



Novena to Don Bosco based on Strenna 2026, Dream at 9 and Good Shepherd

22 January to 30 January



1. Hymn to Mary Help of Christians.

Oh Help of Christians, my mother be; To Thee I pledge my fidelity

Mary my mother my guide thou be; with thee and Jesus, I'll ever be.

2. Let us now listen to Don Bosco's words about his First Dream.

It was at that age (9) that I had a dream. All my life this remained deeply impressed on my mind. In this dream I seemed to be very near my home in a very large yard. A crowd of children were playing there. Some were laughing, some were playing games, and quite a few were swearing. When I heard these evil words I jumped immediately amongst them, and tried to stop them by using my words and my fists.

At that moment, a dignified man appeared, a nobly-dressed adult. He wore a white cloak and his face shone so that I could not look directly at him. He called me by name, told me to take charge of these, and added these words:

“You will have to win these friends of yours not by blows but by gentleness and love. Start right away to teach them the ugliness of sin and of the beauty of virtue.” Confused and frightened, I replied that I was a poor, ignorant child. I was unable to talk to those youngsters about religion. At that moment, the kids stopped their fighting, shouting and swearing; they gathered around the man who was speaking.

Hardly knowing what I was saying, I asked, “Who are you, ordering me to do the impossible?”

“Precisely because it seems impossible to you, you must make it possible through obedience and the acquisition of knowledge.”

“Where, by what means can I acquire knowledge?”

“I will give you a teacher. Under her guidance you can become wise. Without her all wisdom is foolishness. “

“But who are you that speak so?”

“I am the son of the woman whom your mother has taught you to greet three times a day.”

“My mother tells me not to mix with people I don’t know, unless I have her permission. So, tell me your name.”

“Ask my mother what my name is.”

At that moment, I saw beside a lady of stately appearance standing beside him. She was wearing a mantle that sparkled all over as though covered with bright stars.. Seeing from my questions and answers that I was more confused than ever, she beckoned me to approach her. She took me kindly by the hand and said:

“Look.”

Glancing round, I realised that the youngsters had all apparently run away. A large number of goats, dogs, cats, bears and other animals had taken their place.

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

I looked around again, and where before I had seen wild animals, I now saw gentle lambs. They were all jumping and bleating as if to welcome than man and lady.

At that point, still dreaming, I began crying. I begged the lady to speak so that I could understand her, because I did not know what all of this could mean. Then she put her hand on my head and said:

“In good time you will understand everything.”

With that, a noise woke me up and everything disappeared.

I was totally bewildered. My hands seemed to be sore from the blows I had given and my face hurt from those I had received. The memory of the man and the lady, and the things said and heard, so occupied my mind that I could not get any more sleep that night.

3. Reflections from the Strenna 2026 *(The leader reads the reflection. The poster of Strenna 2026 can be placed at a place all can see. One of the community members lights a lamp near the poster.)*

22 January: “Do Whatever He Tells You” (Mary to the Servants): Mary’s words invite us to lead the young to Jesus. Just as Mary guided the servants toward her Son, Salesians are called to guide the young toward God. Authentic devotion to Mary never ends in her; it always leads us to Jesus.

23 January: Listening: The Beginning of Faith and Obedience: The servants listened to Mary and obeyed Jesus; Jesus listened to Mary; Mary listened attentively to Jesus. The result was a miracle. Miracles in life are born of listening. True listening is not blind obedience, but obedience enlightened by reason and religion.

24 January: Faith as the Foundation of All Relationships: The servants trusted Mary and Jesus. We too are called to trust—God and the young entrusted to us. At the heart of the Strenna is faith: “Do whatever he tells you.” In other words, Mary says, “Trust my Son.” Faith is not merely adherence to doctrines; it is a living relationship with the person of Jesus Christ.

25 January: The Hand of God in the Signs of the Times: We are called to recognise the signs of the times with spiritual intelligence. This discernment reflects the role of religion in the Preventive System. Don Bosco read the challenges of his time with faith and transformed problems into possibilities.

26 January: A Mission of Hope: Hope is the ray of light that gives meaning in moments of confusion and darkness. The Salesian mission is always a mission of hope—especially for the young who struggle to see a future.

27 January: Don Bosco, A Man of Faith: Don Bosco trusted not only in dreams but in God and divine providence. His life was rooted in deep faith, sustained by prayer, sacrifice, and total reliance on God.

28 January: Deviations and Distortions of Life Today: The cube in the poster symbolises today’s world—marked by confusion, deviations, and distortions. Many paths lead in different directions, often without meaning or hope. The Gospel remains our compass.

29 January: The Salesian Family: One Mission, One Family: Our mission is a mission of service flowing from the person of Jesus. It is joyful service lived in freedom. For over 150 years, Cooperators and lay collaborators have been true partners in mission. Lay collaboration is essential in every sector of Salesian ministry. At Cana, Jesus, Mary, and the servants worked together—so too does the Salesian Family for the good of the young.

30 January: Heaven, Our Destiny: “Give me souls, take away the rest.” Don Bosco’s promise of bread, work, and heaven reveals his ultimate horizon. While caring for daily needs, we never lose sight of our final goal: the salvation of souls.

4. A Salesian Psalm (Psalm 23 – Paraphrased: to be recited by two choirs/groups in the community)

The Lord is my Shepherd,
revealed to me in Don Bosco’s heart;
He walks with the young,
and I shall not lack hope, joy, or meaning.

He leads me to playgrounds of laughter
and classrooms of life;
He makes me rest where trust is born
and refreshes me with friendship and faith.

He renews my spirit through reason and gentleness;
He guides me along paths of goodness and responsibility
for the sake of forming honest citizens
and faithful followers of the Great Good Shepherd.

Even when I walk through confusion, failure, or doubt,
I fear no harm,
for His loving presence stays close to me;
His guidance corrects me,
His kindness consoles me.

He prepares a table of belonging
in the midst of my struggles;
He welcomes me without judgement,
and fills my life with confidence and dignity.

Surely joy, hope, and loving-kindness shall follow me
all the days of my youth and beyond,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord—
in a Salesian family of faith, forever.

5. Gospel Reading: John 10:1-10 (shorter version: Jn 10:14-15) **The Good Shepherd, the Salesian Jesus**

6. Nine Salesian Qualities from the Good Shepherd

Homily reflections for each day of the Novena

22 January – Listening, Noticing, and Recognising with the Heart

The Good Shepherd begins not by speaking, but by listening. He listens with the heart, noticing the struggles, fears, and silent cries of each sheep. Nothing escapes his compassionate gaze. This is the shepherd's heart that feels before it leads. We see this same attentive gaze in Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who noticed the lack of wine at Cana and the need of her aged cousin Elizabeth. To listen, to notice, to recognise—this is the first Salesian act of love. Before guiding the young, we are called to listen to their stories and feel their wounds.

23 January – Loving Presence and Accompaniment

The Good Shepherd does not shepherd from a distance. He walks with the flock, sharing their paths, their dust, and their daily rhythms. This is the Salesian “sacrament of presence”—being with the young in playgrounds, classrooms, streets, and sanctuaries. He does not push from behind or command from above; he journeys alongside like a friend. Presence itself becomes healing. Like Don Bosco, we are called not just to do things *for* the young, but to be *with* them. They are not our mere beneficiaries or objects of our ministry but subjects, partners and protagonists of our mission.

24 January – Educating and Nourishing Life

The Good Shepherd nourishes life fully. He forms not only the mind, but also the heart, the conscience, and the soul. Salesian education flows from this vision: to educate is to lead young people to the fullness of life through reason, religion, and loving-kindness. Teaching is not mere instruction; it is an act of pastoral love. When the Shepherd feeds, he feeds wisdom, faith, and hope together.

25 January – Personal Relationship and Name-by-Name Care

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, knows his sheep by name and voice. He does not reduce them to numbers, labels, or results. Each one matters. God loves each of us as if there were only one of us. This personal relationship is at the heart of Salesian ministry. Don Bosco believed that every young person needs to feel known, valued, and loved personally. In his oratory, every boy felt that Don Bosco loved him most! Don Bosco had a pastoral heart. True education begins when a young person realises: “I am not just one among many; I matter.”

26 January – Fostering Freedom, Responsibility, Joy, and Spontaneity

The Good Shepherd leads his sheep into freedom, not fear. His presence creates trust; his love awakens joy. In Salesian spaces, young people are encouraged to grow freely, responsibly, and spontaneously. The words of St. Philip Neri, often quoted by Don Bosco—“Run, jump, shout, sing, or dance, but do not commit sin”—are too often forgotten today amid excessive discipline and uniformity. At times, creativity and spontaneity seem far removed from our formation processes and pastoral mission. Yet joy is not a distraction from holiness; it is a pathway to it. Where there is trust, hearts open; where there is joy, growth becomes possible.

27 January – Celebrating Life and Faith

For the Good Shepherd, celebration itself is pastoral. Joy is not optional; it is essential. Celebration embraces both the “good” and the “wounded” sheep, together with friends and neighbours, in a spirit of belonging. Salesian spirituality recognises festivity, play, gratitude, and shared celebration as genuine paths to God. Salesian celebration flows naturally from recreation, music, games, and community life. The Eucharist, too, is a celebration of family spirit and communion. Faith is lived not only in silence and prayer, but also in laughter, song, and friendship. Faith education, therefore, should never be a force or a burden for either the young or the educator; rather, it should be an attraction—an experience of joy and delight in learning, living and loving our faith. A joyful community thus becomes a living witness that God is good and that life is a gift.

28 January – Synodal Good Shepherd

The Good Shepherd makes no hierarchy of worth among his sheep. The lost, the difficult, and the so-called “bad sheep” are not placed below others; they are loved on the same level. The Good Shepherd celebrates with both the faithful and the wounded, and keeps the company of every kind of sheep. This reveals our synodal God, who walks with all. Don Bosco often signed himself as “Fr. John Bosco, the leader of little rascals”, knowing well that not all his boys were Dominic Savios. His conviction was simple and radical: it is enough that they are young for them to be loved. Even in the most wounded young person, there is a seed of goodness waiting to grow. Salesian love, therefore, never gives up.

29 January – Working Tirelessly with Temperance

The Shepherd’s love is not sentimental; it is hardworking. His care is expressed through daily commitment, simplicity of life, and self-discipline. The Good Shepherd is available at all times; he stands as the gate of the sheep through the night while the flock rests in safety. This is the style of Salesian assistance. Salesian assistance itself becomes prayer, penance, sacrifice, and faithful and joyful presence. In the Salesian tradition, work and temperance go hand in hand.

Don Bosco promised his boys bread, work, and heaven—dignity for today and hope for eternity. There is no heaven without work and commitment. In a culture where the dignity of work is often forgotten or diminished, a dedicated Salesian worker becomes a powerful witness. Tireless service, lived with simplicity, thus becomes an authentic expression of pastoral love.

30 January – A Pastoral Heart like Jesus, Mary, and Don Bosco

At the heart of Christianity is the Heart of Christ—the Heart of the Good Shepherd, the Sacred Heart. As Pope Francis reminds us, this is not “the veneration of a single organ apart from the Person of Jesus.” Rather, “what we contemplate and adore is the whole Jesus Christ” (*Dilexit Nos*, 48). This pastoral heart, gentle and full of loving-kindness, inspired St. Francis de Sales and found concrete expression in Don Bosco’s life and mission. The culmination of the Preventive System is loving-kindness: a love that prevents harm, awakens goodness, and leads the young to God. To have a Salesian heart, therefore, is to share in the very heart of Jesus. Mary had a similar heart, one that went out in compassion and sensitivity to those in need. She had a heart that walked with him until his death. A Salesian heart is not apathetic or merely sympathetic, but truly empathetic.

7. Concluding Prayer:

Leader:

Let us pray in silence.

*For the leaders of the Church and of our country, who are called to be good shepherds today.
(Pause)*

*For our Salesian Family, the shepherds who continue the mission of the Good Shepherd.
(Pause)*

*For young people who struggle and suffer because of war, violence, poverty, and other social evils.
(Pause)*

Leader: St. Joseph,

All: be our guardian, as you lovingly protected Jesus, entrusted to your care.

Leader: Mary, Help of Christians,

All: be our inspiration to remain sensitive to the poor and the vulnerable, as you were with Elizabeth and at the wedding feast of Cana.

Leader: St. John Bosco,

All: help us to live with the same faith and hope with which you dedicated your life to the young.

8. Hymn to Don Bosco

Chorus:

We thank you O Lord for Don Bosco,

In him, we see the wonders of your love,
You filled him with gifts of nature and grace,
To lead young people to their home above.

1 He was a man profoundly human,
Open to the signs of the times,
And yet he was a man,
he was a man of God.

2 Enable us to be his double,
Faithful in the service of youth,
Overcoming hardships with firmness,
With hearts filled with your love.

Prepared by Fr. Gilbert Choondal SDB, INK