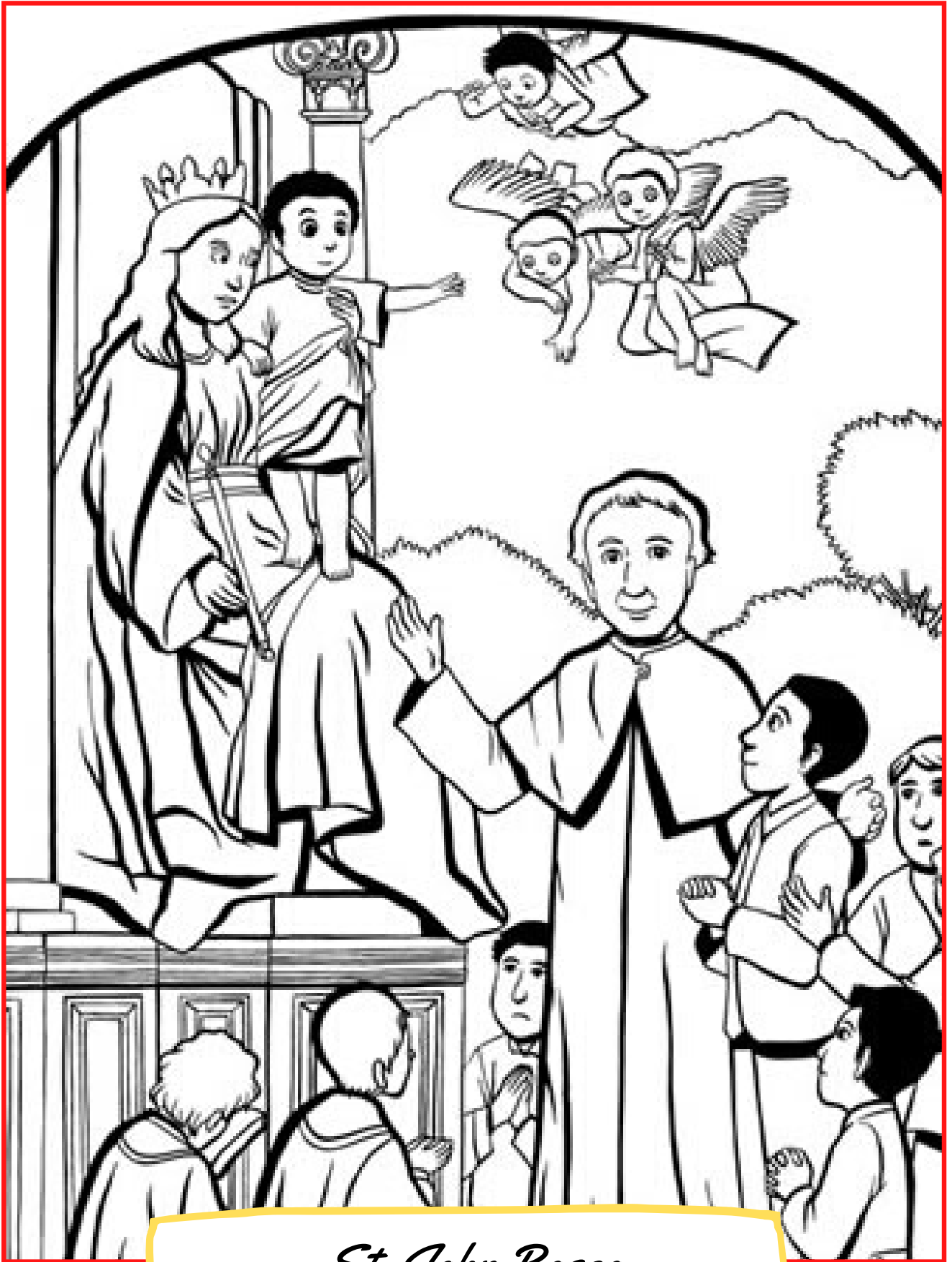
Later, John Bosco's mother came to Turin to help him run a boarding house to shelter some of the boys. Gradually, dormitories were found where the rest could live safely. The city authorities recognized the good work John Bosco was doing and helped him to continue his work.

Think about it...

Catholic Social Teaching states that work is important in God's plan for adults and their families, so jobs and pay should be fair. Young boys like Bart in the story have the right to work and be fairly paid. However, many of them did not have the skills or education needed to work or be treated fairly. John Bosco saw this problem and wanted to help.

To help them, he educated the young, teaching the many boys living on the streets and giving them the skills to work and create a good life for themselves and their families.

St. John Bosco, pray for us!



St. John Bosco