

I DREAM OF A SALESIAN FAMILY THAT CARRIES THE POOREST IN HER HEART

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Another dream of mine for the Salesian Family and for the friends of Don Bosco all over the world, as the fruit of this Bicentenary we lived as a year of grace of the Lord, is what was the norm of his life: *carrying in one's heart the poorest, especially children, boys and girls, young people, the most destitute, the most disadvantaged.*

As I am writing to you, I still have in my eyes and in my heart the eighteen-day visit I lived in Sierra Leone, where I could meet some of our authentic reasons of deep happiness: the boys collected from the streets, the girls set free from the sexual exploitation that enchained them, the youth who have become orphans because of Ebola. Seeing all of them in the Salesian house of Freetown, and seeing how their lives now had a different horizon, gave me the same joy don Bosco felt in Valdocco and Maria Mazzarello felt in Mornese with their first youth.

Visiting the detention home of the capital, in an encounter with 10 per cent of the detainees (160 out of 1.600), of whom over 1200 were young people between 18 and 25 years of age, I had the same feelings as don Bosco did at the "Generalà" in Turin.

When in Accra, the capital of Ghana, I met our FMA sisters with the boys gathered in their house and when at "Don Bosco" I saw the children and youngsters who were victims of human trafficking, I could not help being moved and thanking the Lord who grants us the grace as Salesian Family to be a beam of light in the midst of so much darkness.

In Mekanisa, Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), when I met the 500 children who every day at our place can have a full meal and attend school, and as I greeted the boys saved from the streets who were learning a profession or the 28 young people who every day come from the streets to eat, stay with their friends and with the Salesians to decide whether to return to their wandering life or to be part of the young pupils of the house, my heart beat in unison with Don Bosco's heart who certainly sustained all this together with Jesus, who continues to ask us to go and reach out to the poorest.

Because of this, dear brothers and sisters of our family and dear friends of Don Bosco, I once again repeat to you my conviction that *the poorest are the reason for our existence as Salesian Family, in the Church and that our dedication to them is the reason of our lives.*

I am convinced of how precious is the witness of so many confrères who every day donate their lives with true educative and evangelizing passion in favour of the young; I am convinced that many are the Salesian presences that look with predilection at the poor.

I give thanks to the Lord for this and I repeat: Dear brothers and sisters, "we must go further on, we must go beyond". We must all have a heart as the one of the Good Shepherd, and the one of Don Bosco, as the one of the holy men and women of this religious family that aims at giving the best of herself in favour of the youth. We must unite this commitment of ours to the one of all persons of good will.

Pope Francis in his message to consecrated people says: "Wake up the world, illuminate it with your prophetic and countercultural witness!"

I truly think that the Salesian method to illuminate the world in a prophetic and countercultural way is well rooted in all of us and in all our houses. Do not have the least doubt that by living and working in this way, even with no need of words, the message rouses questions and carries a great testimonial strength; and do not have any doubt, that by living in this way you will not lack the means to reach out to the poorest. Let us all remember the solid trust of Don Bosco in Divine Providence.

If this is the case, what else is there to do? The answer is to continue this journey of ascent until every Salesian, every Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, every lay person of the Salesian Family of each of the thirty groups that form this great tree sprouted from Don Bosco's charism, in the depth of their soul feel regret not to be able to succour every poor boy or girl who are in need of us. If our heart has such a feeling, we will always find solutions and we will always be very faithful to the preferential choice of the poorest youth.

In *Evangelii Gaudium* the Pope quotes a father of the Church, St. John Chrysostom, who says: "Not to share one's wealth with the poor is to steal from them and to take away their livelihood. It is not our own goods which we hold, but theirs".

The Pope reminds us of the globalization of indifference that makes us incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, in a culture of prosperity that deadens us (EG 54). With great force he calls our attention on the "throw away" culture, which we have socially created and in which "the excluded are not the "exploited", but the outcast, the "leftovers" (EG 53).

In the light of this expression that is also a fundamental and essential one of our charism, I tell you, dear friends, that in this direction we need not worry about the identity of our mission, nor about our fidelity. We are in the right path!

I bless you all, that the Lord may continue to fill your lives with that fullness that ONLY COMES FROM HIM.