

WATCH OVER OUR INSTITUTE AND THE ENTIRE SALESIAN FAMILY

These are the first words of the *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco*:

With humble and joyful gratitude, we acknowledge that Don Bosco, by the initiative of God and the maternal mediation of Mary, gave rise in the Church to a singular experience of living the Gospel. The Spirit shaped in him a heart filled with a great love for God and for his brothers and sisters, in particular the little ones and the poor, and in this way made him Father and Teacher of a multitude of young people as well as the Founder of a vast spiritual and apostolic Family.¹

Therefore, we are a Family born from God's Heart but entrusted to Mary from the moment of its birth, when Don Bosco had his dream at the age of nine. It is always moving to recall that first dream, which is the foundation of our Founder's apostolic life; all the words and gestures have a prophetic dimension. Mary is there present as his Mother and Teacher but also as the protector of his entire work:

At that moment, I saw a Lady of stately appearance standing beside Him. Seeing... that I was more confused than ever, She beckoned me to approach Her. She took me kindly by the hand and said, "Look..." At that point, still dreaming, I began crying. I begged the lady to speak so that I could understand Her because I did not know what all this could mean. She then placed Her hand on my head and said, "In good time you will understand everything."²

In this dream Mary *takes little John by the hand* and when he finds himself before such a great mission, he begins to cry and, as Don Bosco recounts, in that moment of anguish and disillusionment Mary *places Her hand on his head*. Don Bosco feels most vividly Mary's presence as his guide and the protector of the work which he will need to accomplish as Father and Founder of a huge Family which is entirely dedicated to the young.

Having recognised that in the founding and the development of his work "Mary has done everything", even in extraordinary ways, he dedicated the newly born Congregation to the Virgin under the title of Help of Christians... Then receiving from Mary the inspiration to found the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, he wanted it to be a «living monument» of his gratitude to the Help of Christians. To her also he entrusted the Salesians-Cooperators, so that in their apostolate they might be protected, and find inspiration in Her. He also set up the Association of the Devotees of Mary Help of Christians, linked to the

¹ Pascual Chavez, SDB. *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco (Salesian Family Charter)*. Trans. (Rome: Tipografia Vaticana, 2012) 9. Print.

² San Giovanni Bosco. *Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855: The Autobiography of Saint John Bosco*. trans. Daniel Lyons. New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Publications, 1989. 19. Print.

sanctuary in Turin, as a sign of gratitude for the maternal presence of the Madonna in all his works... This special reference to Mary has profoundly marked the charismatic and spiritual identity of the various Groups of the Salesian Family which have come into being during the XXth century... Mary is considered not only as Mother of the Church and Help of Christians, but also as the Mother of all humanity, so that co-workers, men and women, of various Groups of the Salesian Family also belonging to other religions, cultivate a sincere devotion to her... With good reason therefore, one can say that the Salesian Family is a *Marian Family*.³

Devotion to Mary (together with that to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist and to the Pope) has been one of the three devotions which marked the spiritual and apostolic life of Don Bosco. The whole Salesian Family is and feels itself to be a *Marian Family*, which came into being through the motherly care of the Immaculate Help of Christians. All the Groups in fact express this conviction in their own Constitutions.⁴

We FMA belong to this Family: “Our Institute is a living part of the Salesian Family... In this Family we share the spiritual heritage of the Founder and, as in Mornese, we offer the unique contribution of our vocation”⁵ and, therefore, we feel the need to entrust ourselves to Mary, not only as an Institute, but as Family, and to entrust to Her all that we hold most dear.

Daily entrustment to Mary therefore is a characteristic of our spirituality. Entrustment has an upwards action: it is a giving of oneself in order to respond generously to a mission to be accomplished; but there is also a downwards motion: accepting with trust and gratitude the help of Her who guided Don Bosco and continues to guide the spiritual Family which has its origin in him.⁶

³ *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco*, 21-22.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵ Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. *Constitutions and Regulations of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*. trans. ETG. Rome: 2015. 33-34. Print.

⁶ *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco*, 55.