



Project Mornese
14 APRIL - 4 MAY 2026

APRIL 20, 2026

2. IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF DON BOSCO

2.4 Don Bosco's First Pastoral Experiences – The Wandering Oratory Turin

*"They have no more wine.
Do what He will tell you." Jn 2,4-5*

(meeting room at Casa 35)

PRAYER

(A prayer space is created using cloth, candle and picture of Don Bosco, two vases containing water and a larger empty vase.)

The Wandering Oratory and Turin

Guide 1: Good morning. We invoke with faith the action of the Holy Spirit to illumine and guide this rich time of reflection and deepening as we make a pilgrimage together with Don Bosco in the challenging beginnings of the Oratory in the light of the wedding at Cana. Now we are invited to walk these paths full of charismatic vitality and to be, with the young men and women, that new wine that pervades our life and mission with renewed freshness.



SONG: Spirit of the Living God, Fall Afresh on Me (23)

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.
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Guide 2: In the text of the Wedding at Cana we observe that the jars were empty. The reality from Turin seemed to be the experience of these empty jars, a sign of the poverty-stricken, heavy-handed and exclusionary obstacle that did not convey the true communion of the people with God.

Guide 1: Even from the first days of his stay in the city, Don Bosco could realize the complex socio-religious reality of Turin, quite different from the quiet and traditional environments in which he had lived until then. The jar, therefore, is a symbol of a tradition that has become heavy and a faith that has become cold.

Guide 2: The foreseeing presence of Mary at Cana reveals her contemplative gaze that makes her attentive to everyone and everything and that makes her provide with courageous decision, speaking and doing, for the good of all. Knowing how to look ... knowing how to speak ... knowing how to intervene. It all reveals a heart that knows how to love.

Guide 1: As at the wedding at Cana, Don Bosco, at the beginning of his priestly ministry, saw the empty jars, but thanks to his faith in Mary and her Son, he did as she said, "Do whatever he tells you."

Guide 2: Today we are invited to approach the empty jars and from them pray the early years of Don Bosco's itinerant oratory.

Guide 1: We religious, too, if we do not fill ourselves with God, can become like empty jars. This emptiness reveals itself when we no longer gather to pray, share our experiences of God, plan together and celebrate together. Instead, if we continue to believe, to faithfully and creatively belong to the Church and the Institute despite their limitations we are filling the jars. Indeed, we are called to be "people-jars" to give others a drink.

(Six participants are chosen to carry a jar that has the name of the various places where Don Bosco gathered young people in the early years of the oratory. As the name of the place is read the participant will enter the room and place the jar in the prayer space.)

Jar 1 - Church of St. Francis of Assisi - Oratory Sacristy



Voice 1: "As soon as I entered the church, immediately I was followed by a group of youngsters, through the streets, through the squares and into the very sacristy of the church of the Ecclesiastical Institute. But I could not take care of them for lack of room" (*MO 120-121*).

Jar 2 - Oratory at the Little Hospital



Voice 2: The Marchesa Barolo, "although she looked favorably on any work of charity," began to press for another arrangement to be sought, her little hospital was soon to be opened.

Jar 3 - Oratory St. Peter in Chains



Voice 3: In the evening the housekeeper of the chaplains stood around Fr. Tesio, and she repeated so many things to him against the Oratory, that she urged him to write at once to the Town Hall, painting Don Bosco's youth in the blackest colors.

Jar 4 - Oratory St. Martin of Molassi



Voice 4: Following the protests of the Mill workers, who could not "tolerate the jumping, singing and sometimes shouting" of the boys, the *Ragioneria* [accounting and book-keeping department] in its session of November 18, 1845, set the end of the concession at January 1, 1846.

Jar 5 - Casa Moretta Oratory



Voice 5: In the three rooms of the Moretta house Don Bosco stayed there for about four months, until, at the end of February, Mr. Moretta was forced to dismiss the Oratory over the protests of the other tenants of the house.

Jar 6 - Filippi Meadow



Voice 6: To exacerbate the situation came the unexpected eviction of the Filippi brothers as well, because they said, the boys "by repeatedly trampling on our lawn will cause the grassroots to be destroyed; the landlords were even willing to let go the rent fee as long as the lawn was vacated within fifteen days (*MO 148-149*).

Guide 2: At Cana, the celebration was about to end badly. Mary's attentive and sensitive gaze allows her to see what no one sees, that is, the wine is finished. If love is lacking then the feast of life ends. Mary becomes compassionate and intervenes because she knows love better than anyone, because she is imbued with it. She understands that we are made for love and that love is what makes a life worth living.

Guide 1: When there is a lack of wine, joy turns to sadness, relationships disperse, ideals dissolve and everything becomes grey, monotonous, routine. One feels drained, like an empty stone jar, one no longer expects anything, one just gets by, as one can.

Guide 2: These were challenging times for Don Bosco and his boys, each time expelled from the space they found, to seek some of the wine of joy, of welcome, of dreams, of listening. The jars were empty, but their faith was greater!

Guide 1: And what does Jesus ask? "Fill the jars with water" (*Jn 2,7*). Jesus' word initiates the miracle. It is He who performs the miracle, but He wants our water. Our faithfulness is necessary for the miracle of the new wine. God needs us to fill the jars with water because He does everything by having everything done! He needs us; He counts on our small and humble contribution.

Guide 2: Pope Benedict XVI writes in this regard, "Ritual purification, after all, is not enough to make a man 'capable' of God, to make him truly 'pure' for God. Water, in the jars, becomes wine. To people's own toil now goes the gift of God who, by giving himself, creates the feast of joy, a feast that only the presence of God and his gift can give."

Guide 1: Now it is we who are invited to be those obedient servants and fill the jars with water so that Jesus may turn it into new wine.

(Each participant, will take the jar of water and pour a bit of water into the empty jar. As this is being done the participant will say a word which she wants to turn into good wine: fear, insecurity, pride, etc.)

Guide 2: Doing what Jesus says is the way to reintroduce love and hope into the world and in family life, to win back love even when it seems impossible, to live and witness the family spirit. Doing what Jesus says is the secret of vocational fruitfulness.

Guide 1: Now we are invited to go the way Don Bosco did, where his jar also was empty. Our prayer will continue into tomorrow when we would like our water to be turned into wine.

Guide 2: We are invited to walk with Don Bosco, to understand which waters need to be transformed.

Guide 1: "Do whatever He tells you", is Mary's last words in the Gospel, and then she disappears behind her son's words. They are her testament, and like any testament, they must be a cherished command to her children, to every child. Then she speaks no more. And what more could she say?

Guide 2: Doing what Jesus says is the way to reintroduce love and hope into the world and in family life, to win back love even when it seems impossible, to live and witness the family spirit. Doing what Jesus says is the secret of vocational fruitfulness.

Guide 1: Today, as we visit Turin and Valdocco, the land of Don Bosco: the Consolata, Church of St. Francis of Assisi, Porta Palazzo, Barolo-Refuge, Pinardi Chapel, Chapel of St. Francis de Sales

Do not enter distracted:

Listen!

Contemplate!

Let yourself be touched!

Song: Saint John Bosco, Our Loving Father (24)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hHIDcvkx2IU&feature=youtu.be>

Saint John Bosco, our Loving Father, now we lift to thee our voices as we gather
around thine altar far and wide the world rejoices.

O Don Bosco, we're thy dearest whose protection are imploring.
For in heaven thou remainest an apostle 'mid thee adoring.

Refrain

Don Bosco, thy children on many a shore
Shall love and revere thee till time be no more.

Don Bosco, thy children on many a shore
Shall love and revere thee till time be no more.

Saint John Bosco, our Loving Father, now we lift to thee our voices as we gather
around thine altar far and wide the world rejoices.

O Don Bosco, we're thy dearest whose protection are imploring.
For in heaven thou remainest an apostle 'mid thee adoring. (Refrain)



(The animators of Progetto Mornese will guide the following visits.)

VISIT THE CONSOLATA

VISIT THE CHURCH OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

VISIT PORTA PALAZZO



VISIT BAROLO - REFUGE

(In the chapel, one of the Daughters of Jesus the Good Shepherd will briefly share about Marquise Barolo's relationship with Don Bosco. The participants will then visit the museum.)
animators of Progetto Mornese will guide the following visits.)



VISIT THE PINARDI CHAPEL

(The animators of Progetto Mornese will share about the Pinardi Chapel. This will take place outside as it is now an Adoration chapel.)



ADDITIONAL READING

The years of early pastoral experiences - Chronological table

26.05.1841	Church of the Visitation	Don Bosco begins ordination retreat
05.06.1841	Archbishop's church	Arch. Fransoni ordains Don Bosco as a priest
06.06.1841	Church of St Francis of Assisi	Don Bosco's first Mass
07.06.1841	The Consolata	Don Bosco's second Mass
03.11.1841	St. Francis of Assisi	Fr Guala and Fr Cafasso accept Don Bosco for Moral theology (1841- 1844)
08.12.1841	Sacristy at St Francis of Assisi	Don Bosco meets Bartholomew Garell
Dec 1841 – Oct 1844	St Francis of Assisi	Don Bosco gathers youngsters
20.10.1844	Barolo Refuge	Don Bosco lives there and brings the oratory
08.12.1844	Little hospital of St Philomena	Borel and Don Bosco bless the chapel of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales
Dec 1844 – May 1845	Little hospital of St Philomena	Festive Oratory at the 'Ospedaletto'
25.05.1845	St Peter in Chains	Don Bosco, the Oratory boys and Fr Tesio's housekeeper

June-early July 1845	'Ospedaletto' and other churches	Wandering Oratory
13.07.-Dec. 1845	St Martins at the Molassi (Mills)	Don Bosco and Borel gather the kids in the afternoon
	Churches around city and beyond	Mass and Confession in the morning
Nov. 1845-Feb. 1846	Casa Moretta	Don Bosco offers weekend and evening school and catechism
	Churches around the city and beyond	Mass and Confession in the morning
Feb.-5.04.1846	Prato Filippi (Filippi field)	Don Bosco and Borel gather the kids in the afternoon
	Churches around city and beyond	Mass and Confession in the morning
08.03.1846	Prato Filippi	Don Bosco meets Pancrazio Soave
Between 4 and 13.03.1846	Pinardi Shed	Borel and Don Bosco rent the shed at Casa Pinardi
		Adjustments made
Mar.-Apr. 1846	Pinardi Shed	
12.04.1846	Pinardi Chapel and surrounding land	Oratory begins at house of Pinardi
05.06.1846	House of Pinardi	Borel and Don Bosco rent 3 rooms
End May 1846	Palazzo Barolo	Barolo 'sacks' Don Bosco at the end of August
July 1846	Ospedaletto	Don Bosco is seriously ill
		Rents one more room
		Don Bosco convalesces
August 1846	Casa Pinardi	
Aug. Oct 1846	Becchi	Don Bosco and Mama Margaret set themselves up
03.11.1846	Casa Pinardi	Whole house rented
01.12.1846	Casa Pinardi	
May 1847	Casa Pinardi	Orphan from Valsesia taken in by Don Bosco
20.06.1847	Pinardi Chapel	Arch. Fransoni administers Confirm.
08.12.1847	St Aloysius Oratory	Opened at Porta Nuova
19.02.1851	Casa Pinardi	Don Bosco buys house and land

Refuge

In the region of Valdocco, near Borgo Dora, the work of the Refuge was established in 1822 by the benevolence of a pious lady Marquise of Barolo, for women and those freed from prison, who has served the penalty of their faults, or wishing by themselves to leave the path of evil ways, give proof of true repentance and show themselves willing to persevere in goodness. It was

governed by the sisters of St. Joseph. Later it was joined by the Little Refuge or Refugee, which contains numerous unhappy young girls, who in their early adolescence were already abused, or by evil domestic examples corrupted. They all received Christian education, learn to read and write and various womanly jobs." Julia of Barolo took care of the women who were coming out of prison and had nowhere to go. Certainly, Giulia di Barolo had to overcome several difficulties. It was not so easy to get funds to house 'women of ill repute'; another big problem was the place, probably no one wanted to have such people as neighbors. In addition to ex-prisoners, this house housed prostitutes who wanted to leave this work but were harassed by exploiters or other unpleasant characters.

When Don Bosco was introduced by the Fr Borel to the Marquise Barolo, she realized the talents with which the young priest was endowed. In order to induce him to accept the post of spiritual director of the little hospital, she not only granted him to be a free catechist but agreed that he should gather his festive oratory at the new, unfinished building of the little hospital of Saint Philomena. Thus, on Sunday, October 20, the transfer of the oratory to the Refuge took place. Don Bosco describes it in his memoirs, also telling us about the inconveniences of the following Sundays: In the afternoon a crowd of youth of various ages and different conditions rush down in search of the new Oratory. Where is the oratory? Where is Don Bosco? One went from all sides asking. No one could say a word because no one in that neighborhood had heard of either Don Bosco or the Oratory. [...]

Fr Borel and Don Bosco were the two confessors, there was a long queue of over two hundred young people wanting to make confession. One wanted to light the fire, another was working to put it out. One brought the wood, the other the water, bucket, springs, paddles, pitcher, basin, chairs, shoes, books, and every other object was put upside down as they wanted to order and fix things. It is no longer possible to go on, said the dear Fr Borel and it is important to provide an appropriate premise. Nevertheless, six festive days were spent in that narrow room which was the upper room at the vestibule of the first door of entrance to the Refuge. (*MO 131-132*) [...]

More space was needed if the activity was to continue. Archbishop Fransoni, asked about this, first of all, he asked if those boys could not go to their parishes. "They are mostly foreign youngsters," Don Bosco and Borel replied, "who spend only part of the year in Turin. They are not even sure to which parish they belong.

[...] The Marquise, pressed by the urgency, allowed two spacious rooms of the little hospital, which was being built near the Refuge, to be converted temporarily into a chapel.

Church of San Francis of Assisi

On June 6, 1841, Holy Trinity Sunday, Don Bosco as a new priest celebrated his first Mass in this church, at the altar of the guardian angel. He was assisted by his spiritual director St. Joseph Cafasso who, in the premises attached to the church, collaborates with Fr Luigi Guala in the direction of the Ecclesiastical Boarding School. From the following November until the summer of 1844, Don Bosco would use these premises.

In 1841, in St. Francis of Assisi, the very young Don Bosco thus began his Oratory. His main concern became those boys, stragglers and without families, he saw them "humiliated by the loss of their dignity."

When Don Bosco approaches Bartolomeo Garelli it is not to invite him to play or jump, but, "Come and listen to Mass, afterwards I will have something to talk to you about that will please you." The afterwards is a friendly chat, in which Don Bosco seems to share some cheerful phrases, while instead, his well-examined questions are a careful test of family, school and Church. Now we will say the three "agencies" that should cooperate in this boy's growth. And he discovers with sorrow that "father and mother are dead," "I can neither read nor write," and "I did not make my First Communion and I do not go to catechism." And Don Bosco, immediately, without waiting a moment, offers him the essentials of his Oratory: the recitation of a Hail Mary and a catechism lesson.

Immediately afterwards for Bartholomew came the games, the walks, the races, the raffles, the distribution of sweets, and the proposal of a Sunday and evening

school. But at the center of everything remain and will always remain in Don Bosco's Oratory Prayer, Confession, and Communion.

The word "Oratory" has its full meaning: a place where first of all one prays. And the program that Don Bosco would repeat until he imprinted into the hearts of his Salesians is condensed into the four words that remain as the fundamental cornerstone of his work: "We seek to make of these boys honest citizens and good Christians."

Porta Palazzo

When John Roda, born in Moncalieri (*Turin*) in 1842 and died in 1939, told his story at a conference of former students from Don Bosco's time, he was over ninety years old. But he still walked with great ease; he was coherent and sympathetically communicative.

In his long life, he had served three kings of Italy; he had been trumpeter at Villafranca, band director at a wedding of the House of Savoy; he could boast of numerous awards. If many memories and small glories were now lost in distant mists, Don Bosco had remained the point of light in his life. Marco Bongioanni in his brilliant essay 'Don Bosco tra storia ed avventura' (*Don Bosco between history and adventure*), on the remote direct testimony of the former pupil, recently confirmed by his daughter, gives poetic voice to his encounter with Don Bosco and the time spent with him.

Meeting with Don Bosco: John Roda

"I was," he narrated, "in one of the little streets around Porta Palazzo in the Molassi area. There were quite a few of us, there were hired hands from the barbers, hat makers, cooks, saddle makers, and merchants, all people you had to call monsù and madama. We used to go there to wait for work because at the age of 12-13 we were of age and you had to earn your bread.

Porta Pila (*now Republic Square*) was a strategic area. Actually, the square was named after Emanuele Filiberto of Savoy, but people always said Porta Pila or at most Porta Pala, because it was introduced into Turin from the north towards the City Palace and the Roman Gate. It was not the best place for a priest with all the

noise from the stalls, peddlers, acrobats and gamblers that went on. But Don Bosco knew a little about everybody, and when it was necessary, he didn't pay too much attention to convenience. I met him there, and that was how I met my father.

I had seen him several times before. I knew his name because he had hooked up with certain of my friends. But I think he had never seen me. When he saw me, he came toward me holding a hazelnut and staring into my eyes. He had that sly smile-and his pockets were always full of peanuts, almonds, peanuts and more. He would go to the merchants to get supplies; then he would wander around the stalls looking for grapes / wine.

He came to me and crushed the nosòla like this, with two fingers, then put the kernel in my mouth.

- What are you doing here?
- Eh, I'm waiting for people to give me work.
- What can you do?
- A little bit of everything. I can learn.
- Your father and mother?
- They died a long time ago.

They had died of cholera right after I was born. I was born in 1842, on October 27. That year the cholera came and I was left alone. A friendly family, somewhat distantly related, had raised me. Knowing my situation, Don Bosco remained chewing and chewing, then spoke to me as I had seen him do with others.

- Wouldn't you like to come with me?
- To do what?
- To stay. To learn something, a trade.
- Of course I'd like that.
- Then come, it's not far.

I went after him like a puppy. I remember it was already quite cold, it was mid-November 1854. Don Bosco lived in a block of flats, a kind of farmhouse, with a beautiful new little church next door [the church of St. Francis de Sales].

When we arrived at the gate, before crossing a courtyard, he called loudly: "Mother, come here. Come and see who's here".

He shouted just like that, celebrating like when a relative or son arrives. Then he called Dominic. At that very moment, I met Mother Margaret and Dominic Savio, who was the same age as me and had arrived there three or four weeks before me. From that moment the Oratory became my home and Don Bosco became my father.

Life in the Oratory! Ah what happiness! Impossible to forget it. It went very well for me, better than for many others, and I will say at once why. Don Bosco had the habit of putting a good boy to be a guardian angel to some other boy who was a little livelier, and I was lucky enough to have Dominic to keep an eye on me.

We made so many friends that I was always looking for him; I would go after him, play with him, study with him. And he would help me, give me advice, as long as I behaved properly, stopped being a ill-mannered like in Porta Pila. We were like two brothers.

Life soon separated them. Dominic Savio died on March 9, 1857 in a reputation for holiness; John Roda entered life as an "honest citizen and good Christian"; but the image of his saintly friend and that of Don Bosco remained with him always.

Consolata

It is the Marian shrine dearest to the people of Turin for being a sign of faith, an ecclesial presence and trust of Our Lady's maternal mediation and also, most frequented by Don Bosco and his boys in the early days of the Oratory.

It has origins dating back to the late 4th century and is linked to the veneration of an ancient statue of Our Lady. The present Baroque building consists of three

intercommunicating churches: the church of St. Andrew, the Shrine proper and the underground chapel of Our Lady of Graces.

The chapel of St. Andrew houses, on the right, the remains of St. Joseph Cafasso, transported here from the general cemetery by his nephew can. Giuseppe Allamano, rector of the shrine. Next door, a staircase leads to the crypt or chapel of Our Lady of Graces, which may have constituted the primitive 4th-century oratory. On the central altar, by Filippo Juvarra (1729), the image of the Virgin and Child is venerated. By tradition it is identified with an ancient icon of the 4th century; in reality it is a painting on wood designed at the end of the 15th century, a copy of the statue found in Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome (14th century). Every shrine has its own history, this is mixed with the suffering of the peoples of Turin who sought it out with tears, invocation of graces invoked and received on the occasion of diseases, misfortunes, famines, plagues, wars, sieges and hunger... This also happened with the life and mission of Don Bosco who several times went to the feet of Our Lady of the Consolata.

Don Bosco already a seminarian had prayed at this shrine on the occasion of his visits to Turin. In the adjoining convent, which had belonged to the Cistercians before the French Revolution, the Oblates of the Virgin Mary of Father Lanteri now lived. His schoolmate and friend Joseph Burzio had also entered. The convent, after the law of suppression, passed to the diocese and, from 1882, became the seat of the Ecclesiastical Boarding School, in the new arrangement given by Can. Giuseppe Allamano.

Don Bosco celebrated his second Mass (*June 7, 1841*), here "to thank the great Virgin Mary-as he attests to us-of the innumerable favors, which she had obtained for me from her Divine Son Jesus" (*MO 115*).

During the very serious illness of July 1846, which brought Don Bosco to the brink of the grave, his poor boys flocked in large numbers to the feet of the Consolata and with their prayers and tears obtained the hoped-for grace of recovery.

In the Ecclesiastical Boarding School period and for long years thereafter, as long as his health and commitments permitted, Don Bosco regularly ministered as confessor in this church.

In the early years of the Oratory, the Valdocco boys' choir was invited several times to celebrate with song the services of the Shrine. Especially on June 20, the Feast of the Consolata, Oratorians never failed to take part in the procession.

At the feet of Our Lady of Consolation Don Bosco often resorted to the most difficult situations in his life. We recall that in a particularly painful moment for him, on November 25, 1856, when at three o'clock in the morning Mother Margaret died, he, accompanied by Joseph Buzzetti, immediately went to the Shrine. Very upset, he celebrated Holy Mass in the underground chapel, then paused for a long time in tears before the statue of Our Lady: "I and my children are now without a mother down here; be you for the first time especially my Mother and their Mother!" (*MB 5, 566*).

Msgr. Lorenzo Gastaldi, archbishop of Turin, was accompanied to the Consolata on the evening of March 24, 1883: "Let us go to see our dear mother, to place ourselves under her mantle. Under Mary's mantle, it is consoling to live and to die." These expressions come down to us by Canon Thomas Chiuso, his secretary. On 11 next morning, March 25, Easter Sunday, the Archbishop died suddenly.

House of Pinardi

Casa Pinardi stands in the poor and degraded Valdocco neighborhood. The social situation in Turin in the 1800s was dramatic; many young orphans did not even have a place in which to spend the night. Don Bosco rents three adjoining rooms in Pinardi House on 5 June 1846, a key date that marks his desire to devote all his energy to the life of the Oratory.

This choice led Don Bosco to an overload of work into which he threw himself unsparingly, to the point of compromising his health. On 3 November 1846, after a period of convalescence in his native Becchi, he moved with his mother to the four rooms of the Pinardi house, where he lived in poverty. On 19 February 1851, Francis Pinardi sold the house for 28,500 lire and the surrounding land to John

Bosco. The Pinardi property is located at the foot of the slope that from the Rondò della Forca slopes down to the Dora River, a residential area full of meadows, vegetable gardens, and low hovels, where the first factories will rise and where farmsteads survive. The house has a dozen rooms and a facade facing noon on which the windows open. The part used as a dwelling consists of a first floor and a second floor and occupies the space of the present porticoes by the church of St. Francis de Sales; on the part behind rests the chapel that is demolished along with the house in 1856.

In 1846 Don Bosco gathered more than three hundred boys in the oratory. On 15 March 1846 Francesco Pinardi offered him the rent (*320 liras per year*) of a canopy leaning against the Pinardi house and a piece of land and declared himself ready to make the necessary changes. On Easter Day 1846 the shed turned into a chapel was consecrated; it was divided into three rooms, the chapel proper, a large room and two small rooms, used as sacristy and storage. The chapel, about two meters high, lit by small windows, is simply furnished: Don Bosco placed on the altar a picture of St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622) and placed in a niche a statue of St. Louis Gonzaga (1568 -1591) in order to arouse in young people devotion to these two saints proposed as models of life.

In 1847 he acquired a statue of Our Lady of Consolation and a small organ. Used until 1852, it is demolished with the Pinardi house in 1856. A refectory was built on the area and used until 1927, when Don Bosco's third successor turned it into a chapel to commemorate the primitive little church: inaugurated on 31 January 1928, it is still improperly called the Pinardi chapel. The iconography of the church, beginning with the canvas on the high altar depicting the Resurrection of Christ, indicates the joy and light of grace and, through symbols, Don Bosco's teachings and an inscription commemorates his presence.

Valdocco

April 12, 1846, Easter Sunday: The Oratory arrives in Valdocco. Don Bosco uses a great deal of care but also a great deal of decision in removing from the Oratory those youngsters and even those helpers who could harm his youngsters. He does not hesitate at one point to remain almost alone with the turmoil of his boys,

with an immense amount of work. But he did not want anyone to spoil his goal: honest citizens and good Christians (*S.G.B. Memoirs*, p.185 ff.).

From 1844 to 1846 Don Bosco is chaplain in one of the institutes of the Marquise of Barolo; at the Refuge, in 1844, a real Oratory begins, with its own chapel and other activities; in 1845 the little hospital of St. Philomena opens, occupying the premises of the Oratory. Don Bosco began his pilgrimage: S. Pietro in Vincoli, Molini Dora, Moretta House, Filippi Meadow were the stages of a youthful exodus that would end at Easter 1846. Don Bosco, evicted by everyone, manages to find in the Lombard Francesco Pinardi the last person who trusts him, and who is willing to rent him a piece of land. Don Bosco in order to establish the Oratory asks him, "a small church to gather some boys. Pinardi offers him a house "dug out, provided with steps, with a different floor," that is, to be used to gather young people around an altar. Only after he resolves this fundamental issue does Don Bosco ask to rent the lawn around it for the boys to play on as *well* (*Memoirs*, p. 139). And the boys, after a long day's work, come to help Don Bosco prepare the Oratory: not to level the lawn, not to draw lines, but to build their church.

So, the Oratory grew, gathering boys who came from all parts of the city, attracted by that priest who "plays with young people" but also by the stories they told among themselves; in the Oratory that Don Bosco founded in Valdocco there was a crowd of 500 boys.

Alone he could not cope with looking after everyone. A government minister, Urbano Rattazzi, will say to him: "If you were to pass away, what would become of your work? Choose yourself some trusted laymen and clergymen, and form a society with them. "Don Bosco had been thinking about this for some time, but he would not choose adults as helpers, he would aim for the best of his pupils. Michelino Rua, so intelligent and hardworking, would soon lend him a hand. But Don Bosco never stopped thinking about possible expansions as well; important in this regard were the last twenty years of his life, beginning with the construction of the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians. However, this period was also the one of greatest crisis: from 1865 to 1869 the young people of the Oratory were reduced to a sparse number, much of the area set aside for them was occupied by the building of the Basilica and the storage of materials that the

construction site required. When the work was finished, Don Bosco realized that he had neglected them. The strip of land next to the basilica, cleared of building material, became the courtyard; in 1880 he would add the 2015 sq. m. plot with a small house attached that would function as the headquarters for several years. To his heirs, along with a myriad of other works, Don Bosco left a fundamental dimension for youth activity, an aspect that had borne fruit but was still much to be explored: the Festive Oratory.

It was a tangible sign of his love for the children, but also a road to conquer the many problems and difficulties he faced: differences in character, behavior of his boys and the spiritual and material needs of the new Congregation he was about to initiate. These were problems that had certainly preoccupied Don Bosco when he entrusted in 1884 Don Giuseppe Pavia with the task of director of the Festive Oratory. Pavia had been a companion of the founder in achieving his goals, strong in a blind trust in prayer and Providence; he had joined the Salesian Oratory in 1865, joined the congregation in 1873, and was ordained a priest three years later. Don Pavia was director until 1915, during the years he lived at the Oratory he imparted a more thorough religious education to his boys, restoring a more strictly catechetical method; the explanation of the Gospel after Sunday or festive Mass was for Don Pavia a commitment that he never wanted to yield to others; he almost always spoke in Piedmontese and the young men listened to him open-mouthed, motionless.

