St. John Bosco

1815–1888 • Italy

When he was only nine, John Bosco had a powerful dream. A large group of rough boys were fighting and swearing. He jumped into their midst and tried to stop them not only with his words, but with his fists. Suddenly a man appeared, his face shining so bright that John Bosco could barely look at him. The man said, "You will win these friends not by blows, but by gentleness and love." A gentle woman with a sparkling mantle then took John Bosco's hand and showed him fierce wild animals unexpectedly transformed into gentle lambs. She explained that he must do the same thing for her children—and then he awoke. Jesus and Mary had come to John Bosco to show him how to win young people for Christ. The memory of this dream would stay with him for the rest of his life.

Not long after his dream, John Bosco saw a group of traveling circus actors perform amazing tricks. He had an idea. He learned how to juggle and to walk the tight rope, and then started to perform his tricks for others, beginning and ending each performance with prayer. He realized that if he attracted others to him through kindness and fun, they would be willing to hear him talk about God and pray with him.

John Bosco's love for Jesus led him to become a priest. His first assignment was in the city of Turin, which had many slums and prisons. When John Bosco visited the prisons, he noticed many boys there between the ages of twelve and eighteen. These boys reminded him of the rough boys in his dream. John Bosco knew he must do everything he could to keep more boys from going to prison by teaching them about God's love. So he went to the slums and befriended the boys with humor and juggled for them in the streets. The boys came to him to play games and stayed to hear him speak about Jesus. John Bosco started a home for boys who had no other place to live. One of the boys who came to study under John Bosco was Dominic Savio. John Bosco saw that Dominic was very holy, even though he was so young. Dominic died when he was only twelve years old, and John Bosco wrote a short biography of his life. Later, Dominic Savio was canonized a saint.

John Bosco spent the rest of his life working for the boys in his care. He helped find them jobs, improved their working conditions, and gave them places to stay. For John Bosco, kindness was better than punishment in changing the lives of those in need. St. John Bosco, help me bring others to Jesus through gentleness and love!

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January 31