Don Bosco

Born: 1815

Died: 1888

Feast Day: 31 January

DERRY DIOCESAN CATECHETICAL CENTRE

John Melchior Bosco, popularly known as Don Bosco was an Italian Roman Catholic priest, educator, and writer of the 19th century. He was born in the hillside hamlet of Becchi, Italy. Becchi is located in a region that was called Castelnuovo d'Asti, which was later renamed Castelnuovo Don Bosco in honour of the saint.

He was the youngest son of Francesco Bosco and Margherita Occhiena. He had two older brothers, Antonio, and Giuseppe. The Boscos of Becchi were farmhands of the Moglian Family. Don Bosco was born into a time of great shortage and famine in the Piedmontese countryside, following the devastation wrought by the Napoleonic Wars and drought in 1817. When he was little more than two years old, his father, Francesco, died, which left the support of three boys to his mother. She played a strong role in Bosco's formation and personality, and was an early supporter of her son's ideals.

He was educated in the faith and in living according to the Gospel message by his mother. He was just nine years old when he had a dream which called him to dedicate himself to the education of young people. While still a boy he began to entertain his peers with games, alternated with work, prayer, and religious education.

Poverty prevented any serious attempt at schooling. His early years were spent as a shepherd, and he received his first instruction from a parish priest. His childhood experiences are thought to have inspired him to become a priest. Being a priest was then more commonly a profession for the privileged classes, than for farmers. Some biographers portray his older brother, Antonio, as the main obstacle for Bosco's ambition to study, as Antonio protested that John was just "*a farmer like us!*"

At 12, he found life at home unbearable because of the continuous quarrels with Antonio, so in February 1827, he left his home and went to look for work as a farm servant. Having to face life by himself at such a young age may have developed his later sympathies to help abandoned boys. After begging unsuccessfully for work, he ended up at the wine farm of Louis Moglia.

Although he could pursue some studies by himself, he was not able to attend school for two more years. In 1830, he met Joseph Cafasso, a young priest who identified some natural talent and supported his first schooling. Bosco's mother managed to earn enough money to finance his education. In 1835, Bosco entered the seminary at Chieri. In 1841, after six years of study, he was ordained a priest on the eve of Trinity Sunday by Archbishop Franzoni of Turin. He was twenty-six years old. He chose as his life's programme, *'Give me souls, take all the rest'* (Gen 14:21).

While working in Turin, where the population suffered many of the ill-effects of industrialization and urbanization, Don dedicated his life to the betterment and education of street children, juvenile delinquents, and other disadvantaged youth. He developed teaching methods based on reason, religion and loving kindness rather than punishment, a method that became known as the Salesian Preventive System.

Don Bosco was a follower of the spirituality and philosophy of Francis de Sales. He was also an ardent devotee of Mary, mother of Jesus, under the title Mary Help of Christians. He believed that Mary was the inspiration and support of his work.

He is patron of Christian apprentices, editors, publishers, schoolchildren, young people magicians, juvenile delinquents, Piura, Peru.