**THE MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR**

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I’M A SALESIAN AND I’M A BORORO

Diary of a Happy and Blessed Missionary Day

Dear friends of the *Salesian Bulletin*, I’m writing to you from Meruri in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil. I write this greeting almost as if it were a journalistic report, because it has been only 24 hours since I arrived in the middle of this Brazilian state.

But my Salesian confreres arrived 122 years ago, and since then we’ve always been present in this mission in the midst of forests and fields, accompanying the life of this indigenous people.

In 1976, a Salesian and an Indian were robbed of their lives with two gunshots by *facendeiros* (great landowners). They are the Servant of God Rodolfo Lunkenbein, a Salesian, and the Indian Simão Bororo, killed because the landowners believed that the Salesians of the mission were standing in the way of their appropriating more land that belongs to the Boi-Bororo people.

Yesterday, we had the joy of experiencing many simple moments. We were welcomed by the indigenous community upon our arrival and greeted each other – without haste – because here everything is unhurried. We celebrated Sunday Mass, shared rice and *feijoada* (bean stew), and chatted from time to time.

For the afternoon, they’d prepared a meeting for me with the leaders of the various communities. A few women chiefs were present; in several villages a woman has the ultimate authority. We chatted. They shared their thoughts with me and presented me with some of their needs.

During one of these moments, a young Salesian, a Boi-Bororo, took the floor. He’s the first Bororo to become a Salesian after 122 years of our being together in this land. This also speaks to us of the need to give things time. Things are not as we think and want them to be in today’s efficient and pragmatic world.

This is how this young Salesian spoke before his village, his people, and their leaders or authorities: “I’m a Salesian but I’m also Bororo; I’m Bororo but I’m also a Salesian. The most important thing for me is that I was born in this very place, that I met the missionaries, that I heard about the two martyrs, Fr. Rodolfo and Simão, and that I saw my town and my people grow – thanks to the fact that **my people walked together with the Salesian mission and the mission walked together with my people**. This is still the most important thing for us: to walk the road together.”

I thought for a moment of how proud and happy Don Bosco would be to listen to one of his Salesian sons and member of this people (like other Salesians who come from the Xavante or the Yanomani peoples).

At the same time, I assured them during my talk that we want to continue to walk alongside them and we want them to do everything possible to continue to care for and save their culture – and their language – with our full help. I told them that I’m convinced that our presence has helped them, but I’m also convinced of how good it is for *us* to be with *them*.

In the early days of our journey as a congregation, Don Bosco sent his first missionaries to Argentina. We are a congregation recognized for our charism of education and evangelization of young people, but we are also a very missionary congregation and family. From the beginning up to today, there have been more than 11,000 *SDB* Salesian missionaries and several thousand sisters, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Today, our presence among this indigenous people, which has 1,940 members and continues to grow little by little, makes perfect sense after 122 years together because they’re on the margins of the world – a world that sometimes doesn’t understand that it must respect who they are.

I also spoke with the matriarch, the eldest of them all, who came to greet me and tell me about her people. After a beautiful torrential rainstorm, we sat down at the site of the martyrdom, to recite the Rosary with great serenity on a beautiful Sunday evening (for it was already dark). There were many of us there, representing the reality of this mission: grandmothers, grandfathers, adults, young mothers, babies, small children, consecrated religious, and lay people – a great richness in the midst of the simplicity of this little part of the world that lacks power but that’s also chosen and loved by the Lord, as He tells us in His Gospel.

I know that we’ll remain here, God willing, for many years to come, because one can be a Bororo and a son of Don Bosco, and a son of Don Bosco and a Bororo who loves and cares for his village and his people.

In the simplicity of this meeting, today was a great day of life shared with indigenous people – a great missionary day.