

Homily Rector Major
Spirituality Days of the Salesian Family
Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, Valdocco-Turin. 2018.01.21

A few days ago, in the General Audience on 10th January, Pope Francis spoke of the beauty of the prayers of the liturgy, and ended his catechesis by saying that "... there can be many beautiful meditations on these prayers. So beautiful! Returning to meditating on the texts, even outside the Mass, can help us learn how to relate to God, what to ask, what words to use. May the liturgy become a true school of prayer for all of us".

So, following his counsel and wish, I want to start today from the prayer that we made at the beginning of this celebration in the 'Opening Prayer'. In the name of all of you, I said: "Almighty and Eternal God, guide our actions according to your will, so that in the name of your beloved Son we may bear generous fruits through good works."

As a Salesian Family, we share our faith and the charism that we have received, each one according to his gift, and we try to listen to the Spirit of the Lord and the Word of Jesus, which reveals to us the will of our Merciful Father, the Almighty and Eternal God. Once again, we hear the invitation of Jesus, the beloved Son, to follow him more closely and to bear generous fruits of good works.

Our Family is like a great tree, which, we hope, gives so many generous and good fruits to nourish the hearts of thousands of young people and adults, those who come to us and those who are on the streets of the world waiting for a hand to lift them up and a heart- home - to welcome them.

The Strenna that the Rector Major offers every year, is also an instrument for living our missionary discipleship together in such a way that it allows us to bear abundant fruits. I want, therefore, to reiterate some of the considerations in view of some pastoral action (point IV of the Strenna).

Reflecting on today's Word and taking into consideration that the good fruits come from good trees, I would like to dream of a Salesian Family that is contemplative and with open eyes, a Pilgrim in places and hearts, a Disciple of the Lord and Mediator of his Word and invitation, and finally a Salesian Family of the "Already" and the "Immediate".

1. A Contemplative and open-eyed Salesian Family.

Let us bring back to our memory the icon of the Virgin of Silence which Sister Paola presented to us. Certainly we were attracted by her big eyes, typical of Coptic iconography. The Virgin of Silence invites us to remain silent and to open our eyes well to see and listen, and more so to contemplate, that is to see with heart and in depth, looking at the Mystery.

Today the Gospel presents to us Jesus who "sees" and contemplates and listens to the hearts of others and is therefore capable of challenging, inviting and accompanying. Two times in this short passage, Mark uses the verb "see" when he says that Jesus "saw Simone and Andrea, Simone's brother, while throwing the nets at sea" and called them, and later "he saw James, Zebedee's son, and John his brother, while they too were repairing the nets in the boat" and called them. These calls of Jesus are no coincidence. He has "seen" something in them.

Only a contemplative look is capable of going beyond appearances and surfaces. A contemplative capacity is not sudden, but is taken care of and cultivated. For this reason, I invite you in the Strenna to "Foster an intense spiritual climate that constitutes the great help for personal relationship with Jesus". I also say that "I am more and more convinced that our young people around the world are thirsty for spirituality, thirsty for transcendence, thirsty for God, even if they do not know at times how to express it or how to ask us for an answer". That's why it is necessary to have eyes well open and contemplate their hearts: to read into and listen to what they can't say.

I can say that only the contemplatives (and we have all been called to be contemplatives, and for this reason, we have received the gift of the charism), I repeat, only the contemplatives are capable of "witnessing the joy with which we live", as I have written and invited in the Strenna.

2. A Salesian Family that is Pilgrim in places and hearts

In today's first reading, God says to Jonah: "Get up, go" and the immediate response was that Jonah "got up and went". Then, the Gospel passage says that "Jesus went to Galilee...", and "as he was walking along the sea... he saw Simon and Andrew", and that "passing a little later he saw James...and John...".

Get up, go and walk.... Verbs proper to pilgrims who do not stop permanently, but are in a movement. Our God is not a static God. Jesus was not a static teacher, comfortable in his areas, rooted, but a pilgrim in places and hearts. We too, like the ancient prophets and above all like Jesus, are called to set out on our way, not to remain comfortable and secure within our works and walls. We are already familiar with the expression "being on the move", so I will not be dwelling on it, but I repeat it anyway.

A pilgrim Salesian Family is always ready to go further, to be open to others, to welcome and accompany them. How painful if we found some members of our family secularized and "armchaired". Instead, a pilgrim community, made up of individuals who live their pilgrimage in communion with others, is a community capable of "cultivating at all times a vocational culture, even in cultural contexts that may seem difficult to us", as I say in the Strenna. And this, because "we want young people to discover a way of life and dream of their lives in which values such as the generosity and self-giving, openness to others and openness to God". Sitting in the armchair, it would be impossible to offer proposals for generosity and self-giving! This would also be the "logic of come and see"! This is the one that attracts more, the one that is included more in prophecy, significance, radicality... "quoting Don Vecchi.

3. Disciple of the Lord and Mediator of His Word and His invitation

Today's Gospel is a classic vocational proclamation. "Come behind me, I will make you become fishers of men", Jesus says to Simon and Andrew, and when he saw James and John,"... he immediately called them "(in this case we don't know with what words he called them. But it doesn't matter with what formula, what matters is that he, the Lord Jesus, calls you, me, us, them, personally, in the midst of everyday life and ordinary things....

Because of the call that we received, we are here today. Each of us has been called to follow Jesus every moment of our lives. We as a Family cannot but be disciples. And as Pope Francis says, quoting the texts of the Latin American Church, missionary disciples, because "the call to follow him" goes along with "the call to announce him".

I have already mentioned the theme of vocational culture. I remember now that we must "offer this opportunity to all young people and to all those who ask for it, without excluding anybody, because in each one the Holy Spirit works... We must accompany (the call of each one) with a journey through which faith becomes as personal as possible; a journey in which one grows in the interiority and in the encounter with Jesus the Lord".

4. A Salesian Family of the 'Already' and 'Immediate'

In the second reading, Paul tells the Corinthians that "time is short..." and we have heard Jesus himself say "time is at hand, and the kingdom of God is near; repent and believe in the Gospel".

So we are talking about the right time, about favourable time! I tell you in the Strenna: "To have the awareness that this is the favourable time. We must continue to walk with boys and girls, with young people and their families, with fathers and mothers who need and accept to walk these roads together..."

Dear brothers and sisters of our Family, "already" and "immediate" are two important words for us. Not to do and do... but to do well. And we do well only when we are who we should be, when we know who we are called to be. But not tomorrow - certainly, tomorrow too! - but let us start today and now!

We are at home in the house of our Mother. May she grant us the grace of being an authentic mediation of the Word of the Lord, which resounds in the heart of every young person, in marriages, in families and in all those who are open to His presence. Amen.