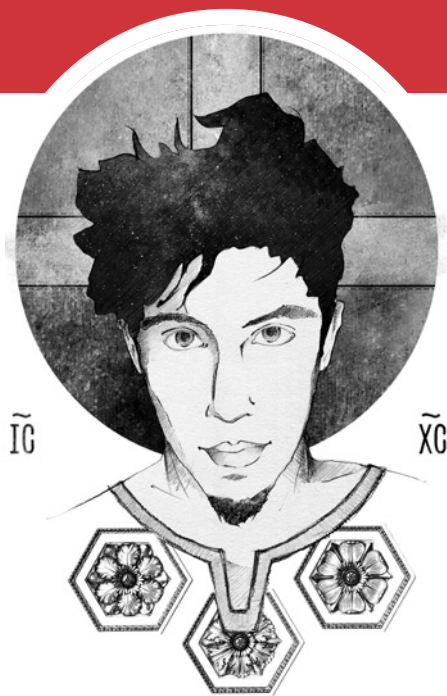


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Salesian Youth Ministry Animation

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Wherever God wants us

Accompanying the first
vocational dreams

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Youth Ministry General Councilor

YOUTH MINISTRY SECTOR
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1 A vocational call in the form of a dream

[a] No dream is trivial. Dreams are important and have always characterized a part of human life. In ancient times it was believed that dreams allowed us to communicate with the supernatural. Today, science says that they manifest the depths of our personality. There is not much distance between the two ideas: God is indeed at work in the depths of human beings. The Israelites believed that dreams revealed divine messages, prophecies and visions; those who were able to interpret them enjoyed great prestige.

Today we also speak of daydreams, the dreams we cultivate without necessarily sleeping and that could characterize our future. But have we ever wondered what it means to dream? **Haven't we all daydreamed, thus stirring our hearts and our future?**

Don Bosco's evocation of the nine-year-old dream is found in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, one of his most personal writings. The manuscript of this work was drafted from 1873-1875 and completed in the years 1877-1879. It is an inspiration for understanding *the first supernatural call felt by a young man*. In his own words:

"When I went to Rome in 1858 to speak to the Pope about the Salesian Congregation, he asked me to tell him everything that had even the suggestion of the supernatural about it. It was only then, for the first time, that I said anything about this dream which I had when I was nine or ten years old. The Pope ordered me to write out the dream in all its detail and to leave it as an encouragement to the sons of the Congregation."

Fortunately, looking at the experience of the birth of Don Bosco's vocation can help us

better understand this call that “remained deeply imprinted in his mind throughout his life.” How many experiences, whether in the form of a dream or real, have remained deeply imprinted in our biography?

Don Bosco’s account takes the form of pedagogical teaching. In other words, if we photograph this moment, *the dream contains, at its core, enough potential to have a better understanding of how to accompany young people on their vocational journey.*

[b] The first thing that we notice is that the dream is a “literary genre” that allows us to transform something ordinary, whether it happened or not, into something extraordinary, in the eyes and ears of those who hear it. In the autobiographical account of Don Bosco’s vocational call there are *simple expressions of a boy who wants to study, to become a priest, who wants to be with his friends, to help them, to do them good and to teach them catechism.* The episode points out to him: the field of work (wild animals, a symbol of abandoned and endangered young men); the educational method (not with beatings, but with gentleness and charity); the qualities of the educator (humble, strong and robust); the Teacher and his help (the Virgin, his mother); and the fruits (meek and happy lambs).

Many young people do not know that God has a dream for each one of them, a custom-designed project. **Behind God’s dream there is always enormous joy.** The secret of the much-desired happiness is precisely the meeting and correspondence of two dreams: ours and God’s.

Hence the significance of dreams in the world of youth: in them lies their happiness. This is why it is important to accompany these first calls that open the way to a life project and its accomplishment. The conclusion is clear: to stop dreaming leads to a vocational deficit.

2 Vocation is a game of grace and freedom

We exist and live with decisions and changes

[a] There are many ways to live our existence, but only a few of them make a person great and leave us with a sense of fulfillment. They deal with the choices and changes we make and that guide our lives and actions. **It is not our qualities that define us, but our choices.**

Since “time is greater than space” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 222), we must initiate and accompany processes of vocation animation, and not impose paths. And these are processes of people who are always unique and free. In this adventure of discovering one’s vocation, we do not need strong emotions, *but humble certainties that help to make sensible and coherent decisions.* The importance of this fact is strengthened by the fact that in deciding (often these are small decisions) we make choices and grow because we orient our life and give it a direction.

The fruit of accompaniment is not deciding between “yes” and “no.” In the end, personal responses must be oriented toward a “yes” to something. Seeking God’s will for me in an authentic way must lead me to accept a yes, a positive response to a life project.

[b] “Feeling a calling” toward something and choosing it **means perceiving oneself as invited by a reality of value that gives meaning to one’s life.** It goes without saying that in life, choosing, dreaming, and deciding are things that involve taking responsibility for the consequences of that choice. This produces *anxiety, discomfort and even fear*, especially when fundamental issues such as which university to choose, which world of work to explore, or which state of life to assume are at stake.

Among the most repeated expressions in biblical texts is undoubtedly “do not fear”

(about 41 times in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament). Predominantly spoken by God or one of his messengers, it introduces, in most cases, a vocational call. That is, *a call to carry out a life project that totally involves the person receiving it*. What is interesting is that a sense of bewilderment often overwhelms the recipient of the message.

At times, fear turns into resistance to facing one's dreams for fear of failure, of not being good enough, of the judgment of others, of betraying the expectations people have placed on us. In other words, it is the vertigo of reconciling desires for the future and the uncertainty of the present.

Jeremiah implores, "Ah, Lord God! I know not how to speak; I am too young" (Jer. 1:6); Isaiah reacts in the same way, "Woe is me; I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5), and many others. They all measure the enormous disproportion that exists between what God demands and the reality in which the person finds himself, and this makes him tremble.

Jesus repeatedly invites us not to be afraid, not to be paralyzed by the vertigo of decisions, because in God's eyes we are worth a great deal and as a Father he is concerned about us and takes care of us.

[C] In other words, the greatness of God's plan for young people makes them feel inadequate and never prepared for it. "I was only nine years old," wrote Don Bosco, "who was asking me to do something impossible? The Turin saint gradually came to understand his dream of 1825. Only in 1846 did Don Cafasso advise him to give credence to his dreams as part of a divine plan for the benefit of souls. As in this case, we too should accompany young people so that they do not doubt the **effectiveness of the Lord's promise that enables them to "reach for the stars."**

This is what the strength of youth consists in: possessing the ability to dream so big that one can *withstand even the greatest disappointments*. It is the strength of an age made to dream of the great things for which one came into the world, regardless of what others will say, the fear of taking risks or the temptation to give in to others.

How many times, as at the end of the narration of Don Bosco's 9-year-old dream, have we been offered different interpretations of what we dream? In Don Bosco's case, his family members interpreted his dream from different perspectives: from defeatism (his brother Joseph), from his grandmother's scepticism (who knows if it was a child's desire, a small burst of generosity) or, lastly, from hope (his mother, "perhaps you will become a priest").

Like Mother Margaret, Pope Francis says that "Young people are not meant to become discouraged; they are meant to dream great things, to seek vast horizons, to aim higher, to take on the world, to accept challenges and to offer the best of themselves to the building of something better." (*Christus Vivit*, 15).

We are all present in God's dream

[a] God calls us by name because he loves us. The disciples are called by name one by one, a distinctive sign of their uniqueness. In this call they experience a deep and intimate relationship with Him, they feel loved; and it is precisely because of this love, which is the result of such a special relationship, that the disciples make the decision to follow Jesus. They do so in a radical way, through the involvement of the whole person, without ulterior motives, thus causing a turning point in their lives. This irreversibility of the response to Jesus' call is the beginning of God's plan, the mission which each person is called to take part in.

Each young person, moreover, is precious not only because God loves them, but also because he created them: *there is a plan for each one*. Vocation is understood, in an interpretation based on faith, as the process of personal choice that leads to a choice. In the case of St. John Bosco, the 9-year-old dream accompanied him throughout his life, motivated him, and compelled him to think and act. From the perspective of faith, this process is an act of faith in which “choosing” means “being chosen” by God, associated with others and protected in the faithfulness of the one who, by his grace, anticipated our response.

All life choices, of any kind and at any age, are a response to a **calling, an undeserved gift**, not another effort. It obeys happiness. Vocation is a choice (of God) for our happiness, a response on our part to feel loved. And love is oxygen, giving life, generating and regenerating life. It doubles our lifespan: it is possible for everyone to live a better life.

Indeed, everyone's life has a wonderful meaning, but it must also be said that the life God has dreamt for us does not correspond to a life of prestige or social prominence. Only a dreamer like Don Bosco could inspire others to leave everything behind to dedicate their lives, without recognition or glory, to the service of the poorest youth.

[b] This is why we often need to recharge our strength and courage. These come from **perseverance in the difficult moments in fulfilling our dreams**: pain is the chisel that brings the work of art out of the wood. Diamonds are formed in the depths of the earth, subjected to unimaginable pressures and temperatures. This means that we should not discard anything of our experiences, for there is grace in everything, even in what we have not yet understood and, consequently, have not yet benefited from.

God's dreams do not come true automatically like “magic.” The real secret to fulfilling our dreams is an enthusiastic desire. We truly achieve our goals not when we avoid difficulties, but when *we learn to face them without shortcuts*. Confidence, patience, moderation, perseverance, the ability to change--these are all ingredients that enable us to cooperate in the fulfilment of the great dream God has for each one of us. Ultimately: it would obviously be rash not to understand that *vocation cannot be discovered by anyone from the outside*.

The dynamic of encountering the Lord is precisely this: seeking, following, dwelling. These are also the essential attitudes for knowing and living love. Love is sought with desire; we have to follow it by roads which are sometimes tiring and full of contradictions, but if we follow it, we eventually come to know it and we remain and dwell in it.

3 Serving young people in the place where they allow themselves to be encountered by God

The Salesian Congregation is a young ecclesial family in vocational age. It would be a grave error to silence or underestimate the vocational proposal; we believe that God continues to call! Vocation is something that concerns every person and every Christian. It is a term with a single root and broad horizons. Vocation gives direction to life, it facilitates experiencing otherness, and does not have a restrictive sense referring only to those who follow the Lord on the path of consecration. The question is: What is my contribution to the world?

Our Salesian charism contains in its depths sufficient potential to generate a broad vocational proposal to the new generations. This is both a gift and a challenge. Obviously, it

implies that the *quality of accompaniment* and, as the flip side of the coin, *vocational discernment* be treated with care: vocational accompaniment must truly be an orientation so that the person may discover and realize the authenticity of the call.

In vocation animation and the service of accompaniment no one is excluded. Every baptized person has been called by the Lord to give their life in different ways. But **choosing a consecrated vocation requires a good deal of discernment and maturity of motivations.** It is a life project whose goal is not only temporal well-being, nor the satisfaction of doing something worthwhile, and not even the desire to have a clear conscience. It accompanies believers who are totally dedicated to the service of the Gospel, who receive a call from the Lord, devoting themselves “full time” to the mission of the Church, which they have received from Christ.

For this reason, vocational dreams carry with them a promise and a mission, but they also need a path of interpretation, purification and clarification.

Where should we begin? What are the criteria for accompanying young people who feel a vocational call? What is the itinerary of the journey? It is the pilots' task to identify the coordinates over which one flies, and toward which one should head. The ground we have flown over in the initial vocational accompaniment is already known, but it needs to be rethought in today's time and space.

Let us focus on this vocational pedagogy from three coordinates that could be drawn, like a Cartesian plane, to interpret in which direction we should move. We can say that the accompaniment of those called is understood as an itinerary that pivots on a **CONTEXT (correspondence to grace)**, an **ACCOMPANIMENT**

(listening to God who calls in a mediated way) and an **ACTION (discernment)**. Every vocational dream is woven and built little by little around these three elements.

A relationship focused on a context: one's own vocational process

[a] It is rare for someone to have a well-structured spiritual life at the beginning of their vocational journey. *Normally, the young person has several valid motivations:* service to others, especially the poorest; a commitment to youth; a flair for the liturgy; an example to be imitated from a priest or a community; significant experiences that set in motion all the inner forces (a spiritual retreat, a joyful celebration, a youth meeting, etc.). This mix of motivations is normal at the beginning ... but it **must be accompanied by a minimal experience of faith**, an underlying spiritual attraction, an “inclination of the heart” (*Christus Vivit*, 294) that is felt even though it cannot be fully defined or explained.

The key question is: among these different motivations, is there any sign that has anything to do with God? Is there any experience, any inner spiritual restlessness, a desire or an intuition of God? **In the expression of the motivations, does theological life appear with simplicity or is it something fictitious?**

In Don Bosco's words, “One must choose what one has most at heart, most adapted to one's physical and moral strength, accepting advice from pious, learned and prudent people.” However, “they must all start from one point and tend to the same center, who is God” (G. Bosco, Letter June 17, 1879, in *Epistolario* III, p. 476).

This core, which is already present in a young person's personality can be cultivated, purified and liberated, but it cannot be “discovered” at a later time.



[b] The accompaniment of early dreams is a relationship centered on the “historical vocational process” that the young person goes through until a decision is made. This uninterrupted process brings lucidity and motivational strength to the youth; but most importantly, they **likely have already had an experience of God that has enabled them to perceive their call in some way** (not that it is already clear; but, with their difficulties and doubts, they have made the first decision to allow themselves to be helped).

The vocational experience begins with the phenomenon we can call “astonishment.” It is, therefore, a process in which at first there is perplexity, something unique happening in the person, something that comes from

outside, not as a result of personal initiative. Isaiah experiences a profound sense of fullness (Isaiah 6:1-5): the train of the garment fills the temple, everything is filled with smoke, all the earth is filled with glory, man is overwhelmed! *He does not even know how to interpret it.* **The young man is presented with inner experiences or resonances** (“lights” and “motions,” mentioned in Christian tradition) that must be deciphered to recognize the Lord’s voice and distinguish it from other dissonant voices.

God’s irresistible presence is not coercive, but one of fascination and attraction: “I am not dragged to God, but drawn” (cf. Jn. 6:44) by his love. Even in an incipient way, it must be perceived that it is the God of Jesus -- incar-

nate and committed -- who attracts and not the many other "gains" one can imagine by following the Lord along this path.

For this reason, today one of the important tasks of accompaniment is to **serve the person in the place where they allow themselves to be encountered by God**. It is He who knows each person by name, who acts in each one of us in a unique and unrepeatable way.

Someone important pronounces or even shouts our name out loud. In any case, it is undeniable that we are all called, it is true, but we are not all called in the same way.

[C] To become aware of this, we are faced with the **need to work on the inner life in which God dwells**. This is not an easy task. Therefore, educating to interiority, to a contemplative look at life and teaching a faithful interpretation of reality to discover God's voice, face and trace in history and in our history, are inevitable challenges.

This initial "inner feeling" is already a sign of calling. The Lord does great things with simple means. Then, it will be necessary to distinguish whether there is a dynamic of vocational authenticity. On the one hand, the awareness of the call; on the other hand, the presence of vocational motivations. The set of psychic forces that impel one to act consistently with the call and to maintain a decision: "what I want and why I want it." Valid and authentic motivations, together with an awareness of the call, drive the young person to embrace the vocation in a responsible, dynamic and constantly improving way.

Vocational maturity is ultimately decided by an act of faith. However, it is important to remember this. Only from here are some opposite extremes held together: the certainty of being called and the awareness of one's inadequacy; the feeling of losing one's life and finding it in an unimaginable way; the great-

ness of one's aspirations and the weight of one's limitations and miseries; God's grace and human nature; God who calls and the one who is called who responds.

The realism of our early vocational dreams may manifest itself in this uncertainty, but **an out-of-the-ordinary dream requires an out-of-the-ordinary faith.**

Respectful mediation that favors a "personal encounter"

[a] An accompanying relationship favors a "personal encounter," a tool to which close attention must be paid. Our goal must be not only to get to know the spiritual person, but also to integrate and unify their personal history. This aspect is not always given explicit attention, but it is of enormous importance in order to understand the meaning of vocational accompaniment.

The first sensitivity or attention to the person is to listen to them. They give themselves to us with their words. *The sign of this listening is the time I dedicate to young people.* It is not a question of quantity, but that "others may feel that my time is their time" (*Christus Vivit*, 292). They must feel that I listen to them unconditionally, without taking offense, without being scandalized, without getting irritated, without getting tired.

This listening is what the Lord practices when he walks with the disciples of Emmaus and accompanies them for a while on a road that was going in the opposite direction from the right one (cf. Lk 24:13-35). Slowly one gets far: *accompaniment must be personalized and gradual, adapted to the situation and the rhythm of the young person.*

The enemy of the initial vocational journey is ignoring the depth of the heart. We are **all experts in deception**, of the "traps laid by the evil spirit" (*Christus Vivit*, 293): compul-

sions, obsessions, disproportionate reactions, wounds and cracks. If all these things are not worked out in personal dialogue, they gradually become craters that prevent us from moving forward because they devour all our efforts.

We must help young people catch the oscillations of their “inner seismograph” in the field of *human maturity, which, as we know, activates or hinders the action of grace*. Our Lady’s concern for John’s human formation - “Make yourself humble, strong and robust” - is well rooted in vocational accompaniment from the very first steps of his vocational journey.

It can be said that in all authentic vocational dreams there are **certain basic components** such as gratitude, openness to transcendence, questioning the meaning of life, availability, trust in oneself and others, awe before beauty and selflessness.

These components are certainly the basis of any vocational approach. And, along with them, the elements that foster the knowledge and appreciation of God’s personal call, of the forms of Christian life, as well as the abilities to come to choose one of these forms, in freedom.

In this sense, a great deal of work needs to be done to *achieve some personal stability without dependency*. Identity is always an ambivalent process involving many tensions; however, it is necessary to be able to manage one’s relationship with family, money or power. A minimum of physical, emotional, mental and social autonomy that allows the young person to make concrete decisions, conscious and free choices. We must accompany these processes and help young people verbalize the inevitable tensions, questions and conflicts in this area.

[b] Relationships structure the vocational journey, not only as a path of maturation

of one’s human identity, but also of one’s faith identity (the believer, the disciple). In Don Bosco’s vocational maturation process, some relationships have played a crucial role:

- he cannot understand his inner life without the providential and major presence of Mother Margaret, his mother, who with simplicity and determination was able to accompany his personal and religious growth;
- his experience with Don Calosso, the “faithful friend of the soul” (he says in *Memoirs of the Oratory*), offered him the opportunity not only to rebalance the tense family situation, but also allowed him to meet a worthy priest with whom he established a personal relationship that left a positive mark on him;
- the role of friends in the life of the adolescent and young Don Bosco was assumed and integrated into his formative process;
- during his formative experience at the Convitto (residence for priests), Don Bosco discovered devoted priests who distinguished themselves for science and apostolic devotion. Amongst these stood out Don Cafasso, his first spiritual director. This wise priest accompanied his formation, counselled him in moments of discernment, was his confessor and proposed a series of pastoral experiences that enriched his life;
- ultimately, the entire family network of Valdocco consisted in establishing relationships through which he built his being a priest and his being an educator.

[c] It can then be said that for Don Bosco the seminary was not a closed world, given that external reference points, such as the situation of needy youth in a wounded society, played an increasingly active role in the discovery of his vocation. **Contact with the youth was a moment of lucidity and grace**. We can say that in this experience the youth helped

him to discern the strength and relevance of his own vocational project.

In conclusion, **love for the Salesian mission among young people and the ability to love and give oneself is a visible vocational criterion:** gratuitous commitment to others, especially the poorest and most abandoned, spontaneous service beyond one's own well-being or interest in the world of youth.

Today vocational awareness requires young people to have "*breaking experiences*" that bring them into contact with exclusion and vulnerability. These are not single, unconnected proposals. They are golden opportunities to redirect life in the perspective of faith and in the key of evangelical generosity. The world of poverty and pain becomes an effective "loud-speaker" that serves as a vocational wake-up call. Indeed, it has become a critical area for the discovery of one's vocation: contact with these worlds fosters the awakening of such sensitivity and the understanding of life in terms of gratitude and service.

[d] In this context, in order to know, verify and accompany the suitability of the young people we accompany, it is necessary to ensure **their readiness to learn**. This involves a realistic assessment of their abilities and possibilities, but also an open readiness to change. One of the most important questions is: do they want to grow, are they willing to engage in a process that implies allowing themselves to be challenged? Passivity, lack of transparency and a distinctly defensive personality are not the best attitudes. Positive signs, on the other hand, are flexibility, creativity, openness to novelty and dialogue and reflection on their experiences.

It is reasonable to think that narcissists - those who tend to isolate themselves from others, to worry excessively about themselves and to use others for their own ends - are incapable of giving a free and unselfish vocation-

al response. It is extremely dangerous to act in the *logic of self-centeredness*, a device that leads a person to be governed by the calculation of interests and whose only goal is to seek the maximum benefit for themselves. The ego is not only the starting point, but it is also often the end point, the parameter used to measure all the other realities.

An action aimed at "vocational discernment"

Discernment can be defined as the exercise that enables us to find meaning in the diverse and fragmented events of our existence. We are constantly faced with situations, events, and relationships and we sense that something is missing; we cannot understand exactly what, we cannot find answers, we lack clarity. It is precisely this lack that gives rise to and triggers discernment.

*Therefore, the starting point is the awareness of a lack of meaning. This lack can be interpreted in positive terms as a desire. **We embark on a path of discernment because we wish to find an answer that we do not have.** Those who claim to have everything clear or under control will never leave room for desire and will never embark on a path of discernment.*

[a] Moreover, this topic is part of a more concrete reality: **discernment requires time, authenticity and patience**. Therefore, we can understand why discernment is not fashionable. People, including young people, prefer to rely on spontaneity, but spontaneity is never authenticity. We are authentic when we recognize the winds blowing on our boat and decide how to use them to go where we have chosen to go. If, on the other hand, we allow ourselves to be pushed by the winds, without recognizing or using them, we will end up on beaches we have not chosen or even crash on the rocks.

It is worth recalling that, just as the parable of the wheat and the weeds teaches us (cf. Mt. 13:24-30), at first the two plants are similar; we have to wait to see what takes away life and what gives it. The same applies to us: we must look within ourselves and gradually become aware of what comes from God and the “weeds” that do not come from Him. But, at some point, there will be enough clarity for us to decide, and at that time we have the responsibility to do so.

[b] We cannot understand God's dream for each one of us without entering into a dialogue with Him. Often, in order to discover who we are, we prefer to take refuge in unknown and distant places.

If God is “*intimior intimo meo*” (Augustine), those who live superficially are not humanly prepared to accept **the free gift of his call**. Activism and the overuse of stimuli that stifle the capacity for silence and recollection are some of today's attitudes and behaviours that hinder or delay entering into that depth, where God is discovered as the You who invites us with a call.

In every vocational process we have an obligation to offer spaces where young people can *experience silence and an encounter with Jesus Christ*. Elijah (1Kings 19:9-14), in his life full of zeal for the Lord, was like a mighty wind and a consuming fire. His word was a sharp sword. He travelled throughout the land where he lived, thundering and threatening. He had accomplished many things. He had destroyed the altars of idols; He had brought the Jewish people back to an authentic religious experience; he had not stopped even before the mighty. He seeks God in order to be recognized by Him. And God denies him. He tells him: you are a fire, an earthquake, a mighty wind. Remember: I am not there. They are your actions, not mine. God adds to his prophet: I am in a gentle breeze, which you do not even notice.

Dreams, plans, endeavours, programs and adventures... these are beautiful, important and precious things. They represent a piece of ourselves, but it is only when we courageously return to the truth of ourselves that we experience God's presence.

[c] This is why it would be naive to think that all prayer is Christian prayer. Prayer is a manifestation of theological life; it is not simply preparing an environment with pictures, lighting candles, listening to music and concentrating, or the like. All these are necessary, but they are not the substance of prayer. Prayer is an attitude of dispossession, of letting God be the center of my life.

As mentioned above, it is important to dialogue with the Lord to get to know His timing, not to waste inspirations for good, or accept His invitation to grow. In this sense, how important it is to achieve *habitual familiarity*



with the living Word of the Gospel. Having a hunger for God is not a matter of biblical culture. It is about seeing one's life from God's point of view. The Word of God is always the source of all vocational growth.

The vocational reading of the Word of God is fundamental. It involves initiating our young people into a daily, ongoing experience of personal and group prayer with the Word. It will necessarily have to be an accompanied and guided activity, especially at the beginning.

The encounter with the Word completes evangelization of the heart. Thus, it is not sufficient to purify my interiority, but it is necessary to "repopulate" it with the life and values of the Gospel. What good is reading art history books if I have never been to a museum, if I don't know how to listen to and appreciate a piece of music?

4 "This is your field; this is where you must work"

The 9-year-old dream invites Don Bosco to a vocation lived with passion, sparing no effort and without calculation; the educator-pastor's attachment and dedication to **his people is not measured by quick responses** ("not with beatings"), but is **linked to the affection which binds him to people** ("but with gentleness").

Young people are enthusiastic dreamers. In fact, they are the dreamers par excellence. And we have a duty to awaken this capacity within them. To do so, dreaming a positive future today requires *a good dose of lucid and*

effective hope, ingredients that are becoming harder to find in our environment. In other words, dreams must turn into plans, because if they remain only dreams, they will disappoint us.

Being called is the premise of being sent and leads there irrevocably. Among the various cases, let us dwell on the story of Jonah, recounted in his short four-chapter book. It is a captivating story full of surprises (the storm, the fish that eats Jonah, the castor bean plant that dries up). It is an educational novel, a parabolic tale, but also an icon: we are called to reinterpret our lives considering this particularly provocative parable in the early stages of the vocational dream.

Jonah is disoriented, bewildered and full of fears. God shows him his errors in perspective; especially when he thinks only of himself and not others, without extending his gaze to the great city. Only in the horizon of caring for those who are far away does one's vocation acquire meaning and value.

Our young people are right there, at the gate of the city of Nineveh, in order to enter with passion and solidarity, companions of the vocation of all men, or to remain waiting for who knows what.

The attitude of "going forth" must be understood as a restlessness that the Holy Spirit places in those who have been called to leave behind their own comfort zone. It is the call to shake off the dust that has stuck to our feet and that is not part of the essence of the mission to which we are called. *To look at the beauty of heaven without losing sight of the earth.*