



On his way to sainthood in the mid-1800s, Catholic priest John Bosco made a lot of enemies helping the poor in the bad parts of Turin. More than once he was attacked by thugs and assassins. Every time, a large gray dog came out of nowhere and saved him. Bosco's miraculous guardian served the priest for more than 30 years.

He may have paid Bosco one final tribute in 1959. That's *71 years* after the mysterious dog first appeared.

So, yes, it's fair to say John Bosco had a guardian angel.

Born in poverty, Bosco had the first of a series of prophetic

dreams at the age of 9. He saw a large field full of poor boys, some acting wild and out of control. A kindly man appeared and told the young Bosco, ‘You will have to win these friends of yours not with blows, but with gentleness and kindness. Show them that sin is ugly and virtue beautiful.’”

He never forgot the dream, even as he struggled to stay fed himself. He gravitated towards the street performers of Turin and eventually began staging his own show of magic tricks and juggling. Bosco later worked on a farm where a young priest was impressed with his intelligence and character and helped him enter the priesthood. Bosco was ordained in 1841.

It was a dangerous time to be a priest in Turin. The industrial age had arrived, attracting poor families from the countryside to live packed in slums and compete for backbreaking jobs in factories for bosses who violently resisted reforms. On the fringes of the city were criminal gangs and revolutionaries and the Waldensians, an anti-Catholic group the church had fought for centuries and were growing in numbers and openly attacking priests.

And the streets were full of children, some orphaned and homeless, some runaways, many wild and prone to theft and mayhem. It was to them that Bosco gravitated because of his compelling childhood dream.

He worked to feed the children and their families, find them jobs and struggled to organize them and push for fairer treatment at work. Father Bosco helped the children find apprenticeships, a doorway to professions and a better life. And he set up a series of centers throughout Turin with barracks for the homeless and

quarters for classes. Bosco often opened his lessons with magic tricks he'd learned years earlier on the street.

Bosco made steady headway — and enemies. Aside from the dangers of street criminals, employers resented his reform work, he made political enemies and the Waldensians violently resisted the progress being made in the name of the Catholic church by the tireless young priest. Given that Bosco's work took him to the worst parts of town, attacks on his life were inevitable.

One night in an especially bad quarter of Turin, a huge gray dog appeared and walked by his side. When he reached the door of the youth center where he was staying the night, it turned and trotted away. On subsequent nights when he was out late in sketchy neighborhoods, the dog reappeared and paced alongside Bosco.

Strays weren't unusual on the streets of Turin, but they were scavengers, feral and sometimes vicious. The strange grey dog was reserved and acted friendly and full of purpose.

Two men began following him one night before the dog showed up. They caught him and a cloak was tossed over his head and a handkerchief was shoved in his mouth. As he struggled, Bosco heard a bloodcurdling howl. When he peeled off the cloak, he saw the man holding it being savaged by the grey dog. Then it turned on the second man and dragged him through the mud. When the men tried to rise, the dog growled menacingly. The bedraggled attackers finally swore to Bosco that they'd leave him alone and the priest called off the dog. It obeyed, then followed him back to the youth center.

He named it Il Grigio, the Gray One.

There were many more attacks on Bosco. Another night, an armed man stepped out from behind a tree and fired twice at close range, miraculously missing the priest. Out of nowhere, Grigio appeared, seized the gunman and dragged him away until he got to his feet and fled.

An entire band of thugs set on the priest one night in a lonely spot, and a man with a club got in a strike on Bosco and he stumbled and ran. Behind him, Bosco heard a terrible ruckus. Grigio was there, attacking the men, bloodying and scattering them. One by one they fled the awful teeth and ran.

On another night, Grigio came to the center and refused to let Bosco leave, sprawling across the door to his quarters and, in the only show of ill temper Grigio ever gave Bosco, showing his teeth if he tried to move the dog. Bosco relented. Shortly afterward a friend came and told him that armed assassins were waiting down the street for Bosco.

Grigio sometimes came into the centers with Bosco and was a favorite of the children. He graciously accepted their attention and stroking, but never their food treats. He was never observed sleeping. He was a peaceful, watchful presence in the centers.

When word got out that the priest was seemingly invincible and several attacks on him had failed, the opposition faded. And so did Grigio. He disappeared until one night ten years later — 30 years after he'd first appeared — when Bosco was visiting a farm on the outskirts of Turin and got lost. Farmers in the area were known to have vicious dogs guarding their flocks and vineyards and Bosco said wistfully to himself, "I wish I had

Grigio here.” And there he was, wagging his tail and grinning. Grigio cheerfully escorted Bosco to his destination. It was the last time the priest ever saw the dog.

Bosco’s work continued. There were miraculous healings attributed to him. He was widely admired when, at the age of 73, he passed away. He was beautified in 1929. Saint John Bosco was the patron of street children, juvenile delinquents and street magicians.

His story has a strange epilogue...

The story was told by Bro. Renato Celato, who was 93 at the time of an interview in 2016. On May 6, 1959, he was the driver for a group of church officials returning in a caravan from Rome with the casket of Saint Bosco, who’d been taken there to be venerated after the inauguration of a new temple. They stopped for the night in Livorno on the coast of Tuscany. The saint’s casket was to be put on display for viewing in a church there until noon the next day.

Before dawn, a priest opened the door and found a large gray dog lying watchfully just outside. When he tried to chase it away, it bared its teeth. It refused to leave. After dawn, it wandered among boys in the courtyard, accepting their petting peacefully. Bro. Celato said he stroked the dog, too. Then it slipped into the church and crouched under the casket of Saint Bosco.

It refused to budge. One of the priests joked that the dog was Il Grigio. They let it stay. It remained quietly in place under the saint’s remains as the priests placed a cloth skirt around the casket just before the viewing. It never growled once as the

crowd came in and many reached over to touch the saint's container. The viewing ended at noon and the dog remained in place until 2 p.m., when the casket was loaded back in a vehicle and the caravan drove away. The dog followed.

Bro. Celato said one of the priests in the car told him, “ ‘Look and see if the dog is there!’ And he was. He was always behind our van, even in the city. I saw him until we reached the third corner on the hill. Then he disappeared.”

It couldn't possibly be the same dog that guarded John Bosco 70 years earlier. Could it?