**RMG – “How Don Bosco greatly inspired people and developed a personal and effective relationship in educating the young”**

The third of the ten monthly articles presented by the General Councillor for Social Communication, Fr Gildasio Mendes, on the theme "Don Bosco and the Digital and Virtual Reality", deals with yet another peculiar aspect of the communication of the Saint of Youth, namely, on how he was able to inspire so many people thanks to the development of meaningful personal relationships. Here is Fr Mendes' reflection:

Communication is the art of inspiring people!

A good communicator is someone who creates personal and effective relationship with others.

Communicating always requires from the communicator a great capacity to relate and create bonds with people.  Whether through radio, TV, internet, newspaper, teaching, preaching, the communicator needs to have a presence that conquers, convinces, remains faithful to its audience, and has something to communicate that touches people's lives.

In the digital and virtual reality universe, the human relationship is fundamental in our way of communicating.  Through relationships, we create a presence in people's lives.

Presence!

The art of communicating is not only about techniques, tricks, sophisticated means to reach people's hearts and minds.   Perhaps this is why, despite the many means of communication, some great leaders have difficulty communicating and winning people over.  Communication is not something simple. It has to do with heart, values and attitudes that touch people’s perceptions and lives. Above all it is about  effective presence!

Presence is about the ability to create strong and faithful relationships. It is linked to touching other people’s lives through the values and the ideals lived and proposed by the communicator. Presence is about credibility, meaning what we say, saying what we mean, and being faithful to what we do and believe.

Effective presence is related to the capacity to draw people, to win them over, to get a positive response from them to do what is proposed to do. Presence is linked to impacting other people’s lives through the values and the ideals lived and proposed by the leader. Presence is about the credibility of the educator and communicator.

Given this perspective on the importance of the ability to establish relationships and create an affective presence, what was Don Bosco’s affective presence like among his youngsters and the other people of his time?

Don Bosco was an educator communicator who lived a profound experience of  presence among his young people and those whom he met. Don Bosco's loving, profound and real presence gave him huge credibility with regard to what he believed, dreamt and wanted to achieve. His affective and active love gave him immense credibility and authority.

From his personal experience as an educator of the young, Don Bosco lived, taught and wrote that presence is one of the most important expressions of human relationships.

Don Bosco's whole Preventive System is based on this essential pillar: presence!  But we must ask ourselves why presence in this sense is so important and how presence is related to the values and vision that someone lives and stands for.

To answer this question, I would like to refer here to a study conducted by social psychologist AMY CUDDY, in her book *Presence*: *Bringing Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges*. New York: Little Brown and Company, 2015.

Cuddy  states that:

**If people really believe in the value and potential of the project of those who propose it, they commit themselves to realizing it and making it even better (p. 32).**

For her, the ability to convince and generate engagement comes from the individual’s self-esteem and confidence,  the communicator’s conviction regarding the values they put into practice.

**People who have a solid sense of self-confidence Always find safe and effective ways to deal with challenges and relationships, becoming more resilient and open( p. 33).**

The basic point this researcher makes about presence is that example of life matters. Communication is about testimony, storytelling that comes from true experience and touches people deeply.

Let’s look at some aspects of Don Bosco life from this perspective.

Don Bosco is a man who has a great story of faith, his struggle with poverty,  loss, difficulties in growing up.  Just take, for example, the pain he suffered after his father’s death, the loss of his great friend Fr. Calosso and Jonas, among many situations he faced.  What calls our attention is the strong faith Don Bosco has, how he interprets his life from a constant trust in God’ s love and providence. His life becomes a touching example for others!!

Furthermore, Don Bosco overcomes difficulties and grows as a man of deep love for others.  From his childhood, in the middle of his struggles, he develops a profound sense of love, care, tenderness and charity.

Through his effective and affective presence, Don Bosco drew people along with him and his vision. Every dream that Don Bosco told us came true, became real, credible, and capable of strengthening and giving credibility to his project as educator and founder of the Salesian Congregation.

Don Bosco is a sure affective reference for young people. As a priest and educator and communicator, he loves in the name of Jesus Christ. His presence was a sign of God’s love for the young.

Giovanni  Battista Francesia, one Salesian from his time,  illustrates how he felt loved by Don Bosco and how this love transformed and gave meaning to his life, having a reference for love like Don Bosco:

**I have seen him, I have known him. He loves me, I love him.**

For Cuddy, people who are confident in themselves are entirely and truly present to others and have a strong  and positive influence on others:

**A person who has has confidence, manages to be present to others, listens to their profound perspectives and yearnings, and integrates these views of people in such a way as to create values and opportunities for all (p. 33).**

For someone to be present with this attitude of inspiring and generating credibility, their emotions, thoughts, facial expression, attitudes and behaviours need coherence. This harmonization must be consistent with the values they believe in and experience.

According to Cuddy:

**We are  inspired when we listen to real stories of people facing difficulties, poverty, loss, suffering, and other problems that make people suffer, but who, at the same time, find strength, and have oriented their lives to overcoming problems and build up their lives. We are Always inspired by these stories (p. 283).**

Presence is not easy! It demands an authentic and complete attitude from the person. The opposite is also true: when we are inauthentic, our projects are ambiguous or we show false emotions, or hide them, then both our verbal and non-verbal communication creates ambiguity, since the elements that make up this communication are no longer coherent. We lose perspective and purpose. Our presence weakens, the message is lost.

From the cradle of the family Don Bosco learned a deep sense of authentic and true presence. His mother, Margaret, was the first to pass on and educate her son in what it meant to have a consistent and coherent presence.

A reading of the MEMOIRS OF THE ORATORY from this perspective allows us to identify how Don Bosco authentically lived presence in the different moments and situations of life. Let’s take as an example his famous dream at 9 years of age.

A glance at the psychodynamics of this significant dream reveals a John Bosco very much present, authentic, true to his feelings, fully engaged in the dialogue with the noble personage. There is consistency and coherence between the spoken word and the images that appear in the dream, in the authenticity of the narration and concomitantly with his reactions and attitudes.

When he tells us, for example, of the loss of his father, of Comollo his friend, of Fr. Calosso, his spiritual guide, the narrative expresses a Don Bosco very  much focused on his inner world, free to express real feelings, true emotions, authentic perceptions of self.

When he speaks of the poverty that the family is going through, he clearly expresses the preoccupations of the family. When he loses his friend Comollo, he describes the anguish of his emotional state in an almost dramatic way.

When he describes his joys and conquests, Don Bosco manifests a grateful and open heart. When he speaks of the pleasure of friendships, games, music, he freely expresses his feelings.

He would become authentic, whole, complete, true in his manner of communication. This complete attitude is what makes the message a natural and true expression of the one who communicates it.

From this presence of love and from his capacity to be an affective and effective reference with credibility, he develops the capacity to attract young people to a Christian life project, to be Salesians and work with him. But presence requires something more: the narration of a life witness based on the story of a life of deep and sacrificial love.

Don Bosco was a man whose expression of love knew no bounds. For Don Bosco, to love was to breathe, live, educate, dream and work. In his letters, in his writings, in his recommendations to the Salesians and many other religious and priests and laity, love was always at the heart of his spirituality and pedagogy.

One of the most vivid and forceful testimonies on how Don Bosco loved was given by Father Paul Albera, his second successor. In one of his circular letters to the Salesians (Turin 1922) he describes how he felt Don Bosco's love:

**Don Bosco loved us in a unique way, one that was typically his: one felt an irresistible fascination in his regard that words cannot express or make understood for those who did not have the opportunity to experience it.**

Fr Albera goes on to say:

**His love attracted, conquered and transformed our hears. He drew us to himself by the fullness of supernatural love which burned in his heart and which, with its flames, absorbed and  unified the little sparks of the same love aroused in our hearts by the hand of God”.**

Don Bosco, deeply human, deeply holy, gives us an immense and profound vision of his greatness, his inner sense of self, his love for God and for the young.

As human beings, no matter our culture or language or age,  we are naturally inclined to trust communicators who speak from the heart, who link their words and feelings in a coherent way, who are effectively present, not afraid of developing real and true relationships.   Communication is about speaking from real experience and truth.

Don Bosco was a communicator who always spoke from his inner experience of God and was truly consistent in the mission God gifted him to love and care for the young. His openness to God’ grace and love and his testimony of humanity and holiness is the most powerful message of his way of communicating and educating.  Pietro Brocardo, writing brilliantly about this integration of humanity and holiness of Don Bosco stated:

**His human richness was so harmoniously integrated with holiness that it became almost a sacrament of holiness, and the gifts of grace, when they were manifested were like the glorification of his humanity (*Don Bosco Deeply Human, Deeply Holy*, p. 45, Portuguese edition,  1986)**

Don Bosco is a reference as a communicator for his time, and also for our times of digital and virtual reality. If in the past, among his young people, he was profoundly present through his educational and communicative fatherliness, today he is present in each one of us who communicates and is effectively present in the lives in today’s young people.