

The path of roses

“‘Oh, how Don Bosco always walks on roses! He goes forward calmly; all things go well for him.’ But they did not see the thorns that lacerated my limbs. Nevertheless I kept going.”Every life is intertwined with thorns and roses, as in Don Bosco’s famous dream of the bower of roses. Hope is the strength that keeps us going, despite the thorns.

Dear Readers, friends of the Salesian Family and benefactors who help the work of Don Bosco in all situations and contexts. In sending you a thought through the Salesian Bulletin, I have chosen to stay with the topic of Hope, as we did last month, for just a little longer.

This is not only for the sake of continuity, but above all because it is a topic worth talking about, because we all need it so much. It is one form of God’s sensitivity in our lives. But when we talk about hope, first of all let us remember that it is an element of profound humanity, and a clear criterion for interpreting life in all religions.

Hope has much to do with transcendence and faith, love and eternal life, Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han points out. We work, we produce and we consume, this philosopher emphasises in his writings, but there is no openness to the transcendent, no Hope in this way of living.

We live in a time deprived of celebration, even though we are filled with things that dazzle us; a time without celebration is a time without hope. The society of consumption and performance in which we live risks making us incapable of happiness, of rejoicing in the situation in which we find ourselves. Even the most difficult situation always has specks of light!

Hope makes us believers in the future, because the place where hope is most intensely experienced is transcendence.

The Czech writer and politician, Vaclav Havel, president of Czechoslovakia at the time of the ‘velvet revolution’ which

many of us still remember, defined hope as a state of mind, a dimension of the soul.

Hope is an orientation of the heart that transcends the immediate world of experience; it is an anchoring somewhere beyond the horizon.

The roots of hope lie somewhere within the transcendent, which is why it is not the same thing as having hope or being satisfied just because things are going well.

When we speak of the future we are referring to what will happen tomorrow, next month, two years from now. The future is what we can plan, predict, manage and optimise.

Hope is the building of a future that unites us to the future that does not end, to the transcendent, to the Divine dimension. Cultivating hope is good for our heart because it puts energy into building the road to Paradise.

The word Don Bosco used most

Fr Alberto Caviglia wrote: "If we turn the pages that record Don Bosco's words and speeches, we find that Paradise was the word he repeated in every circumstance as the supreme argument driving every activity for good and every enduring of adversity.

"A piece of Paradise fixes everything!" Don Bosco would say in the midst of difficulties. Even in modern management schools it is taught that a positive vision of the future becomes a driving force in life.

When he was old and failing, he would cross the courtyard with ant-like steps, and those who passed him would give him the usual quick greeting, "Where are we going, Don Bosco?" Smiling, the saint would reply, "To Paradise".

How much Don Bosco insisted on this: Paradise! He made his youngsters grow up with the vision of Paradise in their hearts and eyes. We all know that we can be Christians, even convinced ones, but not believe in Paradise.

Don Bosco teaches us to unite our here and now with the hereafter. And he does so with the virtue of Hope.

Let us carry this in our hearts, and open our hearts to

charity, to our humanity that embodies what we deeply believe in.

If you receive this brief writing in November, then live this hope with our Saints and with your dearly departed, all united as a group that starts with daily life and leads to the infinite.

Like Don Bosco, living as if we see the invisible, nourished by the Hope that is the provident presence of God. Only those who are profoundly concrete, as Don Bosco was, are able to live with the gaze fixed on the invisible.