

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS to the Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Turin June 21, 2015

His "Unofficial Message" to the Salesian Family on the occasion of the Bicentennial of Don Bosco's Birth

Dear Salesian Family, I have thought a lot about what to say to you and I wrote what I wanted to say but that is too formal. I am giving it to the Rector Major so that you may all read and know the text. This Rector Major whom I came to know in a confessional... but not that I confessed to him or he to me, but during a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Lujan. He had just arrived in Argentina in the month of October. A friend from the Salesian Province was with where he saw a pilgrimage of young people arriving, reaching a million within 48 hours. When a penitent left my confessional, they came near and said to me: "the new Provincial". And I said to him: "Ah, this is the one who comes to command us." Then began our good relations, even in bad moments... we lived some very good moments together but what always struck me was his sense of service and his humility. I remember one time when we had to take care of something in a parish... and he signed off on everything.

Then he came here, to your General Council, at peace, tranquil, to return to Spain afterwards [for he had finished his term as Provincial in Argentina]... and, instead, they made a trap for him... but together with the Holy Spirit.

But I would like to tell you about my experience with the Salesians. My family was very much attached to the Salesians. When my father arrived in Argentina he went to the Salesians in the Italian church, the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in the parish of San Carlo. He knew many of them and he soon became a big fan of a soccer team that had been founded by a Salesian! 500 meters away from the Basilica of San Carlo, that Salesian founded a soccer team that wore the colors of Mary: blue and pink. But with street kids, eh?! Immediately. To me, they are the best team in Argentina, so many champions... Then he met my mother, who lived a short distance away and they were married by a priest who was close to and followed both my father and me all my life. He was a Salesian missionary in Patagonia, born in Lodi, a good man and a great confessor of the Salesian family. I used to go to confession to him. He was the one who baptized me and he helped my vocation. He helped me when the time came for me to enter the seminary of the Society of Jesus.

I am so grateful to the Salesian family. After giving birth for the fifth time, my mother remained paralyzed for a year and she sent us older ones to Salesian schools. I did the last year of elementary school there ***and it was there I learned to love Our Lady. The Salesians taught me to value beauty and work. This is your charism. With love they formed the affective dimension of our lives and helped us to mature in our own affectivity.***

I remember the Salesian confessors, who were compassionate and great. There were always many of them in the basilica. Then my father died, and then this priest died, but I still used to go to Mary Help of Christians every May 24th. I used to bring flowers and pray to the Virgin Mary. It's something that I learned from you. But there is always one thing that makes me think: affectivity. I believe that ***Don Bosco was able to educate the young in affectivity, because he had a mother who had done the same for him.*** She was a good mother, kind and strong. With great love she educated his heart. You cannot understand Don Bosco without Mamma Margaret. It is not possible.

I wonder when it comes to educating the young now if the Salesians, the SDB and the FMA of today, and the whole Salesian Family, when it comes to speaking of educating a young girl, if they show her how Mamma Margaret did so - how she formed the heart of her son. This is what I wanted to emphasize.

And there's something else. At that time, in the late nineteenth century, this region of Italy was "mangiapreti" (priest-eating, literally!), anticlerical and Masonic, even demonic! Turin was one of the places with demonic activity, but how many saints have come from here! Count them yourselves! The Lord gave a mission to the families that were born here. Today many things have improved. There is the computer, and so many other things ... But the situation of youth is more or less the same. ***What did Don Bosco do? He worked with the young people who were there on the streets, with no job and no school to go to. He risked his ministry. That is why so many spoke ill of him.*** He risked the ministry there, "These are second-class youngsters" they told him. "You cannot do

anything with them ...". Today the situation is that here in Italy 40% of young people under the age of twenty-five are unemployed. They neither study nor work. You Salesians are facing the same challenge that Don Bosco faced, to care for these boys and girls. And what did Don Bosco do? He introduced sports, because sports develop one's social skills. They bring a healthy competitive spirit and teach the beauty of working together. And then education. Don Bosco didn't talk of great things, no, but with small schools where they learned a trade. In these Salesian schools, which were both classroom and workshop, the young people learned a trade. **But are the Salesians capable of teaching the skills needed to meet the urgent situations of today?** Really, I do not know, I am asking the question. I do not know, can they learn in six months to be an electrician or a plumber - because there is always a broken tap to be repaired. **Education, but education that responds to the crisis.** We should not think that these young people on the street today - I am thinking of my homeland - can go straight into high school. We must give them something that will help them to find work, even a small job ... I think these young people on the street today need emergency education. A short course leading to a practical trade and then we'll see. That 40% need something. It is up to Salesian creativity to take up this challenge.

And bring them to live their life with joy – to that Salesian joy, which is another thing I learned, and I will never forget. It is the joy that comes from all that the Lord has given us, which is beautiful. Give them motivation and education. Let us give young people on the street something to eat – in truth, one cannot praise God on an empty stomach. But we must also advance them, and how? With creativity. Education that is suited to the crisis. This is what I feel I have to tell you. What did Don Lorenzo Mazza do when he founded the soccer team in 19098? Sports. He gave a bit of mysticism to those street boys. They will be drug runners, they will become dependent, or many will kill themselves... but finding joy in something could help them go forward. This is what I want to say to you.

This is time of great crisis and a time contrary to the Church. But **Don Bosco was not ashamed to speak of his three great loves: Mary, the Eucharist and the Pope.** These were his three loves. **He was not ashamed of Our Lady. Why should he ever be ashamed of his mother ...** Nowadays, there are many... I remember something that hurt me very much. In the 80s, I went to Belgium to meet with some benefactors of the Catholic University in Cordoba. Afterwards, I was invited to supper at a wedding of two professors, both practicing Catholics, with four little children. While at table, they began to speak of theology, Christology, and the situation of the Church. At a certain point they said, "Today, the Blessed Mother doesn't go, thanks be to God that we have gotten past that phase." They were good people... but even today – not among you – but elsewhere you find people who may not be ashamed but who do not speak of Our Lady with love as Don Bosco did. Don Bosco' first love was Our Lady. He entrusted himself to God while he prayed to Our Lady, and he dared so much. His second love was for the Eucharist. The liturgy, when celebrated by the Salesian Family in a devout manner and with explanation, will help the young enter into the Eucharistic mystery. You also have Adoration frequently - this is a good thing which even the Pope does frequently - because Don Bosco loved the Church, Our Lady, and his mother.

And to you, consecrated women, the mystery of woman in the Church. Love for the Pope is not love only for a particular person, but love for Peter as head of the Church, as a representative of the bridegroom of the Church. But behind that love for the Pope there is love for the Church. I don't know how Don Bosco managed to hide or explain certain scandals, but I do know that he made people love the Church. **Think about these connections: the Church as mother; Mary, our mother; and Mamma Margherita, a mother. You form girls to become mothers; help them raise their children to be sons and daughters in love with the Virgin Mary and the Church. Sometimes people ask me: Don't we not need to make some major decisions regarding women in the Church? Sure. But do you think that appointing someone as head of a department is a major decision? Women in the Church have the same job, so to speak, that Our Lady had with the Apostles on the morning of Pentecost. It is impossible to conceive of the Apostles without Mary: that is how Jesus wanted it.** Do not forget the three great loves. Do not be ashamed to speak of Our Lady, to celebrate Holy Mass well, and do not be ashamed of Holy Mother Church. The poor Church is under attack every day ... And learn the role of women in the Church. The three great loves of Don Bosco always lead us down the same path. Then trust in God. As I said, Don Bosco always prayed to Mary Help of Christians and then went ahead. He did not spend too much time making calculations.

I thank God for my Salesian experience of which I spoke, of that school that one year and that was it. I did the rest of my studies in public school. And my family – so attached to the Salesians and to Mary Help of Christians. I used to ask the Salesians to “Give me the Blessing of Mary Help of Christians.” ***I thank God for this experience for they helped me to grow without fear and without obsessions, to move forward in joy, in prayer. Your charisma is of the utmost relevance today. Look at the streets, see the young people there, and take risky decisions. Do not be afraid. Do as he did.***

Thank you so much for what you do in the Church and for the Church. Thank you so much for living the missionary nature of your Family, sending missionaries, the many Salesians hidden in Africa ... I think of the early days in Patagonia, when the Sisters went there with the habit of that time - how did those women manage on horseback? - And they evangelized Patagonia. And I think of the Salesian martyrs of Patagonia ... not that I have an obsession for Patagonia... But Don Bosco dreamed of it! And he sent you there. Those first Salesians did so much good. Perhaps the Rector Major will remember when he came to us to ask about a place to hold a beatification when all the Bishops were gathered for the permanent Commission in Aparecida. A good proposal was made to hold it in Buenos Aires so that all the Past Pupils could be present – but I opposed it, if you recall... it was a field! The Salesians are very concrete in dealing with things... but something is missing. ***The Salesians are practical, they see the problem, think it over, and then take it in hand.*** Finally I said, “as Archbishop, I would not give the permission”... I will say one thing still about this missionary spirit: one of the regions of Patagonia has been abandoned by priests. There, in that place, there are no Salesians. For 15 years the evangelicals came. They were a religious people but who are very isolated. They wanted to hear the Word of God and used to go see this pastor. They were converted, more or less. A certain lady – the Salesians were not here but had made many missions there – received the new parish priest badly when he came back. She accused him of having abandoned them. Finally, he let a little time pass and then the priest asked forgiveness. As he was leaving, the lady called him back. She showed him a statue of Mary Help of Christians: ***“I and an evangelical now, but I will not let go of her.*** I had hid the statue lest the pastor see her.” ... ***This is your missionary spirit.*** Thank you very much for what you do in the whole Church.