THE MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

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THE POWER OF THAT DEFENSELESS BABE CONQUERS ALL THE POWERS OF THE WORLD

### This year more than ever before, we realize the truth of these words of Isaiah: “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: to them that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, light is risen.”

Dear readers of the *Salesian Bulletin*, friends of the Salesian charism,

We stand at the threshold of Christmas. How beautiful is everything that Christmas brings. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI: “Dear friends, the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord which we shall soon be celebrating invites us to practice this same humility and obedience of faith. The glory of God is not expressed in the triumph and power of a king, it does not shine out in a famous city or a sumptuous palace, but makes its abode in a virgin’s womb and is revealed in the poverty of a child. In our lives too, the almightiness of God acts with the force — often in silence — of truth and love. Thus faith tells us that in the end the defenseless power of that Child triumphs over the clamor of worldly powers.” (General Audience of Wednesday, December 19, 2012) “In the night of the world let us still be surprised and illumined by this act of God which is totally unexpected: God makes himself a Child. We must let ourselves be overcome with wonder, illumined by the Star that flooded the universe with joy. May the Child Jesus, in coming to us, not find us unprepared, dedicated only to making exterior reality more beautiful.” (General Audience of Wednesday, December 22, 2010)

I think that for most of us preparing for Christmas and Christmastide, with the season’s different feastdays and parties, touches our hearts deeply. Perhaps some people do not understand in their hearts what this wonderful Mystery of God's Presence - His Love – means, though many do. That notwithstanding, Christmas is always a beautiful time of humanity, of grace, of the desire for Peace, and of Hope.

Even as we stand in the light and beauty of Christmas, of the Mystery of the Presence of God, we are not unaware that we are truly living “a night of the world.” We are living in a time of pain, of despair, of war, of deaths. How timely are Pope Benedict XVI’s words, though he wrote a decade ago, years before the moment in which we are now living.

* We cannot ignore the war that is taking place in Ukraine.
* We do not forget the thousands and thousands of lives that have been cut short as a result of the sin of war and the death that it sows everywhere.
* We do not ignore that thousands and thousands of people are displaced in Ukraine and that other hundreds of thousands of people live hidden in subhuman conditions, without light or heat and with little food.
* In addition to Ukraine, there are currently 29 other war and guerrilla hotspots in the world suffering the same effects of death and desolation.
* More than 35,000 murders occur annually in some Latin American nations.
* The number of the poor in Europe (we who thought we were completely secure) has increased by more than double the number when compared with two or three years ago.
* We have not managed to end world hunger; instead, it has increased.
* Catastrophic fires and floods, the result of climate change on our suffering planet, warn us with increasing frequency and force.
* At the most recent summit on the climate, the nations that pollute the most were not even present, as if the problem had nothing to do with them...

Cannot what I have just described be defined as a “night of Humanity”? It is Pope Francis himself who speaks without hesitation of a third world war, covert in one way or another.

So, where can we find, discover, experience the fruits of the Incarnation and of that first Christmas from more than 2,000 years ago? And where can we experience the Life that comes to us from the Resurrection of the Lord?

Do we have a reason for Hope? Or does the dark night keep us from finding it?

During this time, Pope Francis has returned often to the topic of Hope, urging us to look at our life with new eyes – especially now that we are undergoing a severe trial – with the eyes of Jesus, “the Author of Hope.” The certainty that the darkness will turn into light will help us overcome these difficult days. Hope is “a virtue that never disappoints: if you wait, you will never be disappointed” (Pope Francis). It is a virtue that surprises even God. In one of his poems, the great French Catholic writer Charles Peguy puts these words into God’s mouth: “The faith that I love most, says God, is Hope... What surprises Me... is Hope.”

Indubitably, though we are faced with so much night, there is also so much life: the Life that Mary of Nazareth brings to us in her newborn Son. The life of so many children whose mothers bring to light with immense love, in God’s Name. The life of so much anonymous generosity on the part of millions of people every day who reach out to their neighbor, to the needy, and to the elderly who are alone. Life is what so many anonymous people give away when they fight so much darkness and pessimism in silence. Life is, it seems to me, what is sown every day in thousands and thousands of Salesian presences around the world where, through a gesture, a smile, a piece of bread or a plate of rice, or in a moment of encounter, light and Hope are sown instead of death from bombs. All this, I believe, is the fruit of Christmas, of the Incarnation of the Son of God, of the Resurrection, and of the God of Life – for He always has the last word.

Blessed Christmas,

Don Angel