

Have you thought about your vocation? St Francis de Sales could help you (1/10)

"It is not by the greatness of our deeds that we will please God, but by the love with which we do them", St Francis de Sales.

A ten-part process in which Saint Francis de Sales could also accompany young people today who are asking questions about the meaning of their lives.

1. If we started from the ABC of the Christian life

Dear young people,

I know that I am writing to those who already carry in their hearts a small desire for good, a search for light. You have already walked in friendship with the Lord, but allow me to summarise for you here the ABC of life as a believer, that is, a rich and deep inner and spiritual life. With this foundation you will be equipped to make fruitful choices in your existence. This work is not new to me: when I was Bishop, I visited all the parishes in my diocese, and many were located in the mountains. To reach them there were no roads and I had to walk long distances, even in winter, but I was happy to meet those simple people, to encourage them to live as God likes.

To walk fruitfully, the work of the spiritual guide who notices what is going on in your heart, encourages you, follows you, offers clear, gradual and stimulating proposals is decisive. I wrote in the *Philothea*: "Do you want to set out on the paths of the Spirit with confidence? Find someone capable who will be your guide and accompany you; it is the recommendation of recommendations." Four centuries ago, as today: this is the crucial, decisive point.

The goal to be reached is holiness, which consists of a

conscious Christian life, that is, a deep friendship with God, a fervent spiritual life, marked by love of God and neighbour. It is a simple path, knowing that the great opportunities to serve God rarely present themselves, while the small ones always do. This encourages us to ready, active, diligent charity.

If, when thinking of such a goal, you are tempted by discouragement, I repeat what I wrote centuries ago: "We must not expect everyone to begin with perfection: it matters little how we begin. Just be determined to continue and finish well."

To start off on the right foot, I invite you to purify your heart through confession. Sin is a lack of love, a robbery of your humanity, being in the dark and cold: in confession you hand over to Jesus everything that can weigh you down and make your journey dark. It is getting back the joy of the heart.

Going forward, the tools for walking are as old and valuable as the Church, and have sustained generations of Christians of all ages, for 20 centuries! You too have certainly experienced them.

Prayer, that is, dialogue with a Father who is in love with you and your life. Do not forget that you learn to pray by praying: so be faithful and persevering with it.

The Word of God, that is, the "letter from God" addressed precisely to you as individuals. It is like a sort of compass that guides your walking, especially when it is foggy, dark and you risk losing your bearings! Do not forget that in reading it you have the Treasure in your hands.

The sacrament of the Eucharist is the thermometer of your believing life: if your heart has not gained a lively desire to receive the Bread of Life, your encounter with Him will have modest results. I wrote to my contemporaries: "If the world asks you why you take communion so often, answer that it is to learn to love God, to purify you from your imperfections, to free you from your miseries, to find strength in your weaknesses and consolation in your afflictions. Two kinds of people must communicate with each

other often: the perfect, because being well-disposed they would do wrong not to approach the fountain and source of perfection; and the imperfect in order to strive for perfection. The strong so they don't weaken and the weak to strengthen themselves. The sick to heal and the healthy not to fall ill." Attend Holy Mass with great frequency: as much as possible!

I then insist on the virtues, because if the encounter with God is true and profound, it also changes relationships with people, work, things. They make it possible to have a humanly rich character, capable of true and profound friendships, to be joyfully committed to doing your duty well (work-study), being patient and warm in manner, kind.

All this does not take place in your lonely heart, to improve and please yourself. Life with others is an encouragement to journey better (how many are better than us!), to help more (how many need us!), to be helped (how much we have to learn!), to remind ourselves that we are not self-sufficient (we are not self-created and self-educated!). Without a community dimension, we soon lose ourselves.

I hope you have already tasted the fruits of stable guidance, of genuine confessions, of faithful and firm prayer, of the richness of the Word, of the Eucharist lived fruitfully, of virtues practised in the joy of daily life, of enriching friendships, of the indispensability of service. We flourish in this humus: only in this ecosystem can we perceive the true face of the Christian God, into whose hands it is wonderful and joyful to entrust ours life.

Office for Vocational Animation

[\(continued\)](#)

Don Bosco and door-to-door waste collection

Who would have thought it? Don Bosco as an early ecologist? Don Bosco pioneering door-to-door waste collection 140 years ago?

We could say so, at least according to one of the letters we have recovered in recent years and which can be found in the 9th volume of the Epistolary (no. 4144). It is a printed circular from 1885 that in its own small way – the city of Turin at the time – anticipates and, obviously in its own way, “solves” the major problems facing our society, the so-called “consumer” and “throwaway” society.

The addressee

Since it is a circular letter, the addressee is generic, someone who may or may not be known. Don Bosco cunningly “captures” the reader’s attention immediately by calling him “well-deserving and charitable”. Having said this, Don Bosco points out to his correspondent a fact that is there for all to see:

“Your Excellency will know that the bones, left over from the canteen and generally thrown in the rubbish bin by families as waste, when collected in large quantities are then useful to human industry, and are therefore sought after by men of art [= industry] who are paid a few pence per myriagram. A company in Turin, with whom I am in contact, would buy them in any quantity.” So, what would be a nuisance, both at home and away from home, perhaps in the streets around the city, can be wisely used to the advantage of many.

A high purpose

At this point Don Bosco launches his proposal: *“In view of this and in conformity with what is already being practised in*

some countries on behalf of other charitable institutes, I have come up with the idea of appealing to the well-to-do and benevolent families in this illustrious city, and begging them that instead of letting the leftovers from their table go to waste and become useless, they give it freely for the benefit of the poor orphans gathered in my Institutes, and especially for the benefit of the Missions in Patagonia where the Salesians, at great expense and at the risk of their own lives, are teaching and civilising the savage tribes, so that they may enjoy the fruits of Redemption and true progress. Similar recourse and such a prayer I therefore make to Your Excellency, convinced that you will take them into benign consideration and grant them."



The project seemed appealing to several parties: families would get rid of some of the table waste, the company would be interested in collecting it to reuse it in other ways (food for animals, fertilisers for the countryside, etc.); Don Bosco would get money from it for the missions... and the city would remain cleaner.

A perfect organisation

The situation was clear, the goal was high, the benefits were there for all, but it may not be enough. It was necessary to collect bones "door to door" throughout the city. Don Bosco did not flinch. Seventy years old, he now had deep insights, long experience but also great managerial skills. So, he organised this "enterprise", taking care to avoid the ever-potential abuses in the various phases of the collection operation: *"Those families who are good enough to accept this humble request of mine will be given a special bag where they will put the bones mentioned, which will often be collected and weighed by a person appointed by the purchasing company, and issued a receipt, which in the event of a check with the*

company itself will be collected from time to time in my name. In this way, Your Excellency will have no other choice but to issue the appropriate orders so that these useless leftovers from your canteen, which would otherwise be lost, may be placed in the same bag, to be delivered to the collector and then sold and used by charity. The bag will bear the initials O. S. (Salesian Oratory), and the person who comes to empty it will also present some sign to make himself known to Your Excellency or to the family."

What can we say other than that the project seems valid in all its parts, even better than some similar projects in our third-millennium cities!

The incentives

Obviously, the proposal had to be supported with some incentive, certainly not economic or promotional, but moral and spiritual. Which? Here it is: *"Your Excellency will be well-deserving of the above-mentioned works, you will have the gratitude of thousands of poor youngsters, and what is more important, you will receive the reward promised by God to all those who strive for the moral and material well-being of their fellow men."*

A precise approach

As a practical person, he devised what we might call a very modern approach to succeed in his undertaking: he asked his recipients to send him back the coupon, placed at the foot of the letter, bearing his address: *"I would ask you again to assure me of this, for my sake and for the completion of the procedures to be carried out, by detaching and sending me back the part of this printed matter which bears my address. As soon as I have your acceptance, I will give the order that the aforementioned bag be delivered to you."*

Don Bosco closed his letter with the usual formula of thanks and good wishes, which was so much appreciated by his correspondents.

Don Bosco, besides being a great educator, a far-sighted

founder, a man of God, was also a genius of Christian charity.

Venerable Dorotea Chopitea

Who was Dorotea de Chopitea? She was a Salesian cooperator, a true mother of the poor in Barcelona, creator of numerous institutions at the service of charity and the apostolic mission of the Church. Her figure takes on special importance today and encourages us to imitate her example of being “merciful like the Father”.

A Biscayan in Chile

In 1790, during the reign of Charles IV, a Biscayan, Pedro Nicolás de Chopitea, a native of Lequeitio, emigrated to Chile, then part of the Spanish Empire. The young migrant prospered and married a young Creole woman, Isabel de Villota.

Don Pedro Nolasco Chopitea and Isabel Villota settled in Santiago de Chile. God granted them 18 children, although only 12 survived, five boys and seven girls. The youngest of these was born, baptised and confirmed on the same day: 5 August 1816, taking the names Antonia, Dorotea and Dolores, although she was always known as Dorotea (Dorothy), which in Greek means “gift of God”. Peter and Elizabeth’s family was wealthy, Christian, and committed to using their wealth for the benefit of the poor people around them.

In 1816, the year of Dorotea’s birth, Chileans began to openly demand independence from Spain, which they achieved in 1818. The following year, Don Pedro, who had aligned himself with the royalists, i.e. in favour of Spain, and had been imprisoned for it, moved his family across the Atlantic to Barcelona, so that the political turmoil would not compromise his older children, although he continued to maintain a dense

network of relations with political and economic circles in Chile.

In the large house in Barcelona, the three-year-old Dorotea was entrusted to the care of her twelve-year-old sister Josefina. Thus Josefina, later "Sister Josefina", was Dorotea's "little young mother". She entrusted herself to her with total affection, allowing herself to be guided by her.

When she was thirteen years old, on Josefina's advice she took Father Pedro Nardó, from the parish of Santa María del Mar, as her spiritual director. For 50 years Pedro was her confessor and counsellor in delicate and difficult moments. The priest taught her with kindness and strength to "separate her heart from riches".

Throughout her life, Dorotea considered the riches of her family not as a source of amusement and dissipation, but as a great means placed in her hand by God to do good for the poor. Fr Pedro Nardó had her read the Gospel parable of the rich man and the poor Lazarus many times. As a distinctive Christian sign, he advised Josefina and Dorotea to always dress modestly and simply, without the cascade of ribbons and light silk gauze that the fashion of the time imposed on young aristocratic women.

Dorotea received the solid home schooling which at that time was given to girls from well-to-do families. In fact, she later helped her husband many times in his profession as a merchant.

Wife at the age of sixteen

The Chopiteas had met up in Barcelona with friends from Chile, the Serra family, who had returned to Spain for the same reason, independence. The father, Mariano Serra i Soler, came from Palafrugell and had also carved out a brilliant financial position for himself. Married to a young Creole girl, Mariana Muñoz, he had four children, the eldest of whom, José María,

was born in Chile on 4 November 1810.

At the age of sixteen, Dorotea experienced the most delicate moment of her life. She was engaged to José María Serra, although the marriage was spoken of as a future event. But it happened that Don Pedro Chopitea had to return to Latin America to defend his interests, and shortly afterwards his wife Isabel prepared to cross the Atlantic to reach him in Uruguay together with their youngest children. Suddenly, Dorotea was faced with a fundamental decision for her life: to break the deep affection that bound her to José María Serra and leave with her mother, or to marry at the age of sixteen. On the advice of Fr Pedro Nardó, Dorotea decided to marry. The marriage took place in Santa Maria del Mar on 31 October 1832.

The young couple settled in Carrer Montcada, in the palace belonging to her husband's parents. The understanding between them was perfect and a source of happiness and well-being.

Dorotea was a slim, lanky individual with a strong and determined character. The "I will always love you" sworn by the two spouses before God, developed into an affectionate and solid married life which gave birth to six daughters: all of them receiving the name Maria with various complements: Maria Dolores, Maria Ana, Maria Isabel, Maria Luisa, Maria Jesus and Maria del Carmen. The first came into the world in 1834, the last in 1845.

Fifty years after the "yes" pronounced in the church of Santa Maria del Mar, José Maria Serra would say that in all those years "our love grew day by day".

Dorotea, mother of the poor

Dorotea was the lady of the house, in which several families of employees worked. She was José María's intelligent co-worker, who soon achieved fame in the business world. She was by his side in times of success and in times of uncertainty and failure. Dorotea was by her husband's side when he

travelled abroad. She was with him Tsar Alexander II' Russia, in the Savoy family's Italy and Pope Leo XIII's Rome.

On her visit to Rome, at the age of sixty-two, she was accompanied by her niece Isidora Pons, who testified at the apostolic process: "She was received by the Pope. The deference with which Leo XIII treated my aunt, to whom he offered her a white sundress as a gift, has stayed with me."

Affectionate and strong

The employees of the Serra house felt like part of the family. Maria Arnenos declared under oath: "She had a motherly affection for us, her employees. She cared for our material and spiritual welfare with real love. When someone was ill, she saw to it that they lacked nothing, she took care of even the smallest details." "Her salary was higher than that given to the employees of other families.

A delicate person, a strong and determined character. This was the battlefield on which Dorotea struggled throughout her life to acquire the humility and calm that nature had not given her. As great as her impetus was, greater was her strength to live always in the presence of God. Thus she wrote in her spiritual notes: "I will make every effort to ensure that from morning all my actions are directed to God", "I will not give up meditation and spiritual reading without serious reason", "I will make twenty daily acts of mortification and as many acts of love of God", "To do all actions from God and for God, frequently renewing purity of intention... I promise God to purify my intention in all my actions."

Salesian Cooperator

In the last decades of the 1800s, Barcelona was a city in the throes of the "industrial revolution". The outskirts of the city were full of very poor people. There was a lack of shelters, hospitals and schools. During the retreat she made in 1867, Doña Dorotea wrote among her resolutions: "My favourite virtue will be charity towards the poor, even if it

costs me great sacrifices.” And Adrián de Gispert, Dorotea’s nephew, testified: “I know that Aunt Dorotea founded hospitals, shelters, schools, workshops for arts and trades and many other works. I remember visiting some of them in her company. When her husband was alive, he helped her in these charitable and social works. After his death, she first of all saw to the patrimony of her five daughters; then, her “personal” goods (her very rich dowry, the patrimony received personally in inheritance, the goods that her husband wanted to register in his name), she used for the poor with careful and prudent administration.” A witness stated under oath: “After having provided for her family, she dedicated the rest to the poor as an act of justice.”

Having heard from Don Bosco, she wrote to him on 20 September 1882 (she was sixty-six, Don Bosco sixty-seven). She told him that Barcelona was an “eminently industrial and mercantile” city, and that his young and dynamic Congregation would find plenty of work among the boys in the suburbs. She offered a school for apprentice workers.

Fr Philp Rinaldi arrived in Barcelona in 1889, and he writes: “We went to Barcelona at her call, because she wanted to provide especially for young workers and abandoned orphans. She bought a plot of land with a house, the extension of which she took care of. I arrived in Barcelona when the construction had already been completed.... With my own eyes I saw many cases of assistance to children, widows, the elderly, the unemployed and the sick. Many times I heard it said that she personally performed the most humble services for the sick.”

In 1884 she thought of entrusting a nursery school to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians: it was necessary to think of the children in the outer suburbs.

Don Bosco was not able to go to Barcelona until the spring of 1886, and the chronicles amply report the triumphant welcome he was given in the Catalan metropolis, and the affectionate

and respectful attentions with which Doña Dorotea, her daughters, grandchildren and relatives surrounded the saint.

On 5 February 1888, when he was informed of Don Bosco's death, Blessed Michael Rua wrote to her: "Our dearest father Don Bosco has flown to heaven, leaving his children full of sorrow." He always showed a lively esteem and grateful affection for our mother of Barcelona, as he called her, the mother of the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

Moreover, before he died, he assured her that he was going to prepare a good place for her in heaven. That same year, Doña Dorotea handed over the oratory and the schools in Rocafort Street, in the heart of Barcelona to the Salesians.

The last handing over to the Salesian Family was the Santa Dorotea school entrusted to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. 60,000 pesetas were needed for its purchase, and she handed it over saying: "God wants me poor." That sum was her provision for her old age, what she kept to live modestly together with Mary, her faithful companion.

On Good Friday 1891, in the cold church of Marie Reparatrice, as she was taking up the collection she contracted pneumonia. She was seventy-five years old, and it was immediately clear that she would not overcome the crisis. Fr Rinaldi came to her and stayed for a long time at her bedside. He wrote: "In the few days he was still alive, she did not think of her illness but of the poor and her soul. She wanted to say something in particular to each of her daughters, and blessed them all in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, like an ancient patriarch. As we stood around her bed commending her to the Lord, at a certain moment she raised her eyes. The confessor presented the crucifix to her to kiss. Those of us who were present knelt down. Doña Dorotea recollected herself, closed her eyes and gently breathed her last."

It was 3 April 1891, five days after Easter.

Pope John Paul II declared her “Venerable” on 9 June 1983, i.e. “a Christian who practised love of God and neighbour to an heroic degree,”

Fr Echave-Sustaeta del Villar Nicolás, sdb
Vice-Postulator of the Cause of the Venerable

Don Bosco. A Hail Mary at the end of Holy Mass

St John Bosco's devotion to Our Lady is well known. The graces received from Mary Help of Christians, even the extraordinary, miraculous ones, are perhaps also partly known. Probably less well known is the promise made to the Virgin, to take to Paradise those who have combined a Hail Mary with Holy Mass for their entire lives.

That the saint had an open door in Heaven to his prayers is well known. Even as a cleric in the seminary, his prayers were answered, and to disguise this intervention with Heaven he used the trick of providing bread pills instead of miracles as medicines for a while, until he was discovered by a real pharmacist. The numerous intercession requests and the many miracles that occurred in his life, abundantly recounted by his biographers, confirm this powerful intercession.

The promise of having several thousand young people with him in paradise, which he received from the Blessed Virgin, is confirmed by two seminarians who heard him speak about it during a Retreat to the clerics at the Episcopal Seminary in Bergamo. One of them was Angelo Cattaneo, future Vicar

Apostolic of Southern Honan in China, and he testified in a paper addressed to Fr Michael Rua, and another, Stefano Scaini, who later became a Jesuit; he too left a testimony in a paper addressed to the Salesians. Here is the first testimony.

D. Bosco spoke of the snares the devil laid for the youngsters to distract them from Confession and told them he would have liked to reveal to individuals, who asked him, the spiritual condition of their souls.

[...]

When, after a sermon to the seminarians [of Bergamo], one of them [Angelo Cattaneo] presented himself to Don Bosco with a list of sins in his hand, the Saint threw it on the fire and then listed all the sins as if he were reading them. Then he told his attentive listeners that he had obtained a promise from Our Lady to have several thousand young people with him in paradise, on the condition that they recite a Hail Mary every day during Mass throughout their earthly life. (Pilla Eugenio, *I sogni di Don Bosco*, p. 207)

And also the second.

Very Rev. Sir,

On a certain occasion I was allowed to ask Our Lady for the grace of having several thousand boys with me in heaven (I think he also specified the number, but can't remember) and the Blessed Virgin granted me the favour. If you wish to be included too, I shall be happy to admit you. The only condition is that, for the rest of your life, you say a Hail Mary every day – possibly at Mass and, preferably, at the Consecration."

I don't know what the others made of this proposal, but I myself accepted it joyfully because of the very high esteem I had then acquired for Don Bosco. As far as I can remember, I have never missed my daily Hail Mary for that intention. However, with the passing of years, a doubt came to my mind

which I once asked Don Bosco to clear up.

On January 3, 1882, as I was passing through Turin on my way to the Jesuit novitiate at Chieri, I obtained an audience with Don Bosco, who received me very warmly. When I told him I was about to become a Jesuit, he said, "I am delighted to hear it! When I learn that someone enters that Society, I am as happy as if he were joining the Salesians." Then I said to him, "With your permission, I'd like to ask you to clarify a matter I have much at heart. Father, do you remember preaching a spiritual retreat at the Bergamo seminary?" "I certainly do!" "Do you recall telling us of a grace you asked of Our Lady?" I reminded him of his words and of the condition he had stipulated. "Yes, I do." "Well, I have always said that Hail Mary and will always say it, but you spoke of thousands of boys! I'm afraid I'm no longer one of those lucky ones!"

Without hesitation, Don Bosco replied, "Keep on reciting the Hail Mary, and we shall be together in heaven." After receiving his holy blessing and affectionately kissing his hand, I left with joy and the hope of one day being really with him in heaven.

If this can bring glory to God and honour to Don Bosco, I promise that I'm ready to confirm it by oath.

Lomello, 4 March 1891.

Most humble Devoted Servant

V. Stefano Scaini S.I. [[MB](#) VI,846].

These testimonies make it clear how much eternal salvation was at the heart of Don Bosco. In all his educational and social initiatives, very necessary for that matter, he did not lose sight of the ultimate goal of human life, Paradise. He wanted to prepare everyone for this last examination of life, and for this reason he insisted that young people also be accustomed to do the exercise of the good death every month-end, remembering the last things, also called the *novissimos* (*the last things*): death, judgement, Heaven and hell. And for this he had asked and obtained this special grace from Mary Help of

Christians.

Of course it seems strange to us today that this prayer was made during Holy Mass and also at the very moment of the Consecration. But, to understand this, one must remember that in Don Bosco's time Mass was celebrated entirely in Latin, and since the vast majority of the faithful did not know this language, it was easy to get distracted instead of praying. To find a remedy for this human inclination he used to recommend various prayers during the celebration.

Can we say this Hail Mary at the end of the celebration today? Don Bosco himself has us understand: "*If possible* during the time you are listening to Holy Mass...". What is more, today's liturgical norms do not recommend inserting other prayers outside those of the Missal.

Can we hope that this Hail Mary will also add us to the number of beneficiaries of the promise? By living in God's grace, by doing it all our lives, and by Don Bosco's reply to Stefano Scaini, "Keep reciting that Hail Mary and we shall be together in Heaven" we can answer in the affirmative.

Letter from the Rector Major after his appointment as cardinal

To my Salesian Brothers (sdb) To the Salesian Family

My dear brothers and sisters: receive my fraternal greetings full of sincere and heartfelt affection.

It was such an unexpected news (especially for me), that the

Holy Father, Pope Francis, also announced my name among the 21 people he had chosen to be 'created' Cardinals of the Church at the next Consistory on September 30th. After that, thousands of people must have asked themselves: What is going to happen now? And how will the Congregation be in the near future? You can understand that I asked myself these same questions, and at the same time I presented to the Lord, in faith, this gift that Pope Francis has given us as a Salesian Congregation and as the Family of Don Bosco. We should have no doubt about how much the Pope loves us; in the same way Pope Francis knows how much we all love him and how we support him, as much as possible, through our prayer.

Within half an hour of the announcement he made at the Angelus last Sunday, July 9th, the Holy Father handed me a letter in which he asked me to go and speak to him as soon as possible, in order to agree on the necessary timing in my service as Rector Major for the good, first and foremost, of the Congregation. He himself mentioned to me in this letter about the preparation of the next General Chapter.

Yesterday afternoon I was received by Pope Francis and we entered a serene, fraternal and mutually affectionate dialogue. Now I am in a position to share with the whole Congregation and the Salesian Family of the world the concrete directives according to the will of the Holy Father.

These provisions are as follows:

- we will be able to bring forward the General Chapter by one year, i.e., that it would take place starting in February 2025;
- the Pope has seen as conducive, for the good of the Congregation, that after the Consistory of September 30th I may continue as Rector Major until July 31st, 2024, that is, until the conclusion of the summer session (in Europe) of the General Council;
- after that date I will present my resignation as Rector Major, because I have been called by the Holy Father for the service he will entrust to me. This is what he has

communicated to me;

- according to article 143 of our Constitutions, by reason of the ‘cessation from office of Rector Major’ on being called by Pope Francis to another service, the Vicar, Fr Stefano Martoglio, will assume the government of the Congregation until the celebration of GC29;

- the 29th General Chapter will be convoked by me, at least one year before its celebration, as established in our Constitutions and Regulations (R 111), and it will be the Vicar Fr Stefano who will preside over it;

- during all this time we will continue with the programme established for the animation and government of the Congregation, but adding the efforts of all the members of the General Council and of some extraordinary visitors appointed by the Rector Major, in order to carry out all the extraordinary visitations (including those that were scheduled for the year 2025). In this way it will be possible to arrive at GC29 with a complete vision of the whole Congregation, at present;

- for all the other elements related to the General Chapter, I will provide detailed information when the official convocation of the General Chapter will take place.

Finally, it is only left for me to say what many of you may be wondering: What is the Holy Father going to entrust to me? He has not yet told me, and I understand that, with so much time ahead of us, that is the best thing to do. I do ask all my Salesian brothers and sisters and our dear Salesian Family to continue to intensify our prayer. First of all, for Pope Francis. This was his request in his final greeting: he asked us to pray for him. And I also ask you to pray for what we will experience in this year as a Congregation and as a Salesian Family.

In truth, I ask you to pray for me too as I face the prospect of this new service in the Church which, as a son of Don Bosco, I accept in obedience, without having sought or wanted it. Our beloved Father Don Bosco is a witness of this before

the Lord Jesus.

And from here, from the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, she, Our Mother, will continue to accompany us. I believe, like Don Bosco in his dream at nine – of which we will celebrate the bicentenary next year – that “in due time we will understand everything”. In the case of our Father Don Bosco this happened at the end of his life, before the altar of Mary Help of Christians in the Basilica of the ‘Sacred Heart of Jesus’ which had been consecrated the day before, on that May 16th, 1887. Let us place everything in the hands of the Lord and his Mother.

Greetings with immense affection,

Prot. 23/0319

Turin, July 12th, 2023

Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Rome

In the twilight of his life, obeying a wish of Pope Leo XIII, Don Bosco took on the difficult task of building the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus at the Castro Pretorio in Rome. To complete the gigantic undertaking he spared no tiring journeys, humiliations, sacrifices, shortening his precious life as an apostle of youth.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus dates back to the beginnings of the Church. In the early centuries, the Holy Fathers invited people to look at the pierced side of Christ, a symbol of love, even if it did not explicitly refer to the Heart of the Redeemer.

The earliest references found are from the mystics Matilda of

Magdeburg (1207-1282), St Matilda of Hackeborn (1241-1299), St Gertrude of Helfta (ca. 1256-1302) and Blessed Henry Suso (1295-1366).

An important development came with the works of St John Eudes (1601-1680), then with the private revelations of the Sisters of the Visitation, St Margaret Mary Alacoque, spread by St Claude de la Colombière (1641-1682) and his Jesuit brethren.

At the end of the 19th century, churches consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus spread, mainly as churches of expiation. With the consecration of mankind to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, through Leo XIII's encyclical, *Annum Sacrum* (1899) the cult was greatly extended and strengthened with two more encyclicals to come later: *Miserentissimus Redemptor* (1928) by Pius XI and especially *Haurietis Aquas* (1956) by Pius XII.

In Don Bosco's time, after the construction of the Termini railway station by Pope Pius IX in 1863, the neighbourhood began to be populated, and the surrounding churches could not serve the faithful adequately. This led to the desire to build a church in the area, and it was initially planned to dedicate it to St Joseph, who was appointed as the patron saint of the Universal Church on 8 December 1870. After a series of events, in 1871 the pope changed the patronage of the desired church, dedicating it to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and it remained in the planning stage until 1879. Meanwhile, the cult to the Sacred Heart continued to spread, and in 1875, in Paris, on the city's highest hill, Montmartre (Mount of Martyrs), the foundation stone was laid for the church of the same name, *Sacré Cœur*, which was completed in 1914 and consecrated in 1919.

After the death of Pope Pius IX, the new Pope Leo XIII (as Archbishop of Perugia he had consecrated his diocese to the Sacred Heart) decided to resume the project, and the foundation stone was laid on 16 August 1879. Work stopped shortly afterwards due to a lack of financial support. One of the cardinals, Gaetano Alimonda (future archbishop of Turin)

advised the Pope to entrust the enterprise to Don Bosco and, even though the pontiff was initially hesitant knowing the commitments of the Salesian missions inside and outside Italy, he made the proposal to the Saint in April 1880. Don Bosco did not think twice and replied: "The Pope's wish is a command for me: I accept the commitment that Your Holiness has the goodness to entrust to me." When the Pope warned him that he could not support him financially, the Saint only asked for the apostolic blessing and spiritual favours necessary for the task entrusted to him.



Laying the foundation stone of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Rome

On his return to Turin, he wanted the Chapter's approval for this undertaking. Of the seven votes, only one was positive: his... The Saint was not discouraged and argued: "You have all given me a resounding *no* for an answer, and that is fine, because you acted with all the prudence needed to make serious, major decisions such as this. However, were you to give me a yes answer, I can promise you that the Sacred Heart of Jesus will supply the funds to build the Church, He will pay off our debts, and He will even give us a handsome bonus as well." ([MB XIV,580](#)). After this speech the vote was repeated and the results were all positive and the main boon was the Hospice of the Sacred Heart which was built next to the church for poor and abandoned boys. This second hospice project was included in an Agreement made on 11 December 1880, which guaranteed the perpetual use of the church to the Salesian Congregation.

Acceptance caused him grave worries and cost him his health, but Don Bosco, who taught his sons work and temperance and said it would be a day of triumph when it was said that a Salesian had died on the battlefield worn out by fatigue, preceded them by example.

The building of the Church of the Sacred Heart at the Castro Pretorio in Rome was done not only out of obedience to the Pope but also out of devotion.

Let us take up one of his talks on this devotion, made during a “good night” to his pupils and confreres only a month after his acceptance, on 3 June 1880, the eve of the Feast of the Sacred Heart.

“Tomorrow, my dear children, the Church celebrates the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It is necessary that we too, with great effort, try to honour him. It is true that the external solemnity moves to Sunday; but tomorrow let us begin to celebrate in our hearts, to pray in a special way, to make a fervent communion. Then on Sunday there will be music and the other ceremonies of external worship which make Christian feasts so beautiful and majestic.

Some of you will want to know what this feast is and why the Sacred Heart of Jesus is especially honoured. I will tell you that this feast is nothing other than to honour with a special remembrance the love that Jesus brought to mankind. Oh the great, infinite love that Jesus brought us in his incarnation and birth, in his life and preaching, and particularly in his passion and death! Since then the seat of love is the heart, so the Sacred Heart is venerated as the object that served as a furnace to this boundless love. This veneration of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, that is, of the love that Jesus showed us, was of all times and always; but there was not always a feast specially established to venerate it. How Jesus appeared to Blessed Margaret a feast manifested to her the great good that will come to mankind by honouring His most loving heart with special worship, and how the feast was therefore established, you will hear in the sermon on Sunday evening.

Now let us take courage and each one do his best to correspond to so much love that Jesus has brought us”. ([MB XI,249](#))

The church was completed for worship seven years later, in 1887. On 14 May of that year Don Bosco attended the consecration of the Church with great emotion, solemnly

presided over by the Cardinal Vicar Lucido Maria Parocchi. Two days later, on 16 May, he celebrated the only Holy Mass in this church, at the altar of Mary Help of Christians, interrupted more than fifteen times by tears. They were tears of gratitude for the divine light he had received: he had understood the words of his dream when he was nine: "In good time you will understand everything!" A task completed amidst many misunderstandings, difficulties and hardships, but crowning a life spent for God and the young, rewarded by the same Divinity.

A video was recently made about the Basilica of the Sacred Heart. We offer it to you below.

Salesian presence in the Caribbean

Beneath the Caribbean sun, in villages full of life and joy, Don Bosco continues to be a significant response for the young people of these lands.

For more than one hundred years, the Salesian presence has found both a fertile environment and climate in some Caribbean countries which today, as in the past, confirm their importance in the presence of their young people, in their joyful, affectionate and simple people, in their religious sensitivity and in the welcome they offer others: Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico have offered and continue to offer a propitious environment for the Salesian mission and a fertile land for Don Bosco's charism.

The Salesians, organised into two Provinces, the Antilles and Haiti, together with many other members of the Salesian Family, make this presence concrete today. They are the fruit of the generosity and passion of great missionaries with good will, big dreams, trust in Providence and commitment to the education and evangelisation of the young; this is how Don Bosco's presence was consolidated. There were also natural or social historical events that motivated the decisions that led to its current conformation.

A bit of history

Although the first request for Salesians in the West Indies dates back to 1896, the first country to receive a Salesian presence was Cuba in 1916, followed by the Dominican Republic in 1933, then Haiti in 1936 and finally Puerto Rico in 1947.

Dolores Betancourt, a native of Camagüey, had signed a private agreement in Turin with Fr Paul Albera regarding a foundation in her home town. The first Salesians arrived in Cuba on 4 April 1917 to open a work in Camagüey.

Fr José Calasanz (1872-1936), originally from Azanuy, Spain, a Salesian since 1890, was sent as a missionary to promote foundations in Cuba, Peru and Bolivia. In 1917, the first Salesians entered Cuba, together with Fr Esteban Capra and two Brothers (Bros Ullivarri and Celaya). In 1917, the Salesians were entrusted with the church dedicated to Our Lady of Charity in a rural area of Camagüey, from where they coordinated the first school of arts and trades.



Haiti, Cap-Haïtien

Salesian communities began to grow and consolidate in Cuba, first sharing canonical property with the Salesian Province of Tarragona, Spain. In 1924, it passed to the Province of Mexico

and three years later, due to the religious persecution suffered in Mexico, the headquarters of the Province was transferred to Havana, Cuba.

Father Pittini carried out the duties of Provincial in the eastern part of the United States and there he received instructions from the Superior General, Fr Peter Ricaldone, to move to Santo Domingo to examine the possibility of the Congregation establishing itself in the Dominican Republic.

On 16 August 1933, Fr Pittini arrived in the port of San Pedro de Macorís. In February 1934, Fr Pittini took on the role of Superior of the Salesians who had just arrived in the Dominican Republic; he supervised the work of the school under construction and got to know the people. On 11 October 1935, Pope Pius XI appointed him Archbishop of Santo Domingo.



Haiti, Pétion-Ville

The Salesians arrived in Haiti in 1936. The Rector Major delegated Fr Peter Gimbert, former Provincial of Lyon, to implant the Salesian charism in Haiti. He arrived on 27 May 1936, accompanied by Salesian Bro. Adriano Massa. Later, other confreres arrived to complete the community.

From its foundation, Haiti was successively part of the Salesian Province of Mexico-Antilles with its headquarters in Havana; later it became part of the Province of the Antilles – along with Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico – with its headquarters in Santo Domingo.



Haiti, Gressier

The foundation in Puerto Rico became a reality on 24 April 1947, when Fr Pedro M. Savani, former Provincial of Mexico-Antille, arrived to take charge of the Parish of St John Bosco

in Santurce, Lutz Street. From here, he began the management of an Oratory on what is now Cantera land, where, in 1949, he began the construction of the chapel that would later become the imposing Church of Mary Help of Christians.

The canonical erection of the Antilles Province took place on 15 September 1953 when Fr Renato Ziggiotti was Rector Major, under the patronage of St John Bosco, with its headquarters in La Víbora (Havana, Cuba). It was later transferred to Compostela (Old Havana). After the Cuban Revolution, the provincial headquarters was transferred to Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, at the Don Bosco College where it remained until 1993, when it was moved to its present location at Calle 30 de Marzo #52, in the city of Santo Domingo.

Since January 1992, Haiti has been a Vice-Province based in Port-au-Prince.

Don Bosco in the Caribbean today

The Salesian Province of the Antilles is made up of three countries in the Caribbean region: Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. Haiti forms a separate Vice-Province. In total there are 169 Salesians of Don Bosco in the four countries: 15 in Cuba, 74 in Haiti, 67 in the Dominican Republic and 13 in Puerto Rico.

The works that animate the two Provinces in 32 communities include 41 educational centres (of which at least 20 are technical training centres), 33 oratories, 23 social works, 8 retreat-meeting houses, 1 environmental training centre, 3 formation houses, 4 social communication centres-recording studios, 2 radio stations and 18 parishes with 80 chapels and 44 mission houses.

The Salesian Family in the Caribbean has great vitality and is made up of various groups: Salesians of Don Bosco, Daughters

of Mary Help of Christians, Salesian Cooperators, Association of Mary Help of Christians, Past Pupils (SDB-FMA), Daughters of the Sacred Hearts, Volunteers of Don Bosco, Damas Salesians and Parish Missionaries of Mary Help of Christians (the latter, a Pious Union, approved by the Archbishop of Santo Domingo, Archbishop Octavio A. Beras, was founded by Fr Andrés Nemeth, sdb, on 16 June 1961; although it is not part of the Salesian Family, but because of its closeness to it, it attends its meetings). Relations are warm, some pastoral projects are shared and they meet frequently.

In a very particular social and political climate, the four countries are experiencing a mass migration of their young people and entire families, motivated by hunger, lack of food and work, violence and the search for better paid opportunities. In these circumstances, the Salesian presence continues to be very committed to the processes of education, job training, citizenship and life of faith. There is a serious commitment to defending the rights to education, food and a dignified life for children, adolescents and young adults; playgrounds are used to accompany and encourage playful activities and encounters that allow people to make friends. Music and dance are natural expressions that find in Salesian oratories the stimulus and space to express themselves at their best. Their courtyards have always been places of encounter and refuge, even in the face of natural events.

This presence today is prophetic in sharing with people the social realities that each country is experiencing, deciding to remain close to those most in need, encouraging daily faith, a simple friendship that speaks of God, full of hope and comfort, with fraternal gestures of solidarity and love for the most vulnerable, especially children and young people.



Santo Domingo, La Plaza

Fr Hugo OROZCO SÁNCHEZ, sdb
Regional Councillor for Interamerica

Rector Major, Fr Angel FERNANDEZ ARTIME, appointed cardinal

At the end of the Marian prayer on Sunday, 9 July 2023, Pope Francis announced the creation of 21 new cardinals, including the Rector Major of the Salesians, Fr Angel FERNANDEZ ARTIME.

We wish our Rector Major many graces from the Lord to guide him in the new mission entrusted to him by the Universal Church!

The official news can be found [HERE](#).

Second Congress of Coadjutors of Africa

The Second Regional Congress of Salesian Coadjutors of the Africa-Madagascar Region was held from 24 to 29 May 2023 in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in the “Our Lady of Africa” Visitation of Equatorial Tropical Africa (ATE). The motto of the Congress: “Walking with Raphael and Tobias, pedalling with Artemis” guided the days of deepening the charism, aiming to promote the vocational identity of the Salesian coadjutor and to offer

a vision that helps in ongoing formation. We present the talk by the Regional Councillor, Fr Alphonse Owoudou.

Introduction

General Chapter 28th set us an identity challenge in the form of a question: "What kind of Salesians for the youth of today? This question may come back to us during this Congress of Salesian Brothers: **What Salesian Brothers for the young people of Africa and Madagascar today?** The various reflections that have fuelled these days give us reasons to constantly redraw the portrait of each of our lay consecrated confreres, and this is what we are going to contribute by contemplating a book of the Bible, the book of Tobit, an extremely prophetic, pedagogical and pastoral legend. We will see, through an analogical and slightly hermeneutical perspective, how and to what extent, like Don Bosco and particularly like Saint Artemide Zatti, the Coadjutor is called to become a spiritual parent and a competent companion for young people, not to say a true "sacrament of the Salesian presence".

1. Walking with Raphael and young Tobias

The legend of Raphael and Tobias is a fascinating Bible story about a young man named Tobias and his guardian angel, Raphael. I'd like to sum up Tobith's life by giving him the floor: *"I, Tobith, walked in truth and did what was right. I gave alms to my family and to the Assyrian captives in Nineveh and I often visited Jerusalem for the festivals, bringing offerings and tithes. When I grew up, I married and had a son called Tobias. Deported by Sennacherib, I abstained from eating their food and God granted me mercy before him. Through my nephew Ahikar, I obtained a return to Nineveh where I helped orphans, widows and foreigners according to the law of Moses."*

Accused by one of the citizens, Tobith is unfortunately ruined, and even blinded by a bird's excrement falling on his face. And we remember the quarrel with his wife (chap 2), who had brought in a sheep, and the blind husband thought she had

stolen it, which made his wife angry and insulted her blind husband. Tobith had a son, to whom he had given his own name. The archangel Raphael appeared to this young boy in human form and offered him his help. Raphael accompanies Tobias on a difficult mission, a perilous journey to collect money for his family (chapter 4). During the journey, Raphael helps Tobias defeat a demon that has killed the husbands of his future wives and cures Tobias' blindness. At the end of the journey, Tobias marries Sarra, the daughter of a distant relative, and Raphael reveals his true identity as an angel of God.

The lay Salesian Artemide Zatti was a religious and a man close to his brothers and sisters, especially those who were suffering. He dedicated his life to helping the sick and poor in Argentina. Zatti was a young man from a poor family who began working at the age of four to help his family. He later emigrated to Argentina with his family in search of a better life. Stricken with tuberculosis, he recovered and joined the Salesian order.

Zatti worked as a pharmacist and also ran a hospital, where he was described as being very devoted to the sick and poor. He was also involved in religious activities and was considered a potential candidate for canonisation. Zatti was known for his compassion and dedication to patients, his medical expertise, his work to expand the hospital and his lasting legacy. His bicycle became a symbol of his life dedicated to others, which he used to ride around the city visiting the sick poor. Zatti refused gifts for himself, preferring to continue using his bicycle, which he considered a sufficient means of transport to fulfil his mission of caring for the sick and serving others.

2. Pope Francis' two tweets and a bicycle

1. *Salesian Brother Artemide Zatti, full of gratitude for what he had received, wanted to say "thank you" by taking on the wounds of others: cured of tuberculosis, he devoted his entire life to caring for the sick with love and tenderness.*

2. *The Christian faith always asks us to walk together with others, to step out of ourselves towards God and our brothers*

and sisters. And to know how to give thanks, overcoming the dissatisfaction and indifference that make our hearts grow ugly.

Pope Francis, speaking of Zatti, insists on “walking together”, i.e. sharing and uniting through love to help those who suffer. Zatti devoted her entire life to serving the most disadvantaged, using her bicycle as a means of transport to go to the poor districts of the city and help the sick. His bicycle thus became a powerful symbol of the values he shared: humility, generosity and simplicity.

Indeed, Zatti showed no particular interest in owning a car or even a moped when his friends wanted to give them one. The bicycle was all he needed to achieve his noble goal: to help those most in need of support. His choice of mode of transport also reflected another intrinsic characteristic of his personality: the unconditional love he distributed without restriction or condition to those who weren't fortunate enough to receive as much simply because their social or financial circumstances didn't allow them to.

Every gesture Zatti made resonated deeply with everyone, inviting everyone to follow his example. Walking together means being available psychologically and physically so that each person can feel supported by those around them, but above all serving others with kindness and compassion as he himself cared for them for so many years. These actions are a concrete reflection of the message outlined by Pope Francis about “walking together”: reaching out to those who are suffering in order to collectively envisage an overall improvement in community well-being through a general attitude of greater solidarity and warmth towards others in our daily lives.

3. Our mission of accompaniment and synodality?

This story from the Book of Tobit is an excellent example of the importance and crucial role that accompaniment, synodality and solidarity play in our common mission of service to others.

Raphael accompanied Tobias throughout his journey, including accidents, adapting to each situation and taking the time to answer his questions, assist his companions and help those who were suffering. His role was to encourage, incite and push Tobias to rise to the challenges he faced so that he could reach his destination. But he did more than that: he also gave him practical help in situations where he was powerless against the invisible forces controlling him.



What's more, Raphael didn't work alone during the journey; he worked hand in hand with Tobias to find solutions adapted to the circumstances. He understood that to be effective, he had to listen to the young man's requests, respect his personal leadership style and create a system of cooperation between them to achieve the ultimate goal they shared: to defeat Asmodeus and heal his father.

Raphaël and Tobias teach us that to provide real, useful, cost-effective and satisfying coaching, we need to be attentive to the needs of others, step out of our comfort zone if necessary, actively listen to what they have to say, show empathy, but above all work together so that each of us can contribute, according to our specific abilities, to achieving the common goals we all share. This learning is more relevant than ever, because without collaboration between people with common goals, their mission will be compromised.

4. A “medical” and pastoral vocation

Raphael, which means “God heals”, is known as one of the archangels of the Bible, often associated with healing and protection. Similarly, Zatti was considered a healer and protector of the sick and poor in his community. But this therapy took place on several levels. Zatti's love of poverty, his detachment from material things and his willingness to accept and even beg for what he thought was necessary for the

well-being of his patients, are some of the traits that make him resemble Jesus – who was in reality a lay rabbi and healer. He was always available at all times of the day and night and in all weathers, and would travel in the old wooden carts of peasants if they met him on his way to a patient's home. He was also humble and had a low opinion of himself, despite the efforts of his benefactors to elevate him in his own eyes and in the eyes of the world. The holy Coadjutor's strong interior life, filled with love for God and total trust in the goodness of divine providence, his regular confession and his love for the Blessed Sacrament made him resemble Don Bosco. He often read passages from the lives of the saints to the sick and, at the end of the day, gave them a little note for the evening. Zatti's good humour was also based on the solid foundations of his spiritual and consecrated life, and he always showed cheerfulness and goodwill in fulfilling his duties towards the sick and the unfortunate. He was also a peacemaker, helping to resolve conflicts between members of his staff and the doctors of Viedma and Patagonia. These characteristics of our holy Coadjutor are highlighted here because they are also a powerful antidote against the enemies of our three vows, against indifference and pastoral laziness, against the current distancing between the recipients and ourselves, and the royal road that leads us away from the careerism that disguises itself as clericalism in the religious world.

At the school of the angel Raphael and Zatti, we discover that for us, Salesians of Don Bosco, we too are bearers of the Good News, which often consists, as Jesus announced in the synagogue (Luke 4), in healing and restoring. This "medical" function is an important part of our mission to serve young people and the poor. And if "sickness", like poverty, can take on different faces, we Salesians in general, and the Coadjutor Salesians in particular, are known for our various struggles against ills and various forms of precariousness, hence our immense work in schools, orphanages, hospitals, oratories and the workshops and laboratories of our vocational training

centres and technical colleges. And in our Region, as in the Congregation, several provinces, works and members of the Salesian Family are also involved in activities directly related to health, including hospitals, clinics and care centres for the elderly. Health is seen as an important aspect of the well-being of young people and the poor, and we try, with Don Variara, with Zatti and others, to meet their needs in a total, holistic way.

Today, we need a generation of Salesians who are sufficiently rooted in heaven, like Raphael, and deeply attached to the challenges of earth, like Azarias, to concern themselves with reconciling the temporal good with that of eternity, fighting for all forms of illness and health, especially those that affect the most vulnerable in our society. We need angels and companions who can alleviate our physical, mental and emotional illnesses, as well as health problems linked to poverty, such as malnutrition and limited access to healthcare. We continue to work to meet these needs effectively and holistically, providing quality healthcare and working to improve the lives of the most vulnerable.

5. Metaphor of the educational and pastoral relationship

Azarias, the nickname of the angel Raphael, illustrates the perfect educational relationship between the Salesian coadjutor and the Tobias or young people of today. Especially when we know that the nickname Azarias actually means assistant, auxiliary, coadjutor. So, in the same way that an angel accompanied a young boy towards maturity, the Coadjutor can and must encourage young people to grow and mature in their relationships with their peers, in what are known as equal relationships, but also in their relationships and duties towards their family and parents, and the adult world in general, in what are known as asymmetrical relationships. I encourage us to reread this wonderful story from the Book of Tobit, and to make our own the wise advice of old Tobith to his son, and the lesson in life and religion that Azarias gives to the reconciled family, before going back to God – to

the one who sent him. This is an important detail: going back and forth to God, the one who sent us, like those comings and goings on Jacob's ladder, where the angels shuttle back and forth between heaven and earth, as if to teach today's angels union with God and predilection for the poor of the earth.

Saint Artemide Zatti shows us how we can perfectly assimilate this role in our daily lives: dedicating his life to helping the youngest and poorest, he did much more than simply dispense moral teachings. He guided young people towards personal growth, recognising their inner capacities and showing them how to express them. He also set an example by showing compassion for the sick and the poor; demonstrating through his actions that it is possible to change the world around us through love, self-giving and sacrifice.

The Salesian Brother may be a minority statistically (in Africa 9% in the richest provinces). And yet they are in a privileged position to grasp this admirable model by flying to the outskirts of the mission with and like the guardian angel, walking the paths of the earthly and secular dimensions of life, and "cycling" with Zatti to the bedside of the needy, in all humility and without the arrogance of the big means and arsenal of some of today's pastors. In this way, they can imitate the heavenly Guide provided by God in the story of Tobias: motivating gentle obedience towards his aged and blind father, initiating him in the face of the adversities of the journey, as well as courageously taking an important decision for his future, trust in God in decisive moments, in a word impressive courage and deep empathy that will allow the boy harmonious growth leading towards thoughtful autonomy, even though his parents, anticipating in their anxiety the parable of the prodigal son, waited for him every day with worry. But the text says that young Tobias knew his father's heart and his mother's worried tenderness.

Conclusion

"I am Raphael, one of the seven angels present before the glory of the Lord. Do not be afraid! Peace be with you and

bless God for ever. Do not be afraid of what you have seen, for it was only an appearance. Bless the Lord, celebrate him and write down what has happened to you."

At the end of the story, Raphael defines himself as a sacrament of God's presence with Tobias. Exactly what Jesus did and was, what our founder Don Bosco illustrated, and what the Rector Major recommends to us in the third priority of this sexennium. To be a sign of elsewhere, "as if we too could see the invisible". The invisible in environments that are nonetheless very visible, in schools, in catechesis, in workshops, or, as Don Rinaldi used to say, in agriculture, where certain Brothers know how to cultivate and bring to fruition the earth and creation. The Salesian coadjutor is one of the two forms of the Salesian consecrated vocation, the other being the Salesian priest. According to GC21, it is not just individuals who spread Don Bosco's message, but his communities made up of priests and lay people, fraternally and deeply united among themselves, called to "live and work together" (C 49).



The significant and complementary presence of Salesian clerics and lay people in the community is an essential element of its physiognomy and apostolic fullness. We are well placed this year, in the light of the Strenna of the Rector Major, to reiterate that the Salesian coadjutor is not a lay person like the other lay faithful of the Church. He is a consecrated religious. Of course, his vocation fortunately retains a real connection with the concept of secularity and only exalts it in its most beautiful expressions. In this sense, this second Regional Congress can legitimately consider each of our Salesian Brothers as that angel, that archangel described in the book Tobit, who stands ceaselessly before the face of God, and who travels the roads of the world, flying to the aid of

those in need or on the way, and leading them to praise and thanksgiving. Each Brother is thus invited to contemplate Raphael who, in an admirable kenosis, renounces his angelic rank, and descends to tread the dusty roads to accompany Tobias on the path of initiation to adulthood. This metaphor invites the Salesian Brother to accompany the young people of today towards full citizenship as citizens and believers, as our founder wanted: love of parents (Raphael urges Tobias to obey his father), social commitment (Raphael helps Tobias and supervises miraculous operations for the sick, chastity and love to marry Sarra, and loyalty to become heir to both his father and his father-in-law Raguel) and divine service (Raphael proclaims himself to be sent directly by God and gives advice on honouring and praising God, and loving one's neighbour).

Like the biblical messengers (angels) and apostles in the history of the Church, Salesian Brothers are called to be available, to serve Salesian unity and identity and apostolic fullness by participating actively in the life and government of the Congregation. Alongside their deacon and priest confreres, they accompany young people – and other confreres – in their consecration and in their educational commitments, integrating and celebrating diversity within the Salesian community. The Brothers, well gifted, trained and identified, are pillars for the young people in their often complicated and difficult life paths, just as the Archangel Raphael, alias Azarias, was a pillar, a social and spiritual reference for Tobias, who was thus able to fulfil his mission as a son and future father. The long journey of initiation of our young people from Africa to adulthood is already fruitful and will be even more so if they are accompanied by significant figures and trustworthy people like Azarias, true guardian angels, companions of Emmaus, capable – as in our houses of formation and in our institutions – of educating, forming and accompanying. As well as serving unity, Salesian identity and apostolic fullness within the Salesian congregation with all their talents, Salesian Brothers play a very important role as

guides and mentors for young people who are still seeking their place in the world – a figure similar to Zatti or Raphael who can be seen as a spiritual parent.

St Francis de Sales. Mary's presence (8/8)

[\(continuation from previous article\)](#)

THE PRESENCE OF MARY IN SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES (8/8)

The first information we have about devotion to Mary in the de Sales family refers to his mother, the young Françoise de Sionnaz, a devotee of the Virgin, faithful to the Rosary. She passed love for this pious practice on to her son, who, as a young boy in Annecy, enrolled in the Confraternity of the Rosary, committing himself to say all or part of it every day. Fidelity to this would accompany him throughout his life.

Devotion to the Virgin continued during his Parisian years. "He entered the Congregation of Mary, which brought together the spiritual elite of the students at their college."

Then there was the **spiritual crisis** that broke out at the end of 1586: for several weeks he did not eat, sleep, and was in despair. He had the idea in his head that he had been abandoned by God's love and would "never be able to see your sweet face again". Until one day, in January 1587, on his return from college, he entered the church of Saint-Etienne-des-Grès and made an act of abandonment before the Virgin: he said the Salve Regina and was freed from temptation and regained his serenity.

His prayer and devotion to the Mother of God certainly continued during his years in Padua: he would entrust his vocation to the priesthood to her, and on 18 December 1593, he was ordained a priest and would certainly have celebrated a few masses in the church at Annecy, dedicated to Notre Dame de Liesse (Our Lady of Joy), to thank Her for taking him and leading him by the hand during those long years of study.

Years passed and August 1603 came, when Francis received the letter of invitation from the Archbishop of Bourges to preach for the upcoming Lent in Dijon.

"Our Congregation is the fruit of the journey to Dijon," he wrote to his friend Fr Pollien.

It would be during this Lent, which began on 5 March 1604, that Francis would meet Baroness Jane Frances Frémyot de Chantal. He would begin a journey towards God in search of His will, a journey that would last six years and end on 6 June 1610, the day on which the Visitation was born with Jane Frances and two other women entering the novitiate.

"Our little Congregation is truly a work of the Heart of Jesus and Mary," and after a short time he confidently added: "God takes care of his servants and Our Lady provides them with what they need."

His Daughters would be called Religious of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Four hundred years after its foundation, the Monastery of the Visitation in Paris writes that the Order has never ceased to draw all the best of its spirituality from this Gospel scene.

"Contemplation and praise of the Lord, united to the service of one's neighbour; the spirit of thanksgiving and the humility of the Magnificat; real poverty that throws itself with infinite confidence on the goodness of the Father; availability to the Spirit; missionary ardour to reveal the presence of Christ; joy in the Lord; Mary who faithfully keeps all these things in her heart."

Jane Frances de Chantal summarises the Salesian spirit as follows: "a spirit of profound humility towards God and of great gentleness towards one's neighbour", which are precisely the virtues that immediately arise from the lived contemplation of the mystery of the Visitation.

In the Treatise on the spirit of simplicity, Francis told his Visitandines:

"We must have a totally simple trust which makes us remain quiet in the arms of our Father and our dear Mother, confident that Our Lord and Our Lady, our dear Mother, will always protect us with their care and motherly tenderness."

The Visitation is the living monument of Francis' love for the Mother of Jesus.

His friend Bishop J.P. Camus sums up Francis' love for the Virgin in this way: "His devotion to the Mother of splendid love, of wisdom, of chaste love and of holy hope was truly great. From his earliest years he devoted himself to honouring her."

Mary's presence is like yeast in the dough for his letters: discreet, silent, active and effective. There is no lack of prayers composed by Francis himself.

On 8 December (!) 1621, he sent one to a Visitandine:

"May the most glorious Virgin fill us with her love, so that together, you and I, who have had the good fortune to be called and have embarked under her protection and in her name, may accomplish our voyage in humble purity and simplicity, so that one day we may find ourselves in the port of salvation, which is Paradise."

When he wrote letters around some Marian feast, he did not miss an opportunity to mention her or make a point for reflection. Thus,

– for the Assumption of Mary into heaven: "May this holy Virgin, with her prayers, have us live in this holy love! May

this love always be the sole object of our heart.

– for the Annunciation: it is the day “of the most blessed greeting ever given to anyone. I beseech this glorious Virgin to grant you some of the consolation she received.”

Who was Mary for Francis?

a. She was the Mother of God

Not only Mother, but also... grandmother!

“Honour, reverence and respect the holy and glorious Virgin Mary with a special love: she is the Mother of our sovereign Father and therefore also our dear grandmother. Let us have recourse to her as grandchildren, let us throw ourselves upon her knees with absolute trust; at all times, in all circumstances, let us appeal to this sweet Mother, let us invoke her maternal love and, making every effort to imitate her virtues, let us have the sincere heart of children for her.”

She leads us to Jesus: “Do whatever He tells you!”

“If we want Our Lady to ask her Son to change the water of our lukewarmness into the wine of His love, we must do all that He will tell us. Let us do what the Saviour will tell us well, let us fill our hearts well with the water of penance, and this lukewarm water will be changed for us into the wine of fervent love.”

b. She was the model we must imitate

In listening to the Word of God.

“Receive it in your heart like a precious ointment, following the example of the Blessed Virgin, who carefully kept all the praises spoken in honour of her Son in her own,”

Model for living in humility.

“The Most Blessed Virgin, Our Lady, gave us a most remarkable example of humility when she pronounced these words: Behold the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word; in saying that she is the handmaid of the Lord, she

expresses the greatest act of humility that can be done and immediately performs an act of most excellent generosity, saying: Let it be done to me according to your word."

Model for living *common* holiness.

"If one wants to be a saint of true holiness, it must be common, daily, everyday holiness like that of Our Lord and Our Lady."

Model for living in serenity:

"If you feel excessively worried, soothe your soul and try to give it back its tranquillity. Imagine how the Virgin worked calmly with one hand, while with the other she held Our Lord, during her childhood: she held Him on one arm, never taking her gaze away from Him."

Model for giving ourselves to God in time:

"Oh how happy are the souls who, in imitation of this holy Virgin, consecrate themselves as first fruits, from their youth, to the service of Our Lord."

c. Strength in suffering

Madame de Granieu's husband suffered very painful attacks of gout.

Francis shared in the gentleman's suffering sayings:

"A pain that our Blessed Lady and Abbess (the Virgin Mary) can greatly alleviate by leading you to Mount Calvary, where she holds the novitiate of her monastery, teaching you not only to suffer well, but to suffer everything that happens both for us and for our loved ones with love."

Let me conclude with this beautiful passage that underlines the bond that unites Mary and the believer every time we approach the Eucharist:

"Do you want to become relatives of the Virgin Mary? Go to communion! For in receiving the Holy Sacrament you receive the flesh of her flesh and the blood of her blood, since the precious body of the Saviour, which is in the divine

Eucharist, was made and formed with her most pure blood and with the collaboration of the Holy Spirit. Since you cannot be related to Our Lady in the same way as Elizabeth, be so by imitating her virtues and holy life."