



31 January 2021

CIRCULAR – SOUTH ASIA REGION

BM/2021/SA/Circular 003

“Let them never forget that humility is the source of all peace of mind...”

- Don Bosco, *Letter from Rome*

Celebrate! Imitate!

Dear Confres and members of the Salesian Family and Collaborators,

Happy Feast of St. John Bosco! I am happy to have this opportunity to send feast day greetings to you from *Sacro Cuore*, Rome, the place from where Don Bosco wrote to us the famous “Letter from Rome,” which I have quoted above. During the last two-months-long winter session of the General Council, which we have just concluded, the daily Eucharist was celebrated in the chapel named “*Cappella della Lettera*”. The Rector Major and the General Council members also convey to each of us in the South Asia Region, their greetings, and prayers as we celebrate this feast as one family.

The celebration of the Feast of our Father Don Bosco ought to lead us, above all, to imitate him in his sanctity. As article 21 of the SDB Constitutions indicate, our admiration of his splendid virtues of nature and grace are expected to lead us to “study and imitate him”. In the concluding prayer after meditation, we pray to Mary our Mother saying, “You were Don Bosco’s teacher, show us how to imitate his virtues”. On this feast of our Father St. John Bosco, let us “study” one of his virtues in order to “imitate” him. Let us focus on the first virtue named in the SDB Constitutions, namely “humility”.¹

In the dream of Don Bosco at the age of nine, the majestic lady (Mary our Blessed Mother) instructed Don Bosco to learn to be humble.² Jesus had given to John Bosco, the best teacher of humility, the one who had identified herself as the “humble servant” or “handmaid” of the Lord (cf. Lk 1:48-49).

Interestingly some of the most recent research and study show that a “growth mindset” is promoted by humility. It is curious that “... some companies, such as Google, have already announced that they are explicitly looking for people who combine passion with qualities like *intellectual humility*, instead of traditional measures of academic success like a high IQ or Grade Point Average. ‘Without *humility*, you are unable to learn,’ Laszlo Bock, the senior vice president of people operations for Google, told the *New York Times*.”³

¹ SDB Constitutions, Art 1 “With a feeling of *humble* gratitude we believe that the Society of St Francis de Sales came into being not as a merely human venture but the initiative of God.” Italics added.

² “This is the field of your work. *Make yourself humble*, strong, and energetic. And what you will see happening to these animals in a moment is what you must do for my children.” Italics added.

³ Cited in David Robson, *The Intelligence Trap: Why smart people do stupid things and how to make wiser decisions* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, 2019), 186. Italics added.

As we recall the perennial value of this classic virtue, so well exemplified by Jesus on the cross and at the washing of the disciples' feet, let us recall an interesting dream of Don Bosco about the importance of this virtue of humility.⁴

During a retreat he preached at Lanzo in 1876, Don Bosco narrated this dream.

"Right now, I would like to tell you about a dream that has preoccupied me throughout this retreat and tormented me especially last night. I will tell it to you as it happened only shortening things a bit here and there so as not to be too long, because it seems to me that it was full of many and serious lessons.

It seemed to me that we were all together, going from Lanzo to Turin. We were all in some kind of vehicle, but I couldn't say if we were on a train or an *omibus*, but we weren't walking. When we got to a certain point along the road, I don't recall where, the vehicle stopped. I got off to see what was wrong and found myself face to face with someone whom I cannot really describe: he looked both tall and short at the same time, fat and thin, and he also looked red and white; he walked on the ground but also in the air. I was dumbfounded and could make no sense of it, but plucked up courage and asked: "Who are you?" Without giving me an answer, he said: "Come." I wanted to know who he was first of all, what he wanted, but again he said: "Come quickly; let's get the vehicles moving into this field." The marvel was that he spoke loudly and softly at the same time and in many voices, and I was just left marvelling at it all. The field was very big, as far as you could see, all flat, not dug up but all flattened down like a farmyard.

Not knowing what to say, and seeing him so resolute, we turned the vehicles around so that they entered that huge field and then we shouted out to everyone inside to get off. They all got off in very quick time and as soon as they had, the vehicles were seen to vanish, without our knowing where they had gone to.

"Now that we have got down," I whispered to myself, "you will tell why you made us stop in this place." He answered: "The reason is serious; it is to avoid a terrible danger."

"Which danger?"

"Danger from a wild bull that will leave no one alive if he comes through: *Taurus rugiens quaerens quem devoret.*"

"Slow down, my friend, you are attributing to the bull what St Peter says about the lion in Holy Scripture: *Leo rugiens*" [1 Pet 5:8].

"That doesn't matter: there it was *leo rugiens*, here it is *taurus rugiens.*"

"The fact is that you have to be very much on the alert. Call everyone to come around you. Then solemnly and urgently announce that they be careful, very careful, and as soon as they hear the bull bellowing, a loud and extraordinary bellowing, to immediately throw themselves on the ground and stay face down, faces pressed to the ground, until the bull has passed through. Woe to the one who does not listen to you, for whoever does not lie flat on the ground face down as I have said will be lost, because we read in the Holy Scriptures that the one who is humble will be exalted and the one who exalts himself will be humbled: *Qui se humiliat exaltabitur et qui se exaltat humiliabitur*" [Lk 14:11].

Then he said once more: "Quickly, quickly: the bull is about to come; shout, shout out loudly for them to get down." I was shouting and he was saying: "More, more, louder, shout, shout". I was shouting so loud that I think I even frightened Fr Lemoyne who sleeps in the room next to me, but I couldn't shout any louder.

Then immediately we heard the bellowing of the bull: "Careful, careful!... Line them all up straight next to each on both sides, with a space in the middle for the bull to run through."

I'm shouting and giving these orders; in the blink of an eyelid, they are all prostrate on the ground and we began to see the bull coming from way off, enraged.

Although most were lying face down, some wanted to stand up and watch the bull to see what it was and they were not lying down. Just a few of them. The individual said to me: "Now you will see what happens to them; you will see what they get for not lowering themselves." I wanted to warn them again, shout at them, run to them. The other would not let me. I insisted that he let me go to them. He told me firmly: "Obedience is for you too, get down". I was still not lying down when we heard this tremendous, fearful bellowing. The bull was already close to us; we were all shaking and asking: "What the... what the..." "Don't be afraid: down on the ground!". And he kept shouting: "*Qui se humiliat exaltabitur et qui se exaltat humiliabitur... qui se humiliat... qui se humiliat.*"

A strange thing that really made me wonder was this, that although my head was on the ground and I was completely prostrate with my eyes in the dust, nevertheless I could see everything that was happening around me very well. The bull had seven horns, almost in the shape of a circle: there were two in place of his nose; two in place of his eyes; two where the horns would ordinarily be and one above; but the marvellous thing was that these horns were so strong, flexible, bending in whichever direction, so that to strike or knock someone to the ground the bull didn't have to run here or there;

⁴ Don Bosco narrated this dream on 28 September 1876 at the end of a Retreat preached at Lanzo. Cf. MB XII, 463-469. Here, only the first part of the dream is reproduced.

it just needed to move ahead without twisting and turning itself, to strike whoever it encountered. The horns at the nose were the longest and these caused surprising damage.

The bull was already very close; then the individual shouted: “watch the effect of humility.” And then suddenly, what a marvel it was! We all found ourselves lifted up in the air to a considerable height, so it was impossible for the bull to reach us. The handful who had not got down were not lifted up. The bull came and tore them to pieces in an instant; not one was saved. We, meanwhile, lifted up in the air, were terrified and said: “If we fall down, we’re done for; poor us! What will become of us!” Meanwhile we could see the enraged bull trying to get to us. He was leaping up terribly trying to gore us, but he was not able to do any damage to us. So more enraged than ever, he made it clear he wanted to go and find some fellow bulls; almost as if he were saying: “well, we’ll help each other, we will climb up...”, and so *habens iram magnam* [Rev 12:12], he went off.

Then we found ourselves back on the ground and the person was shouting: “Face the south.” Then, without our understanding what was going on, the scene in front of us changed. Facing south we saw the Blessed Sacrament exposed: there were many candles lit on both sides and the field was no longer there, but we seemed to be in a huge, ornately decorated church. While we were all there in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, many enraged bulls arrived, all with horrible horns and terribly frightening in appearance. They came, but since we were in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, they could do no harm to us. Meanwhile we were saying the chaplet to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. After a while, I don’t know how long, we looked, and the bulls were no longer there. Looking back towards the altar we found that the candles were extinguished, the Sacrament no longer exposed, the church had gone ... “But where are we?” We found ourselves in the field where we had first been. You understand well enough that the bull is the enemy of our souls, the devil that is so enraged with us and constantly seeks to do us harm. The seven horns are the seven capital vices. What can free us from this bull’s horns, from the devil’s assaults, from not falling to vice, is principally humility, basis and foundation of the virtues.”

Our Father wanted us to be humble and strong, as he was advised by the Blessed Mother when he was nine. Let us be reminded of his words given to us in his Spiritual Testament. “Do not grieve over my death. ... Instead of weeping, make firm and efficacious resolutions to remain staunch in your vocation until death.” Let us firmly resolve to imitate Don Bosco in his humility. Let his words in the “Letter from Rome” ring in our hearts: “Let them never forget that humility is the source of all peace of mind...”

I would like to end by presenting to you some excellently crafted digital resources for our study and imitation of Don Bosco. If you are not familiar with these, check them out. The first link leads to an excellent, recently updated digital research tool.

<http://sdl.sdb.org/greenstone3/library>
https://www.sdb.org/it/Biblioteca_Digitale/
<http://www.salesian.online/>

Happy Feast of St. John Bosco! Celebrate and imitate!



Fr. Biju Michael
General Councillor for South Asia Region
31 January 2021

