

Lesson 7 – Salesian Spirit (Session2)

Objectives

1. To understand the ways of relating to others in the Salesian spirit.
2. To understand the method of prayer that is to be followed in the Salesian spirit.
3. To understand Mary's special role in the Salesian spirit.
4. To recognize that the Salesian spirit is a family spirit.

Reference: The Salesian Cooperator, Joseph Aubry, SDB, pp. 72-74

The Ways of Relating to Others in the Salesian Spirit

In relating to other members of the Salesian Family every member should be inspired by the following virtues:

1. *Loving kindness.* The Salesian's manner of action is to seek to do all things well, with due measure and simplicity. He is open and cordial, ready to make the first advance and to receive people with kindness, respect and patience, especially the young. His love is truly personal and affectionate, showing himself to be a father and friend and arousing friendship in response. This is the kindness so much recommended by Don Bosco. (SDB Const. 1972 #45)
2. *Family spirit.* The community becomes a family when affection is reciprocal and the young feel at their ease. In this climate of mutual confidence people feel the need and the joy of sharing everything and relations are governed not so much by recourse to rules as by faith and goodness of heart. (Const. 1972 #46)
3. *Optimism and joy.* "Let nothing perturb you," Don Bosco used to say. Because God has sent us, we have complete confidence in his providence and are not discouraged by difficulties. There is also the optimistic humanism of St. Francis de Sales, which helps us to believe in the natural and supernatural resources of man without, however, ignoring his weakness. With this background we know how to make our own what is good in the world and refuse to lament over our times. We "hold fast to what is good" especially if it is attractive to the young. We make our own St. Paul's exhortation, "Rejoice in the Lord always." This is the witness we must give to youth. "... the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace..." and this is where our own hope and our openness to the Spirit is rooted. (Const. 1972 #47)

The Method of Prayer to Be Followed in the Salesian Spirit

1. *Prayer that is simple and vital.* Our style of work and our relationships with others demand that we must always be renewing the divine element in our apostolic commitment: "... apart from me you can do nothing." We have but few practices of piety, but we pray without ceasing and after the manner of Don Bosco's own union with God aspire to become contemplatives in action by praying in simple heart-to-heart colloquy with Christ, with the Father conscious of his presence, with Mary our helper. (Const. 1972 #48)
2. *Generous openness to the sacramental world.* The Eucharist is the center and the goal of the life of the Christian, as a binding force and a dynamic nucleus of the brotherly community. It is an encounter with the fullness of the same mystery of salvation in whose service he spends his life. The life of a Salesian is especially founded on this truth. The enthusiasm and the richness of all his activity take their origin from the Eucharistic mystery.

For this reason the Salesian cultivates the sense of liturgical celebration and caters for its needs, both in its interior qualities and by its external beauty, well aware that young people are attracted by the splendor and the truth of these celebrations.

In the sacrament of Penance the Salesian meets Christ, who pardons him and who pours into him the meaning of the ever-present necessity of the penitential spirit. (SDB GC20 #104)

3. *Special confidence in Mary.* “Mary most holy is the foundress and will be the sustainer of our works.” The Salesian is convinced of the special, unquestioned role which Mary – always the handmaid of God and associate of his Son – has had in the life of Don Bosco and of the Congregation.

She is the watchful mother of his boys and their “interior” teacher. She is, besides, *his* mother; hence he has for her – the Immaculate One and his Help – a tender and strong devotion, simple and true, enlightened and dynamically practical. (ibid. #105)

To grasp the originality of the Salesian spirit we must take the total of its characteristics and examine how each affects the other. The building materials can be found in various places, but the Salesian building effected is a special kind. The instruments and notes are common property, but the “Salesian harmony” is unique. In *its own fashion* it makes music to the glory of God and fills the Church with joy.

Reference: PVA Statutes, Chapter III, Article 13

A Precious Heritage

Guided by the Holy Spirit, Don Bosco lived and passed down to the members of his Family an original style of life and action: the Salesian spirit.

The Salesian spirit is a quintessential Gospel experience, whose source is in the very heart of Christ, who urges those who live it to become gift and to give service. It is nourished by the carrying out of apostolic charity, the principal interior dynamic which unites passion for God and passion for neighbor. It is manifested in a sacramental spirituality, which is made actual by living daily life with joy and optimism and in responsible service within the ecclesial community and civic society. It requires a demanding “ascetical method” expressed through a serene and joyous countenance, in keeping with Don Bosco’s urging: “work and temperance.”

Reference: PAL Statutes, Chapter III, Article 14

Experience of Committed Faith

1. The Salesian Cooperator welcomes the Salesian spirit as a gift of the Lord to the Church and makes it fruitful according to his or her own lay or ministerial condition. He or she takes part in the charismatic experience of Don Bosco and commits him or herself to promote Salesian humanism so as to create reasons for hope and future prospects for both the person and for society.
2. By living Salesian spirituality, he or she fosters a “practical” experience of ecclesial communion.
3. The Salesian Cooperator entrusts him or herself to the Immaculate Virgin and Help of Christians, for she is the guide of one’s apostolic vocation: to be a true “cooperator of God” in making His plan of salvation real. He or she asks Mary, the Help of Christians and Mother of the Good Shepherd, for the help and strength necessary for his or her own salvation and for that of the young. The daily entrustment to Mary characterizes Salesian spirituality.

Reference: PVA Statutes, Chapter III, Article 15

Centrality of Apostolic Love

1. The heart of the Salesian spirit is apostolic and pastoral charity. It makes the mercy of the Father, the salvific love of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit present among the young. Don Bosco expressed this with his motto:

“*Da mihi animas, caetera tolle.*” He signified it in the name “Salesians,” by choosing St. Francis de Sales, model of Christian humanism, of apostolic dedication, and of amiability, and promoter of lay spirituality, as his patron.

2. This charity is, for Salesian Cooperators, a gift of God, which unites them to Him and to the young. Further, it takes its inspiration from the maternal solicitude of Mary, who supports and sustains them in their daily witness.

Reference: 1 Peter 3: 8-12 (JB)

Christian Conduct

Finally, you should all agree among yourselves and be sympathetic; love the brothers, have compassion and be self-effacing. Never pay back one wrong with another, or an angry word with another one; instead, pay back with a blessing. That is what you were called to do, so that you inherit a blessing yourself. Remember: *Anyone who wants to have a happy life and to enjoy prosperity must banish malice from his tongue, deceitful conversation from his lips; he must never yield to evil but must practice good; he must seek peace and pursue it. Because the face of the Lord frowns on evil men, but the eyes of the Lord are turned toward the virtuous, his ears to their cry.*

Reference: Fr. Pascual Chavez Villanueva, Strenna Commentary 2009

The Charismatic Seed

Don Bosco’s spirit, mentality, pastoral experience, and view of the world and the Church guided him toward some convictions and some corresponding initiatives:

- *the universal mission of the Church*, to be taken up in a spirit of solidarity, to save the whole of the human person and all humanity. Within this mission his sons and followers need to be characterized by a preference for the young, the poor, peoples not yet evangelized;
- the usefulness, or rather the urgent impelling need to *become united spiritually* and to *form associations working together* in enterprises to achieve this end;
- the possibility that the spirit given to him could be lived in *different states of life* and, therefore, through the coming together of “good people” could contribute to the great mission of the Church, taking their place within it with Salesian “priorities”;
- *the founding of the first groups*: spiritually united around the experience of the Oratory as their mission, their style, their method, and their spirit:
 1. with different kinds of links with the Salesian Congregation (the original nucleus),
 2. with different forms of association,
 3. with different levels of public “Christian” commitment as the requirement for belonging.
- The *historic role* of the SDBs, the FMAs, the Cooperators.

Suggested Reading

In the Footsteps of Don Bosco; pages 124-127.

Lesson 7: Salesian Spirit (Session 2) – Questions for Reflection

1. What are some of the ways of relating to others in the Salesian spirit? How can you implement them in your own life?
2. To live the Salesian spirit as a Salesian Cooperator means to live it in the world. What obstacles do you see could keep you from living it? How would you overcome them?
3. In the Salesian spirit there is a special confidence in Mary the Help of Christians. How would you help foster this confidence in your own life?
4. To become imbued with the Salesian spirit you have to make it more and more a part of your life. What means are you going to take to accomplish this?

Prayer Experience

Spend time with the Blessed Mother in your Rosary and ask her to help you to develop the spirit of “union with God” that Don Bosco had.

Don Bosco's Marian Shrine: The Basilica of Mary Help of Christians

The Dreams of 1844 and 1845

On the second Sunday of October 1844, Don Bosco had a dream which was a kind of continuation of the one he had had at the age of nine. In the dream the Blessed Virgin told him to lead a large group of various kinds of animals. As he walked along at the head of the animals, they gradually turned into lambs. At a certain point in the dream there was before him a lofty church. Inside the church a white banner carried the inscription in large characters, "Hic domus mea; inde gloria mea"; that is, "This is my house; from it my glory shines forth." The Blessed Virgin told Don Bosco, "You will understand everything when, with your material eyes, you will see in actual fact what you now see with the eyes of your mind."

In another dream which Don Bosco had in 1845, the Blessed Virgin showed him a large gathering of children, a field, and then three churches in Valdocco. At the third church, the Blessed Virgin told Don Bosco, "In this place, where the glorious martyrs of Turin Adventor, Octavius, and Solutor suffered martyrdom, and on these clods soaked and sanctified by their blood, I wish that God be honored in a very special manner." So saying, she put out her foot and thus indicated the exact spot where the martyrs had fallen.

The vast and magnificent church of Mary Help of Christians in Turin, built by St. John Bosco, received its heavenly inspiration and encouragement from those dream visions of 1844 and 1845. For nineteen years, Don Bosco carried this idea in his mind and, finally, in 1863 he set to work. As a result of the directions which the Blessed Virgin had given him, he chose for his church in honor of Mary Help of Christians the actual spot of the martyrdom of Saints Adventor, Solutor, and Octavius. They were Roman soldiers who were martyred under Maximian ca. 284 A.D. and whose commemoration used to be on November 20.

How to Pay for the Church

After the authorities had issued a permit to build the church, Don Bosco decided at once to begin the excavation. Father Angelo Savio, the financial administrator, objected, saying: "But Don Bosco, this is no chapel. It is a huge, costly church. This morning we did not have enough money to buy even postage stamps."

"Never mind," replied Don Bosco. "We'll get started! Did we ever begin anything with money on hand? Let us leave something to Divine Providence!" Father Savio obeyed.

When the foundations of the church were laid, Don Bosco approached the contractor, Charles Buzzetti. "I want to pay you for this fine work," he said. "I don't know if it will be much, but it will be all I have." He then took out his little purse and emptied the contents into the hands of the contractor, who thought he was about to receive a handful of gold coins. The contractor's jaw dropped in dismay when he saw in his hands only eight cents. "Do not be alarmed!" Don Bosco quickly added with a smile. "The Madonna will see to the payment for her church. I am just the instrument, the cashier." And to those standing by, he concluded, "You will see!"

Meanwhile Don Bosco had a big problem, because several wealthy townspeople who had promised generous donations were changing their minds, while others were not going to come through until later. A bill for one thousand lire for the first two weeks of excavation was due within days.

Extraordinary Cures

Don Bosco said that the cost of building the church was paid for to the last cent, and that it was all the result of graces and favors received through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians. Space does not allow an account of all those favors, but two outstanding ones are recounted here.

Don Bosco was suddenly called to the bedside of a woman who had been racked for three months by fever and a persistent cough. "If I could feel even a little better," she gasped, "I'd make any sacrifice. Just to get out of bed would be a vast relief."

"What would you do for that?" asked Don Bosco.

"Whatever you say."

"Make a novena to Mary Help of Christians."

"What prayers must I say?"

"For nine days say three times the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Glory Be to the Father in honor of the Blessed Sacrament, and three times the Hail, Holy Queen to the Blessed Virgin."

"Fine! And what work of mercy?"

"If you should truly feel better, make a contribution to the church of Mary Help of Christians now being built in Valdocco."

"Most willingly, if during the novena I can leave my bed and walk about my room a little."

In the evening of the last day of the novena, Don Bosco had to have one thousand lire for wages. He called on the sick woman. A maid met him at the door and joyfully told him that her mistress had recovered completely, had taken two walks, and had been to church to thank God.

While the maid told him all this, the woman herself came to meet him. "I am cured," she exclaimed. "I've already gone to church. Here is a little something I promised. There will be more."

Don Bosco took the little package and, back at the Oratory, he found in it fifty gold napoleons, worth a thousand lire.

From then on, our Lady granted so many and such varied graces to those who contributed to the construction of her church, that one might well say that she built it herself.

Work on the church then continued, but the day came when the work had to be suspended due to lack of money. Unexpectedly, Senator Anthony Cotta called on Don Bosco one day and urged him to go ahead with the work. Some days later, Don Bosco called on the senator and found him nearly dying. "A few more minutes and I'll be gone," the senator whispered.

"Not quite," replied Don Bosco. "Our Lady still needs you here. You must live to help me build her church."

"I'd gladly do so, but my time is up. There is no longer any hope."

"What would you do if Mary Help of Christians were to cure you?"

Struck by the question, the senator replied, "If I am cured, I promise your church two thousand lire monthly for six months."

"Good," Don Bosco continued. "I'm going back to the Oratory and will say so many prayers offered to Mary Help of Christians that I hope you will be cured. Have trust in her. She is called 'Virgin Most Powerful.'"

He then prayed for the senator and blessed him.

Three days later, Senator Cotta returned the visit. “Here I am,” he said. “To the amazement of everyone and contrary to all expectations, our Lady has cured me. Here are the two thousand lire I promised for this month.”

He paid the same amount regularly for the next five months and lived three more years in fairly good health, grateful to our Lady. The senator often brought other donations to Don Bosco, remarking, “The more I support your work, the more my business prospers. God actually gives back to me, even in this life, a hundredfold for what I give for his sake.”

On July 3, 1867, Don Bosco declared in the presence of some of his intimate friends: “The whole church was built by means of graces granted by Mary Help of Christians.” One sixth of the cost, about one million lire in those days, was borne by the generous contributions of devout persons. The rest came from the small offerings of those who had been aided by Mary Help of Christians either in health, in business, in family matters, or in some other way. “Every stone, every ornament represents one of her graces,” insisted Don Bosco. The building contractor, who had originally received only eight cents for his work, later testified that “the Church of Mary Help of Christians was paid for to the last cent!”

Opposition to the Title of the Church

Not many are acquainted with the opposition that Don Bosco met in his plan to dedicate the church to Mary Help of Christians. Some persons, even at his own Oratory in Turin, wanted to dedicate it to Our Lady of Mount Carmel, or to the Holy Rosary, or to the Immaculate Conception. The architect argued against the title “Help of Christians.” The municipal authorities were against it also, saying that such a title was novel, vague, and unpopular.

Nevertheless, Don Bosco insisted because he knew that the future of his own Congregation depended upon Mary Help of Christians, just as the Church had needed and obtained that protection at Lepanto on October 7, 1571, at Vienna on September 12, 1683, and again at Rome on May 24, 1814, when Pope Pius VII returned to the Vatican after his imprisonment under Napoleon.