THE MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

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«MY NAME IS SEAN CAYD»

The Story of an Unimaginable Gift

Dear Readers, friends of the *Salesian Bulletin*, and most especially friends of Don Bosco's charism, I send you my affectionate greeting. They always come with gratitude for the sympathy you have towards Don Bosco, the saint of the world's youth, and the closeness, respect, or curiosity you feel towards those of us who try to continue his mission in the Church and the world. With all my heart, I thank you!

Today I am writing to share with you something I experienced just a short while ago when I was visiting the Salesian presences in Zimbabwe. More precisely, I was in a small town called Hwange. There I met with my Salesian confreres, other members of the Salesian Family, the educators from that place, and a group of about 200 young people both from there and others from far away, who had come from Malawi and Namibia with great sacrifice and generosity.

The three days in Hwange were full of life, joy, encounters, and greetings. From the first moment, more than 50 boys and girls from the closest houses joined the gathering. In fact, they spent the day there among us, and, to a great extent, amazed by everything they saw and heard—the songs, the dances, and the joy.

It can be said that one of the greatest riches of Africa are its children. They are all over and always happy and smiling (I would almost say unaware of the poverty in which they live).

Now I would like to tell you about Sean. Among all the children, this one boy was almost always present, together with his friends. He is about twelve years old. There he was, about a yard away from everything that was happening, not keeping his distance and unafraid. He was watching everything that was happening because it was all new for him.

Naturally, I greeted them all many times: in the morning, in the afternoon, and at night when they went home; and we spoke about things together.

When the time came for me to leave to head to the next stop, several hours’ journey by truck, there was that young lad. Just as I was getting into the truck, he came forward and stood very close to me, extending his right hand, fist closed. I understood that he wanted to give me something in my hand. Certainly, I did not have any idea what it was. Perhaps it was a request? Maybe he was letting me know he needed something? The fact is I extended the palm of my hand and received what he gave me. I soon understood that he was offering me a gift—his gift. I looked at what he handed me, closed my hand, thanked him with words and a huge smile, and put it into my pocket. To end our farewell, he visibly handed me a piece of writing paper.

You may wonder what this was all about—what was the gift and what was on the piece of paper. Let me share that with you right now. This boy—as I understand it—felt the need to thank me for having been there, perhaps for having greeted him, or being close to him and his friends, so he gave me what he could. The gift was simply a small stone, one of the thousands that were around on the ground, but one he had chosen to give to me. He gave me everything he could. That's how I received it. I have it with me now and with me it will remain. On the little piece of paper was written: “Pray fou (*sic*) you. My name is Sean Cayd.” Certainly, Sean offered me his prayer and remembrance.

How could my heart not have been touched by that experience?

How could I forget that face and those eyes full of life?

How could I not ask myself what must have gone through that boy’s heart and mind for him to feel that he had to give something to me—a man from a foreign land who had come from afar to visit them?

There are so many questions. Certainly, everything that happened has made me think much and deeply. It called to mind that scene in the Gospel in which the Lord Jesus praises the poor old woman because she had put but a few coins in the basket of the Temple of Jerusalem, the place to make donations. But it was all she had. Since I am a Salesian, an educator, Sean made me think very seriously about the educational action that takes place each day, by every Salesian, and in each Salesian house. The same can be said of every gesture, every word, every caress that happens in homes and families.

In fact, the moral of the story, the one that I try to apply to myself, is that we can never guess to what extent a word, a smile, a greeting, or even a look can reach in the heart of a boy, a girl, an adolescent or a young person, and what it can mean in their lives. What seems like nothing to the one who gives can be everything to the one who receives.

Don Bosco’s life is full of significant encounters, of words whispered in the ear, of glances that pierced the heart and soul—like the young Paolo Albera, who would become Don Bosco's second successor, or Luigi Variara, who promised, as a ten-year-old boy, in that exchange of glances, that he would never be separated from Don Bosco again. He did become a Salesian, a missionary, and the founder of a Congregation of great charity in the care of lepers. Today he is a Blessed.

It seems to me that these are some of the "miracles" that I often say are experienced daily in Salesian houses around the world. The truth is that my friend Sean touched my heart and taught me a great lesson. I pray the Good Lord bless him.

I wish you all the best, dear friends. Let us continue to trust that much good is also being done in the world. Thank you for walking this path together with me and for sharing these ideals.

Cordially,

Don Angel Fernandez Artime, SDB