THE MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

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THE MULTICOLORED FACE OF DON BOSCO TODAY

So many amazing stories that console and encourage us

Dear friends of Don Bosco’s *Salesian Bulletin*, I greet you most cordially. You must know that for Don Bosco the *Salesian Bulletin* was one of the most precious means that he had to make known all the good that he and his Salesian Family were (and are) doing.

As I write to you, I am thinking of January, the month in which we will participate in World Youth Day in Panama together with young people and Pope Francis, and the month of Don Bosco’s feast day, January 31, which, God willing, I will celebrate there as well. The people of Panama have such a great veneration for Don Bosco that more than 700,000 participate in the procession on his feast day. Yes! That number is correct – more than 700,000 people.

Though I am looking toward January, the very Salesian month with so many feast days of our saints, a month dedicated to the Salesian Family and Don Bosco, presently, as I write these lines, I am engaged with the general council meeting that has just begun. This is when the Salesian general councilors return to Rome to gather with the Rector Major to “report” on their visits around the Salesian world on every continent, in one or other of our 1,936 presences. Many of them have just spent four months accompanying the confreres in one of our provinces.

Several hours at the beginning of our meeting were dedicated to sharing with each other how we are and the experiences we have had in these past months. As I listened, my thoughts flew in all directions when hearing the many different, beautiful, and at times challenging testimonies. This is why I chose the title I did for this article, for today Don Bosco truly has a “multicolored face”:

* We listened as one of the councilors described how in Yakutsk, in the middle of Siberian Russia, 6,000 km/3,700 miles east of Moscow, the Salesian community lives among and accompanies its people, few of whom are Catholics. (In fact, there were 15 at Holy Mass on the Sunday he was there.) Still, they share the daily joys and difficulties of those people.
* Another councilor shared how one’s heart is touched by the accompaniment given the very many poor families and the difficulties they face at the Mexican border crossing points of Nuevo Laredo, Ciudad Juarez, and Tijuana, among others. He spoke of how the Salesians live there to accompany these families and educate their children so that they can become freer each day from the drug- and sex-trafficking rings.
* I listened while another of our Salesian confreres recounted his visit to Nigeria, Ghana, and Sierra Leone. There we Salesians accompany young people who are in prison, just as Don Bosco did 170 years ago in the Generala, Turin’s youth prison. It was Don Bosco’s experience in the prisons when he was a young priest that left such a great impression on him, including making him sick to his stomach, and that brought him to the decision that he had to do all he could to help keep those young men and boys from returning to such a place. In those African nations today, the reality is no better than what Don Bosco knew. These young people, too, look forward to the daily visit of their Salesian friends.
* I inquired about our presence in another African nation that I had visited and where we take in boys, girls, and teenagers who had been kidnapped for the purpose of harvesting their vital organs. Thanks to the Lord, they were saved by the police, and we were asked to take care of them until we could find their families. They often remain with us for years.
* Then I shared the very beautiful experience I had myself when visiting various Salesian houses in Korea where boys – generally, teens and young adults – who have been sentenced for a minor offense live with us in genuine family spirit, feeling truly “at home.” Instead of being sent to some other place where they would be deprived of their freedom, they come for a few months or a year into a Salesian house that provides a rehabilitation program. It was a joy to hear from three judges whom I met that more than 85% of those young men and boys are definitively rehabilitated and do not return to delinquency. This is another face of Don Bosco today – this time, with Asiatic-Korean features.

While listening to all these stories, it struck me that Don Bosco must be happy on account of his sons and daughters in the Salesian Family who are still today intent upon being faithful to the charism that God raised up in him. And I felt great joy while listening to all these reports – which are only the tip of the iceberg – about the great good that is being done for so many people. This made me think that today Don Bosco’s face has many colors that he himself probably never imagined.

I am sharing these things with you, dear readers of the *Salesian Bulletin*, because I believe that we ought to spread the good news of the very many beautiful things that are happening and that are going to happen. A long time ago I learned the Chinese proverb, “A falling tree makes more noise than a growing forest.” This is precisely how it seems to be. Well, then, these reflections are what I wish to share with you – although they are just a tiny part of the silent growth in our forest.

Happy feast of Don Bosco! We will remember you in Panama in the midst of a wonderful multitude of young people.

With affection,

Don Angel