**THE MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR**

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MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

IN THE “CITY OF ETERNAL HEAT”

“Once again in my travels around the Salesian world I was able to see for myself that Mary Help of Christians—as Don Bosco promised—is a beacon that illuminates, a safe harbor, and maternal love for her Son and for all of us, her sons and daughters.”

My dear friends, faithful readers of the *Salesian Bulletin*, and all friends of Don Bosco and his precious charism--

I come to you today, in this month of May, to tell you, as is my custom, something that I experienced recently and that has touched my heart. At the same time, it has made me reflect on a certain responsibility we have regarding our devotion to Mary Help of Christians. Then I will tell you why.

**A Salesian City**

It took place at the end of March when I was visiting Peru again. I wanted to draw near to the most northeastern part of the country to be present to a city and a Salesian presence that is very significant, for several reasons:

- Because it is called by its own inhabitants “the city of eternal heat.” Indeed, it is very hot, and the humidity makes it feel even more so.

- At the same time, it is a very Salesian city. The Salesians have been present there for more than a century. Thus, a whole style of relationships and educational ties that are very familiar, very simple—in short, very Salesian—have permeated the spirit of that town.

- Above all it is *a very Marian city*, one very devoted to Mary Help of Christians since it lies in the orbit of two Salesian presences.

- Last, I would like to highlight the magnificent educational service given at Don Bosco School since the arrival of the Salesians and, especially in recent decades, with the Salesian presence called “Bosconia.” This is a humble, beautiful work in one of the poorer neighborhoods plagued by conflict, on the outskirts of town. Thanks to the joint effort of many people (both in civil society and in the Church), and especially thanks to the charism of Don Bosco, that part of the city continues to be transformed, providing the opportunity for hundreds of boys and girls to receive technical training. Without this school, they would not have any chance for a profession. Here they learn and exercise a skill and train for the world of work. There is even a magnificent Salesian medical center in Bosconia that is run by one of the official groups of our Family, the *Damas Salesianas* (Salesian Dames).

I believe I have quickly described what I encountered in the “city of eternal heat.” This was all worth mentioning, but it is not all. Here an *especially deep devotion to Mary Help of Christians* touched my heart. In an almost impromptu gathering—because only a couple of weeks earlier had I announced that I would like to meet them—I met a crowd of more than three thousand people who gather at 6:00 p.m. on any given weekday to celebrate the Eucharist in honor of our Mother, the Help of Christians. I saw hundreds of children and young people with their fathers and mothers, and dozens and dozens of boys, girls, and teenagers from the various Salesian oratories in the area, along with their teachers, and others. The “eternal heat of the city” seemed little to me compared to the faith, devotion, interiority and prayer, the singing and all that I imagined was filling the hearts of those people, just as it filled mine.

Once again in my travels around the Salesian world I was able to see for myself that Mary Help of Christians—as Don Bosco promised—is a beacon that illuminates, a safe harbor, and maternal love for her Son and for all of us, her sons and daughters. She is certainly the MOTHER to whom we ought to abandon ourselves, for she will always bring us to her Beloved Son. I saw this also in Piura.

**It is a *sine qua non***

At the same time, I would like to add another small comment, a necessary self-criticism of all of us who are sons and daughters of Don Bosco. It is this: *the Spirit of God reaches where He wants and touches, as only He knows, the hearts of His faithful. This is also the case with devotion to the Mother of the Son of God*, but she has always desired to count on us. The criticism I make is that this devotion to the Mother of Heaven, to our Mother the Help of Christians, has not been made known like this, with the same intensity and the same apostolic passion in all parts of the world or in all our presences. There are places where we have developed schools, have made progress, and have surely served the good of those people, but we have not known how to make our Mother known and loved. This would be incomprehensible to Don Bosco. I will tell you that it is equally incomprehensible and unacceptable to me. If, in Don Bosco's Family, there are people who do not turn to or spread devotion to the Help of Christians, they may be devout but they will not be sons and daughters of Don Bosco. She is our Mother. Devotion to the Help of Christians as the Mother of the Lord and our Mother is not optional in the Salesian charism—as it was not optional for Don Bosco. It is a *sine qua non*.

I wish with all my heart that she, the Mother of the Beloved Son, she our Helper, continue to be as special to everyone in all parts of the world as she is in “the city of eternal heat” (Piura, Peru).

Happy feast of Mary Help of Christians to everyone around the world.