



**Brother John Cauda, S.D.B.**

Dear Confreres,

Wednesday had just turned to Thursday, January 21, 2010, when our dear confrere

## **Brother John Cauda**

quietly passed from this life into the arms of our Lord, who promised, "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11,28).

His life of 87 years began on July 27, 1922 at the beautiful Piedmontese village of Montà d'Alba. Three days later his parents, Agostino and Anna neé Calorio, brought him to the parish church of St. Anthony Abbot, where he was born into new life in Christ Jesus through the waters of baptism.

We could say that from the beginning Bro. John was also born and nurtured as a Salesian. In the few autobiographical notes that he left we read: "I lived in a small town about 18 miles from Turin, where Don Bosco had his Oratory, and less than 20 miles from Becchi, where Don Bosco was born. My grandfather told me he heard Don Bosco preach many times, of course in dialect."

Bro. John's father, Agostino, worked as a bricklayer and as a farmer, mainly tending vines. Bro. John, the youngest of four brothers, even at the age of eight, had the job of putting the cows out to pasture before heading to school, "just as Don Bosco was doing as a boy at Becchi."

A decisive moment came in his fourteenth year. "One day I was in the kitchen with my mother. My cousin, a Salesian priest, came to see my mother. He told her to give him a son to learn a trade in the Salesian school in Turin (Rebaudengo). My mother said, 'You, Giovanni, can go.' She was very happy, and I was more than she because I did not like my job with the cows."

When our Lord chooses someone for a life of consecration or for a special mission, He sometimes attracts that person through secondary and imperfect means. Then He invites his chosen one to purify his or her motives and to make an ever deeper commitment to Him.

If Bro. John's call to Salesian life began with a decision from his mother, so his life-long dedication to the Salesian mission as a fine woodworker came through another sequence that shows that "the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom" (1Cor 1, 25). Bro. John writes:

The priest asked me what trade I would take. I told him I would like to be a bricklayer. He said that we have all other trades, but not this one. So I picked machine shop.

On the second of January 1934, my father took me to the Rebaudengo Salesian School. The director told me that the only place available was the cabinet shop. He told me to go there, and there I remained.

In what Bro. John added next, "I love the trade very much," we can glimpse the reflection of God's consolation shining on one whose heart is open to God's will in whatever way He manifests it to us.

Bro. John then points to the greatest way, short of a direct inspiration, in which God communicates a vocational call to an attentive soul, namely, the witness of happy, dedicated servants of our Lord. "What impressed me very much was to see the Salesian brothers doing their work. 'That,' I said, 'is what I wanted: to follow them and be one of them.'"

And so John Cauda, the student of fine woodworking, along with ninety seven other aspiring persons entered the Salesian novitiate of Villa Moglia in Chieri, Italy, in 1939. Guided by Fr. Eugenio Magni, he began his life-long commitment to consecrated community life as a vowed Salesian of Don Bosco on August 16, 1940.

For his postnovitiate Bro. John returned to Conte Rebaudengo Institute to perfect his woodworking skills. So well did he succeed that in 1942 his provincial sent him to Colle Don Bosco to open the cabinetmaking shop at Bernardi Semeria Technical School. There he remained, master craftsman and dedicated instructor, for four years.

Bro. Bruno Busatto, at that time an aspirant at Colle Don Bosco, recalls how easy it was to approach Bro. John and speak with him. "He belonged to the sodality of Saint Aloysius, and so it was easy for him to give suggestions to us in the sodality."

The first three years were years of hardship for the community there with World War II raging around them. In 1943, as Allied forces targeted Turin in their bombing campaign, the relics of St. John Bosco, St. Dominic Savio, St. Mary Mazzarello and St. Joseph Cafasso were transferred to the relative safety of Colle Don Bosco. Bro. John, with pride and gratitude, recalls the special part he played in protecting and honoring the relics.

I had the privilege of building the big, solid wood box to contain the relics. All around the big box was built a brick wall [which was] filled with sand for more protection. At the end of the war, before the relics were taken back to Turin, we took the body of Don Bosco in procession in the playground of the school. With five other brothers I had the privilege of carrying the relics of Don Bosco on my shoulder.

Toward the end of 1945, Bro. John volunteered for the missions. In early January 1946, Fr. Pietro Berruti, Prefect General, an experienced missionary, wrote, praising "so good a proposition," and adding, "Prepare yourself for such an apostolate with a great spirit of faith, charity, mortification, always united with a holy joviality of heart."

In mid-February Fr. Berruti announced, "I have the pleasure of communicating to you that your aspirations are very close to having their fulfillment: you have been assigned to the United States." He then advised Bro. John that, since the paperwork would take much time, he would have the remainder of the scholastic year to settle his responsibilities. "But what is more important," Fr. Berruti concludes, "is that you intensify your preparation with prayer and with the observance of the Rule, of which you need to be a model."

One can only imagine the range of emotions that Bro. John lived in those months of preparation. There can be no doubt, though, that he already was a model of observance and prayer, as these are the steady characteristics that he demonstrated throughout his life.

Bro. John's few autobiographical notes conclude with the simple and significant statement: "In November 1946, after 23 days on the ship, I landed in New York."

Bro. John arrived in the United States at the same time as a number of brothers, also skilled in technologies, in order to expand the Salesian apostolate of technical education so appropriate for the post-World War II era.

He spent his first two years in the New Rochelle Province at Don Bosco College in Newton, New Jersey, learning English and teaching cabinetmaking to the young brothers and brother aspirants. Thus prepared, he then embarked on a long and fruitful career of educating young people in fine cabinetmaking, and in providing material support for the development of Salesian works.

A historic first entry in the Chronicle of Don Bosco Technical High School in Paterson, New Jersey (1948-2002), describes Bro. John's transition to fulltime apostolic work.

*Monday, August 2, 1948*

*With the bare necessities of life the seven Coadjutors listed below set out for Paterson at 8:00 a.m.*

*Oscar Andrejasic, Louis Durante, Mario Audero, Aloysius Mazzella, Secondo Bersezio, David Tierney, John Cauda*

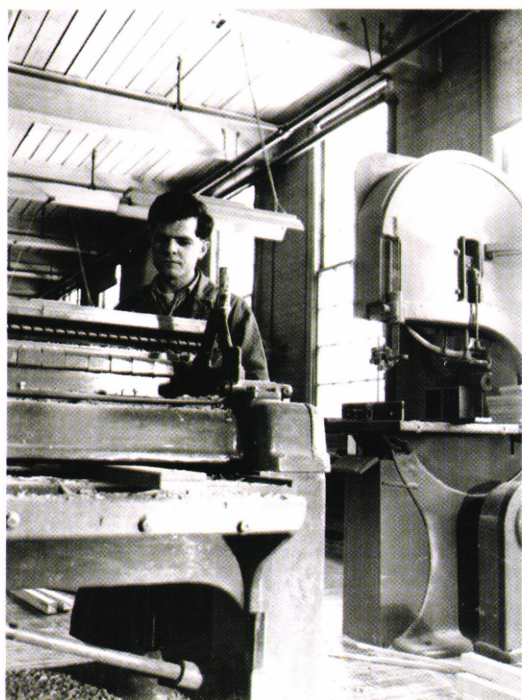
*We reached there at 9:00 a.m. to find Father Provincial [Ernest Giovannini], Bro. [John] Zito, four aspirants from West Haverstraw and a group of workmen already on the job. We lost no time in pitching in to help them.*





*Family*





\*2009\* BROTHER JOHN & THE 1953 DBT BOYS





*He was one of a number of Salesian brothers and priests who volunteered to bring  
Don Bosco's ministry of education in technology to the schools of our province.*

*Fr. Tom Dunne, Provincial*





These were heroic as well as historic days. The brothers worked long hours with no facilities in order to clear the dirt and debris from the building and to construct classrooms, shops, and the community's living quarters. After six months of intense labor, the community opened a boarding section for high school brother aspirants. Then, in September 1949, the program expanded to include a day school for students seeking a technical education. Through sacrifices borne in a cheerful Salesian spirit, Bro. John and his confreres pioneered a major apostolic work in the Province of Saint Philip the Apostle in the Eastern United States.

The heroism of the brothers continued throughout the early years of Don Bosco Tech. In addition to teaching during the day, Bro. John, assisted by Bro. Henry vander Velden and others, produced desks for the Salesian schools in Goshen, New York, and Ramsey, New Jersey, and church pews for numerous chapels. These projects provided an income that enabled the school to continue providing a quality education at an affordable price.

Bro. Henry, whom Bro. John guided from a background in carpentry into becoming a fine woodworker and cabinetmaker like himself, remembers Bro. John as a gentle person, a hard worker and one who got along with everyone. "He never yelled. Instead, when something didn't turn out right, he took the approach, 'How can we fix it?'" A testament to the positive effect he had on his students is the number of them who remained in touch with him and who would visit him throughout the years.

When Bro. Bruno Busatto came from Italy to Don Bosco Tech in Paterson, he immediately established a deep and lasting personal friendship with Bro. John. "From the first day I realized that he was a good religious and a good worker. On Sunday morning after the second Mass, I used to go and spend some time in his office to listen to some Italian music and talk about the school and the shop. He was always somebody to whom I could go for anything, especially when I was down because of difficulties with the English language and with problems in the shop."

Bro. John was renowned for the high quality of his work. Described by Bro. Salvatore Sammarco as fast and accurate, Bro. John taught his students by word and example how to be professional cabinetmakers. Each year his classes produced an average of four complete kitchen cabinet sets. Far from being mere shop exercises, these products graced and continue to grace the homes of grateful patrons of the school.

Many of the furnishings and fixtures of Salesian centers in the New York and New Jersey area came from the skilled hands of Bro. John. His fellow community members remember that one of their directors would come from time to time to Bro. John announcing, in the spirit of Saint John Bosco, that he

dreamed of him the night before. This usually meant an impossible job for Bro. John, which he managed not only to make possible but to complete with beauty and grace, while also commenting wryly, "Father Director, your dreams are my nightmares."

In 1961, after 13 years at Don Bosco Tech in Paterson, Bro. John became once again a pioneer as he headed to West Haverstraw/Stony Point, New York, to establish Don Bosco Technical Institute for brother aspirants and, to inaugurate the new technical building. He stayed with this program for three years, continuing to train young men, to produce attractive and functional furniture and cabinets, and to reflect on the spiritually enriching vocation of the Salesian brotherhood. He then returned to Don Bosco Tech in Paterson, taking up once again his duties as head of the cabinetmaking department.

In 1969, as the aspirantate program in West Haverstraw/Stony Point was ending and the Marian Shrine and Don Bosco Retreat Center programs were emerging in importance, Bro. John returned there to assist with the transition. While always remaining primarily dedicated to educating young people in fine woodworking, other dimensions of his rich Salesian identity took center stage at this time.

His great devotion to our Blessed Mother shone in the joy he experienced bringing pilgrims through the Rosary Way on the "viewmobile." He would skillfully plant flowers and bushes in order to enhance the beauty of the individual shrines, statues and buildings. Along with Bro. Andrew LaCombe and Mr. Michael Naughton, he built the pedestal and fountain which adorn the Shrine's majestic Rosary Madonna.

In 1971, Bro. John once again took up his duties as head of the cabinetmaking shop at Don Bosco Tech in Paterson, remaining there till 1981. Except for one year at the Provincial Residence in New Rochelle, New York (1981-1982), and one year at the Salesian Motherhouse at Valdocco, Turin, Italy (1987-1988), Bro. John expended the rest of his life of Salesian service between the works at Marian Shrine and Don Bosco Retreat Center, West Haverstraw/Stony Point, (1983-1987, 1988-1997, and 2002-2010) and Don Bosco Tech in Paterson (1997-2002).

During the years 1983-1987, Bro. John, while continuing his cabinetmaking and gardening chores, carried the responsibility of administrator of Blue Gate, the home for ailing confreres at West Haverstraw/Stony Point. In his quiet and dedicated ways he helped sustain the spirits of the residents and accompanied them with Salesian devotion in chapel and a pleasant family spirit at table. It was at the end of this delicate and challenging assignment that Bro. John returned to Italy for a year of apostolic activity in the refreshing environs of Don Bosco's native places and the enjoyment of frequent contact with his beloved family.

Increasingly, though, Bro. John's service became more that of suffering and less that of activity. A back injury from a fall from scaffolding, after effects from electrical shock and paint fumes, and chronic pain from the side effects of a partially successful heart surgery curtailed Bro. John's ability to do what he loved best, whether it was in the wood shop or in the garden. Following the example of Saint Paul (2 Cor 12, 8-9) he repeatedly asked our Lord to remove his afflictions only to experience our Lord's reply: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."

An even greater suffering came his way when severe depression overcame him. Speaking to Fr. Steven Schenck about it, he described it as a horrible darkness and an inability to communicate what he was experiencing. With his mind ever clear and his heart ever in love with his Salesian vocation, Bro. John struggled for the last fifteen to twenty years of his life with bouts of depression and physical weakening and pain.

To these sufferings a great sorrow was added in 2002, when Don Bosco Tech in Paterson, which he helped found and to which he gave thirty two years of dedicated service, closed due to economic difficulties.

Throughout his life Bro. John remained constant in his love of Salesian life and his love for his family and village. Whenever he could, he would visit his family during the months of September and October in order to help his brothers with the grape harvest. Coming to the United States was both a heartache of separation from his family and a point of attraction whenever he visited them. Livio Cauda, his great-nephew, writes that Bro. John "used to say that one of the main difficulties that he encountered as soon as he arrived in the United States had been that of speaking and teaching the young people: they, obviously, understood only English, while he didn't know even one word of that language. He was often recalling with emotion those first years in America, far from his dear and affectionate relatives."

Bro. John spent the last eight years of his life at the Marian Shrine and Don Bosco Retreat Center in West Haverstraw/Stony Point, in and out of periods of depression. In his homily at Bro. John's funeral, Fr. Steven Dumais, his director for seven of those years, recalled that despite his sufferings he gave a wonderful witness of perseverance. "He put his hand to the plow and never turned back. He never turned back (see Luke 9, 62). He was steady in his love for God and for his family."

After enjoying a summer in relatively good health and shortly after celebrating his 87<sup>th</sup> birthday in July 2009, Bro. John began to experience the return of depression. Changes in medications and weeks in a residential treatment facility could not prevent the debilitating progress of his illness. Soon his physical health also began to deteriorate.



Bro. John spent the last few months of his life in a nursing facility near the Marian Shrine and Don Bosco Retreat Center. His confreres visited him often, and though his voice was failing, he was able to speak by phone to his relatives in Italy to wish them a Merry Christmas.

On Wednesday, January 20, 2010, Bro. John was brought from the nursing home to the community where he assisted at Eucharistic adoration and the community dinner. He was not able to eat nor was he completely alert during that time. It seems that his body was already going into septic shock. Shortly after returning to the nursing facility, his condition was recognized and he was brought to Nyack Hospital in Nyack, New York. After receiving conditional absolution and the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, Bro. John Cauda, S.D.B., expired shortly after midnight on Thursday, January 21, 2010. He was a faithful Salesian brother for 69½ years, 63½ of which he labored in the Province of Saint Philip the Apostle in the Eastern United States.

His great-nephew, Livio Cauda, expresses the sentiments of all who know Bro. John. "We remember him always in this way: a simple person, available to everyone, who dedicated all his existence for others, especially for the education of young people, guided always by a profound faith and by the teachings of Don Bosco."

Fr. Thomas Dunne, provincial of the New Rochelle Province, reflected shortly after Bro. John's death: "Let us keep in mind the vocational witness that Brother John offered so effectively throughout his almost seventy years of consecrated life. In Brother Cauda, we in our province have come to know the truth of Fr. Rinaldi's description of the Salesian brother as 'a brilliant creation of the great heart of Don Bosco, inspired by Mary Help of Christians.'"

May Mary Help of Christians and Saint John Bosco accompany Bro. John Cauda that our Lord may welcome him into the Salesian garden in heaven.

Fr. John Puntino, S.D.B.  
Director



**Brother John Cauda, S.D.B.**

<i>Born</i>	<i>July 27, 1922</i>
<i>Professed</i>	<i>August 16, 1940</i>
<i>Died</i>	<i>January 31, 2010</i>

*A Salesian of Don Bosco for 69 years*