**MESSAGE TO THE YOUNG ON THE FEAST OF DON BOSCO,**

**AND DURING THE 4 THE CENTENARY OF THE DEATH OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES, our Patron**

Valdocco, Turin, 31 January 2022

My dear young people,

May my greeting reach each one of you with true affection and with all my heart from Valdocco, where we are celebrating the feast of our beloved Don Bosco, “Father and teacher of youth” - as St John Paul II declared.

I am writing this letter to you having just returned from praying for you in the Basilica before the Lord, before our Mother the Help of Christians, before Don Bosco, Mother Mazzarello and St Dominic Savio, the adolescent saint of the early years of the oratory here in Valdocco.

Yesterday's Eucharist was televised from the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin, and the Holy Father, Pope Francis, said during the *Angelus* prayer that he followed the Holy Mass on television, adding that he was greeting all Salesians on the occasion of the feast of Don Bosco. In expressing this he recalled that our Father “did not shut himself up in the sacristy, he did not shut himself up in his own concerns. He went out into the street to look for young people, with that creativity that was his characteristic.” Undoubtedly, this is what Don Bosco would do today, inviting all of us to be at your side, to be beside you and travel the path of life together.

How much the Holy Father loves the Salesian Family, the family of Don Bosco! And how much responsibility this entails, because we must always give the best of ourselves in the service of the Gospel in the name of the Lord Jesus.

And you, my dear young people, you are the key players in this story, just as the boys at Valdocco were with Don Bosco.

In this year when the Church is commemorating the fourth centenary of the death of a great saint, that “giant of holiness” who was St Francis de Sales, the Salesian Family of Don Bosco, and you, the young people who are part of it, all of us with you, are called to live our Christian faith and all the youthful energy that you carry in your hearts, with this “Salesian” charity and gentleness that St Francis de Sales bequeathed to us and that Don Bosco made his own. In 1854, he himself wrote about the Valdocco Oratory: “**This Oratory is placed under the protection of St Francis de Sales to indicate that the foundation on which this Congregation rests should be charity and gentleness, which are the characteristic virtues of this saint.”** To carry out his work, Don Bosco was inspired by St Francis de Sales, the Saint who understood - like few others - that God and his merciful love were at the centre of his life and history. Francis de Sales is the Saint of tenderness, of the heart modelled on the heart of God the Father who, with his gentleness, draws everyone to himself.

And echoing this sensitivity and spirituality which we have received from St Francis de Sales through Don Bosco, and with the strength of the Word with which both Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and Pope Francis have addressed you, I would like to invite you, dear young people from all the Salesian presences in the world, to live with great ideals, with great goals that lead you on the path of happiness and towards God.

* I thought it was very beautiful when, in one of his messages to you young people, Pope Benedict XVI told you: “Dear **young people**, do not settle for less than Truth and Love, do not settle for less than Christ.” How beautiful and what a proposal worth courageously accepting, because it is very likely that the social and cultural environment in many places where you live will not help you in this. But the privilege of not settling for anything less than Christ in your lives is that you can trust God, abandon yourself to him, the living God who invites everyone to live as Jesus lived. I am convinced that being a young Christian today is indeed a courageous challenge.

And in saying this, I am not forgetting many of you, dear young people from Salesian presences around the world, who profess another religion. With true affection my wish is that you live your faith in depth, that you be true believers in the faith you profess, and live it authentically. The only God who exists and to whom we all turn will always be at your side and will know how to meet each one of you. The houses of Don Bosco and of the whole Salesian Family around the world have, and will always continue to have, open doors for every young person who approaches them...

* At the same time, together with my Salesian confreres, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and so many others who make up this precious family of ours, I echo the proposals made to you by Pope Francis and Pope Benedict, because I understand that, just as Don Bosco did with his young people, together we want to ask you to be courageous, never to be afraid, to let yourselves be surprised by Jesus, the Lord; to open the doors of your hearts to Him, letting Him speak to you. Jesus will always surprise you and lead you on the path to true happiness: the happiness you seek, which you desire and need.
* My dear young people, I dare to tell you on this feast of Don Bosco that today, as always and more than ever, the Lord needs you and calls you to be missionary disciples in the Kingdom. Don Bosco needs you, just as he needed his boys at Valdocco, to do good to so many others. And so many of your companions and friends need you and your support. They need you young people who responsibly and generously take your lives into your own hands.

Our world needs young people who feel they have a mission dreamt of by God and who fall in love with it. Young people who feel that God has a dream and a beautiful project for each one of them. Young people with hope and strength. Young people, as Pope Francis says, who do not allow themselves to be robbed of hope:”*Young people are not meant to become discouraged; they are meant to dream great things, to seek vast horizons, to aim higher, to take on the world, to accept challenges and to offer the best of themselves to the building of something better. That is why I constantly urge young people* ***not to let themselves be robbed of hope.”*** (Christus Vivit, 15).

Dear young people,

Let me conclude this message by wishing you a happy feast of Don Bosco and by inviting you to live the whole year in great harmony with Don Bosco and St Francis de Sales. They will continue to lead you to meet the only one who counts: Jesus Christ the Lord.

I recall that at the meeting of the World Council of the Salesian Youth Movement (SDB-LEADS) held last December, after having approved the World Council of the Salesian Youth Movement guidelines, the young representatives from all over the world were unanimous in proposing to celebrate the **400th anniversary of the death of St Francis de Sales**. The members of the Africa-Madagascar Region Council will coordinate this event in which all the groups of the Salesian Youth Movement (SYM) from Salesian provinces around the world will participate, as a sign of homage, gratitude, love and devotion to this great Saint who inspired our beloved Don Bosco.

I encourage you to continue to see to moments of prayer, initiatives in favour of the disadvantaged and to make known and share all that you are doing.

***My dear young people, happy feast day of Don Bosco and a happy “Salesian” year*** under the inspiration of St Francis de Sales.

My blessing on all of you.

With true affection and the assurance of remembrance in my prayers,

Ángel Fernández Artime, SDB

Rector Major