

# Johnny Bosco's Dream and the Dreams of St. Joseph

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The bicentenary celebration of little Johnny Bosco's dream at the age of nine urges us to continue dreaming, as encouraged by His Eminence Card. Angel Fernandez ARTIME our beloved Rector Major through this year's Strenna. The dream that initiated Johnny Bosco's vocation story reveals a recurring theme throughout his life: the transformation of wild animals into meek lambs. This sequence is evident in his mission. The dream of 1844 is connected to the one he had in 1824. In the dream at the age of nine, a dignified person advises him to win friendship of the quarrelling youngsters with gentleness and love rather than blows. Johnny receives Mary as his guide to fulfil his mission. The dreams of 1824 and 1844 reveal a progression in which the guide prompts the dreamer to observe changes in wild animals, symbolizing spiritual transformation. In the 1824 dream, animals like wolves, goats, cats, dogs, and bears turn into meek lambs/sheep, with the dreamer assuming the role of a shepherd. In the dream of 1844, these meek lambs or sheep evolve into shepherds themselves, assisting John Bosco in his mission. This progression prompts us to reflect, in this circular, on the traits of wolves and in the next circular on sheep, and how they relate to human relationships and religious life. As we are in the month of March, I shall conclude the reflection part with spiritual insights from the dreams of St. Joseph and St. John Bosco.

## Wolves and their Traits

Wolves, unlike herbivorous animals, are carnivorous creatures, preying on flocks rather than pastures, often disguising themselves as sheep according to Jesus in Matthew 7:15. Therefore, pastors and elders as shepherds of the flock must be vigilant against them, as St. Paul warns in Acts 20:29-30, emphasizing that the sole desire of wolves is to devour the flock. The traits of wolves and their predatory nature could be depicted with following characteristics:

1. **Wolves manifest Pack Dynamics and Lack of Mutual Respect:** Despite operating in packs, wolves lack genuine respect for each other, often turning against their own kind with ease.
2. **Wolves avoid Shepherd's Vigilance:** Wolves actively avoid pastoral vigilance, but may infiltrate sheep herds if the shepherd is negligent, posing as sheep to evade detection.
3. **Wolves are stimulated by Bestial Hunger:** Driven by their primal instincts, wolves relentlessly pursue the flesh of sheep, exhibiting a bloodthirsty nature to satisfy their bodily hunger.
4. **Wolves are Agents of Unity Destruction:** Wolves disrupt unity and togetherness among sheep, scattering them through attacks, thereby enabling easier consumption of isolated individuals.
5. **Wolves render the Sheep Vulnerable:** When separated from the protection of the shepherd and the support of the herd, individual sheep become defenceless against wolves, lacking the physical capabilities to fend off attacks.

## Some Wolfish Traits that could Echo in our Relationships

When translating wolfish traits into human relationships, one must be however doubly cautious as not to generalize or stereotype individuals. Here are some parallels that could be drawn:

1. **Lack of Respect and Betrayal:** In human relationships, some individuals may exhibit a tendency to form groups or cliques but lack genuine respect for others within those groups. They may easily turn against their peers or allies for personal gain or advantage.
2. **Manipulation and Deception:** As wolves try to deceive shepherds or members of their pack, certain individuals in human relationships may employ deceptive tactics to manipulate others for their own purposes. They may feign loyalty or friendship while harbouring ulterior motives.
3. **Carnality and Exploitation:** In human relationships, there may be individuals who are quick to exploit weaknesses or vulnerabilities in others for their own gratification or benefit. They may prey on others' desires, fears, or insecurities to further their own agenda.
4. **Discontent and Rebellion Against Authority:** Some individuals may harbour grievances against authority figures, such as Leaders or Rectors or Major Superiors. They may use past experiences of perceived injustice or rejection as justification for rebelling against or undermining those in positions of power.
5. **Charismatic Charm and Manipulative Influence:** Certain individuals may possess charismatic personalities that they use to charm or manipulate others into trusting them or following their lead. They may leverage their charisma to exert influence and control over those around them.
6. **Destructive Intentions and Harmful Actions:** Just as wolves are portrayed as agents of destruction in nature, some individuals in human relationships may exhibit behaviours or actions that cause harm or discord within groups or communities. They may seek to undermine cohesion, sow discord, or cause harm to others for their own gain.
7. **Subversion and Division:** Individuals who exhibit wolfish traits in human relationships may seek to undermine group cohesion or unity by sowing seeds of doubt, distrust, or division among members. They may attempt to draw others away from established norms, values, or leadership structures in pursuit of their own agenda.

It's important to remember that while these traits may be manifested in certain individuals, however, not everyone who exhibits such behaviours is necessarily a "wolf." Human relationships are complex, and motivations for behaviour can vary widely. It's crucial to approach individuals with empathy, understanding, and discernment rather than jumping to conclusions based solely on their behaviours.

## A Way out for the one suffering with Wolfish Traits

To navigate and potentially mitigate wolfish traits in human relationships, it's crucial to approach individuals with compassion, kindness and sensitivity rather than generalizing or stereotyping them based on their behaviour. Here are some suggestions for addressing these wolfish traits:

1. **Promote Genuine Respect:** Encourage a culture of genuine respect where individuals value and honour each other's perspectives, feelings, and contributions.
2. **Foster Transparency and Trust:** In our mission, create an environment where honesty and authenticity are valued, making it more difficult for manipulation and deception to thrive. Encourage open communication and discourage hidden agendas.
3. **Empower Vulnerable Individuals:** Support and protect those who may be vulnerable to exploitation, ensuring them that they are not taken advantage of by those seeking personal gain. Offer resources and assistance to help them assert themselves, their boundaries and rights.
4. **Address Grievances Constructively:** Provide channels for individuals to address grievances and concerns they may have with authority figures or leadership, by fostering a culture of dialogue and problem-solving rather than rebellion and division.
5. **Promote Critical Thinking and Awareness:** Encourage individuals to critically evaluate charismatic personalities and be mindful of manipulative tactics. Educate them on recognizing signs of manipulation and how to assert their autonomy in relationships.
6. **Encourage Positive Conflict Resolution:** Teach individuals constructive ways to address conflicts and disagreements, focusing on finding mutually beneficial solutions rather than resorting to destructive behaviours.
7. **Strengthen Community Bonds:** Build a sense of belonging and unity within communities, making it more difficult for divisive individuals to undermine cohesion. Foster inclusive environments where everyone feels valued and respected.

By promoting these approaches, individuals can work towards mitigating the negative impact of wolfish traits in human relationships and fostering healthier, more supportive environments based on trust, respect, and mutual understanding.

## Johnny Bosco's Dream and the Dreams of St. Joseph

March is a month dedicated to St. Joseph, husband of Mary and foster father of Jesus. Both St. Joseph and St. John Bosco experienced God's intervention through significant dreams in their lives, but their contexts and purposes differed. However, both the dreams of St. Joseph and St. John Bosco's dream offer profound insights for our spiritual life. Here are ten lessons that can be gleaned from them:

1. **Trust in Divine Providence:** St. Joseph's dream teaches us to trust in God's guidance and providence even in times of uncertainty or difficulty. Similarly, St. John Bosco's dream emphasizes the importance of trusting in God's plan for our lives.
2. **Obedience to God's Will:** Both dreams highlight the importance of obedience to God's will. St. Joseph obediently took Mary as his wife and cared for Jesus as his own son, while St. John Bosco's dream emphasized the importance of obedience to his superiors, spiritual directors, confessors and God's commands.
3. **Protection and Guidance of the Holy Family:** St. Joseph's dream reminds us of the importance of seeking the protection and guidance of the Holy Family in our spiritual lives. Similarly, St. John Bosco's dream suggests the presence of Jesus and the guidance of Mary, the mother of Jesus, as a source of comfort and support.
4. **Patience and Perseverance:** St. Joseph's dream teaches us the virtue of patience and perseverance in following God's plan, even when it may seem difficult or unclear. St. John Bosco's dream underscores the importance of patience in dealing with difficult situations and people.
5. **Humility:** St. Joseph's dream reminds us of the humility of the Holy Family, particularly in the circumstances of Jesus' birth and early life. St. John Bosco's dream emphasizes the importance of humility in our own lives, both in our relationships with others and in our spiritual journey.
6. **Faith in the Face of Challenges:** Both dreams illustrate the importance of maintaining faith and trust in God, even when faced with challenges or obstacles. St. Joseph's dream shows how faith sustained him in accepting Mary's miraculous conception, while St. John Bosco's dream encouraged him to continue his mission despite opposition and setbacks.
7. **Prayer and Discernment:** St. Joseph's dream suggests the importance of prayer and discernment in seeking God's guidance and direction. Similarly, St. John Bosco's dream underscores the importance of prayer in discerning God's will and seeking strength and guidance in difficult times.
8. **Love and Compassion:** Both dreams highlight the importance of love and compassion in our relationships with others. St. Joseph's dream shows his love and compassion for Mary and Jesus, while St. John Bosco's dream emphasizes the importance of caring for and helping those poor and abandoned youth of his time.
9. **Mission and Vocation:** St. Joseph's dream reminds us that each of us has a unique mission and vocation in life, which may require courage and sacrifice to fulfil. St. John Bosco's dream encouraged him to embrace his calling to minister to young people and to persevere in his mission despite challenges.
10. **Hope and Salvation:** Finally, both dreams offer a message of hope and salvation. St. Joseph's dream heralded the coming of the Saviour, bringing hope to the world, while St. John Bosco's dream offered hope to the troubled young people he ministered to, pointing them towards the path of salvation and redemption.

## Conclusion

As a way of concluding our reflection on one aspect of the dream we have taken up for this month of March, here are some reflective questions that will help us to personalise the message of the dream.

1. How can the lessons from the traits of wolves, such as manipulation and division, inform our approach to nurturing unity and trust within religious communities, especially in contexts where conflict or dissent may arise?
2. Reflecting on St. Joseph's obedience to God's will and St. John Bosco's perseverance in the midst of opposition, how can we discern and respond to our own spiritual calling amidst challenges and uncertainties that arise in our mission?
3. Considering the parallels between wolves' predatory instincts and human tendencies toward exploitation and betrayal, how can leaders and community members work together to protect vulnerable individuals and foster environments of transparency and accountability?
4. Drawing from the themes of trust in divine providence and the importance of prayer and discernment highlighted in both St. Joseph's and St. John Bosco's dreams, how can individuals deepen their spiritual practices to cultivate a stronger connection with God and a clearer sense of purpose in their journey as religious and priest?
5. Reflecting on the virtues of humility, love, and compassion exemplified in the lives of St. Joseph and St. John Bosco, how can religious communities embody these qualities in their interactions with one another and in their outreach to those in need, following the examples set forth by these saints?

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