THE MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

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WHEN AN EDUCATOR TOUCHES HIS CHILDREN’S HEART—OR THE ART OF BEING LIKE DON BOSCO

The art of being like Don Bosco: “Remember that education is a matter of the heart, of which God alone is the master, and that we can achieve nothing unless God teaches us the art and hands us the key” ([*The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*](https://donboscosalesianportal.org/wp-content/uploads/BM_16_en.pdf),XVI, 376).

My dear friends, readers of the *Salesian Bulletin* and friends of Don Bosco’s charism,

I’m writing you this greeting, I’d say, almost as a livestream, before it goes to print. I say this because I experienced the scene I’m going to tell you about only four hours ago.

I recently arrived in Lubumbashi. For ten days prior, I’d already visited very significant Salesian presences such as the displaced and refugee population of PALABEK, Uganda. These people are living in much more humane conditions today than when they first came to us, thank God. From Uganda, I went to the region of Goma in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, a place struggling under a difficult situation. There, the Salesian presences are full of life. A number of times, I observed that my heart was “touched”; that is, moved at seeing the good that’s being done and that God’s presence is so strong there, even in the midst of very great poverty. Still, my heart was touched with pain and sadness when I met some of the 32,000 people (mostly the elderly, women, and children) who have been welcomed and taken in on the grounds of the Salesian presence of Don Bosco-Gangi. I’ll speak about this next time because I need to let it rest on my heart for a while.

Right now, I wish to refer only to one beautiful scene I witnessed on the flight that brought us to Lubumbashi. It was a non-commercial flight in a medium-sized plane. I didn’t know the flight captain but the local Salesians did. When I greeted him on the plane, he told me that he’d studied vocational training at our school here in Goma. He told me that those were years that changed his life, then added something else, speaking to me and to all of us: “And here’s someone who’s been a ‘father’ for us.” In African culture, when you say someone is “a father,” you’re paying the greatest compliment possible. Not infrequently, though, this father is not the biological father to a son or daughter but the one who has really cared for him, supported him, and accompanied him.

This captain is a man about 45 years old; his son, already a young pilot, was accompanying him on the flight. To whom was he referring? To one of our Salesian coadjutor brothers, that is, not a priest but a consecrated layman, as Don Bosco conceived the Salesians. That Salesian brother, a missionary from Spain, Brother Honorato, has been a missionary in the Goma area for more than 40 years. Together with the other Salesians, of course, he did everything possible to make such a vocational training school—as well as many other things—a reality. He came to know the captain and some of his friends when they were just kids—hundreds and hundreds of boys. In fact, the captain told me that four of his companions, who were practically street kids in those years, were able to study mechanics in Don Bosco’s house and today are engineers in charge of the mechanical and technical maintenance of their company’s small planes.

Well, when I heard the captain, a former Salesian student, say that Brother Honorato had been his father, the father of all of them, I was deeply moved. It made me think of Don Bosco, whom his boys considered their father.

I thought, “How true it is that education is a thing of the heart.” It just confirmed my conviction that our presence among boys, girls, and youths is for us almost a “sacrament” through which we, too, reach God. That’s why I’ve spoken with such passion and conviction in recent years to my Salesian confreres and to the Salesian Family about the **Salesian “sacrament of presence.”**

I know that in the Salesian world, in our Family throughout the world, among our brothers and sisters, there are many fathers and many *mothers* who, with their presence and affection and their ability to educate, reach the hearts of young people, who need so much today. Indeed, I would say more and more that they need these presences that can change a life for the better.

Greetings from Africa—and every blessing of the Lord to you, friends of the Salesian charism.

Blessings,

Cardinal Ángel