

The FMA at the School of Mary (Art. 79)

June 24, 2017



The Virgin with Baby Jesus and St. John the Baptist is an iconographic theme which is typical of Christian art. Between the end of the XV century and the beginning of the XVI, it received the attention of the Italian masters: Sandro Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Raffaello Sanzio, and Michelangelo Buonarroti. In this depiction by Raffaello, we can see how Mary cares for the two children: tender and sweet, she expresses her motherliness to each of them. At the same time, we can see John the Baptist expressing total trust in Mary and pious admiration for Baby Jesus. We recall that John the Baptist was the first to perceive in Mary Jesus' Divine Presence through the work of the Holy Spirit: his mother Elizabeth realized it when he leapt in her womb! Elizabeth "caught" it and was filled with the Holy Spirit, as Luke recounts (1:41-44).

The Lord was able to do great things in Mary because she was a woman who **listened** to His Word, **without any resistance** in her will and **fully available** to collaborate in the salvific mission as Co-Redemptrix with Jesus. The doctrine of the Church¹ has shown us how Mary was that essential instrument and how She became the model for all believers, as well as our Mother who accompanies us, cares for us, and shows us the way.

And we, FMA, are privileged because our Institute belongs to Mary; we are her Daughters, as Sr. Anita Deleidi explained: *"The Institute was born as an authentic, living, concrete, and ecclesial expression of the Marian devotion of a Saint like Don Bosco for whom **Mary** was not only an object of veneration and of faith, but a **vital experience, a reality, a living and acting person, who, from the time when she introduced herself into his life never ceased to illumine his path, inspire his action, support his efforts, and help him in every way, even through extraordinary interventions.**"*²

His Dream of 9 years old marks the beginning of this personal rapport with Mary but also the "opening" of the "School of Mary". When Don Bosco felt terribly lost and confused in that dream because of what he had been asked to do, it was Jesus Himself who calmed him with the following words: - ***I will give you a Teacher, under whose instruction you will become wise, and without whom all wisdom becomes foolishness.*** Jesus had already experienced this Himself for He had been the first of Mary's "students" and He offered that same possibility to little Johnny Bosco and, through him, to all the Salesians of yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Jesus is clear – we are able to be experts in sewing, cooking, technology, or sports... we can have many titles, doctorates, or masters... or be great painters, musicians, or actors... – but without Mary, all this is so much nonsense because the true **formation which is the work of the Holy Spirit** and which requires our **listening, our docility, and our collaboration** is missing. And this formation, as Article 79 of our *Constitutions* indicates, is found at the **School of Mary**. Only here can we integrate knowledge of the world with God's wisdom so as to be holistic FMA, centered on the **"Da mihi animas, cetera tolle"**.

At this point, we ought to look into ourselves to see if we have truly entered fully into this School or if we maintain positions which hinder the excellence of discipleship which requires personal conversion. As an example, let us limit ourselves to theoretical knowledge about Mary: we could be great mariologists but not have any relationship with Her; or we could be great "fans" of Mary and Her zealous promoters on Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, email, etc.; yet, all of this notwithstanding, we could be limited to superficial

¹ To delve more deeply into this discussion: read chapter VIII of *Lumen Gentium* and also *Redemptoris Mater*, among others.

² Anita Deleidi, "La devozione mariana alle origini dell'Istituto delle FMA". ("Marian Devotion in the Origins of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians")

emotions or could have an almost unilateral relationship with Her, limited to the requests and prayers which we make to Her.

Entering into Her School is much more than this – it means allowing ourselves to be drawn into the dynamic of faith and to discover **Mary's presence and Her help in directing our life decisively to Christ**. Taking on Mary's attitudes, the Holy Spirit can mold in each one of us the dream that God the Father has for us to be conformed to His Son, in Salesian style.

The advantage we have is that we are speaking of a "school", that is to say, of companions who have preceded us, who are united with us now, and who will follow us. Don Bosco, Mother Mazzarello, and many FMA can show us with their lives what it means to be in Mary's school and what it means to allow Her to be the **Mother and Teacher of our Salesian vocation**. Only then will we be able to be Salesian educators for the new generations, as Sr. Piera Cavaglià clearly explains:

*"Against the ever-arising temptations to relegate Mary to the private sphere, to sterile devotionism, or to empty naivety, the rediscovery of Mary, the Mother who cooperates in the regeneration and the formation of her children, will turn out to be fruitful in perspectives and in new spiritual and pedagogical accomplishments. Mary, with the wisdom of an educator and guide, will continue to reveal to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, just as she did to Don Bosco, the most efficacious modalities for evangelizing the youth of today's culture."*³

WE ASK OURSELVES

Let us read the first two paragraphs of Article 79 of our *Constitutions* in the light of the reflection that we have made:

- ❖ What attitudes of mine might indicate to others that I have already entered into the School of Mary?
- ❖ Have I asked myself if Mary is truly for me "*Mother and Teacher of my Salesian vocation*"?
- ❖ Do I read the biographies of Don Bosco, of Mother Mazzarello, and of so many other FMA who have been true disciples of Mary so as to learn from them?
- ❖ Who is Mary for me: a theory, an affective compensation, a "resolution to problems", or a LIVING PRESENCE?
- ❖ Only Mary's presence, filled with the Holy Spirit, is the living temple of Jesus who made John the Baptist leap for joy and "spread" this spirit of love to Elizabeth... Thus it should be in my life with Mary: filled with the Holy Spirit, dancing with joy for having heard the Lord, for having allowed myself to be shaped and molded by His Spirit, and for having been an active help in the Kingdom of Her Son, as a happy FMA!



³ Piera Cavaglià, "La presenza di Maria tra normativa giuridica ed esperienza spirituale". ("Mary's Presence, Between Juridic Norm and Spiritual Experience")