

THE MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

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FULL LIVES

I believe that this is what we have most at heart, dear readers – to feel that we are living a life that is *full*. It seems that this is a very human aspiration. It is with this thought that I must tell you that I have come to know in my life many persons who live and have lived full lives. I propose to follow this path myself.



I will begin by recounting two life events that seem to be significant on account of the age of the persons involved and, therefore, deserving of attention.

Following the precious feast of Mary Help of Christians in Valdocco (Turin), I began my travels this May with a visit to the Salesian presences in Croatia. The solid faith of those Croatian Christian communities and of those young people hit me directly in my heart. The hundreds of young people whom I met – who are the youths of today, so modern, so up-to-date, so much in the digital world, just like all the young people around the world who have access to that world – still are solid in living their Christian faith. This made a great impact on me, so I took advantage of this message to tell you about that now before diving into the focus of this writing.

We arrived at one of our Salesian presences at 10:00 p.m. On entering the patio of the Salesian house, we heard the music of typical Croatian folk dances and saw a group of about 150 little children, teenagers, young adults, and some parents awaiting us there and, of course, the Salesian community. Great was my astonishment and emotion at seeing among them one of our Salesian confreres (I will omit his name lest he feel embarrassed at knowing he was mentioned by name) who, at 92 years of age, dressed in his old cassock – it seemed to be from Don Bosco's times – and with a smile and a most peaceful face was dancing with the young while waiting to welcome us.

On the following day, at distinct moments of the different celebrations, this nonagenarian confrere of ours was acclaimed by the young, who clapped for and called out to him, and he smiled and gave in to the many things that the young said and did. I thought to myself: Here is a Salesian who has had and still has *a full life*. He did not have an easy life (including having survived hunger and the struggles of World War II – which I came to know when he told me), but it was still a life filled with meaning and *with happiness in what was essential*.

“Next year in Paradise”

A few days earlier, during the celebrations at Valdocco, there was another Salesian there with us – this one was 94 years old. To celebrate the feast of Mary Help of Christians in Valdocco is always a great gift to him. Even though he always jokes that “next year” he will celebrate in Paradise, still this year, we had the gift of celebrating together this wonderful day. Again, I was astonished to see how, at 94 years of age, he still offered himself at various times to accompany some people from Argentina – Salesians and laity – to acquaint them with some of the more meaningful sites of Turin, such as the Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation (La Consolata). They returned tired out – he, especially – and yet, for several days he shared his joy at being in Don Bosco's house with those people and helped them understand all that that means.

I kept asking myself: Whence comes this strength, this motivation? Who knows how many of you

are already giving me the response to that question.

I will add one last testimony that I think has an impact on the entire world. Pope Francis will celebrate his 82nd birthday in December, *Deo volente*. He touches everyone's conscience because of his choice to live a simple life, one *filled with the Gospel*. In the field of morality, everyone recognizes him as the most influential man in our world at the present time. His messages are replete with simplicity and the search for authenticity as he invites anyone who wishes to allow himself or herself to be touched by Jesus' power.

Here is where the source of the fullness of these lives and the lives of many others can be found.

When love is your strength

We are speaking of lives which seek to live in service, in self-giving, and in love.

This is true of millions and millions of moms, dads, granddads, and grandmoms who feel fulfilled in living this life of self-giving. When love fills one's life, all difficulties and efforts, all sacrifices and tiredness – whether dancing with the young in the middle of the night or even going on tiring outings in the city instead of going to rest – don't matter, don't mean anything.

There is a story which I once read that touched me deeply. It speaks of much that has to do with love and with annoyance at having to make sacrifices. Once upon a time a "very Western" tourist arrived in an African village dressed in his safari outfit and carrying his cameras; he caught sight of a little girl about ten years old carrying her two-year-old little brother on her shoulders. The boy was a bit tall and chunky in comparison with his sister's little body. So the tourist said to the girl: "Little one, are you bothered by carrying such a weight on your shoulders?" The little girl, with a great and simple sincerity and a heart full of love, answered: "NO, sir, he is not heavy; he is my brother."

This is the key to a *full life* – whatever one may be ours: living our life for love and with love. Let us hope that ours will be such.

My most cordial greetings to all.