

Lesson 15 – Cooperator in the Church

Objectives

1. To understand the many gifts God provides the Church.
2. To see how many different gifts contribute to the building up of the Salesian Family.
3. To see the place of the Salesian Cooperator within the Church as expressed in the parish and diocese.
4. To understand how the Salesian Cooperators participate in the Salesian mission with their involvement in the Church.

Reference: The Salesian Cooperator, Joseph Aubry, SDB, p. 121, 123-124, 125, 127

“The Cooperators’ main aim, under the general supervision of the Salesians, is to help with their good works the Church, the bishops, and the parish priests” (Don Bosco, 1884, MB XVII, 25)

“The Salesian Cooperators form a very *efficient auxiliary of Catholic Action*. You are deeply imbued with the Salesian spirit. You understand well what close ties you have with the many works which are supported by the Catholic laity in their close collaboration with the hierarchy ... and what reliance we are able to place on your cooperation” (Pius XII to the Cooperators, September 12, 1952).

“We Salesian Cooperators (we would prefer to say ‘Salesians who are Cooperators’) want this message to reaffirm our renewed conviction that today’s social needs require our dedicated work in the Church. Not only our Baptism calls for this, but also our membership of a Union founded by Don Bosco for the very purpose of serving the local Church and the Pope.” (Message of the Cooperators to the GC20, July 2, 1971).

The Salesian Family was born charismatically of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul teaches very clearly that charisms or special spiritual talents are always the gift of the Holy Spirit alone to individuals or to groups “*for the common good*,” to increase the vitality of the whole body, the Church (1 Cor 12). This is exactly how Don Bosco, “man of the Church” par excellence, always understood it.

This awareness or involvement in the Church is one of the characteristic traits of the Salesian spirit. We take the word “Church” in its full meaning, including the People of God (of whom we are members and whom we wish to serve) and the hierarchy (to whom we offer our respectful obedience and generous collaboration). . . . The new SDB Constitutions [of 1972] say, “We have to see the Church as the unifying and animating center of all the forces which work for salvation. For the Pope we have a special reverence and loyalty, toward bishops charity and obedience, and for all other religious families deep esteem. We desire to collaborate at all times so that the Body of Christ may grow. ‘All labor becomes negligible where the Church and the Papacy are concerned’ (Don Bosco).” (SDB Const., 44) [Ed. note: cf. Const. of 2015, art. 13.]

This is exactly how Don Bosco conceived and founded his Cooperators. Perhaps the fact that he was unable to make them canonically one with the Congregation allowed him greater scope and freedom in planning their direct service to the local Church.

It took the clarion call of *Pius XII* to open up the “vast horizons” again. “Dear children in Christ, you are well aware that your Pious Union, engrafted as part of the prolific parent stock of St. John Bosco’s religious family, helping in its many activities and sharing its spiritual riches, does not have, however, as its immediate aim the aid of the Congregation whose name it bears; but rather, as your holy Founder declared, “*to help, under the general supervision of the Salesians, the Church, the bishops, and the parish priests.*” You are deeply imbued with the Salesian spirit.

It is obvious, then, *that whatever work the Cooperators are involved in* (whatever the field of work of the Salesian Congregation or outside that area), they are always in the service of the Church.

Reference: PVA Regulations, Chapter 1, Article 1

The Salesian Cooperators in the Church

1. The Salesian Cooperators integrate themselves in both the parish and the diocese with availability and in an attitude of service in the Salesian style. Called to a ministry by the Church, they carry it out as a means of support and development of the ecclesial pastoral.

They live their baptismal vocation by taking on Don Bosco's Preventive System as the specific modality in which to express God's love, taking particular care of the young and of families.

2. The Salesian Cooperators promote heartfelt acceptance of and adherence to the Magisterium of the Church. Their relationships with their parish priests, with other priests, with religious, and with other laity are marked by esteem, solidarity, and active participation in pastoral plans, especially in those which focus on the young, families, and vocations.

Reference: 1 Corinthians 12: 4-11 (RSV)

Gifts from the Holy Spirit

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

Reference: PVA Statutes, Chapter 1, Article 4

The Association in the Church

1. The Association of Salesian Cooperators is approved by the Apostolic See as a public association of the faithful and shares in the spiritual patrimony of the Society of St. Francis de Sales.

The members actively collaborate in its mission, in the name of the Church, under the authority of the Rector Major as Don Bosco's successor, in a spirit of fidelity to its pastors and in collaboration with other ecclesial forces.

2. Salesian Cooperators manifest a filial devotion to the Supreme Pontiff.
3. The Association of Salesian Cooperators is recognized as a public ecclesiastical judicial person. It has its headquarters in Rome.

Suggested Reading

In the Footsteps of Don Bosco, pages 139-140.

Lesson 15: Cooperator in the Church – Questions for Reflection

1. How do I respond to the teaching office of the Church?
2. Am I actively involved in the mission of my parish or diocese?
3. What different types of gifts or charisms do you see that have been given to the Salesian Family?
4. In being of service to a parish or diocese, what seems to you the best kind of work the Cooperators could do?

Prayer Reflection

Pray to the Holy Spirit that he may fill you with all the gifts of the Salesian charism.

Love for Our Lady

Dominic had a special love for the Immaculate Heart of Mary. When in church he always knelt before her altar, begging her for the grace of keeping his heart free from every impure desire. "Mary," he would pray, "I always want to be your son. Let me die rather than commit a single sin against chastity."

Every Friday he found a few minutes during recreation to go to the chapel with some friends and recite the Seven Sorrows of Mary or the Litany of the Sorrowful Virgin. Not content with his own devotion to our Lady, he was only too happy to get some schoolmate to offer her a prayer. One Saturday, for example, he invited a companion to recite our Lady's Vespers with him, but the lad tried to get out of it by pleading that his hands were cold. Dominic took off his own gloves and gave them to him. Another time he lent his coat to a boy to have him go to church with him for a few moments.

Dominic drew up an interesting set of stories about our Lady to tell his schoolmates and kindle their devotion. He often dropped a good hint to get someone to go to confession and Communion in her honor, and he was the first to set the example.

A pleasant episode bears out his tender love for Mary. The boys of his dormitory had decided to set up a little shrine to our Lady at their own expense so as to keep the month of May. Dominic was very excited about it, but when he found out how much it would cost, he exclaimed, "What can I do? I haven't a cent!" Then he had an idea. He got a book he once received as a prize and, giving it to the boys, said, "Now I can do my share for Mary! Take this book and sell it!" The others were so impressed that they too got books and things and had a little raffle to pay for their project.

After they bought the decorations, they began setting up the shrine, but by the eve of Mary's feast they had not yet finished. "I'll stay up all night to get things ready," volunteered Dominic. But his friends knew that he was still recovering from a recent illness and made him go to bed. "All right," he agreed, "but when you finish, wake me up. I want to be among the first to see our shrine to Mary!"

Dominic's Lasting Tribute

About ten months before his death, with a strange but sure presentiment of that approaching end, he confided to Don Bosco: "Father, I desire to do something for Mary. But I must do it at once, for I fear that should I wait, it will be too late."

Therefore, to achieve his great desire of gaining his companions for God and of his desire to do something for our Lady, what did he do? He created, with Don Bosco's approval, a sodality which had as its object to promote devotion to Mary, in order to obtain her protection in life and especially at death, and also to promote frequent confession and Communion. Dominic called it the Sodality of the Immaculate Conception. On June 8, 1856, nine months before his death, Dominic had all the rules approved by Don Bosco, and the first members were enrolled. The Sodality still exists in some Salesian schools and produces great good among the students.

If we put the founding of the Immaculate Conception Sodality by Dominic Savio together with the apostolic direction that his holiness received from Don Bosco, it becomes clear that devotion to Mary, in the minds of both saints, was to be translated into the active apostolate of that motto: GIVE ME SOULS; TAKE AWAY ALL ELSE. Truly, this is real Marian devotion, for the mission of our Blessed Mother is to bring Jesus to the world and the world to Jesus. Consequently, the Church invokes Mary as Queen of Apostles.

Eucharistic Devotion

Before going to Don Bosco's Oratory, Dominic used to go to confession and Communion once a month, as was the practice in schools. But when he heard Don Bosco tell the boys, "If you want to keep on the path to Heaven, do three

things: go to confession regularly, receive Communion often, and choose a steady confessor to whom you can unburden your heart and whom you will not change without necessity.”

Dominic observed that advice diligently. But his great love was for the Eucharist. At first he went to confession and Communion every two weeks, then every week. Observing his spiritual progress, his confessor (Don Bosco) advised him to go to Communion three times a week and by year's end every day. Dominic placed unlimited confidence in his confessor, sometimes speaking to him of his spiritual problems even outside of confession. No one could induce him to change confessors. But when his regular confessor advised him to go to another priest, especially during a retreat, Dominic promptly obeyed.

Dominic was a happy student. “When I am at all worried,” he would say, “I go to my confessor, and he tells me what God wants me to do, because our Lord tells us that the confessor speaks as God's own voice. Then if I want something important, I go to Communion. What else do I need to be happy?” This accounts for his deep contentment and the joy that shone through his behavior.

His preparation for Communion was thorough and devout. The night before, on going to bed, he offered a special prayer with the aspiration, “Blessed and praised every moment be the most holy and divine Sacrament!” In the morning he gave himself enough time for preparation. But his thanksgiving knew no bounds. Very often, unless he were reminded, he would forget all about breakfast, recreation, and school, so intent was he in his prayer and in contemplating God's goodness.

To spend time in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament was his delight, and he made at least one visit a day, taking other boys with him. No act of devotion and respect with regard to the Blessed Sacrament was too much for Dominic. If he met a priest carrying Viaticum to the sick, at once he knelt in the street, and if he had time he went with the priest to the house. Once, while it was raining and the streets were muddy, finding no dry spot, Dominic promptly knelt in a puddle. A boy who was with him objected, “You didn't have to dirty your clothes! Our Lord doesn't ask that much!”

“My knees and clothes belong to God and should do him service,” was the reply. “When he passes by, I will gladly kneel in the mud to pay him homage! I would even throw myself into a furnace to share in the infinite love that made him institute this Sacrament!”

On a similar occasion, he noticed a soldier who, not wishing to dirty his trousers, merely stood at attention as the Blessed Sacrament passed by. Dominic hesitated to correct him, and so he spread his handkerchief over the dirty cobblestones and motioned to the soldier to kneel on it. Taken aback, the soldier hastily knelt on the bare street.

On the feast of Corpus Christi, Dominic was told he could dress as an altar boy and join in the parish Eucharistic procession. He went gladly, saying it was the best favor anyone could do him.