

## ***Lesson 24 – The Promise***

### **Objectives**

1. To study and understand the words of the Promise.
2. To reflect on how the Promise is lived out daily.
3. To encourage daily renewal of the Promise.
4. To explain the implications of the Promise, both canonical and spiritual.

*Reference: The Salesian Cooperator, Joseph Aubry, SDB (pages cannot be identified)*

Official entry into the Association takes place by the making of a personal “Promise.” Through the Promise Cooperators express their will to live their baptismal call in accordance with the present *Project of Apostolic Life*. They then receive their certificate of membership of the Association. The commitment to be a Cooperator lasts all through life.

What was Don Bosco’s mind about the Promise? Let us remember that the Cooperators were the first and even the only ones to help him during the first eighteen years of his apostolate, given that the Salesian Society was founded only on December 18, 1859. Anyone who undertakes a serious study of the relationship of Don Bosco with his Cooperators before the Regulations of 1876 is surprised at the strictness with which he always wanted to bind them to himself personally and to his works. He never looked on them as mere occasional helpers, but as collaborators who shared in his charism, and whom God himself had sent to form part of his movement for the salvation of the young and for the faith of the common people.

His bold and daring plan to found a single, complex Salesian Society is well known. It was to consist of two kinds of members: those who bound themselves by religious vows, and “aggregate members” who remained in the world but committed themselves to a way of life as close as possible to that of their religious brothers and sisters. All were to have the same Rule, because all had the same ideal: their common sanctification by working together for the salvation of the young. The famous Chapter XVI of the plan presented to Rome in 1864 (cf. MB 7:885) ran as follows:

1. Any person, even living without vows and in his own home and with his own family, can belong to our Society.
2. He does not take vows, but must practice those Rules which are compatible with his age, state and condition – teaching or promoting catechism among poor children, helping to spread good books, promoting triduums, novenas, retreats, and other works of charity, especially directed to the good of youths and the working classes.
3. To share in the spiritual benefits of the Society, the member must make at least a “Promise” to the Rector to engage himself in matters that in his judgment will tend to the greater glory of God.
4. This “Promise,” however, does not oblige under pain of even venial sin.

We may note that the “Promise,” expressed in these terms, is not made before God as is the present practice. But the important thing is the manifestation of a free and personal commitment into the hands of the major superior. Salesian religious made vows; Salesian Cooperators made the “Promise.”

*Reference: Vatican II, Apostolicam Actuositatem*

33. The most holy council, then, earnestly entreats all the laity in the Lord to answer gladly, nobly, and promptly the more urgent invitation of Christ in this hour and the impulse of the Holy Spirit. Younger persons should feel that this call has been directed to them especially and they should respond to it eagerly and generously. Through this holy synod, the Lord renews His invitation to all the laity to come closer to Him every day, recognizing that what is His is also their own (Phil. 2:5), to associate themselves with Him in His saving mission. Once again He sends them into

every town and place where He will come (cf. Luke 10:1) so that they may show that they are co-workers in the various forms and modes of the one apostolate of the Church, which must be constantly adapted to the new needs of our times. Ever productive as they should be in the work of the Lord, they know that their labor in Him is not in vain (cf. 1 Cor. 15:58).

*Reference: Mark 1: 14-20 (RSV)*

### **The First Four Disciples Are Called**

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the proclaimed the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.”

And passing along by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and followed him.

*Reference: PVA Regulations, Chapter IV, Article 14,§1*

### **Sense of Belonging**

1. So that the sense of belonging to the Association may grow, and to nourish constantly their own vocation, the council of every local center commits itself annually to offer the possibility the Salesian Cooperators to renew their apostolic Promise, preferably on the occasion of a Salesian feast.

*Reference: PVA Statutes, Chapter V, Article 32*

### **Meaning and Formula of the Apostolic Promise**

1. The meaning and purpose of the *Promise* is to express the aspirant’s will to live his or her Baptism according to the *Project of Apostolic Life*. Don Bosco himself proposed the *Promise* as an apostolic expression of the Salesian vocation in society.

2. The *Promise*

“O Father, I adore You because You are good and love everyone. I thank You for having created and redeemed me, for having called me to become part of Your Church and for having me come to know in her the apostolic Family of Don Bosco, which lives for You at the service of the young and of ordinary people. Drawn by your merciful Love, I wish to love You in return by doing good.

For this reason, I PROMISE

to live out the *Project of Apostolic Life* of the Association of the Salesian Cooperators with commitment (as a priest).

That is:

- to be a faithful disciple of Christ in the Catholic Church;
- to work in Your Kingdom, especially for the advancement and salvation of the young;
- to deepen and give witness to the Salesian spirit;
- to collaborate, in Family communion, in the apostolic initiatives of the local Church.

Grant me, O Father, the strength of Your Spirit, so I might know how to be a faithful witness to these commitments.

May Mary Help of Christians, Mother of the Church, assist me and guide me in this life choice. Amen.”

*Reference: PVA Statutes, Chapter V, Article 28*

### **Value of Belonging**

1. Salesian Cooperators are aware that membership in the Association nourishes their faith experience and that of ecclesial communion. It represents, moreover, a vital element in support of one’s own apostolic vocation.
2. Membership demands concrete signs which are expressed both in an active participation in the life of the Association and in a fitting demeanor on the part of the member in his/her daily and professional life.

*Reference: PVA Statutes, Chapter V, Article 30*

### **Fidelity to Commitments Assumed**

1. With the *Apostolic Promise*, the Salesian Cooperator responds to a vocation which lasts his or her entire life. He or she expresses it in daily life through witness, apostolate, and various forms of service. He or she places self at the service of the mission of the Church with availability, living the Salesian charism with authenticity. He or she collaborates with commitment in initiatives that are promoted by other ecclesial, religious, and civic organizations. Each one’s fidelity is supported by the affection and solidarity of the other members of the Association and of the Salesian Family.
2. In order to reinforce the value of belonging to the Association – and through this, to the Salesian Family as a whole – membership commitments assumed with the making of the *Apostolic Promise* are renewed according to those modalities which are most opportune, as established by the Regulations.

*Reference: PVA Statutes, Chapter V, Article 31*

### **Leaving the Association**

1. The Salesian Cooperator who, through personal choice, intends to cease to be part of the Association will communicate this to the local council with a written declaration. The local council will send a copy of the declaration to the provincial council.
2. The decision to dismiss one of its members from the Association for grave reasons must be taken by the provincial council, at the justified request of the local council, in the spirit of charity and of clarity, after having verified a lifestyle which is incongruous with the fundamental duties expressed in the *Project of Apostolic Life*. This decision shall be communicated to the interested party in writing.

*Reference: John 15:16 (RSV)*

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and to bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.

## **Lesson 24: The Promise – Questions for Reflection**

1. How can I prepare well for my commitment?
2. How do I understand each part of the Promise?
3. What are some basic helps to root me in living the Promise?
4. What obligations am I assuming when I make the Promise?

### **Prayer Experience**

Spend a day in prayerful renewal seeking the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist in preparation for making the Promise.