

COLLE DON BOSCO

This is the land of Giovannino Bosco. Here he was born, played, worked, and heard the voice of God. Here we breathe the joy and spiritual strength of Don Bosco. These serene places are full of memories and messages. Colle Don Bosco is the place where his dream saw the light and began a long journey. On this hill in the Becchi hamlet of Castelnuovo, on August 16, 1815, Giovannino Bosco was born in the "Biglione farmhouse" where his father worked as a sharecropper. Here are the places that testify to his presence and his work for youth, let's discover them together!



THE LITTLE HOUSE OF THE BECCHI

At two years old, Giovanni became fatherless, so with his mother, brothers, and grandmother, the Bosco family moved to a small house bought by the father and adapted by the mother as a dwelling; in this small house, he lived until he was 16 years old. Here he received the precious education of Mamma Margaret: the fundamentals of human and Christian values. The little house consists of the stable, the small kitchen-room and, on the upper floor, the small bedroom of the mother and grandmother and, finally, the small room of the dream: that dream Giovannino had between nine and ten years old and which would guide him throughout his life. The little house is supported by a structure that houses old photos of the hill and recalls the educational values of Mamma Margaret. The small building testifies to pilgrims the humility of Don Bosco's family and the peasant life of the past.

MONUMENT TO GIOVANNINO THE JUGGLER

The monument highlights Giovanni's beginnings as a very young animator through the art of juggling and street performing on these meadows. Over time, in building his entertainment shows, Giovanni followed certain criteria that would later guide play in the Oratory: seriousness in preparation and healthy and intelligent fun with formative purposes. From his mother, he learned a way to make sincere friendships: to bond with those who are loyal and generous ("avoid the vulgar, the coarse, the ill-mannered, the overbearing...") and with those who are open to the sense of God.

THE MEADOW OF THE DREAM

The meadow to the west is the one that Giovannino saw, at nine years old, in the prophetic dream of his future mission. A pillar recalls the vision he had that foreshadowed a life completely spent for young people. As Giovannino grew, he felt a great desire growing in his heart: to study to become a priest and take care of boys.



MONUMENT TO MAMMA MARGHERITA

In the meadow of the "dream of nine years" stands the watchful eye of Mamma Margaret, a bronze work by Enrico Manfrini (1992), accompanied by five bronze panels illustrating episodes of her life in the Becchi. In the little house of the Becchi, the needy knew they could find a welcoming heart for any need. The monument is meant to be a sign of gratitude from the Salesian Family to the one who made a decisive contribution to the formation of the Saint of youth.

HOUSE OF BROTHER JOSEPH

The two-story building located almost opposite the "little house", next to the small Sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians, is the house of brother Joseph. Joseph married at twenty and built his house here. A room on the first floor was reserved for Don Bosco. A room on the ground floor was then used as a chapel, blessed by Don Bosco in October 1848. The granary and barn became an autumn dormitory for the boys of the Oratory who spent a short holiday here during the grape harvest; they celebrated Our Lady of the Rosary and then left for the famous autumn walks. Here a sundial was placed with the inscription that marked the years of study of the cleric Bosco: "Afflictis lentae – celeres gaudentibus horae", meaning "Hours pass slowly for those who are sad, quickly for those who are in joy".

THE BASILICA

The Basilica of Don Bosco was built where the "Biglione farmhouse" stood, in which Don Bosco's father, Francesco, worked as a sharecropper. The Basilica consists of two superimposed churches. The first stone was blessed on June 11, 1961, by the Archbishop of Turin Maurilio Fossati. In 1965, only the lower church was opened for worship, with a capacity of 700 seats; the upper church was consecrated in 1984 by Card. Ballestrero and was subsequently renovated in 1999, with the installation of heating, improved acoustics, and a more unified redefinition of the internal architectural lines. On September 3, 1988, in the year of the first centenary of Don Bosco's death, the Basilica was visited by Pope John Paul II, who on that occasion beatified Laura Vicuña, a very young Chilean student from an Argentine college of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. On April 12, 2010, Pope Benedict XVI elevated it to the dignity of a minor basilica. The building was constructed in classic forms, interpreted according to contemporary models. The interiors reflect the artistic trends of the time when they were created. The exterior of the Basilica is characterized by the remarkable dome, the two bell towers that emerge from the facade, and the grandiose staircase in front. The building is 26 meters tall overall.

The lower church

The large altarpiece (by Caffaro Rore) depicts the autumn walks from Turin to Don Bosco's Hill with the boys, Mamma Margaret, Saint Dominic Savio, Don Rua (Don Bosco's first successor) and Don Cagliero (first Salesian missionary). In the presbytery, the crucifix by Caffaro Rore and the wooden statue of Mary Help of Christians by Müller (Ortisei) from 1936. Behind the altar, a precious relic of Don Bosco is placed at the spot where he was born. Next to it, the paintings (by M. Bogani) represent, on the left, the marriage of Margaret and Francesco (widower, with his son Antonio) and the baptism of Giovannino; on the right, the death of Francesco and the move to the "Little House". In the side altars are placed the painting of Saint Francis de Sales (Caffaro Rore) and the stained glass windows with saints of the Salesian and Italian tradition. These contribute to highlighting the essential elements of the Salesian spirit. The electric traction organ, with 31 real registers and 2500 pipes, is by the Tamburini company and the Last Supper, at the back of the church, is a life-size photograph of Leonardo Da Vinci's famous work (Ilford company).



The upper church

At the top of the staircase is the bronze statue of Don Bosco, a gift from the teachers of Italy in 1929, on the occasion of the beatification. It is the work of Bellini.

Above the entrance portals, a fresco by M. Bogani represents the Salesian missionary work among the various civilizations of the world.

The interior, designed by the Trucco studio in Turin, has been covered with beech wood panels and laminated beam ribs and closed by a suspended counter-dome. The upper church is the first place in the world that shows pilgrims a Via Lucis in sculptures, an original itinerary of Easter devotion in which the events of Christ's life from Jesus' resurrection to Pentecost are remembered and celebrated. It consists of 14 linden wood sculptures, created by Giovanni Dragoni and placed in the side aisles. The statues describe the manifestations of the risen Christ up to the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The iconographies are by the painter Mario Bogani, author of six canvases that illustrate, in a unified and comprehensible way, some fundamental episodes of Don Bosco's life and activities for young people. By the same painter is the large fresco, placed at the top of the staircase leading to the Upper Temple, which represents the young people of the world entrusted to Don Bosco, thanks to a composition of faces. On the back wall, above the presbytery, is the wooden statue of Christ the Risen Redeemer, the work of sculptor Corrado Piazza. Made of linden wood and 8 meters tall, the statue represents the recall to the premonitory dream that Don Bosco had as a child. The crypt, which recalls the place of Don Bosco's birth, contains the relic of the Saint. The stained glass windows by Luigi Zonta recall, in a stylized way, his mission and spirituality. The rose window depicts the coat of arms of the Salesian Congregation. Also of considerable value is the mechanical traction organ with 47 real registers and 3328 pipes (Pinchi company).



MUSEUM OF 19TH CENTURY PEASANT CIVILIZATION

Built next to the house of brother Joseph, the Museum of Peasant Civilization illustrates the life of the 19th-century peasant family on the Monferrato and Piedmontese hills in general. The life of every man is conditioned by the cultural environment in which he lives, and even more by the natural one in which he spends the years of childhood and adolescence. So it was for Giovanni Bosco, immersed in the peasant reality made of a strong family sense, much work, hard sacrifice, extreme poverty, and strong Christian faith. The objects and photographs in the Museum testify to this lifestyle and its values that Don Bosco's Missionaries have brought to the world.

SMALL SANCTUARY OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

Originally, this place was occupied by the tiny house of Antonio Bosco, which was then destined (1915-17) for the Small Sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians. The idea came from the Salesian Cooperators, who wanted to remember two centenaries: the institution of the Feast of Mary Help of Christians by Pope Pius VII (May 24, 1815) and the centenary of Don Bosco's birth. Boys from all over the world contributed to the construction: the crown of coats of arms that runs under the roof recalls all their nations. The project was drawn up by the Salesian architect Giulio Valotti. The statue of Mary Help of Christians is the work of the Salesian Professional Schools of Barcelona (Spain). Today it is a place of daily adoration and prayer for youth and the Salesian Family worldwide.

SALESIAN INSTITUTE "BERNARDI SEMERIA"

On the eve of Don Bosco's Beatification (June 2, 1929), his third successor, Don Filippo Rinaldi, bought the Biglione Farm and the surrounding land. On this land, Don Pietro Ricaldone built, from 1938 to 1940, a large Institute for young orphans and poor, eager to give their lives to the education of other boys. In the Institute, a Graphic School was opened for the dissemination of good press, in support of the catechetical campaign (started in 1942). Many Salesian coadjutor brothers were trained at this school who then left as missionaries to many parts of the world. The Institute bears the name of the benefactor who offered it, Lawyer Pietro Bernardi, and his nephew, Father Semeria. Currently, the Salesian Community of the Hill lives and works here, welcoming pilgrims, tourists, and youth groups and hosting a Professional Center specialized in Graphic Arts and giving valid support to the parishes of the territory.



MISSIONARY ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM

The Museum documents the missionary dimension of the "dream of 9 years". Started in 1875, the missionary adventure of Don Bosco's Salesians today reaches over 130 nations. The Museum testifies to the missionary action of Don Bosco's sons and the encounter with cultures unknown to most. In the showcases are exhibited significant artifacts of the material, family, work, religious, and social life of the countries that the missionaries visited during their expeditions. The luminous panels recall some great missionaries of Don Bosco, and the action of human promotion and evangelization carried out in mission territories.

CROSS ON THE HILL OF YOUTH BEATITUDES

The definition of "Hill of youth beatitudes" is due to a speech given by Pope John Paul II during his visit to Colle Don Bosco on September 3, 1988. However, he was referring in general to all the hills that characterized the childhood of Saint John Bosco. The cross, on the other hand, recalls the last missionary dream that occurred between April 9 and 10, 1886, while Don Bosco was in Barcelona.

