

Lesson 6 – Salesian Spirit (Session 1)

Objectives

1. To relate Don Bosco's words "It is not enough to love the young. They must know they are loved."
2. To understand the essence of the Salesian spirit: joyful, dynamic, apostolic charity with its accent on youth.
3. To know who is to be served by the Salesian Cooperators.
4. To recognize the Salesian spirit is a spirit of action.

Reference: The Salesian Cooperator, Joseph Aubry, SDB, pp. 65, 68-71

"It is essential that we have in the world friends, benefactors and people who practice the Salesian spirit living with their families, as the Cooperators do" (Don Bosco, agenda for SDB GC1).

"Imbued with the Salesian spirit, you understand what close rapports you have with the complex of works sustained and promoted by the Catholic laity" (Pius XII to the Cooperators, Sept. 12, 1952).

"Furthermore, the laity who in pursuit of their vocation have become members of one of the associations or institutes approved by the Church are trying faithfully to adapt the special characteristics of the spiritual life which are proper to these as well" (Vatican II, AA #4).

The essence of the spirit is dynamic, apostolic charity. "Our life style and the way of doing things taught us by Don Bosco correspond to our mission: pastoral love, young and alive, is at the very heart of our spirit, just as it was for Don Bosco as seen in the very beginnings of our Society. It is this ardent apostolic drive which makes us 'seek souls and serve God alone'" (Const. SDB 1972, art. 40). At the heart of all Christian living is *charity*, i.e., love as existing in God, as explained and lived by Christ.

At the core of Salesian life is this apostolic charity, *characterized by its accent on youth*, an enthusiastic drive that is joyous and generous.

This was truly the tenor of Don Bosco's life; he was possessed of a magnificent and apostolic urge, and it was always in evidence. It was expressed in his motto, "Lord, give me souls" (apostolic love for his neighbor) and in his often-repeated "We must work for the greater glory of God."

The activity of every member of the Salesian Family has three characteristics:

1. *Unflagging zeal and sacrifice.* "Work and temperance, and the Congregation will flourish." On the other hand, seek comfortable surroundings and a life of ease, and we shall cease to exist. The Salesian gives himself to his mission with a ceaseless energy. For these reasons work in the apostolate for us has a mystic value: it has a divine quality and is urgent: to achieve the end, we should be ready to suffer cold and heat, hunger and thirst, fatigue and rejection whenever the glory of God and the salvation of souls require it." (Const. 1972 #42)
2. *Initiative and flexibility when faced with crises.* The Salesian should be a realist and attentive to the signs of the times and be convinced that God calls through the needs of a particular time and place. (ibid. #43)
3. *A lively understanding of the Church in its growth and unity.* 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. (ibid. #44)

Reference: PVA Regulations, Chapter 3, Article 11

Style of Action

1. Don Bosco was a practical and enterprising man, an untiring and creative worker, animated by an uninterrupted and profound interior life. Faithful to his spirit and attentive to reality, Salesian Cooperators have a sense of the concrete. They discern the signs of the times and with a spirit of initiative push themselves to give appropriate responses to the needs of the youth in their territory and in society. They are constantly ready to verify and to readapt their response.
2. They accompany their action with an attitude of contemplation, which urges them to seek and to recognize the mystery of God's presence in everyday life and the face of Christ in their brothers and sisters. Moreover, sustained by the Spirit, they confront with serenity the difficulties of life and the joys and the sufferings which accompany their apostolic work.

Reference: PVA Regulations, Chapter 3, Article 12

Spiritual Life

1. Salesian Cooperators nourish their interior life through daily dialogue with the Lord, participation in the Sacraments, and lectio divina.
2. They celebrate traditional Salesian feast days.
3. If they have the possibility, they also participate in the spiritual exercises, retreats, and other initiatives proposed by the Association.
4. They value spiritual guidance as accompaniment, exercised particularly by Salesians (both religious – FMA and SDB – and lay).
5. The Association is open to all. In its planning, it will facilitate the participation of its own members and of those who feel one with the Salesian charism.

Reference: Fr. Pascual Chavez Villanueva, Message to the Salesian Confreres, April 3, 2009 (AGC #405, p. 89)

Don Bosco's holiness is the guarantee that his life-project, his school of spirituality, [and] his style of apostolic action constitute *an authentic path which leads to the fullness of love*. Following the path opened up by Don Bosco in the following of Christ, we have the certainty of living a life that is fully evangelical, completely given without conditions, without reserve, without holding back. At the school of Don Bosco we too learn to be saints.

Reference: Mark 12: 28-34 (JB)

The Greatest Commandment of All

One of the scribes who had listened to them debating and had observed how well Jesus had answered them, now came up and put a question to him, "Which is the first of all the commandments?" Jesus replied "This is the first: Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You must love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these." The scribe said to him, "Well spoken, Master; what you have said is true: that he is one and there is no other. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself, this is far more important than any holocaust or sacrifice." Jesus,

Chapter 2 – Don Bosco’s Madonna

Introduction

In the Salesian world, St. John Bosco’s devotion to Mary Help of Christians is proverbial. During his lifetime, miracles were performed through the intercession of our Blessed Mother. When people tended to praise him because of his work, Don Bosco’s reply was always: “Mary Help of Christians did it all. I am just her unworthy instrument.” Another of his sayings was: “The Madonna does whatever she wills.” Mary Help of Christians was not always the title under which Don Bosco was devoted to Mary, however. This brief account is an attempt to trace the growth of Don Bosco’s devotion to the Madonna.

Foundation for the Title “Mary Help of Christians”

In the New Testament, one can find the foundation for the title “Mary Help of Christians.” The Blessed Virgin’s *fiat* (“let it be done”) at the Annunciation is the first occasion in which Mary offered her help in the work of redemption and salvation of souls. In the Visitation to her cousin Elizabeth, Mary was a help. At the marriage feast in Cana, she was there helping. On Calvary, we find Mary faithful to her Son, who was dying for the world’s salvation. During the days between the Ascension of our Lord and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Mary was always there as a help to the frightened apostles.

The finest of those scriptural occasions, when Mary is the help of Christians, is on Mount Calvary. Jesus is hanging in agony on the Cross, and Mary supports him with wonderful spiritual and motherly strength. At this time it would seem that nothing remained for Jesus to prove how much he loved us. Yet his love found one more gift to offer us. From the Cross he turned his dying eyes to his Mother, the last treasure he had on earth. “Woman,” said Jesus to Mary, “behold your son.” Turning to the beloved disciple, he said: “Behold your Mother.” From that hour, concludes the evangelist, the disciple took her into his home. In that gift of Jesus, the holy Fathers of the Church recognize three very important truths:

- The beloved disciple became, in all things, the son of Mary.
- On this account, all the motherly care which Mary had given Jesus was now to pass to her new son, the beloved disciple.
- In the person of beloved disciple, Jesus intended to embrace the entire human race.

“Mary,” says St. Bernardine of Siena, “by her loving participation in the mystery of the Redemption of Calvary, has truly generated in us the life of grace. In the order of salvation, we are all born of the sorrows of Mary, in the same way that we are born of the eternal love of the Father and the sufferings of his Son. In those precious moments, Mary strictly became our Mother.”

In consequence of becoming our Mother on Calvary, Mary not only received the title “Help of Christians,” but she also took upon herself the functions, authority, and obligations of that title. That Mary had understood the intention of Jesus on the Cross in this sense, and that he made her the Mother and Help of all Christians, is well proven by her actions ever since.

How the Title Became Reality

In 1868 Don Bosco wrote: “Although the Virgin Most Holy has shown herself at all times the Help of Christians in all the necessities of life, nevertheless it seems she desired that her power should be felt particularly when the Church was attacked on the truths of faith and by hostile armies.” Church history shows the truth of that statement.

Outstanding manifestations of Mary’s help on behalf of Christians include the following:

-- The victory in the Gulf of Lepanto against the Turkish fleet on Sunday, October 7, 1571, during the pontificate of St. Pius V. Don Bosco, following the common tradition, attributes the origin of this Marian title to that victory.

-- The Moslems tried again to overrun Europe and so besieged Vienna in 1683 during the pontificate of Blessed Innocent XI. With Jan Sobieski in command of the Christian forces, the Moslems were once again turned back. After that victory, devotion to the Help of Christians spread, especially through the pious society and confraternity of that name.

-- When Napoleon Bonaparte had taken Pope Pius VII prisoner, prayers and supplications were offered to Mary. Pius VII was released, he returned to Rome in triumph on May 24, 1814, and by a decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites on September 15, 1815, he instituted the feast of Mary Help of Christians, to be celebrated on May 24 as a sign of his gratitude to the Mother of God, because he attributed to her his deliverance from imprisonment and his return to Rome.

Don Bosco's Devotion to Mary

In Turin and in most of Piedmont, Our Lady of Consolation was a popular title and devotion. Like other Piedmontese at the time, Don Bosco followed that devotion. There was the beautiful church of Our Lady of Consolation in Turin, and, when his mother died, it was to that church that Don Bosco went and prayed to our Lady that she would now be mother and helper at the Oratory. He then offered Mass for the repose of his mother's soul.

Don Bosco also had a special devotion to Mary as the Immaculate Conception, even before the doctrine was defined in 1854. He considered December 8, 1841, as the beginning date of his work for abandoned youth in Turin. Ordained only six months, Don Bosco welcomed a 15-year-old laborer, Bartholomew Garelli, to join him at his Mass on the feast of the Immaculate Conception. After the Mass, Don Bosco and Bartholomew said a Hail Mary together. This was the beginning of Don Bosco's "Oratory," a unique combination of catechism, prayer, and play.

In Don Bosco's famous dream of the two pillars in May of 1862, he said that atop one of the pillars was a statue of Mary Immaculate, and at her feet he could read a large inscription, "Auxilium Christianorum," that is, "Help of Christians."

On his desk, Don Bosco had a small statue with a card at its feet reading "Immaculate Help of Christians."

When Don Bosco built the church of Mary Help of Christians in Turin, he placed a statue of Mary Immaculate atop the central dome. When Pope Pius IX granted a plenary indulgence to all who would visit that church, he said these words, "We grant a plenary indulgence to all those who shall visit the Church in Turin dedicated to the Immaculate Virgin Mary under the title Mary Help of Christians."

From all the foregoing, it appears that Don Bosco could not give up the title "Immaculate Conception" because of all it meant to him in respect to his educational method. Therefore, he fused the two titles Immaculate Conception and Help of Christians and called our Lady "The Immaculate Help of Christians."