

## ***Lesson 11 – Apostolic Commitment (Session 2)***

### **Objectives**

1. To understand how the Salesian lifestyle is marked by the spirit of the Beatitudes.
2. To understand what sort of witness the Cooperator should give.
3. To relate more closely with Christ in his preference for his “little ones” and his poor.
4. To realize the call of the Salesian Cooperator to evangelize the world around him.

*Reference: The Salesian Cooperator, Joseph Aubry, SDB, pp. 90-92*

### **The Following of Christ in a Salesian Way According to His Beatitudes**

A second way opens up for the Salesian who is in earnest about his vocation. Being an apostle of Christ does not mean he is dispensed from being a disciple of Christ: *quite the contrary*. The Salesian Cooperator desires to bring the Gospel to others: he himself must be the first to know and live this same Gospel. In fact *he will carry the Gospel to others far more effectively by the way he lives than by the way he speaks*.

### **The Beatitudes**

It is the Salesian’s duty to be among those on the mountainside listening to Jesus preaching his Beatitudes. Both the spirit and the mission of our family are in deep accord with them and impel us to practice *the evangelical virtues* they present:

- *Poverty in spirit and heart*: to help us be detached from ourselves and our smugness and attached to the young and poor.
- *Meekness* and simplicity in our speech, in our way of treating others, in the patience our Salesian method requires of us.
- *Ill treatment* serenely accepted in the face of difficulties; and sympathy for others who are afflicted in any way, especially the young.
- *Hunger and thirst for justice*, i.e., for God’s glory and for the just happiness of our neighbor, especially those who are deprived of justice and happiness.
- *Mercy*: With our hearts ever open to material and moral misery, and ready to pour thereon the healing oil of our understanding and brotherly help.
- *Purity* in thought, word, and deed, avoiding all that could scandalize; but especially bringing to our homes a way of life that is above reproach, welcoming, and serene.
- *Peace that we energetically strive* for in a world agitated by violence and class hatred.
- Determination to *stand four-square by those who are persecuted* in their efforts to achieve the Kingdom of God, of justice, of brotherhood, that kingdom where God’s children are not exploited.

All these virtues make us avoid what is contrary to the Gospel or in any way anti-Salesian: smugness, pride, harshness, and intrigue. They encourage us to be “meek and lowly in heart” like Jesus (Matt 11:29) and “merciful even as our Father is merciful” (cf. Luke 6:36), and to imitate Christ according to the inspiration given us by our patron St. Francis de Sales, who was so steeped in the Gospels.

*Reference: Fr. Pascual Chavez Villanueva, Rector Major, Mass for the Young, Ramsey, N.J., September 7, 2007*

We are also the *salt of the earth* when we live the spirit of the Beatitudes, when we make the Sermon on the Mount part of us and we become an alternative society. We choose peace, pardon, mercy, charity, and sacrifice—beginning with the smallest circle, our own family or community, and then broadening out to the wider social dimension. Traveling throughout the Salesian world, I find so many youngsters from our different presences doing volunteer work. They are young people creating an alternative world, a better world for all of us.

Jesus wants his disciples to make the Sermon on the Mount a program of life: meekness, poverty, freely giving, mercy, pardon, abandonment to God, trust, doing to others what we would have done to ourselves.

*Reference: PAL Statutes, Chapter II, Article 7*

### **The Witness of the Beatitudes**

The lifestyle of a Salesian Cooperator, marked by the spirit of the Beatitudes, commits him or her to the evangelization of culture and of social life. For this reason the Cooperator, being rooted in Christ and aware that all baptized people are called to the perfection of love, lives and gives witness to:

- a life lived according to the Spirit, as the source of joy, peace, and forgiveness;
- freedom, in obedience to God's plan, appreciating the value and autonomy proper to secular realities, committing themselves to direct these, above all, to the service of persons;
- Gospel poverty, administering the goods entrusted to them using the criteria of temperance and of sharing, in view of the common good;
- a sexuality according to a Gospel vision of chastity, marked by delicacy and a joyful married or celibate life, lived with integrity and based on love;
- that mercy which opens one's heart to all material and moral miseries and urges one to work with pastoral charity;
- justice to build a more fraternal world that recognizes and promotes the rights of all, especially of the weakest;
- a firm will to be a builder of peace in a world agitated by violence and class hatred.

This way of love for God and for others is a sure path towards sanctity.

*Reference: Matthew 5: 1-12 (JB)*

Seeing the crowds he went up the hill. There he sat down and was joined by his disciples. Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them:

“How happy are the poor in spirit;  
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Happy the gentle;  
they shall have the earth for their heritage.  
Happy those who mourn;  
they shall be comforted.  
Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right;  
they shall be satisfied.  
Happy the merciful;  
they shall have mercy shown them.  
Happy the pure in heart;  
they shall see God.  
Happy are the peacemakers;  
they shall be called sons of God.  
Happy those who are persecuted in the cause of right;  
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Happy are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven; this is how they persecuted the prophets before you.”

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

6. The mission of the Church pertains to the salvation of men, which is to be achieved by belief in Christ and by His grace. The apostolate of the Church and of all its members is primarily designed to manifest Christ’s message by words and deeds and to communicate His grace to the world. This is done mainly through the ministry of the Word and the sacraments, entrusted in a special way to the clergy, wherein the laity also have their very important roles to fulfill if they are to be “fellow workers for the truth” (3 John 8). It is especially on this level that the apostolate of the laity and the pastoral ministry are mutually complementary.

There are innumerable opportunities open to the laity for the exercise of their apostolate of evangelization and sanctification. The very testimony of their Christian life and good works done in a supernatural spirit have the power to draw men to belief and to God; for the Lord says, “Even so let your light shine before men in order that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

However, an apostolate of this kind does not consist only in the witness of one’s way of life; a true apostle looks for opportunities to announce Christ by words addressed either to non-believers with a view to leading them to faith, or to the faithful with a view to instructing, strengthening, and encouraging them to a more fervent life. “For the charity of Christ impels us” (2 Cor. 5:14). The words of the Apostle should echo in all hearts, “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel” (1 Cor. 9:16).

### **Suggested Reading**

*In the Footsteps of Don Bosco; pages 132-134.*



### **Mary in the Life of Don Bosco**

Like every saint and every apostle, Don Bosco was given to the Church and to mankind by God and by our Lady. In fact, in the life of St. John Bosco one finds the marvelous characteristic not found in the lives of many saints, devoted as they were to Mary. That characteristic is the special guidance exercised by the Mother of God in directing Don Bosco to fulfill the difficult task given to him for the salvation of souls, particularly the souls of the young.

“The Madonna does whatever she wants,” said Don Bosco to the members of his council. “For that matter, things have been taking this extraordinary course ever since I was nine or ten years old.” He was alluding to the first of many dreams in which he received special light from Heaven and plentiful help in spiritual matters for himself and his works.

“Mary was always my guide,” Don Bosco always repeated.

Sure of this, Father Michael Rua once told Father Joseph Vespignani, a newcomer to the Oratory, “Don’t you know that Don Bosco works hand in glove with the Madonna?”

Mother Mary Mazzarello stated on a certain occasion, “If Don Bosco says so, it is the Madonna who has spoken to him.”

For that matter, it was Don Bosco himself who confided to Bishop James Costamagna, “Of all the congregations and religious orders, ours is perhaps the one that has been most favored with the word of God.”

Father Julius Barberis once spoke to Don Bosco about his dreams, mentioning those which had reference to the progress of the Congregation and to the spreading over it of the Madonna’s mantle. Don Bosco referred to several dreams of that nature. Then he suddenly became grave and almost troubled, saying: “When I think of my responsibility, of the position I hold, it makes me tremble all over.... What an account I shall have to render to God for all the graces He confers on us for the good or our Congregation!”

In 1885, after the official communication of the appointment of Father Rua as vicar general of the Salesian Congregation, Don Bosco spoke. He said that the Salesians owe everything to Mary, and that all our greatest events began and were fulfilled on the feast of the Immaculate Conception. He described the state of the Oratory forty-four years before, comparing it with that of the present day. He reminded the Salesians that all the blessings bestowed on us from Heaven came by means of our Lady and were the fruit of that first Hail Mary recited with fervor and sincerity with the boy Bartholomew Garelli in the church of St. Francis of Assisi on December 8, 1841. Don Bosco finished his talk by saying that our Congregation was destined for great things and was to spread throughout the world, if the Salesians were faithful to the Rule given them by Mary Most Holy.

On December 8, 1887, the last feast of the Immaculate Conception which Don Bosco celebrated on earth, he called his secretary Father Charles Viglietti and told him, “Take pen and paper and write what I dictate.”

This is what he dictated: “The exact words the Immaculate Virgin said to me last night when she appeared to me: ‘It is pleasing to God and to the Blessed Virgin Mary that the sons of St. Francis de Sales go to open a house in Liege in honor of the Blessed Sacrament. Here began the glories of Jesus publicly, and here they must spread these glories to all their families, and especially among the many young people who, in the various parts of the world, are and will be entrusted to their care.’ The day of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, 1887.”

Here Don Bosco stopped. He cried and sobbed as he dictated. Emotion moved him even afterward. Bishop John Cagliero entered, and Don Bosco told Father Viglietti to read him the heavenly message. At the end of their conversation, Don Bosco uttered the well-known words: “Up to now we have walked on sure ground. We cannot make a mistake; it is Mary who guides us.”

Even on his deathbed, Don Bosco insisted: “The help of God and of Mary will not fail you.... I recommend devotion to Mary Help of Christians and frequent Holy Communion.... If only you knew how many souls Mary Help of Christians wishes to save through the Salesians!”

### **Spread Devotion to Mary Help of Christians**

Among Don Bosco’s recommendations to the missionaries is: “Constantly promote devotion to Mary Help of Christians and to the Blessed Sacrament.” Whenever there was a danger or a special need in the Church, Don Bosco recommended to his Salesians and boys to pray to Mary Help of Christians. For example, when the bishops of Piedmont were urging that public prayers be offered, that God might enlighten the Pope regarding the dogmatic definition of the Immaculate Conception, prayers were immediately begun in the Oratory, for Don Bosco himself had a most ardent desire to see Mary honored with this new crown.

In the Swiss canton of Ticino, Catholicism experienced anxious moments during the elections in 1877 and 1886. When Don Bosco heard about it, he ordered special prayers to Mary Help of Christians.

When carnival time came, Don Bosco told the boys: “Whatever you do during this time, let it all be directed to the honor and glory of Mary. What you do for her, offer it up also in suffrage for the souls in Purgatory.” On some special feast he would tell the boys: “Tomorrow you must offer a splendid present to our Lady. Give her a soul from Purgatory. Go to Holy Communion and gain a plenary indulgence, and ask Mary to have released from Purgatory the soul most pleasing to her.” Whenever the boys went home for vacation, Don Bosco would recommend devotion to Mary and complete trust in her for their spiritual and temporal needs.

During novenas, tridiums, and feast days and on the 24th of each month, Don Bosco always recommended that the Salesians and boys offer some special prayers to Mary, and often under the title of Help of Christians. On more than one occasion, by various expressions, Don Bosco would say, “Make Mary known, and you will see what miracles are.”

Whoever reads the biography of Don Bosco cannot help but be impressed by the influence our Lady had on his life and work. His devotion to her, the seed of which was sown by his own mother, grew apace with his age and experience. Dreams and visions and voices were always the way our Lady directed Don Bosco.

On May 16, 1887, two days after the church of the Sacred Heart in Rome was consecrated, Don Bosco offered Mass. During it he broke down in tears several times with great emotion as it vividly came home to him how our Lady had directed his life. Don Bosco declared: “We owe all our success to Mary.... If the Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians correspond faithfully to their vocations, you will be able to see for yourselves the wonders that the Mother of God will perform by their means.”

As Father Peter Ricaldone, Don Bosco’s fourth successor as Rector Major, wrote, “We Salesians must seek the secret of all our success in constant and filial devotion to her whom our holy founder proclaimed to be ‘The Foundress and support of our work.’”