"Try to gain love…"

Good Afternoon to you and to each of my esteemed listeners! Welcome to EWTN's Open Line Tuesday edition. Barbara McGuigan here, alive and grateful to be with you today and each Tuesday – and each Saturday on The Good Fight. What do *you* think is the best tool for teaching our children "to treasure God's will and promise?" God's airwaves are open and here are the numbers to call:

North America call 1-800-585-9396

Outside North America call 1-205-271-2985

Our email address is always Openline@ewtn.com

Today, February 1, is the feast day of St. Brigid of Ireland. She is second only to St. Patrick himself in Ireland's long, long list of great saints. The ancient chroniclers tell us that St. Brigid and St. Patrick had "so great a friendship of charity that they had but one heart and one mind" and that "Through him and through her Christ performed many miracles." St. Brigid of Ireland, pray for us!

Now, yesterday, January 31, was the feast day of another great saint, one of Mother Church's most wonderful treasures, St. John Bosco. TAN Books publishes a great biography, entitled simply, *St. John Bosco*. I would like to quote, in part, the foreword to this book, because I believe it sums up our saint so well:

> This life, so full of color and of drama, will appeal to all, whatever their creed or opinions. St. John Bosco, or simply "Don Bosco," as he wished to be called, spent himself wholly, from his very childhood, in healing modern human miseries. As he saw and foresaw the dangerous surging tide of misled popular masses longing for justice, he threw himself headlong among the youth of the lower classes, pointing to them the only way to a better place in this life and in the life to come. He did not talk much: he acted. He did not write long and elaborate educational treatises: his example is the best one.
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> When asked about the secret of his immense success with the youngsters, he simply answered: "love . . ." By a kind of surprising intuition, Don Bosco knew that selfishness, bearing injustice and hatred, was at the bottom of this modern society, forever prattling about equality, philanthropy and fraternity. He felt the sting of the sarcasm and of the tragedy of the common people proclaimed "sovereign" in theory, but in fact reduced to slavery by this blustering modern liberalism, which raised the flickering torch of human "reason" against the eternal light. Don Bosco set himself to bring back the multitudes to the only Heart that understood their needs. He is the greatest pioneer of Christ in modern times…

Brothers and sisters, as you might expect, Don Bosco was blessed with a holy Mother. Her name was Margaret Bosco. I believe the question I asked at the opening of our show today is a valid one. How do we make our beloved children apostles for God? I love Margaret Bosco's living example of a mother who, unbeknownst to her, is raising up a saint. Tan's biographer writes:

> St. John Bosco's mother, like the mother of many great men, [and might we include great women] was a notable woman, one of the heroic company of Catholic wives and mothers who carry the great ideals of their faith into the smallest things of life… Margaret Bosco, though herself unlearned, was a born educator. The beginning and end of her teaching was God. Morning and evening the whole household knelt together, asking their daily bread, both for soul and body, for courage to do well, and pardon for what was done less well. Margaret seldom punished. "God always sees you," she used to say, "even when I do not. I may not be there, but He is always there."
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> She would speak to her children of His beauty, revealed in the lovely world of His creation, and when their tiny vineyard, as sometimes happened, was stripped of its fruit by a sudden hailstorm: "God gave them to us," she would say, "and He has taken them away. He is the Master; may His Will be done." And when in the winter evenings they sat by the fire, listening to the wind that howled around the little cottage, "Children," she would say, "let us thank God, who is so good to us. He is truly a Father — our Father in Heaven." When the children were tempted to be untruthful: "Take care," she would say, "God sees our most secret thoughts"— and out would come the truth.

Margaret Bosco's manner of choosing "love rather than severity" as the tool for bringing up her children to know, love, and serve God surely influenced our great saint. In an updated edition of *Butler's Lives of the Saints* we read:

> Don Bosco's method of study knew nothing of punishment. Observance of rules was obtained by instilling a true sense of duty, by removing assiduously all occasions for disobedience, and by allowing no effort towards virtue, how trivial so ever it might be, to pass unappreciated. He held that the teacher should be father, adviser, and friend, and he was the first to adopt the preventive method. Of punishment he said: "As far as possible avoid punishing . . . try to gain love before inspiring fear." And in 1877 he wrote: "I do not remember to have used formal punishment; and with God's grace I have always obtained, and from apparently hopeless children, not alone what duty exacted, but what my wish simply expressed."
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> In one of his books he has discussed the causes of weakness of character, and derives them largely from a misdirected kindness in the rearing of children. Parents make a parade of precocious talents; the child understands quickly, and his sensitiveness enraptures all who meet him, but the parents have only

> succeeded in producing an affectionate, perfected, intelligent animal. The chief object should be to form the will and to temper the character.
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> In all his pupils Don Bosco tried to cultivate a taste for music, believing it to be a powerful and refining influence. "Instruction", he said, "is but an accessory, like a game; knowledge never makes a man because it does not directly touch the heart. It gives more power in the exercise of good or evil; but alone it is an indifferent weapon, wanting guidance."
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> He always studied, too, the aptitudes and vocations of his pupils, and to an almost supernatural quickness and clearness of insight into the hearts of children must be ascribed no small part of his success. In his rules he wrote: "Frequent Confession, frequent Communion, daily Mass: these are the pillars which should sustain the whole edifice of education." Don Bosco was an indefatigable confessor, devoting days to this work among his children. He recognized that gentleness and patience alone were not enough to bring to the task of education. He thoroughly believed in play as a means of arousing childish curiosity - more than this, he places it among his first recommendations, and for the rest he adopted St. Philip Neri's words: "Do as you wish, I do not care so long as you do not sin."

One biographer, Ann Ball, in her book *Modern Saints*, writes how Don Bosco saw, in his dreams:

> …the state of soul of boys at the Oratory, which was the house he started. In one dream he saw some of them shining with light, and looking so handsome that they no longer seemed to be his boys. He saw others with eyes, ears and tongue covered with sores, their mouths filled with dirt, giving off a foul odor, and their bodies a deathly color. Others appeared in the dream with their hearts eaten through with maggots or filled with snakes, that is, mortal sins. Don Bosco was in agony over their terrible state, and longed to bring them back to spiritual health. After he described this dream to his boys, he urged them to examine their consciences and to make a sincere confession. One by one they visited him all day long to talk to him about their souls. It was not uncommon for Don Bosco to see the state of their souls before they even confessed.

Even though Italy was hostile to any new religious orders, our saint, guided by Our Blessed Mother, started the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales – the Salesians – in 1859, and received papal approval for it in 1869. In 1875, after seeing a vision of starving, unwashed, and poorly clothed girls, Don Bosco, along with St. Mary Mazzarello, founded the Salesian sisters, called the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. He also formed a lay order called the Cooperators who would pledge to assist the Salesian priests, brothers and sisters in their work for the souls of young people.

Our great saint lived poor and died poor. It was said that on the day of his death in 1888 at the age of 72, his fellow religious had to beg the baker for bread on credit.

Pope Pius XI said of Don Bosco, “God gave him magnanimity of heart as the sand on the sea-shore.” He was beatified in 1929 with the multitudes joyfully present. He was canonized on Easter Sunday, 1934. St. John Bosco, pray for us!

My brothers and sisters, I welcome your comments and questions. Do you think Don Bosco's tools for teaching and training children would be beneficial today? In our culture where rappers, rock stars and famous athletes seem to be the role models of our young people, do you think it's worthwhile to teach them what made the saints tick? Here are the numbers to call: 1-800-585-9396 and 1-205-271-2985.

Closing: A zillion thanks for your calls today! Also, special thanks to my brilliant producers,Tom Graye, Elena Rodriguez and Mike Romano.

Fr. Bernard Bro, a French Dominican priest, theologian and author, tells this little story about St. John Bosco in our *Magnificat* prayer book for January 31st:

> It is said that at the end of the 19th century, John Bosco had to spend a short time in Paris. He went to the rectory of a large church, in the center of Paris. Seeing this Italian priest, who was perhaps of poor appearance and no doubt with hesitant French, the parish priest gave him a room in an attic on the sixth floor. Several years later, the same priest, questioned in Rome about Don Bosco during the canonization process, made this naive as well as awesome remark: "Well, of course, if we had known he was a saint, we wouldn't have put him on the sixth floor!"
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> In this regard, we need only read once again Chapter 25 of St. Matthew, which contains the great scene of the very last judgment of men and nations. "Lord, when did we see you hungry...or thirsty...or a stranger?... Amen I say to you, as long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it for me." “Well, of course, if we had known he was a saint..." It was Christ himself...
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> Charity involves sharing part of God's heart and discovering, through my prayer, the infinite dimensions of love.

Until next week on Open Line, Blessed be God and may He mightily bless you!

Bye for now!