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Getting To Know
Don Bosco Series
His Spirituality

Preface

For every member of the Salesian Family, and every person who resonates with the spirit of Don Bosco, August 16th 2015 is a highly meaningful day to look forward to, as we will celebrate the bicentennial of Don Bosco's birth. As a way to get all of us ready for this great day, a three-year preparation period has been set, through which we can enrich our knowledge of Don Bosco as a founder, father and educator for the youth. Starting from 2012, we have placed our focus on different major areas in the personality and charism of Don Bosco, namely "His History", "His Pedagogy" and "His Spirituality", so that we can come to know and imitate him better.

In this book, we have brought together a series of monthly articles written for the Salesian Family by Fr Pascual Chávez, Rector Major of the Salesians of Don Bosco, under the theme of "His Spirituality" in his Strenna 2014. These enlightening articles will guide you through the journey of exploring the secrets of the spirituality of Don Bosco, how he, very early in his life, lived in constant union with God his loving Father; how God chose to make John Bosco experience His loving care through the maternal intervention of Jesus' own Mother, Mary; how Don Bosco, throughout his life, single-mindedly strove, in small things as in great things, to conform his will to God's will. In these articles, Fr Chávez, very creatively, uses a special form of expression. Throughout, he has Don Bosco speak in the first person. The reader will certainly appreciate this as an encouragement to grow in intimate friendship with Don Bosco himself.

It is our hope that after reading this book, you will be

inspired to try to live out Don Bosco's spiritual experience. Animated by this experience, you will also be willing to continue his work of serving the underprivileged youth in this ever-changing world.

In an Appendix to this book, we have included a commentary of Fr Chávez on his Strenna for 2014. It asserts pastoral charity, the love of Jesus the Good Shepherd, as the core of Don Bosco's spirituality, and explains how this spirituality can be lived by both young people and lay members of the Salesian Family. In addition, a brief biography of Don Bosco, presented in point form, is also provided for the readers' easy reference.

As the last volume in the 3-volume "Getting to Know Don Bosco Series" sees the light, I would like to thank from the heart our beloved Rector Major Emeritus Fr Pascual Chávez Villanueva, the author of all the contents in the Series. In particular, we are grateful to him for having written specifically for this publication of ours the last six chapters in this third volume. Thank you, dear Fr Pascual!

At the same time, we would like also to thank the English translator(s) of the Italian originals of these three volumes. The English text presented here is, in the main, the fruit of their painstaking and hidden labours. Thank you!

Fr Lanfranco M Fedrigotti
May 24th 2015
Solemnity of Mary Help of Christians

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God Has Always Been a Good Father to Me

An Essential Introduction

My entire life came into being, grew and developed in intimate contact with the supernatural. If the world has been my testing ground, faith has been my response as a believer. I have been accustomed to saying: *“Amidst life's toughest challenges it takes great faith in God to go through”*.

I have always told others this, and myself in the first

instance. After all, at home I had learned from my mother to interpret the signs of God's loving and provident presence in the events and vicissitudes of life.

Certainties Which Have Always Sustained Me

One certainty has always guided me: I have always felt a guarantee from on high in everything. Though being aware of my own limitations, I have always felt the zeal of the biblical servant burning within me, the call of the prophet who knows he cannot back away from the divine will. Even if, when I spoke of my "dreams", I never used the biblical term "proclaim", I always maintained they were authentic reminders from on high to be treated with prudent humility and trusting acknowledgement. In the years after I had grown up, when I took another look at my apostolic experience, I almost felt giddy, and evangelical wonder made me exclaim: *"I was a poor priest, alone, abandoned by everyone, and worse than just being alone, because I was despised and persecuted; I had a vague idea about doing good... Back then the thoughts of a poor priest just seemed a dream, but God made them come true, fulfilled the wishes of that poor priest. I would hardly be able to describe how it all happened. I couldn't give an answer to that. **But this I do know, that God wanted it**".*

I felt like the *useless* servant the Gospel speaks about. Just like Our Lady, I blessed the Lord because in my nothingness He, the Almighty, had done *great things*.

And I encouraged my early Salesians, whom I had accompanied in their growth since they were boys: *"The Lord is expecting great things from you: I can see them clearly... God began and will continue his work, and you will play a part*

in it... it was the Lord who began these things. It was He who set them in motion and gave them increase. And as the years continue He will sustain them. He will bring them to completion. God is ready to do these great things... He just asks one thing of us: that we do not make ourselves unworthy of such goodness and mercy”.

I allowed myself to be guided by a phrase I had so often heard from my mother's lips: *“We are in the Lord's hands, and he is the best of fathers who constantly watches over us for our good and knows what is and what is not best for us”.*

A good dose of faith was needed, of courage and abandonment to the Lord's Providence; I was not lacking this, although towards the end of my life I would have to humbly admit: *“If I had had a hundredfold more faith, I would have done a hundredfold more than I have done”.*

I tackled life with all the challenges it offered, with calm and filial trust in the Lord. In 1847 I was already writing for my boys in a book of prayer and Christian formation entitled *The Companion of Youth*. It became a genuine *best-seller* with a felicitous style and content: *“You are not in the world just to enjoy yourself, get rich, eat, drink and sleep like the animals do, but your purpose is to love your God”.* I described the Christian as *“someone journeying towards heaven”.* For me the Lord and heaven were substantially the same. In fact I wanted my boys to be *“happy now and in eternity”.* When I spoke of God as a *“merciful and provident Father”* my prayer would change in tone: in general, my prayer was simple and warm, without too much inflection of the voice, but when I said the words *Our Father* I said it in a tone – and those present would very simply make reference to it – which betrayed an unusually heartfelt enthusiasm. I wept

at the death of my father, Francis, with the innocent and heart-rending sorrow that only a child barely two years old is capable of. That death introduced me to the mystery of a God who never abandons his children. From the earliest days of my life I related to Him as a good and merciful Father. I always suggested: *“Let's put our trust in God and push ahead”*. My trust let me say: *“To gain a good result when you have nothing, you need to set to work with complete trust in the Lord”*.

An Endless Task

I would like to reveal something of my inmost world to you. Perhaps it is one of those rare flashes of light in which I have revealed myself. Let me do it in the words I wrote in 1854. *“When I began to devote myself to this particular aspect of the sacred ministry I set out to consecrate my efforts to the greater glory of God and the benefit of souls, and to work to make good citizens on this earth so that one day they would then be worthy inhabitants of heaven. May God help me to continue until my last breath. Amen”*. As you can see, more than being a promise it was a prayer, a consecration of life and thinking on behalf of the young. That *“Amen”* at the end sealed my offering forever.

Looking back now over many years, these demanding words demonstrate the definitive program of my entire life, and it never waned. So much so that in presenting *The Companion of Youth*, I was able to say something very courageous, but very true: *“My dear friends, I love you with all my heart, and it is enough that you are young for me to love you very much. I can assure you that you will find useful books by people far more virtuous and gifted than I am, but only with*

great difficulty will you find someone who loves you more than I do in Jesus Christ and who desires your true happiness”.

I was always committed to young people, even if I went through a period of great uncertainty. A little earlier (it was July 1846) I suffered a physical collapse that brought me to the brink of the grave; then, after a brief period of convalescence spent at the Becchi, I returned to Turin. And there I had a rather tense and difficult discussion with the good Marchioness Barolo. So I'm happy to repeat once more the clear stance I then took with my generous benefactor (who loved me like the son she had never had), my official and definite "yes", my "credo" on behalf of the young. And so it is today, too, when I see the Congregation spread across 132 countries: *“My life is consecrated to the good of the young. I thank you for what you have done for me, but I cannot diverge from the path that Divine Providence has traced out for me”.* And without any human support I abandoned myself *“to what God had laid out for me”.*

I trusted in God, He who had always been a good "dad" to me.