

# St. Dominic Savio

BORN 1842; DIED 1857  
CONFESSOR  
FEAST DAY: MARCH 9

**M**ANY PEOPLE undergo a great conversion of heart before they achieve holiness. Other souls seem to respond fully to God's grace from birth. Among these privileged few is St. Dominic Savio.

The second of ten children (an older brother had died) of a poor blacksmith, Carlo Savio, and his wife, seamstress Brigitta Agagliate, Dominic was born at Riva di Chieri near Turin, Italy. His parents lived their faith devoutly and taught their son how to love and follow the will of God. By five, he could be found praying at the village church and, in an age when eleven was the usual age for First Communion, he was permitted to receive at seven. He made four written promises to himself at that time: frequent confession and Communion, giving Sundays and holy days wholly to God, having our Lord and his mother as his best friends, and to prefer death to sin.

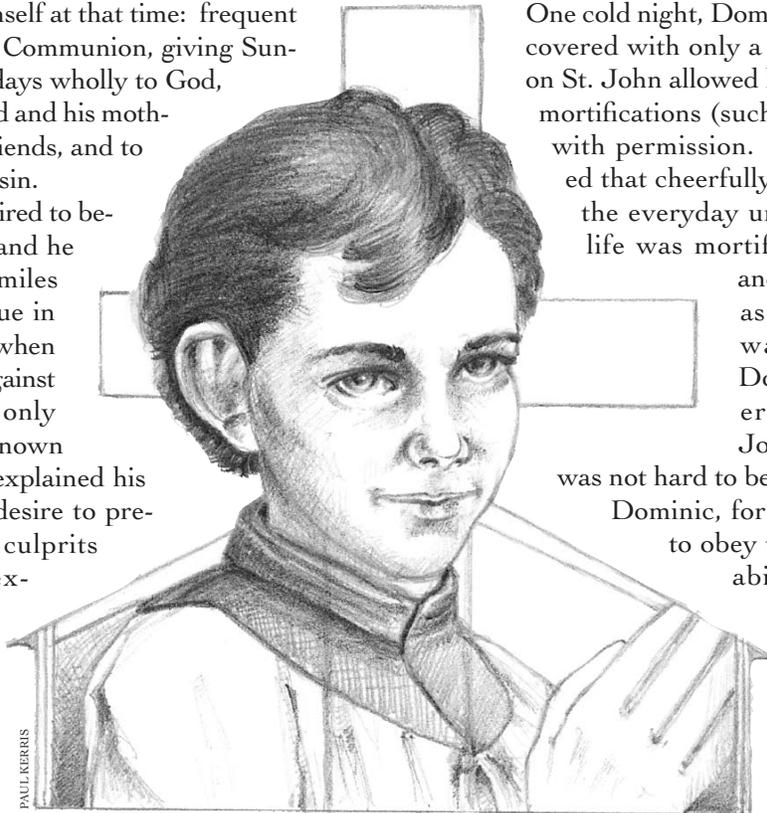
Dominic desired to become a priest, and he walked many miles daily to continue in school. Once, when an accusation against him at school only later became known to be false, he explained his silence by his desire to prevent the true culprits from being expelled, plus his recollection that Jesus, too, was unjustly accused. He avoided class-

mates who tried to include him in their mischief, vandalism, and theft, even when he was taunted by name-calling. He nearly succumbed to the temptation to swim in the nude with classmates in the summertime. This seems not to have been an innocent boyhood recreation, and he realized it before he joined them.

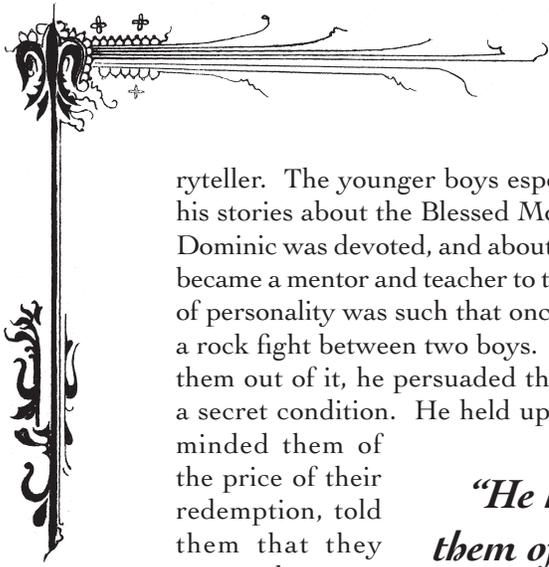
St. John Bosco's Oratory of St. Francis de Sales was designed for the care and education of neglected street-boys of Turin. He wished to begin training some young men for a future as priests to help in this ministry. Dominic, then twelve, had already been inspired by this holy man. Dominic's parish priest recommended him to St. John who, when he interviewed the boy, understood that his soul was already a wonderful work of grace.

St. John was an excellent influence on Dominic, keeping him spiritually balanced. One cold night, Dominic tried to sleep covered with only a sheet; from then on St. John allowed him to undertake mortifications (such as fasting) only with permission. St. John insisted that cheerfully putting up with the everyday unpleasantness of life was mortification enough, and used obedience as one of his chief ways to school Dominic to greater sanctity. St. John taught that it was not hard to become a saint and Dominic, for his part, sought to obey to the best of his ability. He wanted, with all his heart, to be a saint.

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PAUL KERRIS



ryteller. The younger boys especially enjoyed his stories about the Blessed Mother, to whom Dominic was devoted, and about the saints. He became a mentor and teacher to them. His force of personality was such that once he prevented a rock fight between two boys. Unable to talk them out of it, he persuaded them to agree to a secret condition. He held up a crucifix, reminded them of the price of their redemption, told them that they were about to make an outrage against Jesus, and then — his condition — told them to begin the fight by throwing the first stone at him.

When they protested, Dominic asked why they could hurt God when they did not want to hurt him. The fight never happened. He also tried to persuade others to walk away from temptation — listening to dirty jokes, profanity, looking at unchaste magazines, leering at girls. He himself was tempted to truancy from school to avoid some of the boys' taunts, which he resisted only with difficulty.

Dominic formed the Company of the Immaculate Conception to assist St. John's work, both spiritually and practically. The Company did menial jobs such as sweeping floors, and paid

special attention to boys who were misfits even among the unfortunates St. John had taken from the streets into his care. Every original member of the Company was among the twenty-two men with whom St. John founded the religious order of the Salesians two years after Dominic's death.

Dominic was a mystic, experienced ecstasies, and had the spiritual gift of prophecy — and yet hated the idea of being the object of scorn from the other boys, and struggled to keep his deep spiritual life from their view. Pope Pius IX was influenced

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by one of Dominic's visions to reestablish the Catholic bishoprics in England, which due to persecution had not existed for over two hundred years.

Never in good health, Dominic was eventually sent home from the Oratory, hopefully to recover. He was subjected to the standard medical practices of the day, including bloodletting, which most likely accelerated his illness. He died a month later, shortly before his fifteenth birthday, a radiant example of how sanctity can be attained at any age, if one is only willing wholeheartedly to answer God's call.

