THE MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

Don Ángel Fernández Artime

I wish to continue to serve others -

in a different way.

MY NOMINATION AS CARDINAL

I feel that I share what our holy Founder stated in 1884: “I see ever more what a glorious future has been prepared for our Society, how it will spread and what good it will be able to accomplish.”

Dear friends of the Salesian charism, I send to each of you my sincere, fraternal, and affectionate greeting.

The *Salesian Bulletin* has “suggested” to me that I prepare this greeting not as I’ve done at other times, telling you of something noteworthy that I’ve experienced, but speaking of myself, of this new reality that awaits me. I’ve experienced something of what I’ve studied regarding the person of our father Don Bosco. He found it difficult to speak of himself, and still more difficult to voice what he was feeling. In my case, I have to admit that it’s a little more difficult to speak or to write of the most recent things that have happened to me; but I admit that sooner or later I have to do it, and the message of the *Salesian Bulletin* that comes into the hands and the hearts of so many friends of Don Bosco’s charism is a good way of sending this personal message.

After the unexpected news (for me, especially) by which the Holy Father Francis announced my name, too, among the 21 persons whom he has chosen to “create” cardinals of the Church at the next consistory on September 30, thousands of people have asked me, especially Salesians of Don Bosco and members of the Salesian Family around the world: “What will happen now? Who will accompany the life of the Congregation for the near future? What steps await us?” You can well understand that I’ve put to myself these very questions, while I’ve thanked the Lord in faith for this gift that Pope Francis has given us as the Salesian Congregation and as Don Bosco’s Family.

Reading with our faith, aware of the great deeds God has done and what we know through his Word, we can say that God loves surprises. It’s usual in the Bible for God to say: “Go! The road will be revealed to you.” One important thing that Don Bosco has taught us is, “Let nothing upset you, and put your trust in God’s Providence.”

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I was able to speak personally with Pope Francis after he made his Angelus announcement, assuring him of my availability, that he can count on me for service of any sort. I answered as Don Bosco did when he was asked to build the Sacred Heart Church in Rome—in this case, an aged and sick Don Bosco, who was also aware of the burden and the responsibility for a Congregation being born. Don Bosco answered: “If this is the Pope’s order, I obey!”

With simplicity, I told the Holy Father that we Salesians have learned from Don Bosco to be always available for the welfare of the Church, and in particular for anything the Pope might request. So, while I thank God for this gift that’s for the whole Congregation and the Salesian Family, I express my gratitude to Pope Francis by assuring him that all the members of our great Family will pray for him more fervently and intensely. As I said, our prayer will always be accompanied by our sincere and profound affection.

What will happen now?

I must share with you that I’ve been deeply touched by Pope Francis’s sensitiveness in our regard by taking into account that my service as Rector Major shouldn’t change immediately from one day to another. For this reason, after about half an hour from his announcing my nomination following the Angelus on Sunday, July 9, the Holy Father sent me a letter in which he spoke of the time necessary for me to prepare for the general chapter of our Congregation before I take up whatever he intends to entrust to me. As always, the Holy Father has shown that he’s attentive, cordial, and particularly fond of and highly esteems the charism of Don Bosco. These sentiments in my own name and the name of the whole Salesian Family, I reciprocated.

I’d like to share with you the arrangements that the Holy Father communicated to me.

The Pope has decided that, for the benefit of our Congregation, after the consistory on September 30, 2023, I may continue my service as Rector Major until July 31, 2024. After that date, I’ll present my resignation as Rector Major, as our Constitutions and Regulations require, so as to put myself into the hands of the Holy Father for the service that he’ll entrust to me.

This is as much as the Pope has communicated to me. We can expect the 29th General Chapter in a year, that is, in February 2025. My vicar, Fr. Stefano Martoglio, will assume the government of the Congregation *ad interim*, as our Constitutions establish, until the celebration of GC29. Finally, I still have to mention and answer one other question that many of you have: what task will the Holy Father give me? Pope Francis hasn’t told me yet. Furthermore, I think this is ample time for what’s to be done most opportunely.

In any case, I ask all of you, dear confreres and members of the groups of our Salesian Family, to continue and intensify your prayer – above all, for Pope Francis. He asked specifically for that at the end of the private audience he granted me.

Finally, I ask also that you pray for me, as I face the prospect of a new service in the Church which, as a son of Don Bosco, I accept in filial obedience, without having sought it because I truly believe that in the Church the services we provide can’t be and must never be sought or claimed as if we were concerned about making a personal career. What belongs to the “world” is inappropriate for us as servants in the name of Jesus. And we must differ (very much, I hope) from any worldly standard. To all this our beloved Father Don Bosco bears witness before the Lord Jesus.

I thank you for your love, the closeness you’ve expressed in these weeks with the numerous messages that have come to me from every part of the world.

I feel addressed to me the same words that the Madonna said to Don Bosco in his dream at nine years of age – whose second centennial will be celebrated next year: “In due time you’ll understand everything.” And we know that for our Father that came, in effect, almost at the end of his life, at the altar of Mary Help of Christians in the basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which had been consecrated the day before, on May 16, 1887. From the basilica of Mary Help of Christians I send you an affectionate and grateful greeting, entrusting everything and everyone to her, our Mother, who will continue to accompany and sustain us. As always, I greet you with immense love.