

BARTHOLOMEW GARELLI

-On the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary (8 December 1841) Don Bosco was vesting to celebrate holy Mass at the appointed time.. The sacristan, Joseph Comotti, saw a shy young boy in a corner of the sacristy. He invited him to serve Mass.

Bart: I don't know how

-He answered completely embarrassed.

Sacr: Come on, I want you to serve Mass.

Bart: I don't know how. I've never served Mass.

Sacr: You little brat, if you don't know how to serve Mass, what are you doing in the sacristy?

-With that he grabbed the feather duster and hit the poor boy about the head and shoulders. As the boy beat a hasty retreat, Don Bosco cried aloud:

DB: What are you doing? Why are you beating him like that? What's he done?

Sacr: Why is he hanging round the sacristy if he doesn't know how to serve Mass?

DB: But you've done wrong.

Sacr: What does it matter to you?

DB: It matters plenty. He's a friend of mine. Call him back at once. I need to speak wit him.

Sacr: Young man, young man! The sacristan began to shout, as he ran after him.

-Promising him better treatment, he brought the lad back to Don Bosco. He came over trembling and tearful because of the blows received.

DB: Have you attended Mass yet?

Bart: No

DB: Well, come to Mass now. Afterwards I'd like to talk to you about something that will please you.

-He promised to do as Don Bosco said; who wanted to calm down the poor fellow's spirit and not leave him with that sad impression towards the people in charge of the sacristy. Once Don Bosco celebrated the Mass and made due thanksgiving he took the young man into a side chapel. Trying to calm the poor boy reassuring him that nobody was going to beat him Don Bosco started to ask him.

DB: My good friend, what's your name?

Bart: My name is Bartholomew Garelli.

DB: Where are you from?

Bart: I am from Asti

DB: Is your father alive?

Bart: No, my father is dead.

DB: And your mother?

Bart: My mother is dead too.

DB: How old are you?

Bart: I am sixteen

DB: Can you read and write?

Bart: I don't know anything.

DB: Have you made your first communion?

Bart: Not yet.

DB: Have you ever been to confession?

Bart: Yes, when I was small.

DB: Are you going to catechism classes now?

Bart: I don't dare.

DB: Why?

Bart: Because the other boys are smaller than I am, and they know their catechism. As big as I am, I don't know anything, so I am ashamed to go.

DB: If I were to teach you catechism on your own, would you come?

Bart: I'd come very willingly.

DB: Would you come willingly to this little room?

Bart: I'd come willingly enough, provided they don't beat me.

DB: Relax. No one will harm you. On the contrary, you'll be my friend and you'll be dealing with me and no one else. When would you like to begin our catechism?

Bart: Whenever you wish.

DB: This evening?

Bart: OK

DB: Are you willing right now?

Bart: Yes, right now, with great pleasure.

-Don Bosco stood up and made the sign of the cross to begin; but Bartholomew made no response because he did not know how to do it. Don In that first catechism class Don Bosco taught him to make the sign of the cross. He also taught him to know God the Creator and why he created us. Though Bartholomew's memory was poor, with attentive diligence in a few Sundays he learned enough to make a good confession and, soon after, his holy communion. This is how Don Bosco began his work with the poor boys in the city of Turin, Italy