

## ***Lesson 10 – Apostolic Commitment (Session 1)***

### **Objectives**

1. To focus on the importance of daily spiritual growth in one's relationship with God.
2. To understand that the apostolate of the Cooperators depends on their own conformity with the Church's aim as well as on their own Christian witness.
3. To understand that a vast field of action is open to the Salesian Cooperators' apostolate.
4. To see how the Salesian Cooperator vocation strengthens this commitment.

*Reference: The Salesian Cooperator, Joseph Aubry, SDB, pp. 83, 85, 86, 87, 89, 90*

“Your life must be exemplary in every sense of the word.... The “Action Saint” has invited you to practice the *same rule of the spiritual life he gave to his Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*. You do not live the religious community life; you live with your families and have your own social milieus. In these circumstances you have chosen to apply yourself seriously to that most exalted of all tasks, Christian perfection. This imports a special internal and external attitude toward God: it is for this that Don Bosco's rule of life is meant to train you.” (*Pius XII to the Cooperators, September 12, 1952*)

Now we must delve deeper and contemplate *Christ himself as Don Bosco saw him and imitated him*. In his whole life Don Bosco made it plain that his only desire was to reproduce Christ and emphasize certain traits in his personality, and to make his whole mission nothing other than the spreading of Christ's saving action.

Don Bosco asks of his sons and disciples that they look to Christ and try *to resemble him in those things in his life that most correspond with their God-given mission and the spirit that animates it*. In the first edition of the SDB Constitutions (about 1858), article 1, Don Bosco wrote, “The aim of this Congregation is an assembly of men trying to perfect themselves by imitating the virtues of our divine Savior, especially in charity toward the young who are poor.”

To follow Christ in a Salesian way we need to:

**1. Imitate Christ in untiring work for the Kingdom of God.** Every Salesian should be greatly concerned about his responsibility as an apostle. [The Salesian Cooperator] must accept the responsibility of being one of the workers [for the harvest]. His whole being should cry out, “Father, hallowed be thy name; thy Kingdom come.”

**2. Imitate Christ in adopting the way of the Good Shepherd.** – At nine years of age John Bosco dreamed of Christ the Good Shepherd and received from him the secret of success in education: “Not with blows but with gentleness and charity.” The Good Shepherd knows his sheep, calls each by name, makes himself loved by them, leads them to good pastures, hastens to seek out those who have wandered away, defends them, and gives his life for his sheep. And so with every Salesian.

**3. Imitate Christ in ceaseless effort for unity.** – In Don Bosco there was an overriding desire for unity, for the family, for the brethren in community, for “one heart and one mind.”

*Reference: PVA Statutes, Chapter II, Article 8*

### **Apostolic Commitment**

1. Salesian Cooperators carry out their apostolate, first of all, through their daily tasks. They follow Jesus Christ, the perfect Man, sent by the Father to serve the people of the world. This is why they are committed to putting into practice the Gospel ideal of love for God and for one's neighbor in the ordinary circumstances of life.

2. Animated by the Salesian spirit, they give special attention to young people, especially to those who are poorest or victims of any kind of marginalization, exploitation, or violence; to those setting out in the world of work; and to those who show signs of a specific vocation.

3. They foster and defend the value of family – the foundational nucleus of society and of the Church – and are committed to construct it as “a domestic Church.” Married Salesian Cooperators live their mission through their marriage as “cooperators with the love of God the Creator” and as “the primary and principal educators of their children,” according to the pedagogy of goodness proper to the Preventive System.

4. They are attentive to the social justice doctrines of the Church and to social communications so as to foster educational journeys to grow in these areas.

5. They support the Church’s missionary activity and commit themselves to educate to a global perspective as an opening to dialogue among cultures.

*Reference: Mark 9:50; Matt 5:13-16 (JB)*

### **Salt and Light**

“Salt is a good thing, but if salt has become insipid, how can you season it again? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.”

“You are the salt of the earth. But salt becomes tasteless, what can make it salty again? It is good for nothing, and can only be thrown out to be trampled underfoot by men.

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lamp-stand where it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine in the sight of men, so that, seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in heaven.”

*Reference: Vatican II, Apostolicam Actuositatem, November 18, 1965*

### **Group Apostolate**

18. The faithful are called upon to engage in the apostolate as individuals in the varying circumstances of their life. They should remember, nevertheless, that man naturally social and that it has pleased God to unite those who believe in Christ in the People of God (cf. 1 Pet 2:5-10) and into one body (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12). Hence the group apostolate of Christian believers happily corresponds to a human and Christian need and at the same time signifies the communion and unity of the Church in Christ, who said, “Where two or three are gathered together for my sake, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt 18:20).

For this reason the faithful should exercise their apostolate by way of united effort. Let them be apostles both in their family communities and in their parishes and dioceses, which themselves express the community nature of the apostolate, as well as in voluntary groups which they decide to join.

### **Various Types of Group Apostolate**

19. There is a great variety of associations in the apostolate. Some set before themselves the broad apostolic purpose of the Church; others aim to evangelize and sanctify in a special way. Some propose to infuse Christian spirit into the temporal order. Others bear witness to Christ in a particular way through works of mercy and charity.

Among these associations those which promote and encourage a closer harmony between the everyday life of the members and their faith must be given primary consideration. Associations are not ends unto themselves; rather they should serve to fulfill the Church’s mission to the world. Their apostolic dynamism depends on their conformity

with the goals of the Church as well as on the Christian witness and evangelical spirit of the individual member and of the association as a whole.

*Reference: PVA Statutes, Chapter II, Article 12*

### **Structures and Ways in Which They Work**

1. Salesian Cooperators participate in the mission of the Association in the Church and reinforce it with their own commitments and by involving other persons.
2. Normally, the activities of Salesian Cooperators take place, in a spirit of collaboration and cooperation, in structures where secular circumstances offer them greater possibilities of meaningful involvement: civic, cultural, socio-economic, political, ecclesial, and Salesian.
3. Salesian Cooperators can carry out their apostolic commitment in works run autonomously by the Association and in initiatives which respond to the most pressing needs of their locality.

*Reference: PVA Regulations, Chapter I, Article 5*

### **Works Run Directly by the Association or by Members of the Association**

1. Salesian Cooperators can live out their apostolic commitment in works run either directly by the Association or by its members. Such works must express the Salesian spirit and charism, in both their characteristics and goals, according to what is defined in the respective statutes.
2. The responsibility for running the work will rest directly with the local center if it is a work promoted by the Association, or with those members who have undertaken its administration, without involving in such a case any responsibility on the part of the higher levels of the same Association.

The Association can take steps necessary to be recognized as a civic nonprofit organization in those places in which they consider it opportune.

### **Suggested Reading**

*In the Footsteps of Don Bosco; pages 131-132.*

## **Lesson 10: Apostolic Commitment (Session 1) – Questions for Reflection**

1. The apostolate is the heart of the Salesian Cooperator vocation. How would you enflame yourself with an apostolic desire?
2. In every apostolate there needs to be harmony. What ways do you see that you can contribute to the harmony of an apostolate?
3. Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in the midst of them.” Give some examples of communion and unity in group apostolates.
4. What type of apostolates among the young do you see in your local area?

### **Prayer Experience**

Pray a novena to Don Bosco asking him to help you in your apostolate as a Salesian Cooperator.

## **The Blessing of Mary Help of Christians**

“Never shall I forget,” wrote Father Paul Albera, Don Bosco’s second successor as Rector Major, “the impression I experienced whenever I saw our good Father give the blessing of Mary Help of Christians to the sick. While he recited the Hail Mary and the words of the blessing, it would seem that his face became transfigured; his eyes filled with tears, and his voice trembled on his lips. It seemed to me that ‘power went out from him.’ I marveled, not so much at the miraculous effects which followed, but rather, at the consolation to the afflicted and the healing of the sick.”

The principal place where these wonders were worked by Don Bosco’s blessing in the name of Mary Help of Christians was Valdocco, especially during the month of Mary and on the occasion of the novena and feast of our Lady. Also Rome, Paris, Barcelona, and other cities and towns of Italy, France, and Spain witnessed the extraordinary effects of the blessing of Mary Help of Christians given by Don Bosco.

When Pope Leo XIII’s own nephew, Count Pecci, and his family were presented to him for his blessing, the Pope told them to go instead to Don Bosco and ask for his blessing. In 1867, a distinguished and wealthy gentleman from Marseilles and his wife brought their only child, who was deaf and dumb, to Pius IX in the hope that the Pope’s blessing would cure the child. The Pope advised them to take the invalid to Don Bosco in Turin. So it happened that, after Don Bosco’s blessing, the child walked, heard, and spoke clearly.

When about to give the blessing, Don Bosco tried to awaken the fullest confidence in the power and goodness of the Help of Christians. He would say to boys, adults, and even to church dignitaries such things as: “Do you have faith in the Help of Christians?” “Do you love Mary Help of Christians?” “Have confidence and then leave all to the Madonna.” “Have faith, a lively faith in the Help of Christians, and she will cure you.” “Faith can do all things.” “Provided it is not contrary to God’s greater glory, we shall most certainly obtain this grace.” “Don’t imagine you get the blessing from me, but from God, through the powerful aid of Mary Help of Christians.” “I am but a poor instrument in the hands of God.”

In 1881, Father Dalmazzo, after the unexpected cure of a cripple, remarked to Don Bosco: “Well, he is completely cured after your blessing!”

“It was the blessing of Mary Help of Christians that cured him,” corrected Don Bosco.

“But I have given the blessing of Mary Help of Christians many times with the same formula, and I have never been able to do anything like this.”

Don Bosco replied, “It’s because you don’t have faith.”

The Rector Major Father Philip Rinaldi in his first letter to all the Salesians, wrote: “Let it be the special aim of every good son of Don Bosco to have a most tender and filial devotion to Mary Help of Christians.” In his last letter to all the Salesians, he wrote: “How Mary loves us! How good the Madonna is to us! It is easy to see that the Madonna is always our Mother! It is she who protects our works! It is through her that our Congregation exists and prospers!”