**“Buonanotte” of Fr. Francesco Cereda**

**“*Priority of Salesian consecrated vocation*”**

**Turin, 18 February 2020**

Dear Confreres,

I wish to communicate to you what in recent years I found to be a fundamental need in the life of the Congregation, especially through the study of the reports of the extraordinary visitations and consultations for the appointment of new provincials, on the occasion of team visits to the Regions, in the visits I paid to some provinces, in personal relations and in the correspondence I exchanged with provincials, vice-provincials and confreres.

In the Congregation I note a vivid desire and a great need to assume as a priority the Salesian consecrated life in all its dimensions. Our vocation is consecrated life; if we do not strengthen our vocational identity, everything weakens. Many confreres have a strong desire to live an authentic consecrated life; there is also a great need to live consecrated life in order to ensure the vitality of the charism and to prevent numerous difficulties. This is the path we have travelled following GC27, but it still requires further strengthening steps.

The centrality of the love for the Lord Jesus, friendship with Him, prayerful listening to His word, personal and community prayer, the prophetic witness of following Him are the first fundamental aspect of our consecrated life which exerts an irresistible fascination on us and on those who live alongside us. We are called to be with Jesus, to be like Jesus, to be Jesus. Without love for the Lord Jesus our life is extinguished and withers; love for Jesus is a fire that must be continually nourished. It is from "everything for Jesus" that comes "Jesus for all".

Furthermore, the fraternity experienced in the community is another aspect of our vocation; it has a strong impact on our young people and lay partners in the mission, on families, on the Salesian family, on the local church and on the territory. The prophecy of fraternity still remains a priority; our community life is weak. This requires us to have authentic communication among confreres, to build quality relationships, to live and work together, to overcome individualism.

Our mission for the youth is another aspect of our vocation, which requires profound changes. We need more passion and dedication in apostolic work: tireless work for souls is our characteristic; we run the risk of losing dedication to work, especially when individual interests prevail. We need to spend more time with the youth and not just worry about running works and institutions. Poor young people must find more attention and space in provincial projects. Formation and the shared mission between Salesians and lay people still have ways to go. Openness to the missions *"ad gentes"* is a great push to promote. There are also new needs of the youth mission to be addressed: the protection of minors, active citizenship and the formation of leaders, commitment to the common home, voluntary work, ... The GC28 will undoubtedly be a push in this direction.

Our consecrated vocation requires the grace of unity; these three aspects mentioned above demand harmony and balance in our lives. We often still experience fragmentation and dispersion in living our vocation, reflected in a stressed personal life and a superficial community life. The Salesianity of our vocation should also be strengthened especially in reference to Don Bosco and to our charismatic identity in spiritual life, in fraternity and in mission.

I conclude by referring to three aspects that in these six years I have followed to help the growth and significance of our consecrated life. These are necessary conditions, although not sufficient, which have given rise to some processes that are still in progress.

*The quantitative and qualitative consistency of Salesian communities.* There are several causes for the scarce consistency of the communities: ageing, a decrease in vocations, the maintenance of all the works without changing the model of management, the desire to reach poor young people, the emergence of new priorities in the mission without making decisions about the existing works. Steps have been taken in this direction; above all, a new awareness has been created, but the process must continue.

*The reshaping of the Salesian presences in the province.* Its aim is to ensure the vitality of the charism in the province and not the survival of the works. The provinces have made plans for reshaping. For the most part these plans have established timescales and ways of ensuring the quantitative and qualitative consistency of the Salesian communities and the qualitative consistency of the pastoral educational communities; the tasks of responsibility to be entrusted to the Salesians and those to be entrusted to the laity have been identified, especially in administrative areas; the works to be entrusted to lay management under the responsibility of the province have been indicated; choices have been made on how to give concrete form to the attention to poor young people, immigrants; the commitment to provincial and especially local vocations promotion was taken up again, paying attention to the Salesian consecrated vocation in its two forms; choices were made for the qualification of the confreres; interventions were indicated to foster the missionary spirit and arouse missionary vocations; criteria were given to ensure the sustainability of each work.

*International Communities.* Today we live in an era of great mobility of persons and peoples. There are various reasons for this phenomenon: poverty, hunger, war, persecution, desertification, climate change, globalization and consequently the search for security and better living conditions. The result of mobility is a mixture of people from every nation, culture, ethnicity, religion, language; this situation requires addressing problems of cultural adaptation, civil coexistence and social integration. Many young migrants find themselves without work and therefore without a future, excluded from society, exposed to crime and violence. In order to respond to their needs, pastoral educational communities are becoming more and more intercultural, even with the presence of volunteers from various countries; this is why the provinces feel the need to create international communities. In the Congregation there is already a notable exchange of confreres; it is necessary to increase the growth of missionary vocations and the temporary exchange of confreres between provinces.