

THE MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

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AS BOTH BALM AND FIRE

«The grace that comes from the Lord and to which I abandon myself, your help, the help of all the Salesians in the very diverse places of the world, and the love that all of us have for our young people - especially the poorest - give me the peace and courage that I need».

Dear Salesian Family and friends, at the beginning my new sessennium, I wish to share with you what I feel in my heart. First of all, I thank God - in whose loving hands we all find ourselves and in whom we all move and have our being. God has guided us right up to this moment. The "yes" I once again pronounce stems from trust in God and in all of you who form the great soul and the great heart of this our beloved Family.

My emotions are running high.

I still feel overwhelmed at being a *successor of Don Bosco* and the "father and center of unity" of the entire Salesian Family. I am left speechless yet again when I read in Don Bosco's Spiritual Testament what our father left us in writing about this:

«Before leaving for my eternity, I have some duties to fulfill toward you and, thus, fulfill a wish most dear to my heart. I am leaving you here on this earth, but only for a little while... Your rector is dead, but another will be elected who will take care of you and your eternal salvation. Listen to him, obey him, and pray for him as you have done for me». (*The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco. Volume XVII, p. 232.*)

The words of our beloved father, Don Bosco, resound in my mind and heart as both balm and fire simultaneously. His figure is so great that I inevitably feel small and unworthy. Only the grace that comes from the Lord and to which I abandon myself, your help, the help of all the Salesians in the very diverse places of the world, and the love that all of us have for our young people - especially the poorest - give me the peace and courage that I need.

Many confreres have asked me how I feel. My answer has always been the same: very peaceful and very free. This is what I have felt the entire time, during the Chapter and during discernment. This is what I felt both before and after the elections: *peace and freedom* because I was not and am not looking for this task of service. I was spiritually ready to continue because I feel that the six previous years have been years of grace; albeit, not without difficulties - but ones that neither snatched hope from me nor took away my desire for personal fidelity to the Congregation. However, I was also ready to end my service, if that had been the sentiment of the Assembly gathered in the Name of the Lord.

It is with this peace and freedom that I impress in my heart what has been said about the expectations concerning the Rector Major: I will try to be, as far as possible, a true man of God, with a strong charismatic and pastoral identity, forward-thinking and farsighted, and capable of a gaze of faith and hope when reading the reality of things. It is my deep desire to continue to be, as far as possible, a man capable of fatherhood and fraternal affection, and of accompaniment and closeness to our confreres.

I believe I shall put much of my energy into being a man capable of building unity, of involving others, of accompanying, of creating a common vision, of harmoniously bringing together differences, of building communion around him, of teamwork, and of delegating responsibilities.

Finally, I turn my gaze to young people. They are for us the "sacrament" of our encounter with God. They constitute "the burning bush" to which we draw near in His Name. They are the sacred place that God has given us in Don Bosco for our sanctification and the sanctification of all.

The presence of young people at the General Chapter left our hearts filled with emotion thanks to the strength of their youthful words.

The young people asked us to stay with them, not to abandon them, not to leave them alone in their fate. They asked us to love them, to love them truly, because they want us and love us. They asked us to accompany them along the journey of life. And they asked us to be *men capable of talking to them about the love that God has for them*. They did not ask us for buildings, or more walls, or management plans, or even activities.

In his message to GC XXVIII, Pope Francis said that the young people were co-founders with Don Bosco. "That's why they and the sound of their voices," writes the Holy Father, "are and must be our *best music*. We are therefore called to permeate the lives of many abandoned, endangered, poor, discarded young people who await a gaze of hope, who await that Salesian who will be a brother, sometimes a father, and always a friend."

We cannot but be faithful if we keep children, adolescents, young people and their families before our eyes. They expect of us a double fidelity: a loyalty to young people and a docility to the Holy Spirit.

It was important for us to have held GC XXVIII in Valdocco. The Holy Father himself spoke to us about what he called the "Valdocco choice/**OPTION?**" – a choice/**AN OPTION** which I translate into dreams that are already reality but that must become ever more so because I dream like Don Bosco that the 21st-Century Salesian be a man full of hope and one passionate about Jesus Christ. I dream of a Salesian Family that has the spirit of Valdocco, just as Don Bosco constructed it to be: living for and with children and young people, truly loving them in the Name of the Lord.

I dream of a Salesian Family in which the poorest and most abandoned, the "throw-aways", the excluded, and those who have suffered any type of abuse and violence are their priority, just as they were for Don Bosco.

If it be so, then our Mother, the Help of Christians, will continue to do everything in this Congregation and in this Salesian Family.

So, to all of you, I repeat the words of Pope Francis, with great affection: *Dream and dream big. Dream and help others dream.*