

SAINT OF THE MONTH OF JANUARY

ST. JOHN BOSCO, JANUARY 31, 2019

John Bosco was born in Becchi, Italy, on August 16, 1815. There was drought and famine at the time of his birth which was just after the end of the Napoleonic Wars which ravaged the area. At the age of 2 his father died and he was raised by his mother. His mother & he attended church and he became very devout. When he wasn't in church, he helped his family grow food and raise sheep. They were poor, but his mother found enough to share with the homeless.

When John was 9 years old, he had the first of several vivid dreams that would influence his life. In his dream, he encountered a multitude of boys who swore as they played. Among these boys, he encountered a great, majestic man and woman. The man told him that in meekness and charity, he would "conquer these your friends". Then a lady, also majestic said, "Be strong, humble and robust. When the time comes, you will understand everything". The dream influenced John the rest of his life.

Not long afterwards, John witnessed some traveling circus performers. He was enthralled by their magic tricks and acrobatics. He realized if he learned their tricks, he could use them to attract others and hold their attention. He studied their tricks and learned how to perform some himself. One Sunday evening, John staged a show for the kids he played with and was heartily applauded. At the end of the show, he recited the homily he heard earlier in the day. He ended by inviting his neighbors to pray with him. His shows and games were repeated and during this time, John discerned the call to become a priest.

To be a priest, John required an education, something he lacked because of poverty. However he did find a priest willing to provide him with some teaching and a few books. John's older brother became angry at this apparent disloyalty, and reportedly whipped John saying he's "a farmer like us!" John was undeterred, and as soon as he could, he left home to look for work as a hired farm laborer. He was only 12 when he left home, hastened by his brother's hostility. He found work in a vineyard and worked there 2 years before he entered the seminary for 6 years of study. He was ordained a priest in 1841.

He worked in poor neighborhoods and went to work with the children of the poor. While visiting prisons, he noticed a large number of boys, between the ages of 12 and 18. The conditions were deplorable and he wanted to do something to help other boys from ending up there. He went to the streets and started to meet young men and boys where they worked and played. He used his talents as a performer, doing tricks to capture attention, then sharing the message of the day.

Father Bosco worked tirelessly seeking work for boys who needed it, and searching for lodgings for others. His mother began to help him, and she became known as "Mama Margherita". By the late 1860's, Father Bosco and his mother were responsible for lodging 800 boys. He also negotiated new rights for boys who were employed as apprentices, so they would not have to perform manual labor unrelated to their apprenticeship. He also identified boys that would make good priests and helped them to be ordained.

In 1859, Father Bosco established the Society of St. Francis de Sales. He organized 15 seminarians and one teenage boy into the group. The purpose was to carry on his charitable work, helping boys with their faith formation and to stay out of trouble. The organization still exists today and continues to help people, especially children around the world. In the years that followed he expanded his mission.

Father Bosco died on January 31, 1888. Pope Pius XI declared him blessed in 1929 and he was canonized on Easter Sunday, 1934. He was given the title, "Father and Teacher of Youth." In 2002, Pope John Paul II was petitioned to declare St. John Bosco the Patron of Stage Magicians. St. Bosco had pioneered the art of what is today called "Gospel Magic," using magic and other feats to attract youth.

Saint John Bosco is the patron saint of apprentices, editors and publishers, schoolchildren, magicians, & juvenile delinquents.