



**Bi-Centenary of the birth of Saint John Bosco
August 16, 2015
Homily**

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In 1824, a young boy of nine woke up after a very puzzling and disturbing dream. In sharing the dream with his family over the breakfast table the next morning, he explained that he found himself in an open field, with a large group of boys, who were all fighting, yelling and swearing. In order to try and stop them, he threw himself into the midst of the group and lashed out with his own fists in a vain attempt to calm them down. Suddenly, without any warning, a man appeared in the dream who told him it was not with his fists, but with gentleness and kindness, that he could help these boys change their ways. The little dreamer was confused, so the man in the dream promised that he would give the boy a helper. Then a woman appeared, who told him to make himself humble and strong. As the little boy watched, the group of fighting boys turned into a pack of wild animals and then, in the strange way of dreams, the wild animals turned into gentle lambs. The little boy was confused and afraid and started crying. And then the woman, who of course was Mary, said to him "Don't worry. Eventually you will understand everything". Then the little boy woke up. His name was John Bosco and today, throughout the world, people are celebrating the two-hundredth anniversary of his birth on August 16, 1815.

Little John Bosco was to grow up, become a priest, and in his home in the northern Italian city of Turin, was to begin a movement dedicated to the care of young people, which today is known as the Salesian family. With around thirty thousand priests, brothers and sisters, and countless thousands of other people who follow his spirit, this Salesian family of John Bosco is one of the largest movements in the Church today.

As many of you know, I am one of those people. I joined the Salesians of Don Bosco in 1977, and became a Salesian priest in 1986. In the strange ways of God I now find myself here in Perth as the Archbishop and of course I bring with me the gift of the Salesian spirit, which I hope helps me to serve the people of the Archdiocese as well as I can. Today, I invite you to celebrate with me, during this Mass, the special gift of Saint John Bosco, or Don Bosco as he is usually known, to the whole Church.

Don Bosco was a dreamer, but not in the sense that he had his head in the clouds and didn't know how to live in the real world. On the contrary he was one of the most practical and down to earth saints the Church has ever known. Towards the end of his life, after a lifetime caring for the young, and especially those who were poor, abandoned or



neglected, he had another dream. He was in Rome attending to some business for the Pope, and during the dream two men who used to be boarders in his school in Turin came to him and asked him if he would like to see how things were going in Turin during his absence. Together the three of them walked through the playground and while everything seemed to be going well, Don Bosco noticed that everyone was a little more subdued than usual. There wasn't the same sense of fun, light-heartedness and friendliness between the boys and the Salesians. When Don Bosco asked his two guides why this was so, they replied that the Salesians didn't love the boys as much as they used to and for this reason the school wasn't the happy place it used to be. When Don Bosco protested and pointed out that the Salesians, mostly young men themselves, had given up everything in order to care for the boys, the two guides said something to Don Bosco which I think contains his secret and sums up the gift which God has given to the Church through him. "It is not enough to love the boys," the two guides said. "The boys have to know that they are loved."

The Salesians have always understood that these words are not just the product of a fertile imagination but are, instead, a precious gift from God. I think the Salesians are right. But these words are not just a gift to the Salesians or to those who wish to work with and for young people. They are a gift to everyone who wants to be a good wife or husband, a good mother or father, a good sister or brother, a good friend. We have to keep trying to love, and show our love, to those who matter to us, in ways that will make sense to them rather than simply in ways that will make us feel good. We have to love in ways that will say clearly to them that they are indeed loved, accepted, and cherished and at the same time in ways that uphold their dignity and really contribute to their flourishing.

What Don Bosco really offers us is precious insight into Jesus' own way of loving. Jesus' love wasn't empty words, or based on some kind of predetermined formula. It was based on the personal situation and deep needs of each person he encountered. He showed his love to Simon Peter in one way, to the woman who washed his feet with her tears in another, to the paralysed man in another, and to the woman caught in adultery in yet another.

And in the end, as today's gospel reminds us, his love was based on his absolute determination to put his own needs last and the needs of others first. The Eucharist we celebrate today, and the Lord's gift of himself we receive in Holy Communion, are the great confirmation of this. "God loved the world so much", St John's gospel tells us, "that he gave his only Son so that the world might be saved". God's gift of his Son becomes Jesus' gift of himself, on the cross and in the Eucharist, out of love for us. We are not only loved by the Lord. We know we are loved because of what he has done for us.

As we remember the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of St John Bosco this morning, my prayer is that we will all allow ourselves to be reminded by him of the



extraordinary nature of the love of Jesus for us, and inspired to bring that kind of generous, practical, faithful and selfless love into the heart of all our own relationships. May we, as Jesus has asked us to do, love one another as he has loved us.