

THE MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

DON ÁNGEL FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME

FOR 125 DOLLARS MORE THE MOST SPLENDID AND PRECIOUS MONEY I HAVE EVER SEEN

I ask that the Salesians of Don Bosco and the entire Salesian Family throughout the world please make known how much good is being done everywhere – not just by us but also by many persons, groups, and institutions. We have to make the good known, to make it visible. For if we do not, only what is evil and egotistical is seen for this is made visible and known – but only for the selfish interests of a few.

My dear readers of the *Salesian Bulletin*,

I greet you warmly again and, this time, with special joy on account of what I want to share with you.

During the Christmas Season, which has just recently ended, one of the members of the General Council, the one for the Missions, was able to spend Christmas in two very significant presences of ours in Uganda. In one of these, there is a large group of children whom we have rescued from the streets and who live in our Salesian House. The second is our refugee camp in Palabek, Uganda, where we arrived on January 31, 2018, just a year ago, and just months after the first refugees had arrived there. It was at that moment that we decided that we SDB ought to be there, among them, and share life with those people who today number 42,000 – and the number is still growing.

Our General Councilor for the Missions, Don Guillermo Basañes, and I met during these first days of the New Year 2019 and he gave me two envelopes. One comes from Kampala, Uganda, from the educational project "Children and Life Mission," and the other from the Palabek refugee camp. Inside each envelope, there was a brief message.

The children rescued from the streets and living in Don Bosco Boys Home, together with some churches in their neighborhood, took up a collection to send to me. They asked me to use it for the poorest people whom I meet around the world (as if they themselves are not poor!). Inside, I found \$100, the fruit of the generosity and sacrifice of these people and these boys.

The other envelope was just like the first. That one came, as I said above, from the refugee camp. The people there practically have no money, and generally barter with food and animals, etc. For example, some raise half a dozen chicks, allow them to fatten up a bit, and then exchange them for other foodstuffs. This gives them just enough to survive; but when asked to give help to those who are poor, hundreds and hundreds of persons got going and took up a huge collection. They sold some chicks for coins and then added to that amount what they were able to collect at the various Masses celebrated under the open sky and trees (which serves as their church building now).

I opened the envelope with great emotion and found \$25 and two coins therein (one of 100 shillings; the other of 200 shillings) with a note asking me to give this money to those who need it most. I was alone in my office at the time and was unable to contain my emotions. This was such a touching and special moment that I just could not keep it to myself. For this reason, I immediately thought of sharing it with you. You know that I already have shared with you something like this when I wrote about those two wedding rings that were sent to me and the symbolic value that they carried with them.

The Gospel passage came to mind wherein Jesus pointed out to His disciples the poor widow who had put all she had – two coins – into the treasury in the Temple in Jerusalem and how the Lord praised her for her generosity because it was authentic. This is what I see in these two donations – in that \$125.00 – the most precious ones that I have ever received in my life.

This made me stop and ponder the human heart. There is such beautiful humanity in our hearts. Lamentably, it seems that the world can put before our eyes only bad news and threats from which we need to protect ourselves. This includes the news that is often the fruit of “obedience” to political, economic, or ideological interests. But this is not so - the human heart is much greater than that. There is not only bad news!

I hope to be able to save from oblivion and make it known that just as many good things happen each day. I also want to rescue from oblivion all the good that is done anonymously in the world each day. And I ask that the Salesians and the entire Salesian Family throughout the world please make known how much good is being done everywhere – not just by us but by many persons, groups, and institutions. We have to make the good known, to make it visible. For if we do not, only what is evil and egotistical is seen for this is made visible and known – but only for the selfish interests of a few.

I still have not had the chance to meet the refugees in Palabek personally. I do not know if I will ever be able to go there in person, but through my Salesian brethren, I have sent my thanks and my word that we do not forget them and that they, too, are very important.

Simple gestures such as these that I have just shared with you give us ever greater hope for mankind. They lead me to give thanks to our good God for the very many beautiful things that happen each day. They also make me think that good intentions and nice words are not enough to change the realities of injustice and marginalization. This challenges me and many of us – and who knows, maybe you, too, dear readers – not to be passive and conformist but to shine with the Light of Christ and be critical in the face of what "others" want to make us believe, or feel, often through fear tactics.

The heart of our beloved Don Bosco was brilliant and always firm in purpose and decisive in not being complicit with anything that did not have at heart the good of his boys or their families (if they had any).

I send my greetings from here in Rome to the people, families, and children of Palabek and Kampala. I am certain that your messages and your gestures will reach much further than you imagine. I promise you that those \$125.00 have not only left an indelible memory in my heart but that they will also reach there where they are needed. Those people will know the immense value of this gift because of their origin and their having been given with such great generosity.

With much affection.

Don Angel

