**THE MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR**

Don Ángel Fernández Artime, SDB

THIS IS LOVE...

This is the simple and silent good that Don Bosco did.

This is the good that we continue to do together.

My friends and readers of the *Salesian Bulletin*,

I’m sending you my cordial greeting, as I do every month. It’s a greeting that I prepare by allowing the heart to speak: that heart which wants to continue looking at the Salesian world with the same hope and certainty that Don Bosco himself had – that together we can do much good and that the good that’s done must be made known.

Before writing my greeting, I always read all the content of that month’s *Salesian Bulletin*. The editors send it to me in advance so that I can write something that takes into account and accords with its theme.

I like this month’s *Bulletin* very much, with its great variety of articles that give precious testimony to how one can be very Salesian in his/her daily dedication to the Salesian oratory everywhere: on every playground, in every place where young children and teens – and the young adults who animate them – find a space to live life. The oratory is a healthy space, an educational space, a space that educates for life and to the meaning of life, and a space of faith (if one so desires).

At the same time, however, I felt pain and concern reading the story about Sudan. There, everyone’s living in a very difficult situation, including the Salesians. Today, I wish to share in my greeting another beautiful testimony, even though I wasn’t an eyewitness this time, but will relate, in turn, what was shared with me.

**A MOTHER’S COURAGE**

The scene takes place in Palabek (Uganda). Five years ago, refugees arrived there for the first time, and we, the Salesians of Don Bosco, chose to accompany them. Our house was a tent, and the chapel in which we could pray and celebrate the first holy Mass was the shade of a tree.

Hundreds upon hundreds of refugees arrive at Palabek every day from Sudan, at first because of the conflict in South Sudan. Now, years later, they continue to arrive but because of the conflict in North Sudan.

The person who told me what I am narrating now is the general councilor for the Missions. He had gone to Palabek just days before to accompany our missionaries in this refugee camp where tens of thousands of people live.

Ten days ago a woman arrived with eleven boys and girls. Without any help, she and her children had traversed various regions that are fraught with dangers. As they walked more than 700 kilometers (430 miles) in the prior month, the group of children grew. This is what I wish to point out because this is HUMANITY and this is LOVE. This woman arrived at Palabek with eleven children under her care and introduced them all as her children. But, in fact, six were the children whom she had carried in her womb. Another three were the children of her brother, who had recently died, and for whom she had assumed the care. Another two were little orphans whom she had found alone along the way, and, of course, without any papers. (Who would give a thought to look for papers and documentation when the most essential things for life are missing!!!) They became the adopted children of this woman.

Sometimes the title of MOTHER COURAGE! (COURAGEOUS MOTHER) is attributed to a mother who gave her all to defend her child to the end. So, too, in this case, I wish to attribute to this mother of eleven children the title of “Mother Courage,” but above all “WOMAN WHO KNOWS VERY WELL” – in the depths of her heart – “WHAT IT IS TO LOVE.” Perhaps she knows that kind of love that lasts “even until it hurts” because she has been living in absolute destitution with these eleven children and still continues to do that.

Welcome to Palabek, Mother Courage (Courageous Mother)! Welcome to our Salesian presence. Undoubtedly, everything possible will be done so that her boys and girls don’t lack food and have a place to play and laugh and smile – in the Salesian oratory – and a place to learn in our school.

This is the simple and silent good that Don Bosco did. This is the good that we continue to do together because – believe me! – knowing that we are not alone and certain that many of you welcome and empathize with the efforts we make every day for the good of others, gives us a lot of human strength. We trust, without a doubt, that the Good Lord makes it grow.

I wish you a good summer. Undoubtedly, ours – mine, too – will be more serene and comfortable than that of this mother from Palabek. But I think I can say that having thought of her and her children, we have somehow built a bridge.

Be very happy.

Don Angel