

## **THE SPIRITUALITY OF PRESENCE – A PATH TO PERFECTION**

'Give me souls,' is a biography of Don Bosco written by Peter Lappin. This book presents to us some of the extra-ordinary events connected to Don Bosco's life. Once Fr. John Branda, of the Salesian house at Sarria-Barcelona was sleeping. Suddenly, he heard the whispering sound of Don Bosco. Anyhow, thinking that it was only a dream, he never bothered to pay his attention to the voice of Don Bosco. Again, on 6 February 1886, he had the same experience. This time he got up from the bed and followed the voice of Don Bosco. He dressed and went to Dormitory. There he saw a vision of Don Bosco – 'asking him to take him around the house. Then Don Bosco directed him to the dormitory and there he pointed out three boys who were on the verge of moral corruption. The one who was responsible for their deviation from good morals was their brother assistant who was called to be their guardian angel. Hearing his name as culpable, Fr. Branda was dumb folded because he appeared as pious in his religious favour and faithful to his superiors. Then Don Bosco led him to his office there he saw those three boys standing. As soon as they saw Don Bosco, the tried to hide from him. Then Fr. Branda saw the brother who ruined the souls of those innocent boys. Don Bosco was hard on him and accused him of taking away those souls from the presence of the Lord. At once, Don Bosco asked Fr. Branda to expel him from the oratory otherwise, he would do great harm. However, Fr. Branda was helpless since there were no proofs so he asked Don Bosco to ask someone else to carry out his order and he saw Don Rua and immediately Don Bosco disappeared and vision was over.'

He could not sleep further. Even then, Fr. Branda was hesitated to take action against the culprit. Meanwhile, he called the prefect of studies and assistants to find out the naughtiest boys in the group. All the same, these efforts could not find the desired results. He was a bit relaxed and thinking that the vision that he had only an illusion. A few days later, he got a letter from Don Rua telling him that he met Don Bosco that evening and he enquired about the progress of action that Don Bosco asked him to implement in the oratory. He was more disturbed and after a few days, he went to celebrate Mass in the house of Senora Dorotea de Chopitea. 'Do you know I dreamed about Don Bosco last night,' she told him. 'Excuse me,' afraid to hear what Don Bosco would have told her, he hurried for celebrating the Mass. At the end of the Mass, he heard a voice speaking within him: 'Do what Don Bosco told you to do immediately otherwise it would be your last Mass.'

Now fully determined came back to the house and met prefect of studies and bound him by the vow of secrecy and ordered him to enquire about the truth. He revealed to him the names of those three boys and asked him to call them one by one in secret and enquire about the

person who led them astray. Fr. Branda locked the other two companions in the room to avoid cross-talk. In the end, he handed over the name of the culprit to the prefect of studies and asked him to check the person whom boys revealed as responsible. It was the same brother pointed out by Don Bosco. Fr. Branda called him and asked about the issue. In the beginning, he acted as though he did not know anything. When he revealed the truth, he asked Fr. Branda who raised this accusation against him. When he heard that, it was Don Bosco, he fell on his knees and asked pardon. However, they arranged for his future sustenance but expelled him at once from the oratory...

If there were no original sin would Jesus incarnate in our midst? Yes, indeed, he came to redeem us and perfected our human nature. Jesus says: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Mt. 5:48) We could not be perfect by ourselves because of our inclination towards sin that created hindrance in our effort towards perfection. While he was here on earth, all his efforts were to empower humanity and human nature. When he was given the scroll of Isaiah to read in the synagogue, he was declaring his manifesto that promised the integral liberation of humanity from all its imperfections. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring Good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Lk. 4: 18-19) In the gospels, we see several events wherein, Jesus mended the broken humanity of all its imperfections and led them to the experience of liberation.

In the gospel, we see Jesus exorcises the demoniac. Jesus knew the imperfection caused by the evil spirit in this person and his surroundings. The evil spirit vehemently proclaims the identity of Jesus. nevertheless, Jesus was not carried away by the distractions of evil. He was not ready to compromise with evil. At once Jesus exercised his authority and commanded him to be silent and go out. Jesus was extremely strict with the evil power that possessed the person and did not ostracize the person who became the victim of the evil power. Jesus recognized the sufferings of this person, liberating him from the attack of the evil spirit, and empowers his human nature.

In our life journey, we come across various people. At times, we may have to live or deal with people who struggle with imperfections. What is our attitude towards them? At times, we become quite judgmental or critical about their imperfections rather being a presence that helps them to overcome their imperfections. The life of Don Bosco teaches us that young ruffians become saints because of his nurturing presence in their life. He too moved with compassion for youngsters especially those who were exploited physically and

economically. At the same time, he did not compromise with the evil tendencies among them. Like Jesus, he did not hate the person instead tried to help them to come out of various addictions and other problems that they were caught up with. Taking young prisoners for a day of the picnic, promising the authorities that if any one of them was found missing he would remain in the prison on behalf of them. Who would take such a high-risk? It depicts the depth of his shepherding heart that went behind the lost sheep like Jesus. Let us imitate these examples and try to be persons who help others to come out of their bondages and assist them to lead a virtuous life...