

The Marian Atmosphere That Fosters Vocations

from Circular Letter 636 of April 24, 1980 of Mother Ersilia Canta

Our Lady is truly a vital operative presence at the origin of the Institute, and is always present and actively operative in all its history... Her maternal heart, capable of that unlimited love created in her by the Holy Spirit, can make us participants in her universal maternity. If we wish, therefore, to work effectively for the future of the Congregation, we must give to Mary the place which is her due in our charism and learned at her school.

The Rector Major, Don Egidio Viganò, reminds us that "devotion to Mary Help of Christians is an integrating factor in our Salesian life in the church because it forms part of its totality. It would be senseless, harmful, in fact, to try to separate our spirituality from devotion to Mary Help of Christians, just as it would be absurd to try to separate Don Bosco from the Madonna. Devotion to Mary Help of Christians is an inescapable element of our charism. Without a healthy vitality in the Marian dimension, our spirituality would feel the effects in vigor and fruitfulness." (Egidio Viganò, "Mary Renews the Salesian Family of Don Bosco," 28-29.)

These authoritative assertions lead us to the conclusion that, to be what it is, our Institute must be truly Marian. We often stop to consider the painful drop in vocations, and we ask ourselves: why were vocation so numerous yesterday and not today? Leaving aside the causes which do not depend on us, let us ask ourselves a counter question. Is there, today, in all of our communities that Marian atmosphere that obtained yesterday, and thank God still obtains in many places, the growth and blossoming of vocations? Are we still working along the Marian lines given us by Don Bosco?

Care for vocations was one of the most obvious expressions of our holy Founder's devotion to Mary. Don Bosco, as we have already said, lived out in practice the motto of John Paul "Totus tuus, Maria." He did nothing without Mary. In her he lived and breathed. The Salesians and the young boys of the Valdocco Oratory were enveloped in a Marian atmosphere which entirely pervaded it and them. They felt Our Lady to be a living person in their midst, and they turned to her as to a mother in their material and spiritual needs. Looking at her not only did they avoid sin, but they consecrated themselves entirely to her Most Pure Heart, giving her everything, body and soul, life and death. This consecration is the root from which many intrepid vocations developed.

For reflection and prayer:

- Which concrete choices express the Marian identity of my Community/educational Work?
- Am I attentive to welcoming and accompanying, with maternal solicitude, the seeds of vocation in the young whom I encounter?
- Spiritual exercise: In a dialogue with Mary, I will review my vocation story. What difficulties did I encounter in my relationship with her? What helped me overcome them? How may I help my Sisters, the young, and the laity to grow in ever greater confidence in Mary? I will take on the habit of entrusting to her, in an explicit way, the young, my Sisters, and all who are entrusted to my educational and pastoral care.

Mary Help of Christians, with your presence among us help us to live in our houses that atmosphere of Paradise proper to Valdocco and Mornese, which opened the heart of so many young people to the love of the Father, transforming them into enthusiastic apostles and into wise educators. Amen.