

THE MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

DON ÁNGEL FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME

I Dream of a Salesian Family with a Missionary Heart

The 147th Missionary Expedition proclaims that the Lord continues to love the Humanity that He willed and created and that we, the Salesian Family, feel filled with God's tenderness in a special way.

It is precisely this fullness of love that seeks to "brim over" to all around us and calls forth from us a response of fidelity which is demanding.

Once again, Valdocco has been witness to the joyous and moving day of the departure of new missionaries. On November 11, 1875, Don Bosco sent his first missionaries to Patagonia, in Argentina. This was the legendary "first missionary expedition" headed by the young and courageous Giovanni Cagliero. As we well know, right from his youth, Don Bosco had nurtured the dream of becoming a missionary. Don Cafasso "blocked" that path as he accompanied Don Bosco along his vocational discernment, telling him that going to the missions was not for him. On September 25th of this year, I celebrated the sending of forty-three missionaries, both Religious and Lay, on missionary expedition number 147 because Don Bosco's "secret" dream never paused, not even during the two tragic World Wars.

This time, eighteen young Salesians and seventeen Daughters of Mary Help of Christians are leaving homeland and those whom they love and are setting off to the most diverse points of the globe. Seven young people (six young women and one young man) join them to do civil and missionary service for one year. Certainly, the Religious, instead, have made the choice "forever." They give the gift of their life: remaining with the poor, with those who feel most abandoned, and with their other Salesian Confrères and Sisters who are experiencing difficult times. They do so as members of the Church because God remains close to His suffering children.

Theirs is a gesture that speaks. It proclaims that the Lord continues to love the Humanity that He willed and created and that we, the Salesian Family, feel filled with God's tenderness in a special way. It is precisely this fullness of love that seeks to "brim over" to all around us and calls forth from us a response of fidelity which is demanding. For this reason, I told our missionaries that my dream is for a missionary Salesian Family bearing four "petals."

1. TO BE MISSIONARIES OF HUMANITY

The point of being missionaries in the world is not to make some type of conquest. We are missionaries so as to share life with the people who welcome us. We are missionaries to serve, no matter what the circumstances or the situations. We give food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty because it is good to do so, no matter what the consequences.

At the close of Vatican Council II, Blessed Paul VI stressed that the doctrine of that Council was channeled in one direction only: "the service of mankind, of every condition, in every weakness and need." And I said in the Basilica in Torino: "You are sent to serve the men and women whom you find along your paths: in their diversity, with their intercultural and ancestral riches, in their dreams, in their anguish, and in their hopes. You must bring with you the riches of your own humanity, which you received from your families and your cultures, as well as the profound one that you have nourished daily in your trusting rapport with the Lord Jesus."

2. TO BE MISSIONARIES OF MERCY AND OF FRATERNITY

The second petal of my missionary dream is a consequence of the first, just as I said to the participants: "Because you are missionaries of humanity, I invite you also to be missionaries of mercy and of fraternity. Today the entire world is suffering everywhere. You will find wars, divisions, extreme poverty, refugees, the hungry, the ill, and the abandoned. You will also meet with instances of racism and xenophobia, but you must bring a message of peace, of development, of pardon, and of fraternity - and not only as a discourse or a sermon, but with your very own life, in the way you live your daily life, and in your witness. There can be no Salesian "neutrality" in the face of the sufferings of our people or before the situations of suffering and of lack of every kind. We must respond as quickly as possible, seeking to accompany the people in their life and searching for possible solutions together with them. Further, our response must always be the one of the Gospel, of the dignity of the human person, and of respect for life and of creation. The world has great need of fraternity and brotherhood!"

3. TO BE MISSIONARIES TO THE ONES WHO ARE "LAST"

To be a Salesian missionary today means to have one's eyes and hearts for those who are "the last" and the "little ones". I said to the missionaries: "I recommend with all my heart that you: have your eyes open wide to see the people and to look them straight in the eye; have your hearts and your arms open to receive them; and have the courage to give your entire life to them. Just like Don Bosco, you can be close to all but your heart must always be for those 'who are last' and your life must always be for them, too. I invite you to open your heart to so many people who live in precarious and painful, difficult situations; to be close to those who have no voice; to help them gain the justice that they deserve; to care with fraternity and solidarity for those wounded by life; and to stay far from that indifference which - way beyond not being helpful - humiliates.

And in regard to those who are "last" - never forget that we help them in their every necessity, but that we have learned from Don Bosco never to neglect the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Who speaks to us of our Good and Merciful God Who is our Father. Don Bosco was, above all, a priest with his heart full of God, with a heart of an educator who always sought to raise up in his young people the sense of God and of confidence in Him."

4. TO BE MISSIONARIES BECAUSE YOU ARE DISCIPLES

Never can we forget that the root and the strength of our being missionaries comes from being disciples. We are essentially missionary disciples, members of the faith-filled community which takes seriously Jesus' commandment to teach in His Name and to make all nations come to know the Merciful and Faithful God Who loves each one of His sons and daughters on the earth.

We are also the heirs of a tradition which is more than 100 years old - our Salesian Family.

Be courageous proclaimers of the measureless mercy and free self-giving on the part of God, which is manifested, above all, among the poorest and the neediest.

May Mary, our Teacher and our Help, the Mother of Mercy, accompany you every day and in your every step. Learn from Her to be attentive to the needs of poor people, and of the poorest boys, girls, and young people whom, I am sure, you carry in your hearts. Learn from Her to praise God for the wonders that He does in every corner of the earth, in every culture, and in every nation.