

January 31 – St. John Bosco

John Bosco grew up on a small farm in Italy with his brothers. His father died when John was only two, and though his mother worked hard, they were very poor. But John was rich in other ways: he was smart, funny and loving; he was a good writer, and he had an incredible memory; he could juggle and walk on a tightrope; he had lots of energy, and he could work hard. And, he knew God wanted him to become a priest and help children. Off he went to school, wearing hand-me-down clothes, and working many jobs to stay there. Soon he began working with children. At that time, there were many children who left their poor families on farms in hopes of getting jobs in a city. Most did not. They were hungry, scared and homeless. John invited these children on picnics, where he walked a tightrope or did handstands to make them laugh. He gave them good food and played ball with them. He taught them about Jesus and he prayed with them. Soon John found buildings for these children to live in. With his own mother's help, he fed them, cut their hair, found them jobs, taught them to read, write, do math, sing, to become clever thinkers, to pray and trust in God. With his great energy and with a smile on his face, St. John Bosco helped thousands of children.

Here is a story about a very special friend who helped John Bosco.

Story: The Saint and His Big, Ugly Dog

There were many people who saw the work Fr. John Bosco was doing and frowned. For several reasons, they wished he would give up working with all those homeless kids. Perhaps, some of these people thought, they could "convince" the priest to give up.

So they made plans to scare and even hurt John. He was now often in danger as he went about doing his work.

One day, a dog showed up at John's house. It was huge and gray, and frightening to look at, a big hulk of a dog. No one knew where it had come from. Nobody had seen it before. But it seemed to love Fr. John and went with him everywhere.

With Grigio, as the dog was called, at John's side, no one dared attack him. Anyone foolish enough to try was soon scared off by Grigio. This happened many times.

One day, Fr. John and his dog were inside a building. When it was time to leave, Grigio growled at John. John cautiously walked towards the door, but Grigio snarled and showed his teeth. The huge dog blocked the door, and John was trapped. John was puzzled, and he did not try to get closer to the well-guarded door. Why was Grigio, always so loving, suddenly acting so strangely?

After a few hours, Grigio finally relaxed. He stopped growling and moved away from the door. John went on his way. Later, he found out that right outside, several men had been hiding, waiting to hurt John when he came outside. Grigio had kept John indoors until they left and it was safe again for John.

John continued his work, helping more and more children and Grigio continued to protect him. Eventually, the people who were against him changed their minds. All the danger was gone now. One evening, Grigio showed up as usual. He rubbed his head against John and held up one huge paw. Then the dog wandered off into the nighttime darkness, and never came back.

Discussion Starter: How did John Bosco help children? Why did John Bosco need Grigio's help?