

THE APOSTOLIC COMMITMENT OF THE SALESIAN COOPERATOR

«You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. Let your light shine before men so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in Heaven» (Mt. 5:13-16)

The entire second chapter is illuminated by these words: “The lifestyle of a Salesian Cooperator [is] marked by the spirit of the Beatitudes.” The Beatitudes speak to us of a different world, of a different kind of community, of a logic which is in radical opposition to that of the world – an alternative to the ones that exists – and of a Church which makes Herself the servant of mankind. It comes spontaneously to ask ourselves: What gestures can verify and render the proclamation of the Beatitudes comprehensible today?

Jesus’ Beatitudes are neither a simple wish nor a codification of ethical conditions which ensure the fulfillment of a promise. They are the efficacious proclamation of the Messianic Promise: It is possible to be “blessed” in who and what one is. This – even if the situation seems desperate – is because it is God who makes blessed those who entrust themselves to Him. The Beatitudes are a huge, efficacious promise of life and of felicity which spur us on to rethink the ways in which we define life and happiness in our daily life. The different intonations given the Beatitudes and in which they find fulfillment in the Bible texts (the poor, the pure of heart, those who hunger and thirst for justice and peace, and those who suffer and cry...) indicate, through a truth offered, welcomed, and taken to oneself what life and felicity are, precisely as they assure us of its fullness. If proclaiming the Beatitudes means rewriting them in an ever-new and ever-faithful story – one in which the events of the Gospel Beatitudes lay the groundwork and our renewed passion for evangelization and the challenges that the young throw at us are interwoven in these complex times of crises and of profound change – then it is indispensable that we identify these challenges with precision and have the willingness to respond. How we perceive them conditions, in fact, every proposal that seeks to face reality head on. Among the many challenges, we Salesian Cooperators highlight those that concern education.

We “place our bets” on education

We know that we are living in dramatic and complex situations. And we realize that man is at the center of a story of political, economic, cultural, and, sometimes, even religious relationships which set conditions on and often suffocate him. A long ecclesial tradition recommends to us the courage to give privilege of place to education as the way to a global transformation which is both incisive and feasible. Education is a privileged way to serve social transformation because through it one can achieve a concrete realization of the Beatitudes. Education is, in fact, a presence and a relationship for restoring to each man the joy of living and of a future which previously had often defrauded him by progressively setting into motion within him a conscious reflection and self-criticism – of his own story, of others, and of the world. To restore life and hope in this way seems but a little thing in the midst of all the bullying and abuse of power, the being taken advantage of, discrimination and prejudice, and of acts of violence; but it is, in truth, a very great thing which we are willing to bet on, both in the political realm and in its regenerative capacity. Here is found the core of our apostolic commitment and service to the young.

Not only do we affirm the close relationship that must exist between education and evangelization, we also highlight something more: the choice of education as also the privileged place for evangelization.

This perspective reminds us that God is indispensable in every person's life, precisely when man is the lord of his life. He is not a ruthless competitor in his hunger for life and liberty. He is, instead, the "decisive resource" to be called upon in his depths and in the truth of the very dignity of man.

Love for life as the reference point

The preceding points are expressed and become concrete within a global attitude – love for life. This attitude is indispensable for anyone who wants to proclaim the Gospel Beatitudes. In our love for life we confess God's saving power. And in the Name of Jesus, in fact, we affirm that the man of every day is already the new man. The present is marked in a germinal way by its future.

Certainly, man is poor and a sinner. But he is not only that. He is already the new man – poor, faltering, and a sinner – who becomes new by bringing the gift of his life to its gradual fulfillment. Life is like a seed: it carries the entire plant within it – in that miniscule fragment of life in which it is expressed. By means of an intrinsic force and in the presence of favorable conditions, it blossoms little by little into something continuously new. The leaves, the trunk, and the branches are not added on from the outside. They are not pieces to be assembled. They are already present in that incipient stage, *in potentiā*: that seed is already the plant, even if it develops into it day by day.

This is life. An act of faith in God's power instantly becomes a huge, limitless trust in man. The Salesian Cooperator stays close to the young to witness to this faith and this trust: he or she is not the one who makes the seed inside them sprout into a large tree. He or she but supports the growth process – unleashing it, encouraging it, urging it on, and restoring to each one the ability to get back his own life and sense of hope.

«You are the salt of the earth... you are the light of the world»

These words serve as an excellent introduction to the illumined and wise understanding of the material in the second chapter, which is dedicated precisely to the apostolic commitment of the Salesian Cooperator in the concrete fabric of his family and his social, professional, cultural, political, ecclesial, and Salesian life. In such a context of being fully immersed in the secular world, he must carry out a mission which fosters quality human and Christian life for all those with whom he lives and works and, especially, for the privileged "receivers" of his apostolic commitment: the young and common folk.