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THOUGHTS FROM THE SEEDBED

COLLECTED GOODNIGHT TALKS IN DON BOSCO SEMINARY



Donnie Duchin Duya, SDB, June 2014

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COLLECTED GOODNIGHT TALKS IN DON BOSCO SEMINARY



Don Bosco Seminary





DEDICATION

To my confreres, aspirants and prenovices of Don Bosco Seminary, in whose company I mused and composed and delivered these talks

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

“Gratitude is the language of the heart.”

I heard the quote from a goodnight talk, several years ago in Canlubang. I don't remember now who uttered it. But this struck some sensitive chords in my heart that more than a decade after, I have not let go of it.

This compilation may just be mere words. But let its essence speak of gratitude and of love.

My expression of thanks goes

to **Mr. Itchan Decena** for helping me make this manuscript see print;
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to the **Prenovices** and **Aspirants** of the formation years 2010-2012 who formed me as I journeyed with them;

And to **Jayce**, the Great Gardener, who first planted the seed of vocation in us and have not grown tired in taking care of it.

FOREWORD

It is a privilege for me to write this Foreword on *Thoughts from the Seedbed*, a collection of the ‘Good Night Talks’ by Bro. Donnie; but it is far more privilege and pleasure for me to hear him in person deliver these nuggets of wisdom to our Community of Salesians, prenovices and aspirants in Don Bosco Canlubang.

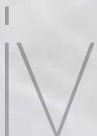
Good night talk is a long-standing Salesian tradition dating back to the time of Don Bosco where he would tell stories, tidbits of wisdom, and some food for the soul that the boys can bring with them as they sleep in the night.

It has been quite a long time already since he last delivered to us these talks but I can still imagine him as I read the pages of the *Seedbed*. I can still see his half jesting, half serious face ready to crack a joke or a pick-up line; or his facial expression when he tells a story that made an impression to his listeners.

What is admirable is that each of his good night talk is well prepared, written, crisp and stimulating because they came from his own experiences and musings about life.

I thank Bro. Donnie for sharing himself with us.

Fr. Gerry Martin, SDB
Rector, Don Bosco Seminary



INTRODUCTION

In between the chores of checking whether the *sems* (on this side of the Salesian world, this is how we call our aspirants and prenovices) are in their proper places, prepare lessons for my teaching stint in the college, take care of the gardens-- among many others--one of the most challenging duties of being a practical trainee in a formation house is the task of giving good night talks.

That is, at least for me.

Blame it on my stage fright, or perhaps to my distaste of public speaking, that when it's my turn to deliver the talk for the night, I'd go into solitude to reflect and compose a piece so that I'd have something decent to offer.

But even before I knew it, the two years of my practical training quickly came and went.

One of the things that rub it in for me that *that* phase is now over is a compendium of delivered good night talks sitting quietly in one of the folders of my computer.

Those once loose talks are neatly compiled here.

They serve as a beautiful memento of my practical training now long gone and a reminder of that *first fervor* which I once had—and still wish to carry with me—up to that final moment when I am thrust back to the seedbed from where I came.



On Epiphany

First, here are some pick-up lines:

- Do you believe in love at first sight or should I walk by again?
- Do you know why I can't see any stars tonight? You outshine them.
- Did you know you're like my blood...
you're A+ and always in my heart
- Did you just fart? Cause you blew me away!

For the more outrageous and out-of-this-world pick-up lines, please go to Romnick. He has got a lot more under his belt.

Pick-up lines have been in the limelight of late. I'd like to think that this is so because of our attachment to symbols.

The bananas or blueberries, the CPR, the stars in the night, the blood, and yes, even the fart could be stretched a little further to symbolize how they remind us of the person whom we consider significant to us.

Or if there is no connection at all, we'll try to find one.

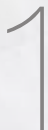
A grade six student from Albay named Janela Arcos Lelis,¹ must have found that strong connection between the Philippine flag and the country it represents when she braved the floodwaters as she tightly held the Philippine flag in a heroic act to save the national symbol from being swept away by the raging waters on that stormy day on July 26.

To recognize her act of bravery, a little Philippine flag was pinned on the left collar of her uniform. She was also given P 20,000 in cash for this selfless act.

More than two thousand years ago, a group of wise men found a connection between a star and the coming of the Great King who would rule them all.

That star, in my opinion, could have easily been forgotten if it did not lead the magi to their supposed destination. But it did what it ought to do. That explains why every year we take pains in thinking of what type of star to crown our Christmas tree.

1 Philippine Daily Inquirer, December 30, 2011



Symbols are fundamentally important not because of what they are, but because of what they stand for.

On that first Christmas night, the star was there to stand for the coming of God and to announce the reign of His Kingdom.

May we, who also seek to discover God's will for us, become ourselves an outstanding sign of God's loving compassion. So that when people, when our companions, when the young people we relate with see us, they will be reminded that Christmas is not an event which only happens once a year.

It goes on.

Merry Christmas!

What does love look like?

I was feeling bad one day when I thought of flipping the pages of my journal.

On one page I wrote two years ago, I read this line “A confrere-friend shared with me that when he was in the novitiate, he promised not to look at flowers so as not to lose his focus on God. I was awe-inspired.”

On Valentine’s Day, my heart leapt when I read this entry. “A 16-year old teenager, a close friend, sent me this text message. He told me that the he’s preparing himself to be consecrated to God” for he was due to enter the seminary this year.

Last March, one entry reads “I was gently moved with one aspirant when I raised my voice at him. I expected him to react negatively—to justify his deed, perhaps—but I was surprised when he gently reminded me to correct him in private. My anger faded away.”

Turning to another page, I realized that I jotted a personal observation in my journal when we came back from Tarlac after the thanksgiving mass of Fr. Reggie. An aspirant caught my interest for he was the last person to leave the bus. He silently collected the wrappers of bread left by the rest of the community.

Apart from soothing my wounded soul after reading these journal entries, I noted one thing common to all of them. All of these are concrete practices of love. They show me concretely what love actually looks like.

God bless. Good evening.

My Vocation Story

One concrete proposal of Fr. Chavez in his stenna is for the Salesians, and I'd like to believe, for you as well who opted to become SDBs someday, to share our vocation stories.

And tonight, allow me to use this opportunity to share mine.

To begin with, I am a returnee. I left the seminary in 2004 as a novice-to-be on the eve of our supposed flight to the novitiate. I worked as a teacher in some school in Manila, and I thought that I'd be happy to live and die working as one.

Along with that teaching stint, I worked for a publisher producing English textbooks exclusively marketed in Korea. I also contributed articles and edited educational materials for a Japanese firm. And because I had so much free time left, I also worked as an English tutor for a language school.

Looking back, I couldn't believe that I was able to juggle three jobs all at the same time!

Despite the fat pay check I was receiving, the glamour of working as a professor in a respectable academic institution in the country, the fulfilment of doing what I liked doing the most, I was not satisfied.

There were so many possibilities ahead of me. Or so I thought.

One late afternoon, after coming from work, I passed by a mall. I told myself that I could treat myself to a fancy restaurant for I was hungry. While deciding where to eat, out of nowhere, I was reminded of my past life as a seminarian.

I recalled those times in the seminary when there would be unstructured activities by batch, and we'd just have a quick hike to *Tatlong Butas*, order *halo-halo* and something else, and share stories we would be delighted to talk about over and over and over again.

And that alone was a piece of heaven!

It was not just the tasteful flavour of the *halo halo* served there, but the unique friendship, and yes, the warm brand of brotherhood that bonded us as one batch.

That time, I longed exactly for that.

I set aside the idea of eating for I had become hungry for something more, for something greater that could not just be satisfied by any physical food alone. Deep within, I was completely empty.

That time, God knocked again at my door. And at that moment, He knocked me down.

I got in touch my spiritual director, one year after I left. I told him of my situation. And then, we talked about the process of my re-admission. He asked me to volunteer at the street children center *Pugad* once a week. And then we processed my experience.

Irony of ironies, it was on a Good Friday that I got settled with my decision to re-enter. The universal Church was recalling the agony of Jesus that day, but inside me, I found peace in my decision.

On June 1, 2006 I returned to this seminary together with my third batchmates, all first timers, three of whom will be professing their vows six months from now.

I've been a Salesian for only three years. Too young, you would say. But that short period has been filled with moments of bliss and faithfulness, although, it has been also marred by pains and infidelity. There were clear moments when I felt that God wanted me to remain by His side; but there were also times when haunting questions became my sole reason to stay.

I listened to him when He told me "Donnie, come and see." When I wanted to explore, He allowed me to "Go and see." And now, that as I wrap up my practical training, He tells me "Donnie, we shall see."

God bless. Good evening.

On Namuncura and Savio

Namuncura and Savio have some things in common.

One is that the Church recognized their sanctity. The latter was canonized, while the former was beatified.

Aside from this, they were both Bosconians.

And your guess is as good as mine: They would have been splendid Salesians had God permitted them to live a little longer. But as we know it, they lived only a short life. Savio met the Creator when he was just barely 15 years old. Namuncura, however, smiled goodbye when he was about my age: 19 years old.

When the latter entered the Salesian school, it was not a walk in the park. He found it difficult to fall in line and to be obedient to the sound of the bell.

Picking up Savio as his model, Namuncura's companions could no longer distinguish the former from the latter. He became a wonderful copy of him.

When a companion slighted him with the question "what does human flesh taste like" inferring that he was a cannibal since he was an Indian, he responded with just a big tear.

The life of Zefferino is a parable of scarcely 19 years, but it was a life filled with lessons.

Fr. Chavez said that "A saint is never like a meteorite that unexpectedly flashes across the sky of humanity, but is rather the fruit of a long and silent gestation in a family."

Saints inspire others to be saints. Let us learn from their examples.

God bless. Good evening.

On Good (and Bad) Books

“Uncle Charles Cabin” and “The Wandering Jews” Do these titles ring a bell?

For those among us who are taking the Rizal course, they should, for these two books greatly awakened Rizal’s consciousness in fighting for our freedom.

Hands down, books influence us. There’s no argument about it. Was it not St. Augustine who said that “The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page?”

Don Bosco knew the importance of reading books. This prompted him to issue, three years before his passing, a circular letter devoted entirely on spreading good books.

At this point, let us listen to the words of Don Bosco:

The enemies of souls are aware of the influence of this weapon, and experience has taught us how young people avail themselves of it to the loss of their innocence. Strange titles, presentable paper, clean type, fine engravings, low prices, popular style, variety of plot, vivid descriptions: everything is exploited with diabolic artistry and craftiness. Woe to all of us if we doze off while the enemy is constantly alert!

All pupils should be told to hand over any new book they may acquire or that may be brought to them by relatives or friends. Professors, supervisors in the study hall, and assistants must take note of what the boys are reading in the church, at recreation, in class and in study hall.

Speak often on the subject of bad books during the year from the pulpit, in the evening talk, and in the classroom. Point out the harm they do.

If we act along these lines, I hope that no bad books will be smuggled into our schools, and that if they are, they will soon be destroyed.

cf Biographical Memoirs, pp. 173-177

This letter was written in 1883. And the popular medium back then was the printed matter. If Don Bosco were alive today, I am certain that he would also write a letter on movies, TV shows, Internet sites.

We have been reminded to choose our friends well, to associate only with those who serve as good examples. I believe that, it is also true in choosing the books, and of comics, and of video clips we save in our computers. For we do not just possess them, we also allow them to possess us.

I said a lot tonight. Forget everything, but please remember this. When you receive some cash during the Christmas break, please consider buying good books that will not just satisfy your curiosity, feed your mind, warm your heart, but more importantly, buy books that will nourish your vocation.

God bless. Read more. Good evening.



Magone and Mary

Most of the Bosconians I know could very well relate with the naughty General Mickey more than the perpetually holy Savio. I can perfectly understand the reason why. Dominic, they perceive, must have been groomed right from the very start to become a saint. General Mickey, on the other hand, had to find his way towards the greater scheme of holiness. It was not an easy feat for him to turn his back on his former life; to leave a life of sin did not happen in a snap. He agonized over the past evils he committed.

Mickey Magone figured into my consciousness when I read in that classic orange book entitled “Don Bosco: Spiritual Director of Young People,” that he made six resolutions to prepare himself to celebrate the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of our Lady.

1. To detach my heart from all earthly things so as to give it completely to Mary.
2. To make a general confession in order to ensure a peaceful conscience at the hour of my death.
3. To skip breakfast every morning as a penance for my sins and to recite the Seven joys of Mary to merit her assistance at the last hours of my life.
4. To go to communion every day provided my confessor advises it.
5. To tell my companions an anecdote in honor of Mary each day.
6. To place this sheet at the feet of Our Lady’s statue and, with this act, to consecrate myself completely to her and for the future, I wish to be entirely hers until the very last moments of my life.

All of these were approved by his confessor except for the first part of the third resolution, that is, to skip breakfast every morning as an act of penance for his sins.

Some observations:

First, you see in these resolutions the awareness of Magone of the reality of death.

At a very young age, he did not consider death morbid. In fact, he welcomed the idea of it. He longed for it to happen. He embraced it. And when it finally came, instead of it conquering him, he conquered 'it.'

Second, we see here an image of a young person who desired greatness, not through the use of force and might, but through his submission to the will of the Father.

Third, Magone took advantage of the sacraments, particularly confession and communion, to attain holiness.

And finally, he allowed Mary to be his guide.

Magone died more than 100 years ago. But he lives on in that orange book, and in the many young people who continue to believe and declare, through their words and deeds, that God is still in charge after all.

God bless. Good evening.

On New Media

One of the main issues we tackled in the social communication East-Asia Oceania regional meeting was formation. Not only of the seminarians—aspirants and prenovices—but also of Salesians—the young ones and the once young.

You see, the emergence of personal media such as the mobile phone, I-touch, I-pad, netbook and the like have done a lot of wonderful stuff in our ministry for the young people.

Fr. Duds Hila, a Salesian based in Tondo has his weekly Kiliti ng Diyos, a blog dedicated to breaking the Word aptly written for the young people. For those who are into Lectio Divina, the Pandelasmena of Fr. Chito Dimaranan will surely be of help.

The reflections of Br. George Celis concisely wrapped in more or less 140 character text message and sent to all his phone contacts never fail to capture the essence of the Sunday Gospel.

One Salesian priest who sells his retreat manuals has three SIM cards—one for Globe, another for Smart, and the last one is for Sun. His reason: So that he could easily be reached by the young people belonging to any or all of the networks. Whenever he celebrates Mass at the Greenbelt chapel, he would use the PowerPoint, which he generously shares on one condition: that the one asking for the file should invite him to be a friend in Facebook.

Young Salesians are also sharing their reflections in cyberspace. Of late, I saw one informative and inspirational video produced by the brothers of the postnovitiate community on St. Benedict. Practical trainees flood the Facebook thread with the photos of Bosconians taken during their retreats and school activities.

When I was a cloistered novice in the hill at Don Bosco Lawaan, I was able to befriend some of our Bosconians from Mandaluyong, Makati, Pampanga and even Tarlac! I corresponded with an FMA aspirant in the United States and an elderly Salesian Indian priest based in Rome.

This was made possible through my blog.

The websites of the Salesians in Africa, in Australia, in the United States are loaded with so many materials on vocation promotions.

One night will not be enough to enumerate how personal media have been used to evangelize and to make way for God to be known in the digital continent.

But as I enumerate its advantages, let us not close our eyes to the dangers it poses.

One of the major blunders of the Aquino administration last year endangered our diplomatic ties with our neighboring country Vietnam. When he visited that country last year, one of his secretaries noted that the wine served to them was not that delicious, and that there was a scarcity of good looking men. There is nothing bad about this opinion, only that, it was made public via Twitter.

It is true that the new media have made our life a lot easier, but it has also made our lives more complicated. For one, in the context of the seminary, the clausura is diminished. The wall separating us from the outer secular world collapses. We are exposed to the crazy outfits of Lady Gaga, and even the antics of Moymoy Palaboy. We could receive text messages in the wee hours of the morning, waking us up to the morning greeting: *kamusta na u?*

We may shield ourselves from the complexities of the cybernet if we'll honor the seminary values inculcated in us. Two words. Just two words. Authenticity and Transparency.

We are seminarians. Let us hold on to this our identity even when we step in the realms of cyberspace. This identity should remind us to behave well and observe prudence in whatever stuff, be it photos, reflections, witty remarks we post in the Internet. There is such a thing as digital footprints. Once we leave our mark in the cyberspace, it will be difficult to erase it.

Your seminary formators are helping you by barring you access from certain websites. For us to monitor what you place in your Facebook account, or the videos you upload in Youtube or your reflections in your blog, or even the text messages you send will be quite difficult if not utterly impossible. You have to do the gatekeeping yourself.

So, the next time you log on to the net, remember these two words: authenticity and transparency.

God bless. Good evening.

Evangelizing Ourselves First

The South American region has contributed about 101 canonized and beatified saints to the Church. We have saints like St. Rose of Lima, St. Peter Claver, and of course, our very own Bl. Ceferino Namuncura who all come from this region.

Being considered the most Catholic continent in the world, the question “why does it need Catholic missionaries?” surely defies logic and reason.

Meeting in Brazil four years ago, the region’s bishops called for the Latin American church to be in a “permanent state of mission.” The bishops realized that “Latin America is a continent of people who are baptized, but who are not really disciples, much less missionaries,” noted a Bolivian theologian.

When I came across this news earlier this week, I suddenly felt afraid for the Catholicism in the Philippines. Did Fr. Rector not mention only last night that there is just only an estimated 15% of genuine Catholics in the country?

Just looking at the support of Filipino Catholics to the RH bill, which is tantamount to contradicting the teachings of the Church, one cannot but see the writings on the wall. If we do not do our part, we are also doomed to face the same situation.

We who belong to an institution founded for the main purpose of evangelizing and educating to the faith need to do more. A lot is expected from us.

But before we set foot in inviting others back to the church, before we dream about that wonderful first sermon in our thanksgiving mass, or the awe-inspiring good morning talks which we’ll deliver to the students, let us begin first the serious task in the mission field we are asked to evangelize: let us begin first to evangelize ourselves.

God bless. Good evening.

Insight and Reflection

Every third Sunday, for the past five months now, I slip away from our community to go to Makati for the radio broadcast.

I cannot thank Fr. Gerry enough and the rest of the confreres for the go signal and the support they have given me to pursue this media apostolate. Despite the fact that agreeing for me to be there means I would not be here.

I love to teach, and I consider the classroom as my rightful place in the congregation. It's where, I think, I'll be most productive, it's there that I'll be most maximized by the province.

But communication is my first love. And so far, my experience of being on the radio can be summarized into three words: I am learning.

Br. Jomar would tease me for being so silent most of the time on air because I feel intimidated being in the midst of seasoned broadcast professionals.

Coming back to the community after each broadcast, I bring home that exhilarating experience of not just being able to learn how to operate the console when a commercial needs to be played, or how to modulate my voice so that it becomes more pleasing to the listeners, but being able to learn some insights from my co-hosts and from the listeners who interact with us a well.

I hope that your stint in the seminary does not only give you the obvious skills that we want you to have: to play an instrument, to have a deeper relationship with the Lord, etc. but also, those which are subtle and hidden, skills which could only made surface through insight and reflection.

God bless. Good evening.

True to our Identity

Before Paulo Coelho, JK Rowling, Bob Ong, Dave Peltzer and Arun Gogna invaded the seminary, there was first Robert Fulghum.

In his magnum opus, entitled “All I really need to know, I learned in kindergarten,” he outlined the lessons, which were not taught to him by his professors in the graduate school, but learned in his lowly kindergarten class.

These are some of the things he learned:

- *Share everything.*
- *Play fair.*
- *Don't hit people.*
- *Put things back where you found them.*
- *Clean up your own mess.*
- *Don't take things that aren't yours.*
- *Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.*
- *Wash your hands before you eat.*
- *Flush.*
- *Live a balanced life.*
- *Be aware of wonder.*

I was reminded of this when I was having my personal spiritual reading on the life of Savio the other day, and reached that episode when he sought the help of St. John Bosco to help him attain sanctity.

Don Bosco told Dominic that in his school, to become a saint, one needs to be cheerful. The former made the latter realize that to be genuinely holy, one needs to be human first. The age we are in may be characterized by immediacy: think of pancit canton ready in just three minutes and antique furniture that could be manufactured while you wait. We come to realize that “instant” does not apply in the process of sanctity.

There is no shortcut to the process.

Here in the seminary, we have to learn how to become human first. And when we have mastered that lesson: when we are able to say sorry, inculcate discipline, and develop the habit of denying ourselves, the task of becoming a saint will just be some corners away.

In our quest to reach sanctity, let us first be true to our humanity.

God bless. Good evening.

Mabuhay si San Bosco!

Last week, during the send-off of the relics, I committed a major major blunder. I guess, it would easily land on the list of my most embarrassing moments.

No, it was not when I shouted “*Mabuhay si San Bosco* (Long live St. Bosco).” I maintain that that is acceptable. If we have San Lorenzo, San Pedro, and even Sta Cruz, Sta Mesa in our lexical consciousness, then it follows that we could also have something like “San Bosco.”

When Fr. Arnold shouted “*Mabuhay ang Panginoon* (Long Live the Lord),” that’s when I entertained the possibility—however remote it may be—of how Don Bosco must have been complaining because he’s been getting so much attention.

That made me also feel a little disturbed realizing how the majority of individuals who came to venerate Don Bosco with much care seemed to fail to show respect to the Blessed Sacrament. What is worse is that some even failed to recognize its existence.

God is present in our Blessed Sacrament 24/7, seven days a week. And we don’t just get to see and touch and talk to Him. We consume Him. He becomes part not just of our biological mechanisms but also, and more importantly, He strengthens us spiritually.

When Don Bosco was alive, he would be branded in the newspapers as a “miracle worker” owing to the countless miracles he would perform. But he would be quick to deny that he did not do it and almost instantly, he would lead them to thank God’s Providence.

If there is an improvement in the quality of our relationship with Christ; then, Don Bosco’s coming to Canlubang is not in vain. And his visit is not going to be just that, a short visit, for he will remain in our hearts.

Mabuhay si San Bosco! God bless. Good evening.

Musings on Don Bosco's coming

Advent season is about coming, I am certain that it's always been general knowledge. And coming means we are to prepare.

This year, this season of advent means doubly special for we are preparing for the Christmas season, and more than a week after, we brace ourselves for the coming of Don Bosco in the flesh, metaphorically and literally. We'll be able to see a part of him.

I hope that we'll not be drowned in the pomp and pageantry and noise of his coming, for I believe that his visit is meant to strengthen us spiritually.

Don Bosco's coming is a meeting with the person of Don Bosco. And I'd like to believe that he has some special message for each of us.

I've read a couple of episodes in the Biographical Memoirs when Don Bosco would do oratory hopping to visit his Salesians, the novices, the young people, and the preparations are simply remarkable. They would assign someone to deliver the speech. They would intensify their practices of piety. They would offer their communion and confessions so that the visit of Don Bosco to their house will be a tremendous success.

I wish that we'll also do the same.

That as we busy ourselves in thinking about what exhibits could be set up, what else will catch the fancy of our guests, what will make the event more special, we may not lose grasp of the essential.

After all, that's what his motto is all about: Give me souls, take away the rest.

God bless. Good evening.

On Salesian Brothers

Yesterday, we quietly marked the first day of the triduum in honor of Blessed Artemide Zatti.

I note that there was nothing special in the community schedule, no colorful fanfare, no ballyhoo at all; such a characteristic of Salesian brothers who usually opt for the side lines, shying away from the publicity and attention.

I think it was in the library of the novitiate where my knowledge and fascination about the Salesian brothers grew more. There's this booklet in the library entitled "Life Sketches of the First Coadjutors." It details the life stories of Salesian brothers who helped Don Bosco when the congregation was just starting.

Among the names listed there, there were:

Marcello Rossi, a porter for 48 years.

Dominic Palestrino, sacristan.

Peter Enria, music master and in charge of stage, cook, painter

Camilo Quirino, a polyglot

Maestro Dogliani, a music genius

Andrew Pelazza, director of the press

Peter Cenci, head tailor

Joseph Gambino, head of the Salesian library

Joseph Rossi, General Economer of the Salesian Society

Among the ones in the list, my favorite is **Joseph Buzzetti**. He was just nine years old when he came to Turin to work as a brick layer. He donned the clerical habit in 1851. But a pistol shot wounded one of

his finger so that it had to be amputated. This accident discouraged him from becoming a priest. However, he loved Don Bosco so much that his preoccupation was to make himself useful in the Oratory and soon he became the factotum of the house. He would teach catechism, he was in charge of music and of the choir until 1860 when Don Cagliero took over.

When Don Bosco had some important business at hand and did not know to whom he could entrust it, he would say: "Call Buzzetti!"

If there is one idea that will neatly package and synthesize that book on the life of Br. Zatti, it is this: They all loved Don Bosco: that even in the littlest, humblest, lowliest task they carried out, they did it with the greatest love.

I heard from someone that the greatest form of devotion is imitation. Let us do likewise. Let us live as the first lay brothers and Br. Zatti did.

God bless. Good evening.

Damaso?... Santo!

Carlos Celdran has been an instant celebrity for some weeks now. And in case you're not aware why, you must have been out of the planet. He disrupted the homily at a Mass celebrated at the Manila Cathedral, where no less than Cardinal Rosales, Archbishop of Manila, was among the celebrants. He hurled up an improvised placard and at the top of his voice, shouted at the members of the clergy to "stop getting involved in politics."

Upon his arrest, support for him has steadily been snowballing. Facebook accounts were set up in his honor and those who made their reactions publicly had generally only two things to say:

1. To free Carlos Celdran
2. To criticize the Catholic Church

Assessing the quantity and quality of the discourse, I was saddened by the great majority of those who have elevated Celdran to a hero status for being brave enough to challenge the leaders of the Catholic Church.

In times like these, we don't expect the members of the clergy and even the religious congregations to exclusively do the talking. They are very much identified with the Church, and for simple minded folks, it's just that, the priests and religious are the church.

And so, I believe that the most effective stance against the passing of the RH bill is beyond us. We are against the present form of the reproductive health bill as it contradicts the very morals we hold and even if we try to sound objective and rational about it, people have made up their minds.

Amidst the clutter of comments, I found the insights of lay people most enlightening, if not comforting. These level-headed Catholics

have been vigilant in taking up the cudgels in defending the stand of the CBCP against the passing of the RH bill and surprisingly, they seem to be well versed in the teachings of the Church. Some claim to have read *Humanae Vitae*, and they seem to have been enlightened with it.

My point is this.

We don't only become evangelizers when we write our names with the initials SDB or when we are ordained for priesthood. Our ministry begins now. We have the privilege of meeting our students on a weekly basis. We have to do our best in catechizing them. This is especially true for public school students who may be receiving the last religious instruction in their lifetime.

The students we have at present, who have received the finest values and religious instruction, may not just become apologists in the future, but probably even saints.

God bless. Good evening.

Tribute to Fr. George

They come in threes.

Fr. Gerry started the streak of paying Fr. George homage. Last night, we heard the paean of Fr. Nesty. Tonight, it's my turn.

Young Salesian I may be, I also have my precious encounters with Fr. George. Not with the ageing, bed-ridden priest the younger ones have come to know now, but with the still robust, lucid and youthful octogenarian priest I first met ten years ago.

I was a first year seminarian when I was assigned to be the room cleaner of Fr. George. I recall that I would be delighted to clean his room notably because of two reasons:

1. two pieces of candies await me each time I report for work—with the equally sweet note he hand-scribbled that accompanied it "For my room cleaner."
2. his room is a concrete example of how to live a life totally detached all for the reason of serving the Lord.

He didn't want his room to be cleaned on Sundays. According to him, it's the Lord's Day and I should be resting. But since it was part of the seminary schedule, I would still go just the same. His room was always unlocked anyway. But on Sundays, strikingly, there would be no candies.

His kindness and warm smile would draw people towards him. He would have ready candies in his pockets. And his supply of sweets is bottomless. He had tons stored in the physics lab. He might not have enough energy to carry out his apostolate, but his foresight would still enable him to be a Salesian in the midst of the young.

A confession to Fr. George in the confines of his physics lab means enjoying a reward of candies.

This made me entertain bad thoughts then, whether people really go to him for the sacrament or for the candies.

His devotion to the sacraments is unparalleled. He would be in the confessional box as early as 5.30 AM to hear our confessions. He would be in his post again at 7.00 in the evening during our spiritual reading and evening prayers. Almost faithfully, he would be in the periphery of the gym for the EPC Masses whole year round.

Apart from these encounters, you may ask, what has Fr. George left me with?

An example of faithfulness and dedication to the consecrated life I have chosen to live.

Fr. George is gone. He has gone ahead of us to the Salesian Garden that Don Bosco promised his children.

God bless. Good evening.

On Noynoying

Those who took up linguistics must recall the term ‘neologism.’

Neologism means a newly coined term, word, or phrase, that may be in the process of entering common use, but has not yet been accepted into mainstream language.

We have got some examples of this:

Robotics, 1941

Cyberspace, 1984

Blog, late 90’s

I was reminded about neologism because even before leaving Canlubang, militant groups protesting against the government had invented a new word to describe how President Aquino is running the country.

It is called *Noynoying*.

They defined it as “That idle moment when you are supposed to do something but you are not doing anything.”

They even were creative in using the new word in sentences which have found their way in my Twitter timeline.

“It’s our Finals tomorrow, but let me just do Noynoying first.”

“Today, I will go Noynoying. Is there a hostage crisis? Let me just eat first. Is there a typhoon coming? I’ll go partying first.”

“Let me predict what you’re doing now. It’s 315pm and you’re all Noynoying at your desk, watching the clock, waiting for 5pm to come.”

Noynoying has become viral in the online world. It has a twitter account and a Facebook page.

For the past days, we can say that we've been joining the Noynoying craze as we enjoy this piece of white paradise away from the structure of the seminary.

Daily VTRs were offered, along with generous free time and unstructured activities by the sea; relatively lighter responsibilities you need to contend with in exchange for monetary compensation to boost the economy of your respective countries.

But one may ask, what have these got to do with my seminary formation?

I say, a lot.

For St John Bosco himself believed in the power of recreation in relation to the formation of young people.

This is specifically true for you who are set to follow him more closely, God willing.

Fun and games occupy a privileged place in Don Bosco's educative method. He gave it a pedagogical slant elevating it into a spirituality that coincided with sanctity. Dominic Savio expressed it insightfully to his friend, Camillo Gavio "here we make holiness consist in being cheerful."

And so, as we continue to join the Noynoying bandwagon, let us be conscious that this activity or non-activity has got fundamental value.

God bless. Good evening.

On Graduation and Ordination

Tomorrow, we'll witness two events: the ordination to the diaconate of the 9 brothers from the theologate, and of course, the graduation of our very own fourth years.

The ordination tomorrow is a little special for me, because four of them were my classmates when we were prenovices. The graduation tomorrow is anticipated because it marks a milestone in the lives of our fourth years who will not just be called "professional" after tomorrow, but more importantly, they will be "prenovices" soon, God willing.

These two events are moments which we dream of. And for those who are concerned, these events are not just dreams—for tomorrow, they'll be a reality!

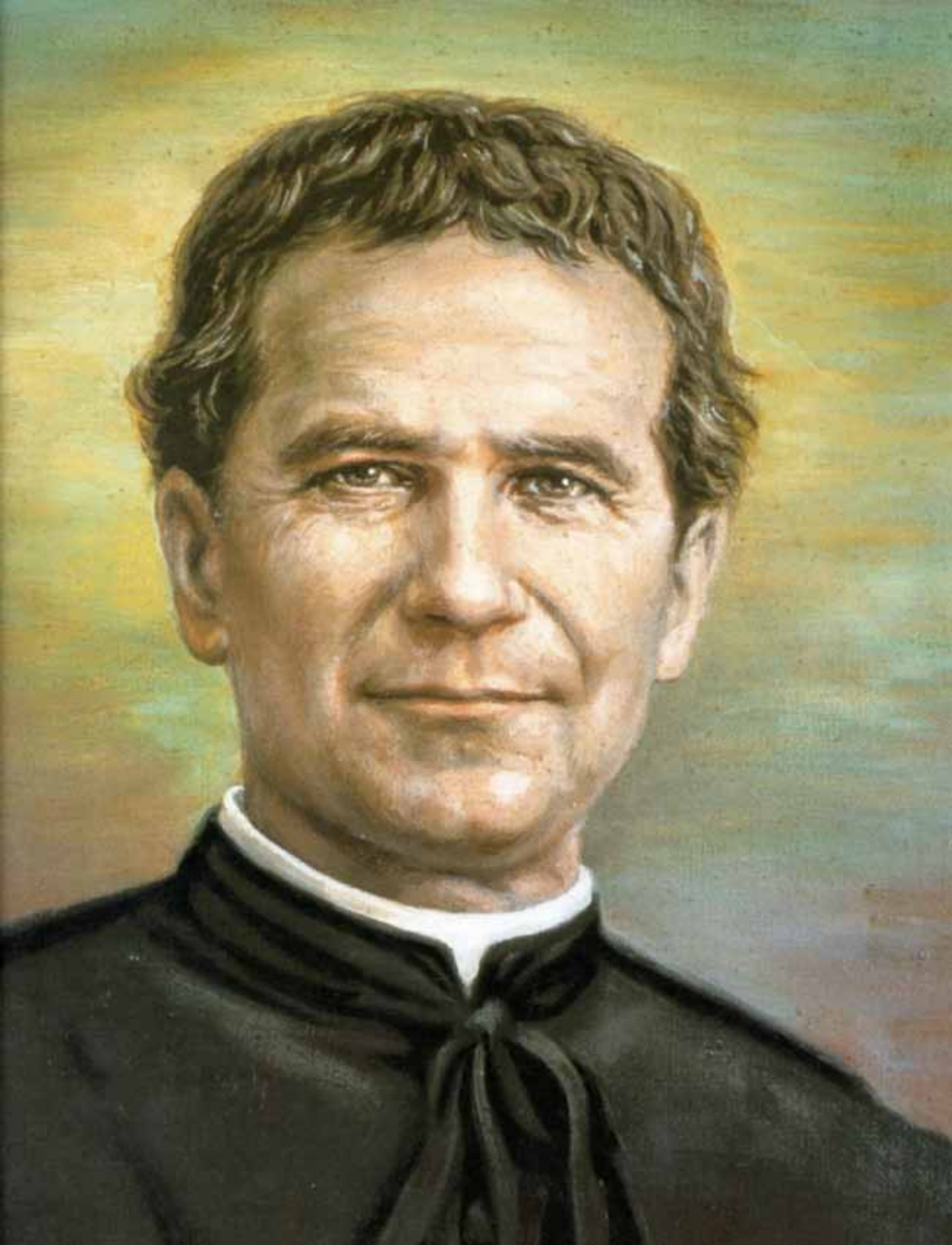
What we'll witness tomorrow is the glorious triumph of our seminary companions. We'll add our applause to the applauses of the audience, we'll convey our congratulatory remarks to them, and perhaps, we may also feel envious because they're already in the threshold of enjoying the fruits of their labor.

But what we are not aware of is the drama behind it: the many sacrifices they offered, the many daring questions they needed to confront, the puzzling problems they had to endure, the many sleepless and restless days and nights of their lives... all for the sake of reaching their goals.

And so, as we accompany them in these events tomorrow, I invite you to pray for them, that they may always be in the loving Grace of God, that they may continue to walk along the way leading to the Father. And as we do these, let us also pray for each of us who are still on the journey towards our respective goals.

May the difficulties and trials and afflictions we'll encounter along the journey challenge us to live our dreams.

God bless. Good evening.



On saying Good Words about Others

Once upon a time, I wanted to know whether God was calling me to be a Jesuit.

I talked with my spiritual director about this matter and with the go signal from my Salesian formators, I found myself one day in the midst of young Jesuits who were explaining to me the process of how to become one.

That took place 10 years ago.

One sweet after-taste of that encounter with the Jesuits is the realization that they speak well of their confreres. I note that they only reserve the best and sweetest adjectives for each other.

And that feeling of awe I still carry up to now, now that I am already a Salesian.

I have learnt in my research that the SJs don't put much emphasis on community life unlike the way we celebrate our fraternal community, but they are able to express their love through their good words for each other.

Scanning the pages of our very own Biographical Memoirs, I found out that it's no less than the "Salesian Pope" himself in the person of Pio Nono who advised Don Bosco when he visited the former in Rome to imitate the Jesuits in their ways of treating the confreres.

Don Bosco quoted Pius IX with these words:

You will never hear a Jesuit priest speak less than favorably of any of his confreres. Rather, they always highly praise any of them should their names come up in conversation. Should anything

happen that might in any way stain or tarnish the name or reputation of your society, keep it hidden from the strangers. Do likewise.

cf Biographical Memoirs, p. 262

These words of St. John Bosco stirred some sensitive chords in my heart. It has forced me to evaluate how the Salesians live well to the standards of the Jesuits in terms of fraternal charity. It asks me to assess each Salesian as regards his treatment of his brother Salesian.

Don Peter Ricaldone, the fourth successor of Don Bosco, entitled his 1933 message “Think well, speak well and do well to all.” At a glance, it seemed that it’s written more for very young kids who are learning to “stop, look and listen,” however, the profundity and richness of his message written more than seventy years ago has never lost its essence.

He said that “Charity exhorts us in the first place to think well of all. “Think” here means the proper use of the mind in forming judgments with regard to our neighbor. Uncharitableness is so detestable a vice that St. John Chrysostom compares it to the low occupation of cleaning out sewers and revealing the filth that is in them.”

“St. Francis of Sales rightly points it out: those who criticize others by making laudatory preambles and interweaving appealing clever remarks are the most subtle and poisonous slanderers of all.”

I don’t know if you’ve noticed it or if you’re concerned at all, but the ill remarks toward others are spreading like wild fire; it's more satisfying to speak about the weakness of others rather than of their strength; it's easier to put them down than to lift them up.

Basking in the glow of the good news of Christ's resurrection, let us become ourselves good news by stopping the verbal assaults we hurl against our companions, and even and our hushed grumbling about the imperfections of our formators.

I say this especially because of two reasons: first, it contradicts charity; and second, it will not make the person change.

I have let out a mouthful. I hope that you'll not be constipated in digesting them. But let me end this with an invitation to speak well of our community members.

Happy Easter, good evening and God bless.

The Perfect Garden

“A perfect garden” my spiritual director once told me “is not that which is filled with plants and has the most beautiful flowers.” He told me that a flawless garden is that which does not provide for any possible spot in which weeds may grow.

Our gardens here in the seminary may not be able to live up to that standard. For if you look around, you’ll notice that weeds co-exist with the beautiful plants you take care of.

An aspirant came to me one afternoon during work time with a plucked out plant in his hand, asking me if it could be taken care of in the greenhouse. I examined the plant and it took me sometime before I figured out that it’s a weed.

Seminary is a garden. And it is not a perfect one. We need to distinguish plants which we need to take care of from those which need to be plucked out.

But it is not an easy task. We need to allow the small plants grow in order to determine whether they are real plants. If they are weeds, they need to be pulled out. This is important not just because they are out of place and they make the garden ugly, but, more importantly, they also steal away the nourishment which should be enjoyed solely by the plants.

The act of discernment can be likened to this. We need to know which are the plants and which are the weeds so that we can separate them.

God bless. Good evening.

Brods, madali bang magprofess?

“*Brods, madali bang magprofess?*” (Brother, is it easy to profess?)

One aspirant asked me this question sometime in the recent past. I found this question in my memory bank surfacing upon seeing our novices last week winding up their novitiate. Time has flown fast for them. In a matter of two months, they will be back here as freshly minted Salesians of Don Bosco.

“*Brods, madali bang magprofess?*”

The question reminded me of an interview with Dolphy, the comedy king of the Philippine showbiz industry. A reporter asked him “*Bakit po hindi kayo tumakbong presidente?*” (Why did you not think of running for presidency?) To this, he retorted casually: “*Madali lang namang tumakbo. Pero paano kapag nanalo ako?*” (It’s easy to run, but what if I win?)

He made a lot of sense in that off-the-cuff remark. The wisdom underneath his statement is a no-brainer. It’s not easy to become a president of the land, for he ought to be not just our leader, but he should represent the best ideals of our country so that he could lead us to *daang matuwid*.

But consecrated individuals are not just asked to become divine signs in the temporal world, for they are to signify what lies beneath when we all reach the end of our earthly existence.

Pope John Paul II, in his apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, describes a consecrated individual as “someone of radical nature of following Christ. (84)”

He emphasized that the very purpose of consecrated life is conformity to the Lord Jesus in His total self-giving. (65)” That in the process of our consecration, we become Jesus Christ ourselves in the midst of a world that embraces Godlessness.

Just last week, a co-practical trainee share with me that to be a Salesian in the midst of the young is to be like a Superman!

But come to think of it, if our idea of religious life is just to write the initials of the religious order after our names; if we just enjoy being seen in our clerical attire and cassocks; if we just love the attention, the respect, the dignity cast on to us simply because we are religious; then, yes, it is easy to become one. No sweat!

But if your idea of consecrated life is that of “the affirmation of the primacy of God and of eternal life, as evidenced in the following and imitation of the chaste, poor and obedient Christ,” then you have the concrete answer right in front of your fingertips.

So, *madali bang magprofess?* Think about it.

God bless. Good evening.

