

St. Dominic Savio

Feast: May 6



Facts

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Dominic Savio was born on April 2, 1842 in the village of Riva in northern Italy. His father was a blacksmith and his mother a seamstress. He had nine brothers and sisters. His family was poor but hardworking. They were devout and pious Catholics.

When he was just two years old, Dominic's family returned to their native village of Castlenuovo d'Asti, (Today, Castlenuovo Don Bosco) near the birthplace of John Bosco. Bosco would himself later be canonized as a Saint by the Church and became a major influence on the life of Dominic.

As a small child, Dominic loved the Lord and His Church. He was very devout in practicing his Catholic faith. For example, he said grace before every meal and refused to eat with those who did not. He was always quick to encourage others to pray.

Dominic attended Church regularly with his mother and was often seen kneeling before the Tabernacle in prayer. He even prayed outside the Church building. It did not matter to Dominic if the ground was covered with mud or snow, he knelt and prayed anyway.

Dominic was quickly recognized as an exceptional student who studied hard and performed well in school. He became an altar server. He also attended daily Mass and went to confession regularly. He asked to receive his first communion at the age of seven. This was not the practice in the Church of Italy at the time. Normally, children received their first holy communion at the age of twelve. Dominic's priest was so impressed with his intelligence concerning the faith, his love for the Lord and his piety that he made an exception. Dominic said that the day of his First Communion was the happiest day of his life.

On the Day he received his first communion, Dominic wrote four promises in a little book. Those promises were:

I will go to Confession often, and as frequently to Holy Communion as my confessor allows.

I wish to sanctify the Sundays and festivals in a special manner.

My friends shall be Jesus and Mary.

Death rather than sin.

The young Dominic graduated to secondary school and walked three miles to school each day. He undertook this chore gladly. While walking to school on a hot day a farmer asked why he wasn't yet tired. Dominic cheerfully replied, "Nothing seems tiresome or painful when you are working for a master who pays well."

Although he was young, Dominic was clearly different than his peers. When two boys stuffed a school heating stove with snow and rubbish. The boys were known troublemakers and were likely to face expulsion if caught, so they blamed Dominic for the misdeed. Dominic did not deny the accusation and he was scolded before the class. However, a day later the teacher learned the truth. He asked Dominic why he did not defend himself while being scolded for something he did not do. Dominic mentioned he was imitating Jesus who remained silent when unjustly accused.

Dominic's teacher spoke well of him and brought him to the attention of Fr. John Bosco, who was renowned for looking after hundreds of boys, many of them

orphaned and poor. In October 1854, Dominic was personally introduced to Fr. Bosco - along with his father.

At the meeting, Bosco wanted to test Dominic's intelligence and understanding of the Catholic faith. He gave Dominic a copy of *The Catholic Readings*, which was a pamphlet that dealt with apologetics. He expected Dominic to provide a report the next day, but just ten minutes later Dominic recited the text and provided a full explanation of its significance. This solidified Bosco's high opinion of Dominic.

Dominic expressed an interest in becoming a priest and asked to go to Turin to attend the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. Fr. Bosco agreed to take him.

At the Oratory, Dominic studied directly under Fr. Bosco. He worked diligently and always asked questions when he did not understand something. He renewed his First Communion promises that he wrote in his little book at the age of seven. After six months at the Oratory, Dominic delivered a speech on the path to sainthood. In his speech, he made three outstanding points; it is God's will that we ALL become saints, it is easy to become a saint, and there are great rewards in heaven for saints.

Dominic's desire to become a saint troubled him however. He wondered to himself how someone as young as he was could become a saint? In his zeal, he tried voluntary mortification and other voluntary penances, hoping that they would help him to grow closer to Jesus and help him to be less concerned with his own needs. He even made his bed uncomfortable and wore thin clothes in winter. When Fr. Bosco observed these practices, he corrected Dominic. He explained that as a child, what he should do instead was to devote himself to his studies and to be cheerful. He discouraged Dominic from any more physical penances. Dominic's happy demeanor quickly returned.

At the same time Dominic was developing his reputation as a fantastic student, his health began to fail. He started to lose his appetite and Fr. Bosco became concerned. Dominic was taken to the doctor who recommended that he be sent home to his family to recover. Dominic wanted to stay at the oratory, but Fr. Bosco insisted he go home. Everybody expected Dominic to recover, except for Dominic himself who insisted he was dying.

Before he departed, Dominic made the Exercise of a Happy Death and predicted this would be his final devotion.

After four days at home, Dominic's health worsened. The doctor ordered him to bed to rest. He then performed bloodletting, which was still performed at that time. Over the next four days, Dominic was bled ten times before the doctor was satisfied he would recover.

But Dominic was sure of his impending death. He implored his parents to bring the parish priest so he could make a last confession. They obliged him and Dominic made a confession and was given the Anointing of the Sick. He asked his father to read him the prayers for the Exercise of a Happy Death. Then he fell asleep. Hours later he awoke and said to his father: "Goodbye, Dad, goodbye ... Oh what wonderful things I see!" Dominic fell asleep and died within minutes. It was March 9, 1857 and Dominic was merely 14 year of age.

His father wrote to Fr. Bocso to report the sad news.

Fr. Bosco was powerfully touched by Dominic and he wrote a biography, "The Life of Dominic Savio." The biography quickly became popular and would eventually be read in schools across Italy. As people learned about Dominic, they called for his canonization.

Detractors argued that Dominic was too young to be canonized and pointed out that he was not a martyr. However, Pope Pius X disagreed and opened his cause for canonization.

Dominic Savio was declared venerable in 1933 by Pope Pius XI, beatified in 1950, then canonized in 1954 by Pope Pius XII.

Saint Dominic is the patron saint of choirboys, the falsely accused, and juvenile delinquents. His feast day is May 6, moved from March 9. Many schools and institutions dedicated to boys are dedicated to him.

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