THE MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

DON ANGEL FERNANDEZ ARTIME

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS STILL AT WORK

ST. FRANCIS XAVIER AND DON BOSCO

TWO GREAT MISSIONARIES YESTERDAY AND TODAY

Just a short while ago I was in Goa, India, where I saw how amid the palm trees and the fine sand of the sea there rise up cathedrals and churches built during the 16th and 17th centuries. One of these shrines is the Basilica of the Good Jesus, which has become a site for pilgrimages, especially for Christians but also for believers of other religions, because here lie the remains of St. Francis Xavier, the missionary from Navarre who evangelized the Far East and was a disciple of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits. Even though St. Francis Xavier died in China in 1552, his remains rest in this most beautiful basilica situated next to the cathedral and to the church of St. Francis of Assisi. This place in which his mortal remains rest was erected between 1594 and 1605. His body is conserved there. Its incorruptibility was the miracle for which St. Francis Xavier was canonized in 1622.

Accompanied by other Salesians and some lay persons, I had the privilege of celebrating Holy Mass on the altar at the tomb of this great and holy Jesuit missionary. I asked to celebrate the Mass in honor of St. John Bosco to beg him to intercede for us. Why did I do this? The main reason is because Don Bosco is another great missionary. It was a very simple Mass, beautiful, and profound. Through the intercession of St. Francis Xavier and Don Bosco, I presented to the Lord the Salesian mission throughout the whole world and our great care and concern for youngsters and young adults everywhere, especially the poorest.

**“My sons and daughters will go for me”**

Somebody might ask why I speak of Don Bosco as a great missionary since he never went as a missionary *ad gentes*. Don Bosco sent his sons, his Salesians, to the missions, but he himself never went as a missionary to foreign lands. We know this for certain, but it is, nonetheless, very inaccurate. The information I offer you here now suffices when speaking of the great missionary heart of Don Bosco. When Don Bosco died on January 31, 1888, the Salesians were 754 in number; what is impressive is that Don Bosco had already sent 153 – 20% of his sons – as missionaries to South America. Now, tell me that this is not a response to a true missionary passion – that very same passion which he himself had declared various times in his letters: that he wanted to be a missionary, but it would be his sons who would go.

While in Goa, I gave thanks to the Lord for this missionary miracle. The Holy Spirit has guided and accompanied the entire mission of evangelization throughout all Asia from the first Franciscan, Dominican, and Jesuit missionaries just as he has done for Don Bosco’s sons and daughters. In India today there are 2,786 Salesians of Don Bosco and several thousand consecrated religious sisters of various congregations (the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians, the Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate Help of Christians, etc.). This is all a true grace.

“In Goa, one experiences and feels that the centuries do not distance us from what is essential and most authentic in life or from that evangelization which continues most wonderfully today.”

After that beautiful Mass, that very same morning I was able to meet face-to-face some of my brother Salesians who accompany the children they have rescued from the streets. We spent a glorious morning with a group of 40 young boys of differing ages, ranging from 10 to 15 years old. Their eyes shine with a special light. These young men feel at home. They go to school, where they receive formation and an education that will give them all the opportunities for their future. They sing magnificently. They smile. We greeted each other and – of course – we took our photo, and they even learned how to say “*Hola y hasta la vista*”!

Finally, I thought that 170 years ago the boys in Valdocco, Turin, lived just like this with our beloved Don Bosco. Today, his missionary heart does exactly the same for these boys and girls around the world through his sons and daughters who are living as though in another Valdocco and another Mornese.

Today with the grace of communion that exists between the Church already in Paradise, the Church Triumphant, and us, the Church Militant, our holy missionaries St. Francis Xavier and Don Bosco continue to bless the mission and, together with the Lord, give life to these people and to these boys and girls in beautiful Goa, too.

Here one experiences and feels that the centuries do not distance us from what is essential and most authentic in life or from that evangelization which continues most wonderfully today.

During this month dedicated to our Mother, I ask Mary Help of Christians to continue to accompany the mission in the Name of the Lord throughout the world. May our Salesian Family continue to be as ***faithful*** to the missiontoday as they have always been until now.

May the Lord bless you and the Help of Christians accompany you.

With affection,

Don Angel