

MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF THE SALESIAN YOUTH MOVEMENT - 2007

Dear Friends,

As successor of a dreamer, I too had a dream and I want to narrate it to you, with the same simplicity and confidence with which our father Don Bosco used to confide to the young people during the good nights at Valdocco.

I dreamt that he himself was personally writing this message to you, almost like a new letter from Rome. I have just lent him my hand (and my computer).

Therefore here is the message of Don Bosco to you. Read it with the same simplicity and love of the young people of his time.

A warm wish from me too.

Fr. Pascual Chávez Villanueva

Dearest Young People,

Even though far from you, I think of you and feel close to your desire to live and to be happy. I support your best aspirations with my prayer and I am close to you in your difficult moments.

You are my life and therefore these words are from one who loves you tenderly in Jesus Christ.

I would like to possess all the sweet and strong love of Mamma Margaret in order to speak to your heart and communicate to you that great passion for life that she passed on to me from my childhood. In her mother's heart throbbed the heart of God the lover of life, and I have learnt to recognize it in the splendid and warm brightness of the dawn and the dusk, in the poor that knocked on the door of the house. A mother who found the right words, the right gestures in order to reveal with simplicity the love that embraced life and a love that healed the wound opened by the death of my father.

Dear young people I address the same tender and strong words to you. Life is the most precious gift you have received: respect, defend, love and serve life, all your life and the life of everyone!

God who is passionate about life does not permit that we trade with human life. Human beings are not goods. There were times when human beings were bought and sold and unfortunately it is not over as yet. It was happening on the streets of Valdocco, as it happens today in the squares and on the streets of your cities.

I have never forgotten what I saw in the prisons and on the streets, the horrible reality of those days. It changed my life: I decided to spend my life to free the young from all kinds of prisons, material and of loneliness, of ignorance, of delinquency, of confusion and of desperation.

My times were sad, but also you live dramatic events in which dominates the depreciation of human life, terrorism, abuse and the exploitation of women and children. In such a situation you cannot remain indifferent, much more as young people. From you should rise a new energy, a movement that speaks of God's love for human life.

I want to show you a way to respond to this mission and to live a full, happy and fruitful life. The secret is your friendship with Jesus Christ. In Him is manifested the mercy and the tenderness of a God that loves life. He took part in human events; spent all His life liberating, saving and giving life to all those oppressed by evil. He knew joy, friendship, but also pain, persecution and death. By giving His own life through love and rising from death, He gave birth to a life full and eternal.

His Resurrection is like the eruption of a volcano that demonstrates that within the universe there is the flame of God's fire, that moves the new vital forces of a transfigured earth.

Dear young people, in order to understand and to live this mystery that is in the heart of life, you need to look up.

«What do you see, Jeremiah?», asks the Lord to the prophet. «I see a branch of an almond tree » (*Jer 1,11-12*). The almond tree is the first to flower and announces spring time. The state of being awake helps him to see the invisible in the branch that flowers. Only the eye that is attentive and awake manages to see this miracle, the miracle of life that is reborn after the summer. In order to understand your heart, the profound mystery of life, you must be awake, with your eyes attentive and illumined by faith.

Raise your eyes from your everyday distractions that lead you to empty thoughts. - Begin to live the more profound and intimate side of yourselves, entrust yourselves to the prayer that will reveal to you the depth of God's heart and those of all men and women. From the profound wells of your soul, draw up a new meaning of things, a wider vision of history, the fraternity that is born of the Risen Christ, which is manifested in the Church. It is the "sacrament" of the mercy of God in this world. It is the house of God accessible, warm and welcoming, the place where human suffering is listened to, in a special way that of the young and the poor.

Your society, at least that of the west, is very rich, but it has to account for newer forms of poverty. And the Church cannot place itself in any other place if not close to the Cross of Jesus, the spring of Resurrection. Your place is close to the little ones, to people worn out and wounded, to those who do not matter or remain cut off from the great caravan of progress. Christ, once again, is crucified outside the city, on the margin of history. The Church "samaritan" ought to be there: the poor are her "holy land". And this holy land is your fertile field of youthful commitment.

The Church ought to make visible, in a transparent way, the beauty and the love of God that wants to reside in our midst today. And you, dear young people, ought to build this Church as Christ wants it, the face of the merciful God of life.

This is the way that I wanted to teach my dear young people of Valdocco and on which I invite you to build your youthful environments. Valdocco was not a anonymous space like a street, but a welcoming house, a human ambient, rich in values and of family warmth. My mother Margaret has given us the care and concern of a mother. I have given you all, the love of a father. Like a real father of a family, I gave my children a house, clothes, bread, work, education and recreation. I married with passion this great mission and I asked the Lord to help me meet and welcome many young people, and to free me from everything that is not in their interest.

The oratory became a place of life and of meeting, where the expectation and the initiatives of the young, their language and their protagonism found welcome, support and space.

They were journeying as mature men and Christians, enthusiastic about life, according to the spirit of freedom of the Gospel. The vigorous personalities that matured at Valdocco are a proof: from Dominic Savio to Michael Magone, up to the pioneer

missionaries, Cagliero, Lasagna, Costamagna, Fagnano, and many other important personalities.

I was educating my youth to liberty and creativity : I wanted them to be enlightened by the motives of their decision; I was giving to everyone the due place to reason; I was multiplying the catechism lessons and the good nights, in which I was explaining why and how to believe. I wanted from the young enthusiasm in their choices. I was pushing them to take initiatives in every field. I was not protecting them for the fear of the world. We were opening ourselves with courage to the parishes, to the needy in the city, in the church and in the world. It was an incredible environment overflowing with life and enthusiasm. We were conscious of changing the world and the love that bound us together was the sign of it.

I dream that every salesian presence be like my first oratory and I think that you will make my dream a reality. My dream is to see the young people meet Christ and find in Him the meaning and the joy of life, the answer to their expectations and ideals, their role in the Church and in the world. My dream is to see you the young people of the third millennium, as a resource of the present, developing your talents and your energies for good, putting yourself at the service of the others, in order to rejuvenate the society and the Church. My dream is to see you as missionaries of your friends, presenting the face of Christ in the day to day events through which everyone recognizes oneself.

This dream of mine becomes concrete in my commitment and that of the Salesian family to be always clearly and explicitly promoters of the culture of life against all that can threaten and decry it; carriers of the love of God, fathers and masters of the spirit, intelligent guides and capable of accompanying us in the beautiful and involved project of life.

In this commitment count always on the maternal help of Mary, the Mother in difficult time, who was for me a Mother and a teacher and one who had promised to take me under her special protection all those who enter a Salesian house. Entrust yourselves to her with complete fidelity and you will also see miracles in your life.

Dear young people, I always feel close to you. I have only one desire and that is to see you happy now and forever, following the path of the evangelical beatitudes in order to be able to participate altogether in the great feast of life in heaven.

Turin, 31st January 2007

Affezionatissimo in G. C.

Geo. Gio. Bosco