**THE RECTOR MAJOR’S MESSAGE**

Cardinal Angel Fernandez Artime, SDB

**MAMMA MARGARET’S BASKET**

At the end of a year, we all have a basket of memories in our souls. It contains what we have experienced, a year that was rich and full of pleasant memories, but also of unexpected events, and a year in which there was no shortage of surprises.

Dear friends of Don Bosco and his charism,

At the close of this year, 2023, it seemed interesting to me to use the basket that Mamma Margaret always carries on her arm as a symbol. Even in the new strenna poster, her hallmark is the basket hanging from her arm. We are all used to seeing Mamma Margaret like this. Without the basket, the kerchief on her head, and the dress of a poor peasant woman, it wouldn’t seem to be her.

Her basket was made of wicker woven with great care. In it, she had carried baby clothes for her grandchildren, fragrant freshly-baked loaves of bread, and linen scented with cleanliness.

But on November 3, 1846, as Don Bosco recounts in the *Memoirs* *of the Oratory*, when he and his mother went down from Becchi to Turin to gather the abandoned young men of the city, Mamma Margaret had filled it with her wedding trousseau, carefully folded, with some bouquets of lavender placed in the middle. At the bottom, well hidden under the cloth lining, she hid her little treasure: a little velvet package containing two rings and a gold pendant.

With these few possessions, they were able to meet the basic needs of the Oratory. Mamma Margaret had a heart as big as all the hills of Asti; so the linen began to disappear, turning into shirts and underwear for the boys. The fate of the wedding dress is curious, as it became the first altar cloth for the Pinardi Chapel and then a bedsheet for a cholera patient.

Still, the basket wasn’t empty, for it contained the scent of all the good and beautiful things of her life.

**The Treasure Chest of Happy Memories**

At the end of a year, we should all have a basket like that, hanging on our mind and heart – a treasure trove of happy memories. We should fill it with the wonder of the dance of life that has quickly passed away: the people who have done good to us; the grace-filled moments; the encounters that have given us breath and courage; the certainties; the hopes; and undergirding it all, the precious gold of God’s presence.

In my basket, I found so many things for which to thank the Lord of Life, our good God and Father. And certainly, as happens in everyone’s life, even in your life, dear reader, not everything experienced in a year produces joy. There are also sorrows, hardships, demands, and losses, but when all these things are lived with faith, they are illuminated in a precious way.

·     In my basket, I find many efforts – both my own and the efforts of those who assist me in animating and governing the Congregation – which have served to give life, so much life. We’ve been able to help so many people, so many children, and so many youths throughout the Salesian world, thus encouraging my confreres and the Salesian Family to continue along the journey of Salesian fidelity. My basket is full of many donations from a number of people from all over the world – in 135 nations and in the thousands of works of the entire worldwide Salesian Family.

·     In my basket this year, there’s the visit of Don Bosco’s successor to the juvenile detention center (the old Generala Prison that Don Bosco visited with Fr. Cafasso), from which I returned home with a heavy heart, filled with pain for having been in the midst of those young people (who I hope will soon overcome this situation), but with the joy of knowing that they will make it. The greeting of that young man who asked me, “When are you coming back?” is etched in my memory. I will be back soon.

·     In my basket, there is the joy of the many travels made during the year – once again to the six continents, given that I went back to Australia. I could write pages and pages about these trips. I will mention only my visit to Peru, which I made twice in February: once to the plateau of Huancayo, with its cold and its hills and with the encounter with more than a thousand young people, at an altitude of 8,200 feet. Then, to Piura, and the immense heat of the “City of Eternal Heat” (as they themselves like to say), where I found a devotion to Mary Help of Christians that moved me.

·     My basket contains the joy of having been in Viedma, Argentina, five months after the canonization of our Salesian coadjutor brother, St. Artemides Zatti, the joy of retracing the paths he traveled and of living where he lived and made holiness a reality in everyday life.

·     And this year, the basket, deep in my heart, contains the most profound experience that any human being can have: that of losing one’s mother, especially when one’s father has already gone to Heaven. You really feel that the “umbilical cord” that sustained you, not only until you were brought into the world, but throughout your life as well, has been cut definitively. Although I certainly experienced this as a loss, yet I also experienced it, with the Lord’s grace, as full of meaning and hope and with immense gratitude to the Lord of Life for a long and beautiful life in the case of both my father and my mother. How can we not thank the Lord for this?

·     My basket this year contains the immense joy of the precious days spent in Lisbon on the occasion of World Youth Day. More than a million young people gave a precious witness of humanity and of humanism and of the ability to live in harmony, friendship, and peace while being very diverse, different from one another, for they came from every part of the world. What a great lesson they teach us.

·     Finally, my basket this year contains a profound act of faith and obedience. No doubt, it was with faith that the Holy Father appointed me cardinal of Holy Roman Church. And, indeed, it is with faith and the certainty that our God accompanies each one of us along our life in the unique way that only He knows, that I accepted this plan and this obedience. Just as one hears when receiving the cardinal’s ring, certainly it was accepted with gratitude and with the promise of fidelity and loyalty to the Vicar of Christ. Only through faith can this be lived worthily.

As you can see, my friends, my basket is full. I am sure that this is also the case in each one of your lives. This is God’s great gift of life.

I wish you blessings in this month. I hope that, while waiting for the coming of Jesus Christ, you will continue to work as a Salesian Family to ensure that our world be purified of hatred and discord and filled with the Christian spirit, so that all of us can always live in peace with one another.