



Holy Heroes

St. John Bosco---January 31



John Bosco grew up in a poor Italian farm family in the 1820's. At a very young age, he began to work on the farm, mainly tending sheep out in the hills. Even though his family was poor, and needed his help, when John announced at the age of nine that he wanted to become a priest, he was allowed to go. He walked four miles a day to get to school, he could only go for half of the year (Fall and Winter) but John finally was ready to enter the seminary.

As a young man, John Bosco presented one-boy shows of tricks learned from circus performers. After his performance, while he still had an audience of boys, he would repeat the homily he had heard earlier in church and pray with the boys. This combination of play and teaching would serve him well in later years.

He worked as a tailor, baker, shoemaker, and carpenter while attending college and the seminary. After much hard work and study, John Bosco was ordained a priest and taught at an orphanage in Turin, Italy. He devoted his spare time to helping poor children in the city slums. He entertained them with stories and tricks and found them jobs. He understood that playing was as important as praying and that playing could be a way of teaching the boys about Who they were praying to. He wrote many articles and books explaining the teachings of Christ. Then he showed his young listeners how to print them for themselves.

He bought a run down farm and taught the boys to restore the buildings and learn to garden and raise produce. Slowly but surely, the boys grew and developed in this atmosphere of love, help and acceptance. They began to work, to pray and to learn.

Saint John Bosco founded the Society of Saint Francis de Sales (S.S.F.S.), later known as the Salesians of Don Bosco (Italian for Father Bosco), priests who still work with and educate boys. With the help of a friend named Saint Mary Mazzarello, he also founded the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians to aid abandoned girls. Finally, he founded a lay movement called the Salesian Cooperators, who bind themselves to the Salesian way of life by promise rather than vow.

John Bosco believed greatly in the power of Holy Communion. He wrote, "Do you want our Lord to give you many graces? Visit Him often. Do you want Him to give you few graces? Visit Him seldom. Visits to the Blessed Sacrament are powerful and indispensable means of overcoming the attacks of the devil. Make frequent visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and the devil will be powerless against you."

Saint John Bosco died at the age of seventy-two in 1888 and was canonized in 1934.