

THE MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

Fr. Ángel Fernández Artime

I LOVE YOU, SALESIANS!

“Many of us cannot imagine a life without Don Bosco, without Salesians, and we can attest that without him we wouldn’t have fallen in love with God in a ‘crazy’ way, full of laughter and great experiences.”

Dear friends and readers of the *Salesian Bulletin*,

The Church wants to listen to the dreams of young people and to respond to them with all its “maternal love” with the Synod gathering in Rome. We Salesians, in full concert with the Church, are preparing ourselves to do the very same thing with our General Chapter gathering, now in the organizational stage.

We want to listen to the heart of young people, of all young people: those who are nearest to us as well as those who are the most distant or from whom we are the most distant. We are asking them what they expect of us and how we might help them. We are also asking them how *they* can help us be more faithful to the Lord, like Don Bosco. Their participation in the assembly will be more than “symbolic” even if they cannot physically take part at all times in General Chapter 28. They will be present to us through their words – words that are youthful, strong, courageous, even “daring” – and words that we will receive and welcome with a ready heart.

The theme of the chapter is “What kind of Salesians for today’s youth?” This is the most beautiful and most coherent question that we can ask. Indeed, philosopher Umberto Galimberti explains, “The young are seeking teachers who are motivated and charismatic because people learn when they are fascinated.” And they say to the adults: ‘We do not hate you; indeed, we are grateful if you can help us realize what we wish to become because we, too, have a dream that we don’t want to see extinguished like falling stars that die.’”

“Dear Don Ángel”

As an example of this, I wish to share with all of you two messages that I received recently. The first is a personal message received on Facebook. The second is a testimony of a young man whom I met during one of my most recent visits.

I am relating both messages here just as they were written by the young people. The first one, received two weeks ago, is from a young woman, a youth animator:

“Dear Don Ángel,

“I just saw your message about General Chapter 28 and I decided to write you just to tell you this: the chapter’s theme seems marvelous to me. I have already spent a little bit of time reflecting on who a Salesian is, and how our reality and our young people need them. These thoughts were motivated by my own personal life experience with the Salesians who accompanied me as I grew up. It seems to me that the chapter will directly involve us youths in formation/accompaniment and those who are already youth animators – from the moment in which we become very open to the gestures made to us.

“In all sincerity, sometimes I felt a little sad because some Salesians, apparently, seem to give more value to other things like bills, household goods, saving money, buildings, administration, etc.

“Still, the invitation to give first place to the things of the heart fills me with joy. The challenge of leaving aside the realm of the ‘easy life’ fills me with joy because we need Salesians who live by their convictions, dreams, and zeal and so can be living witnesses to the love of Christ and an example to us of all that Don Bosco professed.

“In this way, I believe we can fall in love yet again with this lifestyle and thus our dear Salesian Family can grow greatly, obviously with each one doing his fair share.

“I hold you in my heart. With great affection,”...

Then, during my last visit to Mexico, a young man who is part of the Salesian Youth Movement handed me this message after having read it aloud publicly.

“Ciao, Don Ángel. Before anything else, I want to greet you and thank you for all that you do. It is a true joy to be able to share a little of the experience of my community as a member of the Salesian Youth Movement.

“My name is A.K. I am 23 years old. I am from the border town of Nuevo Laredo, in Tamaulipas. Writing these words has truly been a challenge since I knew that I was writing them to be read before Don Bosco’s successor – our beloved Don Bosco and the person who has inspired thousands of young people to conversion because of the love of God, and to live unforgettable experiences and to come to know themselves more intimately.

“I now tell you that I have known the Salesians for ten years and I consider it a great blessing to have seen the birth of an oratory in a place that was once a genuine landfill. It is a joy to see how little by little a community formed that wanted to work, to make a difference, and to cultivate a place where we young people could live together in peace and where we can love Christ freely, dedicating both our time and our labors.

“During this time it was difficult to keep the oratory running on account of the rough neighborhood surrounding us – one filled with drugs, alcohol, trafficking, illegal migration, and a place where the boys and girls are the most at-risk. The struggle we face every day is a very difficult one – a struggle of all against all.

“The support of the Salesian community and the volunteers who accompany us and seek to free us young people from these situations must be acknowledged. But there are also young people who are in love with Jesus and with Don Bosco – young people who have found a second

home, new friends, and a place where they can be themselves and have fun in a way that is wholesome and good for them.

“Therefore, we young people of Nuevo Laredo wish to tell Don Bosco that we are courageous just like him by having to live in such situations without losing hope or surrendering – always fighting for our dreams even if we don’t know how far we’ll be able to go. Many of us continue to ask ourselves what we did to be chosen to know and to live in an oratory, and to learn there how to share Don Bosco’s example.

“We get fired up knowing how he dedicated his time and his life to those most in need, giving them a place to live, and sending people to look after us and transmit to us the same strength to believe in Jesus and to live according to His example.

“Many of us cannot imagine a life without Don Bosco, without Salesians, and we can attest that without him we wouldn’t have fallen in love with God in a ‘crazy’ way, full of laughter and great experiences. Don Bosco, you guided the lost who, not knowing where their lives were going, found their answer here within this home, this school, this church, and this playground.

“Therefore, dear Don Bosco, I want to say ‘thank you’ because you continue to encourage and to motivate young people always. I also wish to thank you because you keep alive my ‘Great Salesian Family’ where I have spent the best moments of my life and where I have known stupendous persons from whom I am still learning, above all, the joy of loving God in a way that I never would have thought. Here I know the joy of being myself and of doing what I enjoy, without fear or feeling embarrassed in front of others, living simply to the greatest degree the Salesian charism and, therefore, being able to say that Christ, in Don Bosco’s style, is my choice.”

And so, there you have it: the two testimonies that tell us how important it is to live life in a Salesian environment where the young are and how that Salesian environment has brought them to meet Jesus. At the same time, they ask us to be close to them, to walk beside them, especially when they must make important – the most profound – decisions that truly affect their lives and their hearts.

We are the sons and daughters of a dreamer, and we cannot allow the dreams of the young to be extinguished like falling stars that die.