THE MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

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That human heart so capable of very great things

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My faithful friends, readers of the *Salesian Bulletin*, the means of family communication and friendship that Don Bosco himself valued so highly, I greet you with all cordiality.

I come to you on this occasion with my heart impressed by what I was able to experience around the time of the great Solemnity of Saint John Bosco. There were many things that impressed me, but today two testimonies stand out. For the former, I was but a witness of a talk and for the latter but a recipient of a message. Both of them made me feel that the human heart is very capable of great and beautiful things. Let me share them with you.

The former took place on the night of January 29, 2021, in Valdocco, in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, where I sat in the pews among the people and participated in the prayer vigils leading up to the Solemnity of our beloved Saint and Father of the Salesian Family. Four young people who had participated in the “Economy of Pope Francis” Meeting in Rome, organized by the Holy See, animated that night’s prayer vigil. These are young entrepreneurs who do not consider commerce to be a way to get rich at the cost of impoverishing others, but who engage in business with a sense of justice and solidarity. Two of these young people gave a witness talk that went far beyond the details of money management. One of them shared with us, with deep emotion, that he lost his father two years ago and how his widowed mother sought a way to give great meaning to her life in memory of her beloved husband: she decided to welcome into her home, together with her children, two immigrant children who are in this country (Italy) alone, without any affective or family ties. This young man shared with us how deeply impressed he and his siblings were by the decision and courage of their mother to live the Gospel as she believes we need to live it today: in a concrete way, a faith that has faces and names.

The second testimony was that of a young woman entrepreneur who decided to tutor a Senegalese child to help him as he makes his way, grows, works at his education, and prepares himself for life. I was strongly impressed by her because she showed the Gospel come alive and without “artificial sweetness”. Her witness also means that even today we can live like this. Without a doubt so many of you do live like this, each one in his own way, simply and concretely.

**One of those “rare messages”**

When it comes to speaking of the “concrete”, I want to offer you another testimony that confirms what is deeply engraved in my heart. I have said this more than once: in a world like ours, which is undoubtedly very complex and which is beset by so many dark powers and realities, we must make known the good that is done. Don Bosco did this daily and I shall do so here.

Just a few days ago, I received one of those rare messages that bring with them no complaints and do not speak ill of anyone (certainly, you know that complaints are frequent everywhere). Quite the contrary, this message bore the testimony of a young woman who has lived for years in a Salesian environment and which has left its mark on her life for the better. In reading her message, my heart swelled. I told myself that I had to share it with you so you too would hear something good that touches the heart and not does not cause it pain.

This is what the young woman said:

“Dear Don Angel: Ever since I found the way to write to you, I have greatly desired to share some things with you. Here, where I live, the Salesians are tremendous: they protect us in grief, shelter the lonely, always find time to listen, and exhort us to believe, to trust, and to hope against all hope.

They soothe our souls in bitter moments and celebrate our joys as if they were their own. Trust me, Father, I'm not making up stories. My whole life has been “lit up” by the Salesian charism, first, in a small city (where the first Salesian house in the Americas was opened) and now, for these past few years in Rosario, a big and beautiful city. Here, in the House of San José, I work in the school and participate in the parish activities. I have experienced firsthand what I will now share. Our Director, Fr. X, knows each student by name. He knows how to accompany each one in painful moments. Many of our children’s lives are marked by stories of dolorous and difficult realities: one has leukemia, some have parents who have died, others live in the midst of domestic violence and many other misfortunes. He knows each of them and embraces them with his heart and his words. Another Salesian brings the Church alive at each Mass. Then there is Don X who, although elderly, mingles among the children, entertaining them with stories of “the old days”. In another Salesian house, with Fr. X, we search tirelessly for the best method to teach the first graders to begin to read and write. There are so many names I could mention.”

On Saturday, I traveled over 900 miles just to see Padre X, who resides in the Zatti retirement home. I went to see him just to remind him how much he is loved, to give back a little for all his labors for us, and to have lunch with him. Moved deeply by this, he understood that everything had been worth it. So much life put at the service of others!

“Salesian” is synonymous with “living for others.” This is how we know our Salesians here. Thus they are. Thus they live. “We are in the world for others,” Fr. X constantly repeats to us, paraphrasing Don Bosco. Yes! That is why there is something special in the air, something invisible in the atmosphere, of our school playgrounds. It all has to do with joy, with hope, and with holiness.

Happy Feast of Don Bosco, dear Rector Major. I pray for you and in you for every Salesian who makes us feel that Don Bosco is alive, that he always was and that he continues to be. Happy Feast of Don Bosco and blessings for all.”

There you have this precious testimony full of zest and life. I am keeping her identity anonymous so as not to make her blush but there may be people who think I am making “publicity” when they read this. You know, my friends, that I am not. Why should I not speak, why should I keep silent about life-giving news that tells the truth of those who experience deep in their hearts what they have written to us? In all simplicity, I am saying that the boys at Valdocco knew this same reality because Don Bosco was alive among them. How happy it makes me to know that many of our Houses today have that same “Valdocco flavor”!

I wish you all well! May your hearts also swell and be open to *Hope*.