



SEPTEMBER 29, 2024

2. IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF DON BOSCO

2.3 The years of adolescence and youth - Chieri

"Jesus was also invited to the wedding with his disciples." Gn 2, 2

TOTAL SURRENDER OF JOHN BOSCO - SEMINARY

(moment of silent reflection in the courtyard of the Seminary at the end of the visit)



Oh how much old stuff there is to remove!

My God, destroy in me all my bad habits.

Yes, O my God, let me at this moment be clothed anew, that is, let me from this moment begin a new life, all according to the divine will, and let justice and holiness be the constant object of my thoughts, words and deeds. So be it.

O Mary, be you my salvation.

WISE DISCERNMENT - CAFFÈ PIANTA

Guide: One of the priority choices of GC XXIV calls us to renew ourselves daily by the power of the Holy Spirit, to live *docibilitas* as an openness to let ourselves be formed and transformed by life, by encounters, by every existential situation. The Chapter states, "This dynamism sets the person free to learn [...] from life and throughout life, fostering a fruitful, convincing, contagious, happy vocational animation."



John Bosco's life and attitude in Chieri was a moment of openness to the Holy Spirit who helped him learn from his life and situations not to complain but accept everything with faith and love, focusing his gaze only on his goal. One of the episodes that we can focus on is the time he spent at the Café Pianta (3 Palace Street, Chieri) from 1833-34. Being present in the same place (Café Pianta), we reflect on the experience of John Bosco staying here.

(Each one personally reads the following passage and reflect)

John Pianta, brother of Lucia widow Matta, a native of Morialdo and friend of Mamma Margherita, came to Chieri in the fall of 1833 and opened a café with a billiard room attached. Since he was just starting out, he insisted to Mamma Margherita that John stay with him and help him with the many things that were necessary to run a public café.

The café opened shortly after the school year began. John meanwhile had left the Marchisio house and stayed briefly with the baker, Michele Cavallo, at the Ricci house next to the Cumino tailor shop.

The Pianta café had two rooms, one open to the public and the other used for billiards and a piano set toward the inner courtyard. There was a long passage between them (3.50 meters), from under the staircase where there was also a small brick stove for making cakes and coffee. There was a small area under the stairs where John could stay. In his free moments during the school year he helped Mr. Pianta with his work and learned how to make coffee, cakes and liquor. He also waited tables in the billiard room and this helped to raise the standard of the language spoken thanks to John's interventions!

It was here that John Bosco developed his friendship with Jonah, the Jewish boy, whom he had already met from Elijah's bookstore. The two often sang, played the piano and chatted. Here began the young Jewish boy's journey of faith.

John received no salary at the Café Pianta but only a place to stay, a plate of soup and some time to study. His mother, as was the custom at the time, gave him

bread and something else to eat, but her finances did not allow her to give him money. For clothing and whatever else he needed, even to supplement his diet, John earned what he could from tutoring. In his humanities year (1833-1834) things were very hard.

The Blanchard family lived in the same house on the second floor. Their room overlooked the inner courtyard, and the wooden balcony can still be seen today. Joseph, one of their sons and a friend of John (13 years old), often brought him fruit to appease his hunger, at his mother's insistence. Don Bosco will never forget this act of charity and friendship (cf. MB 1, 298-300).

To the economic limitations we must add that this was the year when his vocational choice was at its most crucial and difficult stage. In March Johny decided to join the Franciscans and was admitted, but then put it on hold to discern things better.

Despite all this his life was serene, active and of service, as Giuseppe Blanchard and Clotilde Vergnano tell us. Clotilde was the daughter of the owner of the house. Besides studying and working at the café, his generosity made him ready to make himself useful to anyone. Every day he brought water from the well (now walled up but still visible under the corridor leading into the courtyard). He brought water to the elderly Fr. Charles Arnaud who lived upstairs; he also mingled with a group of six or seven boys with whom he spent time or helped with homework. They were boarders in a nearby house owned by Veteran Torta (cf MB 1, 291-292).

The café, however, was not the best place to benefit from his studies. Domenico Pogliano, cathedral bell ringer, who admired John for his devotion and apostolate among his peers, invited him to stay with him so that he could study more. But he saw the need for different arrangements for the following year (cf. MB 1:293).

(After reading the passage, let us go to contemplate the place where John Bosco stayed and spent his nights. Let us make our own personal prayer and reflection and note it down after returning to our place.)

VOCATIONAL PRAYER BEFORE OUR LADY OF GRACE - CATHEDRAL

A heart open to listening and discernment



Guide: In a continuous attitude of *docibilitas*, we set ourselves to listen to the breath of the Holy Spirit and open our hearts to welcome the inner motions of God's grace, in this significant place for us and for the whole Salesian family. We place ourselves where Don Bosco used to come daily to pray at the altar of Our Lady of Grace, where he, with Luigi Comollo, used to come, to pray for light on his vocation and where he would help the sacristan prepare for his rhetoric exams. He came as a cleric every Sunday to sing solemn Mass. It is also the place

where, at the altar of Our Lady of Grace, he celebrated his fourth Mass of thanksgiving.

L 1: Don Bosco even as a young man learned to accept Our Lady as his Teacher and Mother. By entrusting his life to her, he discovered God's will in the folds of his personal history.

L 2: The Lord invites us today to join John Bosco and, with Mary, to walk in a continuous attitude of listening: listening to God in the Scriptures, listening to God in history and in daily life; a listening that educates us in discernment.

Song: Hail Mary Gentle Woman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-ZZzHRxc4s&t=195s>

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.
Blessed are you among women
and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now,
and at the hour of death. Amen.

Gentle woman, quiet light, morning star, so strong and bright.
Gentle mother, peaceful dove, teach us wisdom, teach us love.

You were chosen, by the Father, you were chosen for the son.
You were chosen, from all women, and for woman, shining one.
Gentle woman, quiet light, morning star, so strong and bright.
Gentle mother, peaceful dove, teach us wisdom, teach us love.
Blessed are you among women. Blest in turn, all women too.
Blessed they with peaceful spirits. Blessed they with gentle hearts.

Gentle woman, quiet light, morning star, so strong and bright.
Gentle mother, peaceful dove, teach us wisdom, teach us love.
Teach us wisdom, teach us love.

Jn 2:1-2

At that time, there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee and Jesus' mother was there.
Jesus with his disciples was also invited to the wedding.

(pause)

L 1: In the adolescent and youthful period of John Bosco's life we recognize a path of attentive, humble and obedient listening, a listening that enabled him to reread his daily experiences, labours, poverty, events, encounters, and significant persons with new eyes, a listening that widened his gaze to recognise in his personal story the hand of God.

L 2: John Bosco, as a public school student, came every day, morning and evening, to pray in front of this statue, mindful of his mother's recommendation, "Be devoted to Our Lady! (MB 1, 268). By praying in this chapel, together with his friend Luigi Comollo, he obtained light to discern his own vocation. Indeed, the saint tells us:

L 3: "Since the obstacles were many and enduring, so I resolved to share everything to my friend Comollo. He gave me the advice to make a novena during which he would write to his uncle provost. On the last day of the novena, in the company of the incomparable friend, I made my confession and communion, then I participated in the Mass and served another in the cathedral at the altar of Our Lady of Grace. We then went home and found in fact a letter from Fr. Comollo

conceived in these terms: having carefully considered the things set forth, I would advise your companion to postpone entering a convent. Let him wear the clerical habit, and while he is doing his studies he will know better what God wants of him. Let him have no fear of losing his vocation, so that with recollection and the practices of piety he will overcome all obstacles." (MO 85).

Guide: At the feet of Our Lady of Grace, with the same faith as John Bosco, let us entrust to Mary our vocation and that of our young people. Let us pray together:

Prayer: Our Lady of Graces, Holy Virgin, you helped John Bosco to listen to the voice of God. Help all young people to find the plan of love God has for their lives. Generate in them the same courage you had to respond with freedom and a generous heart. Under your gaze as Mother we entrust the young women in vocational discernment, the aspirants, postulants and novices of our provinces. To you who were the guide and inspirer of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello help us to revive the beauty of our Salesian vocation. Amen

CLOSING PRAYER FOR THE DAY

(prayer in pullman)

Guide: Let us silently remember the experience we lived today. What do John Bosco's childhood and adolescence say to our hearts? Let us thank God with Our Lady's words and a heart full of joy for the wonders He does in those who are unassuming and humble.

Magnificat: My Soul Proclaims

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MecuQzjyoQU>

My soul proclaims the Lord my God,
My Spirit sings His praise!
He looks on me, He lifts me up
And gladness fills my days.

All nations now will share my joy
His gifts He has outpoured;
His little one He has made great;
I magnify the Lord.

His mercy is forever more
His name I praise again.
His strong right arm puts down the proud
And lifts the lowly high.

He fills the hungry with good things
The rich He sends away;
The promise made to Abraham
Is filled by him each day.

Magnificat, Magnificat,
Magnificat, praise God!
Praise God, praise God, praise God, Praise God,
Magnificat, praise God.

(RESOURCES: The Ten Years of Chieri in the Life of Don Bosco)



ADDITIONAL READING

The years of adolescence and youth – Chieri (1831 – 1841)

The ten years at Chieri in Don Bosco's life

John Bosco lived in Chieri from Nov.1831 to May 1841. They were the decisive years as a teenager and young adult for his personality. He had turned 16, was a country lad full of good will when he arrived there. He left there as a twenty-six-year-old priest, on a firm spiritual footing, culturally prepared and ready to plunge into pastoral ministry, especially for youth. A tour in two stages: the public schools (1831–1835) and the seminary (1835–1841). His years at the public schools were difficult but lively ones. Difficult because he had little money, plenty of work and sacrifice, long nights studying and reading, but there was also the spiritual tension of finding out what his true vocation was. But they were also lively years filled with interests, an explosion of human and spiritual gifts, exuberance, warmth and happy times. Students were followed up throughout the day in a fairly demanding but also human and friendly way by their teachers, the Prefect of Studies and the Spiritual Director. During his seminary days, gradually leaving behind the lively and happy rhythm of the earlier years, the cleric Bosco focused on cultural improvement and his spiritual duties so he could be a priest according to the model that was offered him there, but without losing any of his human warmth. His starting point was to be faithful to his daily duties as laid down by the strict seminary regime. To the scholastic tasks implied by the courses he was taking, he added his voracious reading of all kinds: historical, biblical, theological, ascetic, using up every spare moment of time. At the same time, he was becoming more refined in human and spiritual terms. He was obedient and fond of his superiors, was available for all the demands of community life and struck up deep friendships with the very best of his fellow seminarians. He shared recreation, study, prayer and ascetic ideals with them. As the years passed, his spiritual energy increased and he broadened his cultural interests. He immersed himself in increasingly more demanding reading, even using the Autumn break for this.



His efforts, intense work, the ascetic tenor of his life weakened his health and more than once he was at the point of falling seriously ill; but John's robust mettle did not give in. His friend Louis Comollo instead, could not handle it and died even before he turned twenty-two. On 5 June 1841 when Don Bosco was ordained priest in Turin, his cultural and spiritual formation was well established. Fr Cafasso invited him to the Pastoral Institute to complete his pastoral formation, but the solid basis of the ten years at Chieri and the gifts he had developed here, the hidden and intense years proved their worth for the rest of his years as an educator and pastor of the young.

Emerging pedagogical and spiritual values

Don Bosco's teenage and early adult years in Chieri offer us excellent pedagogical and spiritual pointers. Here are some:

- Study and culture are an essential ascetic process in building up one's personality, especially when pursued with constant and daily fidelity.
- Manual work and personal initiative in actively cooperating with parents' concerns.
- Sport, play, active life with a wise dose of duty — for physical development and spiritual and psychological harmony.
- Friendships that are well-chosen and enriching; being part of a group, shared interests; mutual help, making one's gifts available to others.
- Friendly relationships with significant adults who can be teachers and models of life and values.
- Choice of a regular confessor with whom we have frequent and confident encounters.
- The humility to question oneself and ask advice on important questions regarding one's future. A solid life of prayer with established times for prayer and personal meditation each day.
- Weekly and even daily Mass.
- Devotion to Our Lady, mother, help and model of life.
- The energy to discern God's will and one's vocation in life, the mission God wants to entrust to us.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

School year	Class	Teacher	Stayed with	Event
1831-1832	Sixth Fifth Fourth	Dr. Pugnetti Fr.Valimbert Mr. Cima	Lucy Matta	Society for a Good Time Paolo Braja dies
1832-1833	Grammar	G. Giusiana	«	
1833-1834	Humanities	Fr. Banaudi	Caffè Pianta	Friendship with Jonah Contest with acrobat Admitted to the Franciscans
1834-1835	Rhetoric	G. F. Bosco	sarto Cumino	Meets L. Comollo Decides on vocation Clothing exam
1835-1836	1st Philos.	I. Arduino	Seminary	Holidays: extra Greek study at Montaldo
1836-1837	2nd Philos.	«	«	L. Comollo in seminary
1837-1838	1ª Theol.	L. Prialis I. Arduino	«	
1838-1839	2ª Theol.	L. Prialis G. B.Appendini	«	Sacristan 02.04.1839: Comollo dies
1839-1840	3a Theol.	«	«	25.04.1840: Tonsure and Minor orders Autumn: exams,4th Theology
1840-1841	5a Theol.	«	«	Dormitory Prefect 19.09.1840: Subdiaconate 29.03.1841: Diaconate 05.06.1841: Priesthood

Bibliography

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