John Bosco and the Greatest Show

Ages 4 to 9 · About 10 minutes to read aloud · Feast day January 31

Virtue: Joy and befriending children

The story in a nutshell

John Bosco, a poor farm boy in Italy, dreams that he will win wild boys not with fists but with kindness. He learns to juggle and do tricks, and the price of a ticket to his shows is a prayer. As a priest in Turin, Don Bosco makes a home for boys with no one to care for them, and wins their hearts with joy and gentleness.

Before reading

- Look at the cover. What is the priest doing? How do the boys feel? *Listen for: He is juggling; they are delighted.*
- Can you do a trick, juggle, or tell a joke?

While reading

- In the dream: what did the shining man tell John? *Listen for: Not with fists, but with kindness and love.*
- At John's show: what was the price of a ticket? *Listen for: To pray.*
- When Don Bosco meets the boys in Turin: why did his heart ache? *Listen for: They had no home and no one to care for them.*

After reading

- How did Don Bosco win the boys' hearts? *Listen for: He played with them, did tricks, forgave them, and was gentle.*
- Who was Grigio? Who did Don Bosco believe had sent him? *Listen for: A big gray dog who kept him safe; God.*
- When someone makes you cross, what can you do instead of hitting back? *Listen for: Take a deep breath, answer kindly, and tell a grown-up if someone keeps being unkind.*
- *Older children:* The book says the road to heaven is walked with a joyful, kind and playful heart. What do you think that means?

Words to explain

- **Don**: what Italians call a priest, like "Father"
- **Turin**: a big city in northern Italy
- **Oratory**: the home and playground Don Bosco made, where his boys could eat, learn, pray and play
- **trade**: a skilled job, like shoemaking or printing
- **Salesians**: the priests and brothers who carry on Don Bosco's work today

Be a Little Saint this week

The book ends with three challenges. Choose one to try together, or send all three home:

1. Learn the name of a new child at school or church, and ask them to play with you.
2. Whenever someone makes you cross, don't hit, push, or shout back. Take a deep breath and answer with love and kindness, just as John learned in his dream. And if someone keeps being unkind, tell a grown-up.
3. Learn a joke or a little trick, and use it to make someone smile.

Pray together

Dear God, thank you for games and laughter and friends. Fill my heart with joy, and when I feel angry, help me to win others, not with fists, but with kindness and love, the way Saint John Bosco did. Amen.

A note for the leader

Not hitting back. A child who is being hurt could hear the dream's lesson as "put up with it". Stress the end of the challenge: if someone keeps being unkind, tell a grown-up. If a child asks why the Turin boys had no home, say that their families were far away or had died, and Don Bosco gave them a family again.

Go further

Our free **Greatest Show pack** has show tickets that cost one prayer, a class show where every child has a part, and a take-home page on answering with kindness. More ideas for the feast day are at littlesaintsbighearts.com/saint-john-bosco-feast-day, and every free printable is at littlesaintsbighearts.com/printables.

John Bosco and the Greatest Show by Joseph Glazier. Free to copy for your class or program.