The Dream of the Two Columns

IT WAS MAY 30, 1862, penultimate day of the Month of Our Lady. After night prayers, before hundreds of boys went to bed, Don Bosco started like this:

"I want to recount to you a dream. It is true that he who dreams does not reason. In spite of that, I, who would recount to you even my sins if I were not afraid of making all of you run away and making the house collapse, will narrate it to you for your spiritual benefit. I had this dream a few days ago.

Imagine you are with me on the on a cliff overlooking a vast expanse of sea with no other land in sight except that which is under your feet. In the middle of the endless sea, soaring to the sky, are two solid, stout columns a short distance apart from each other. One is surmounted by a statue of the Blessed Virgin Immaculate, at whose feet hangs a large placard with the inscription: *Auxilium Christianorum* [Help of Christians]. The other column, far loftier and sturdier, supports a Host of proportionate size, and underneath it is another placard with the inscription: *Salus Credentium* [Salvation of believers]. From these two columns hang many chains with hooks and anchors in every direction to which ships can be attached.

The water is covered with a countless multitude of battling ships. The prow of each is fitted with beaks of iron that are like spears or arrows stabbing and piercing everything they hit. These ships are heavily armed with cannons, firearms, and incendiary bombs of every kind, even books, and all of them are thronging and chasing after a mighty ship, bigger and taller than any of them. The enemy ships try to ram this stately vessel, to set it on fire, and to damage it in every possible way while an escort fleet shields it. All the efforts of the Pope who captains the great ship are bent to steer it between those two columns against winds and waves that favor the enemy. The commanding general of the flagship, the Roman Pontiff, seeing the enemy’s fury and his auxiliary ships’ grave predicament, summons his captains. All the pilots gather around the captain and hold a conference, but the storm grows steadily more ferocious, and they are sent back to command their own ships lest they founder. When it again grows a little calmer, the captain summons his pilots for a second time as the flagship sticks to its course. The enemy ships keep trying in every way to block, damage and sink the great ship. They bombard it with everything they have: firearms, cannons and incendiary bombs, the beaks of their prows, and with fire from books and journals which they try to hurl into the big ship. The storm becomes dreadful and smashes the ships of the Pope so badly that the enemies let out shouts of victory. The Pope strains every muscle continuing to steer his ship between the two columns as fierce combat ensues and all the enemy ships move in and violently ram his ship again and again. Yet all the efforts of that multitude of ships are useless as their weapons shatter, their guns and cannons sinking into the sea. In a blind fury the enemy forces take to combating the big ship with their hands, fists, books, blasphemies, and curses. Unscathed and undaunted, the flagship keeps on its course.

It is true that at times a formidable ram splinters a gaping hole or wound into the hull of the great ship but immediately, a favorable wind breezes from the two columns and instantly heals the gash and the ship continues on its way. One blow gravely injures the Pope, who suddenly falls down. Those around him immediately help him to get up, but he is struck by a second blow, falls again, and dies. Another shout of victory goes up among the remaining enemies and indescribable rejoicing is seen on their ships. But no sooner is the Pope dead than another takes his place. The assembled pilots elected another captain so quickly that the news of the preceding captain arrives with the news of the election of his successor. The enemy loses courage as the new Pope overcomes every obstacle and routs all the tottering ships with his. Breaking through all resistance, the new Pope steers his ship safely between the two columns. Once in between them, he attaches the prow to an anchor hanging from the column with the Host. With another anchor he attaches the other side of the ship to the column with the Blessed Virgin Immaculate.

Then total disorder breaks out over the whole surface of the sea. All the ships that so far had been battling the Pope’s ship scatter, fleeing and colliding with one another, some foundering and trying to sink the others. Then many of the small ships scurry to the columns and attach themselves to those hooks. Some ships, which had gallantly fought alongside the great ship, are the first to tie up at the two columns. Many others, which had fearfully kept far away from the fight, stand still, cautiously waiting until the wrecked enemy ships vanish under the waves. Then they too head for the two columns, tie up at the swinging hooks, and remain there all safe and secure with the main ship and the Pope.

A great perfect calm now covers the sea.

At this point Don Bosco asked Fr Rua, "What do you think of this story?"

Fr Rua replied: "It seems to me that the ship of the Pope is the Church, whose head he is; the other ships are men; the sea is this world. Those who defend the huge ship are good people who love the Holy See; the others are her enemies who, with all sorts of arms, make attempts to annihilate her. The two pillars of salvation seem to be devotion to Mary Immaculate and the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist."

Fr Rua did not mention the Pope who fell dead, so Don Bosco was also silent on this point. He only added: "You have said well. Only one expression must be corrected: the enemies' ships are the persecutions; they prepare very serious troubles for the Church. What has taken place so far is almost nothing compared with what will occur. Her enemies are the ships which make an attempt to sink the flag ship, if they can. There remain only two means to save ourselves in the midst of so much danger and confusion. Devotion to Mary Immaculate, frequent Confession and Communion. It is necessary to use every means and try our best to practice them and have them practised everywhere and by all. Good night!"