

Monsignor Giuseppe Malandrino and the Servant of God Nino Baglieri

Monsignor Giuseppe Malandrino, the ninth Bishop of the Noto diocese, returned to the House of the Father on 3 August 2025, the day on which the feast of the Patron Saint of the Diocese of Noto, Mary Ladder of Paradise, is celebrated. 94 years of age, 70 years of priesthood and 45 years of episcopal consecration are respectable numbers for a man who served the Church as a Shepherd with “the smell of the sheep” as Pope Francis often emphasised.

Lightning rod of humanity

During his experience as pastor of the Diocese of Noto (1906.1998 – 1507.2007), he had the opportunity to cultivate his friendship with the Servant of God Nino Baglieri. He almost never missed a “stop” at Nino’s house when pastoral reasons took him to Modica. In one of his testimonies, Monsignor Malandrino says: “...finding myself at Nino’s bedside, I had the vivid perception that this beloved sick brother of ours was truly a “lightning rod of humanity”, according to a concept of sufferers so dear to me and which I also wanted to propose in the Pastoral Letter on the permanent mission *You will be my witnesses*” (2003). Monsignor Malandrino writes: “It is necessary to recognise in the sick and suffering, the face of the suffering Christ and to assist them with the same care and with the same love of Jesus in His passion, lived in a spirit of obedience to the Father and in solidarity with his brothers”. This was fully embodied by Nino’s dearest mother, Mrs. Peppina. She, a typical Sicilian woman, with a strong character and great determination. She replies to the doctor who proposes euthanasia for her son (given his serious health conditions and the prospect of a life as a paralytic), “if the Lord wants him, he will take him, but if he leaves him to me

like this, I am happy to look after him for life.” Was Nino’s mother aware of what she was going to face at that moment? Was Mary, the mother of Jesus, aware of how much pain she would have to suffer for the Son of God? The answer, when read with human eyes, does not seem easy, especially in our 21st century society where everything is unstable, fluctuating, consumed in an “instant”. Mamma Peppina’s Fiat became, like Mary’s, a Yes of Faith and adherence to that will of God which finds fulfilment in knowing how to carry the Cross, in knowing how to give “soul and body” to the realisation of God’s Plan.

From suffering to joy

The friendship between Nino and Monsignor Malandrino was already underway when the latter was still bishop of Acireale. In fact, as early as 1993, through Father Attilio Balbinot, a Camillian very close to Nino, he presented him with his first book, “From suffering to joy”. In Nino’s experience, the relationship with the Bishop of his diocese was one of total filiation. From the moment he accepted God’s Plan for him, he made his “active” presence felt by offering his sufferings for the Church, the Pope, and the Bishops (as well as priests and missionaries). This relationship of filiation was renewed annually on 6 May, the day of his fall, later seen as the mysterious beginning of a rebirth. On 8 May 2004, a few days after Nino celebrated the 36th anniversary of the Cross, Monsignor Malandrino went to his house. In memory of that meeting, he writes in his memoirs, “it is always a great joy every time I see him and I receive so much energy and strength to carry my Cross and offer it with so much Love for the needs of the Holy Church and in particular for my Bishop and for our Diocese. May the Lord always give him more holiness to guide us for many years always with more ardour and love...”. Again: “... the Cross is heavy but the Lord gives me so many Graces that make suffering less bitter and it becomes light and sweet; the Cross becomes a Gift, offered to the Lord with so much Love for the salvation of souls and the Conversion of

Sinners...". Finally, it should be emphasised how, on these occasions of grace, the pressing and constant request for "help to become a Saint with the daily Cross" was never lacking. Nino, in fact, absolutely wanted to become a saint.

An anticipated beatification

Moments of great significance in this sense were the funeral of the Servant of God on 3 March 2007, when Monsignor Malandrino himself, at the beginning of the Eucharistic Celebration, devoutly bent down, albeit with difficulty, to kiss the coffin containing Nino's mortal remains. It was an homage to a man who had lived 39 years of his existence in a body that "did not feel" but which radiated joy of life in every way. Monsignor Malandrino emphasised that the celebration of the Mass, in the Salesian courtyard which had become an open-air "cathedral" for the occasion, had been an authentic apotheosis (thousands of people participated in tears) and it was clearly and communally perceived that they were not in front of a funeral, but a true "beatification". Nino, with his testimony of life, had in fact become a point of reference for many, young and old, lay people and consecrated persons, mothers and fathers of families, who, thanks to his precious testimony, were able to read their own existence and find answers that they could not find elsewhere. Monsignor Malandrino also repeatedly emphasised this aspect: "in fact, every encounter with the dearest Nino was for me, as for everyone, a strong and vivid experience of edification and a powerful – in its sweetness – spur to patient and generous giving. The presence of the Bishop gave him immense joy every time because, in addition to the affection of the friend who came to visit him, he perceived the ecclesial communion. It is obvious that what I received from him was always much more than the little I could give him." Nino's fixed "obsession" was to "become a saint"; having fully lived and embodied the Gospel of Joy in Suffering, with his physical ailments and his total gift for the beloved Church, ensured that everything did not end with his departure to the Heavenly Jerusalem, but

continued, as Monsignor Malandrino emphasised at the funeral. “... Nino’s mission now also continues through his writings as he himself had announced it in his spiritual Testament.” “... my writings will continue my testimony. I will continue to give Joy to everyone and to speak of the Great Love of God and the Wonders he has done in my life.” This is still coming true because “a city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house” (Matthew 5:14-16). Metaphorically, it is intended to emphasise that “light” (understood in a broad sense) must be visible, sooner or later; what is important will come to light and will be recognised.

To revisit these days – marked by the death of Monsignor Malandrino, by his funerals in Acireale (5 August, Our Lady of the Snow) and in Noto (7 August) with subsequent burial in the cathedral which he himself strongly wanted to be renovated after the collapse of 13 March 1996 and which was reopened in March 2007 (the month in which Nino Baglieri died) – means retracing this bond between two great figures of the Netine Church, strongly intertwined and both capable of leaving an indelible mark on it.

Roberto Chiaramonte

Saint Monica, mother of Saint Augustine, witness of hope

A woman of unshakeable faith, of fruitful tears, answered by God after seventeen long years. A model of a Christian wife and mother for the whole Church. A witness of hope who transformed herself into a powerful intercessor in Heaven. Don

Bosco himself recommended to mothers afflicted by the unchristian lives of their children, to entrust themselves to her in prayer.

In the great gallery of saints who have marked the history of the Church, Saint Monica (331-387) occupies a unique place. Not for spectacular miracles, not for the founding of religious communities, not for significant social or political undertakings. Monica is remembered and venerated primarily as a mother, the mother of Augustine, the restless young man who, thanks to her prayers, her tears, and her testimony of faith, became one of the greatest Fathers of the Church and Doctors of the Catholic faith.

But to limit her figure to the maternal role would be unfair and reductive. Monica is a woman who knew how to live her ordinary life – wife, mother, believer – in an extraordinary way, transfiguring daily life through the power of faith. She is an example of perseverance in prayer, of patience in marriage, of unshakeable hope in the face of her son's deviations.

News of her life comes to us almost exclusively from Augustine's Confessions, a text that is not a chronicle, but a theological and spiritual reading of existence. Yet, in those pages, Augustine draws an unforgettable portrait of his mother; not only a good and pious woman, but an authentic model of Christian faith, a "mother of tears" that become a source of grace.

Her origins in Tagaste

Monica was born in 331 in Tagaste, a city in Numidia, [Souk Ahras](#) in present-day Algeria. It was a lively centre, marked by the Roman presence and an already rooted Christian community. She came from a well-to-do Christian family; faith was already part of her cultural and spiritual horizon.

Her upbringing was marked by the influence of an austere nurse, who educated her in sobriety and temperance. Saint Augustine would write of her, *"I will not therefore speak of*

her gifts, but of Your gifts to her, who had not made herself alone, nor educated herself alone. You created her without even her father and mother knowing what daughter they would have; and the rod of your Christ, that is, the discipline of your Only Begotten, in a house of believers, a healthy member of your Church, instructed her in your fear.” (Confessions IX, 8, 17).

In the same *Confessions*, Augustine also recounts a significant episode. Young Monica had developed the habit of drinking small sips of wine from the cellar, until a servant reprimanded her, calling her “drunkard”. That reprimand was enough for her to correct herself definitively. This apparently minor anecdote shows her honesty in recognising her sins, allowing herself to be corrected, and growing in virtue.

At the age of 23, Monica was given in marriage to Patricius, a pagan municipal official, known for his choleric character and marital infidelity. Married life was not easy. Living with an impulsive man distant from the Christian faith severely tested her patience.

Yet, Monica never fell into discouragement. With an attitude of meekness and respect, she gradually won her husband’s heart. She did not respond harshly to outbursts of anger, nor did she fuel unnecessary conflicts. In time, her constancy bore fruit. Patricius converted and received baptism shortly before he died.

Monica’s testimony shows how holiness is not necessarily expressed in sensational gestures, but in daily fidelity, in the love that slowly transforms difficult situations. In this sense, she is a model for many wives and mothers who live marriages marked by tensions or differences in faith.

Monica as a mother

From the marriage, three children were born: Augustine, Navigius, and a daughter whose name we do not know. Monica poured all her love upon them, but above all her faith. Navigius and her daughter followed a straightforward Christian

path; Navigius became a priest; her daughter embarked on the path of consecrated virginity. Augustine, however, soon became the centre of her worries and tears.

Even as a boy, Augustine showed extraordinary intelligence. Monica sent him to study rhetoric in [Carthage](#), eager to ensure him a brilliant future. But along with intellectual progress came temptations: sensuality, worldliness, bad company. Augustine embraced the Manichaean doctrine, convinced he would find rational answers to the problem of evil. Furthermore, he began to live with a woman without marrying her, with whom he had a son, Adeodatus. Her son's deviations led Monica to deny him hospitality in her home. But she did not stop praying for him and offering sacrifices, *"from the bleeding heart of my mother, the sacrifice of her tears was offered to You for me night and day"* (Confessions V, 7,13) and *"she shed more tears than mothers ever shed at the physical death of their children"* (Confessions III, 11,19).

For Monica, it was a deep wound. Her son, whom she had consecrated to Christ in the womb, was going astray. The pain was unspeakable, but she never stopped hoping. Augustine himself would write, *"My mother's heart, struck by such a wound, would never heal, for I cannot adequately express her feelings towards me and how much greater her travail in giving birth to me in spirit was that with which she had given birth to me in the flesh."* (Confessions V, 9,16).

The question naturally arises, why did Monica not have Augustine baptised immediately after birth?

In reality, although infant baptism was already known and practised, it was not yet a universal practice. Many parents preferred to postpone it until adulthood, considering it a "definitive washing". They feared that if the baptised person sinned gravely, salvation would be compromised. Furthermore, Patricius still a pagan, had no interest in educating his son in the Christian faith.

Today we clearly see that it was an unfortunate choice, since

baptism not only makes us children of God, but also gives us the grace to overcome temptations and sin.

One thing, however, is certain, if he had been baptised as a child, Monica would have spared herself and her son much suffering.

The strongest image of Monica is that of a mother who prays and weeps. The *Confessions* describe her as a tireless woman in interceding with God for her son.

One day, a bishop of Tagaste – according to some, Ambrose himself – reassured her with words that have remained famous, “*Go, the son of so many tears cannot be lost.*” That phrase became Monica’s guiding star, the confirmation that her maternal sorrow was not in vain, but part of a mysterious design of grace.

A mother’s tenacity

Monica’s life was also a pilgrimage in Augustine’s footsteps. When her son decided to secretly leave for Rome, Monica spared no effort. She did not give up the cause as lost, but followed him and sought him until she found him. She reached him in Milan, where Augustine had obtained a chair of rhetoric. Here she found a spiritual guide in Saint Ambrose, Bishop of the city. A deep harmony developed between Monica and Ambrose. She recognised in him the pastor capable of guiding her son, while Ambrose admired her unshakeable faith.

In Milan, Ambrose’s preaching opened new perspectives for Augustine. He gradually abandoned Manichaeism and began to look at Christianity with new eyes. Monica silently accompanied this process. She did not force the timing; she did not demand immediate conversions, but she prayed and supported him and remained by his side until his conversion.

Augustine’s conversion

God seemed not to hear her, but Monica never stopped praying and offering sacrifices for her son. After seventeen years, her pleas were finally answered – and how! Augustine not only

became a Christian, but became a priest, bishop, doctor, and father of the Church.

He himself acknowledges it: *"But you, in the depth of Your designs, answered the vital point of her desire, without caring about the momentary object of her request, but taking care to make of me what she always asked You to do."* (Confessions V, 8,15).

The decisive moment came in 386. Augustine, inwardly tormented, struggled against the passions and resistances of his will. In the famous episode in the garden of Milan, hearing the voice of a child saying *"Tolle, lege"* ("Take up and read"), he opened the Letter to the Romans and read the words that changed his life. "Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh" (Romans 13:14).

It was the beginning of his conversion. Together with his son Adeodatus and some friends, he retired to Cassiciaco to prepare for baptism. Monica was with them, sharing the joy of finally seeing the prayers of so many years answered.

On Easter night in 387, in Milan Cathedral, Ambrose baptised Augustine, Adeodatus, and the other catechumens. Monica's tears of sorrow turned into tears of joy. She continued to serve him, so much so that in Cassiciaco Augustine would say, *"She cared as if she had been mother to all and served us as if she had been daughter to all."*

Ostia: ecstasy and death

After the baptism, Monica and Augustine prepared to return to Africa. Stopping in [Ostia](#), while waiting for the ship, they experienced a moment of intense spirituality. The *Confessions* narrate the ecstasy of Ostia: mother and son, looking out of a window, contemplated together the beauty of creation and ascended towards God, anticipating the beatitude of heaven.

Monica would say: *"Son, as for me, I no longer find any attraction for this life. I do not know what I am still doing*

here and why I am here. This world is no longer an object of desire for me. There was only one reason why I wished to remain a little longer in this life, to see you a Catholic Christian before I died. God has answered me beyond all my expectations. He has granted me to see you in His service and freed from earthly aspirations for happiness. What am I doing here?" (Confessions IX, 10,11). She had reached her earthly goal.

A few days later, Monica fell seriously ill. Feeling the end near, she said to her children: *"My children, bury your mother here; do not worry about where. Only this I ask of you, remember me at the Lord's altar, wherever you may be."* It was the synthesis of her life: the place of burial did not matter to her, but the bond in prayer and the Eucharist.

She died at 56, on 12 November 387, and was buried in Ostia.

In the 6th century, her relics were transferred to a hidden crypt in the same [church of Saint Aurea](#). In 1425, the relics were translated to Rome, to the [Basilica of Saint Agostino in Campo Marzio](#), where they are still venerated today.

Monica's spiritual profile

Augustine describes his mother with well-measured words:

"[...] womanly in appearance, manly in faith, aged in serenity, maternal in love, Christian in piety [...]". (Confessions IX, 4, 8).

And again:

"[...] a chaste and sober widow, assiduous in almsgiving, devout and submissive to Your saints; who did not let a day pass without bringing an offering to Your altar; who twice a day, morning and evening, without fail visited Your church, and not to confabulate vainly and gossip like other old women, but to hear Your words and to make You hear her prayers? Could You have disdained the tears of such a woman, who with them asked You not for gold or silver, nor for fleeting or fickle goods, but for the salvation of her son's soul, You who had made her so by Your grace, refusing her Your help? Certainly not, Lord. Indeed, You were beside her and heard her, working according

to the order by which You had predestined to work.” (Confessions V, 9,17).

From this Augustinian testimony, a surprisingly contemporary figure emerges.

She was a woman of prayer; she never ceased to invoke God for the salvation of her loved ones. Her tears become a model of persevering intercession.

She was a faithful wife; in a difficult marriage, she never responded with resentment to her husband's harshness. Her patience and meekness were instruments of evangelisation.

She was a courageous mother. She did not abandon her son in his deviations, but accompanied him with tenacious love, capable of trusting in God's timing.

She was a witness of hope; her life shows that no situation is desperate, if lived in faith.

Monica's message does not belong only to the 4th century. It still speaks today, in a context where many families experience tensions, children stray from faith, parents experience the fatigue of waiting.

To parents, she teaches not to give up, to believe that grace works in mysterious ways.

To Christian women, she shows how meekness and fidelity can transform difficult relationships.

To anyone who feels discouraged in prayer, she testifies that God listens, even if the timing does not coincide with ours.

It is no coincidence that many associations and movements have chosen Monica as the patroness of Christian mothers and women who pray for children far from faith.

A simple and extraordinary woman

The life of Saint Monica is the story of a woman both simple and extraordinary. Simple because lived in the daily life of a family; extraordinary because transfigured by faith. Her tears and prayers shaped a saint and, through him, profoundly influenced the history of the Church.

Her memory, celebrated on 27 August, on the eve of the feast

of Saint Augustine, reminds us that holiness often passes through hidden perseverance, silent sacrifice, and hope that does not disappoint.

In Augustine's words, addressed to God for his mother, we find the synthesis of her spiritual legacy: *"I cannot say enough how much my soul owes to her, my God; but you know everything. Repay her with your mercy what she asked of You with so many tears for me"* (Conf., IX, 13).

Saint Monica, through the events of her life, achieved the eternal happiness that she herself defined: *"Happiness undoubtedly consists in reaching the goal and one must have confidence that we can be led to it by a firm faith, a living hope, an ardent charity."* (On Happiness 4,35).

Becoming a sign of hope in eSwatini – Lesotho – South Africa after 130 years

In the heart of Southern Africa, amidst the natural beauty and social challenges of eSwatini, Lesotho, and South Africa, the Salesians celebrate 130 years of missionary presence. In this time of Jubilee, General Chapter, and historical anniversaries, the Southern Africa Province shares its signs of hope: fidelity to Don Bosco's charism, educational and pastoral commitment among young people, and the strength of an international community that bears witness to fraternity and resilience. Despite the difficulties, the enthusiasm of young people, the richness of local cultures, and the spirituality of Ubuntu continue to point towards paths of future and communion.

Fraternal greetings from the Salesians of the smallest Vice-Province and the oldest presence in the Africa-Madagascar Region (since 1896, the first 5 confreres were sent by Fr. Rua). This year we thank the 130 SDBs who have worked in our 3 countries and who now intercede for us from heaven. "Small is beautiful"!

In the AFM territory live 65 million people who communicate in 12 official languages, amidst many natural wonders and great underground resources. We are among the few sub-Saharan African Countries where Catholics are a small minority compared to other Christian Churches, with only 5 million faithful.

What are the signs of hope that our young people and society are looking for?

Firstly, we are trying to overcome the infamous world records of the growing gap between rich and poor (100,000 millionaires versus 15 million unemployed young people); the lack of security and increasing violence in daily life; the collapse of the educational system, which has produced a new generation of millions of illiterates, struggling with various addictions (alcohol, drugs...). Furthermore, 30 years after the end of the apartheid regime in 1994, society and the Church are still divided among the various communities in terms of economy, opportunities, and many unhealed wounds. Indeed, the "Rainbow Nation" community is struggling with many "gaps" that can only be "filled" with the values of the Gospel.

What are the signs of hope that the Catholic Church in South Africa is looking for?

Participating in the triennial "Joint Witness" meeting of religious superiors and bishops in 2024, we realised many signs of decline: fewer faithful, lack of priestly and religious vocations, aging, and decreasing number of religious, some dioceses bankrupt, continuous loss/decrease of Catholic institutions (medical care, education, social works or media) due to the sharp decline in committed religious and

laity. The Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC – which includes Botswana, eSwatini, and South Africa) indicates as a priority, assistance to young people addicted to alcohol and various other substances.

What are the signs of hope that the Salesians of Southern Africa are looking for?

We pray daily for new Salesian vocations, to be able to welcome new missionaries. Indeed, the era of the Anglo-Irish Province (until 1988) has ended, and the Africa Project did not include the southern tip of the continent. After 70 years in eSwatini (Swaziland) and 45 years in Lesotho, we have only 4 local vocations from each Kingdom. Today we have only 5 young confreres and 4 novices in initial formation. However, the smallest Vice-Province in Africa-Madagascar, through its 7 local communities, is responsible for education and pastoral care in 6 large parishes, 18 primary and secondary schools, 3 vocational training centres (TVET), and various social assistance programmes. Our provincial community, with 18 different nationalities among the 35 SDBs living in the 7 communities, is a great gift and a challenge to embrace.

As a minority and fragile Catholic community in Southern Africa

We believe that the only way forward is to build more bridges and communion between religious and dioceses. The weaker we are, the more we strive to work together. As the entire Catholic Church seeks to focus on young people, Don Bosco has been chosen by the Bishops as the Patron of Youth Ministry, and his Novena is celebrated with fervour in most dioceses and parishes at the beginning of the pastoral year.

As Salesians and Salesian Family, we constantly encourage each other: “work in progress” (constant work)

In the last two years, following the Rector Major's invitation, we have sought to relaunch our Salesian charism, with the wisdom of a common vision and direction (starting from the annual provincial assembly), with a series of small

and simple daily steps in the right direction, and with the wisdom of personal and communal conversion.

We are grateful for the encouragement of Fr. Pascual Chávez for our recent Provincial Chapter of 2024: “You know well that it is more difficult, but not impossible, to ‘re-found’ than to found [the charism], because there are habits, attitudes or behaviours that do not correspond to the spirit of our Holy Founder, Don Bosco, and his Project of Life, and have ‘citizenship rights’ [in the Province]. There is truly a need for a true conversion of every confrere to God, holding the Gospel as the supreme rule of life, and of the entire Province to Don Bosco, assuming the Constitutions as a true project of life.”

Fr. Pascual’s advice and commitment were voted on: “To become more passionate about Jesus and dedicated to young people,” investing in personal conversion (creating a sacred space in our lives, to let Jesus transform it); in communal conversion (investing in systematic monthly ongoing formation according to a theme); and in provincial conversion (promoting the provincial mentality through “One Heart One Soul” – the fruit of our provincial assembly), and with monthly online meetings of the Directors.

On the souvenir image of our Vice-Province of Blessed Michael Rua, next to the faces of all 46 confreres and 4 novices (35 live in our 7 communities, 7 are in formation abroad, and 5 SDBs are awaiting visas, with one at San Callisto-catacombs and one missionary undergoing chemotherapy in Poland). We are also blessed by a growing number of missionary confreres who are sent by the Rector Major or for a specific period from other African Provinces to help us (AFC, ACC, ANN, ATE, MDG, and ZMB). We are very grateful to each of these young confreres. We believe that, with their help, our hope for charismatic relaunch is becoming tangible. Our Vice-Province – the smallest in Africa-Madagascar, almost 40 years after its foundation, still does not have a proper provincial house.

Construction began, with the help of the Rector Major, only last year. Here too we say: “work in progress”...

We also want to share our humble signs of hope with all the other 92 Provinces in this precious period of the General Chapter. The AFM has a unique experience of 31 years of local missionary volunteers (involved in the Youth Ministry of the Bosco Youth Centre in Johannesburg since 1994), the “Love Matters” programme for healthy adolescent sexual development since 2001. Our volunteers, in fact, involved for a whole year in the life of our community, are the most precious members of our Mission and of the new groups of the Salesian Family that are slowly growing (VDB, Salesian Cooperators, and Past Pupils of Don Bosco).

Our mother house in Cape Town will celebrate its one hundred and thirtieth (130th) anniversary next year, and thanks to the one hundred and fiftieth (150th) anniversary of the Salesian Missions, we have created, with the help of the China Province, a special “St. Louis Versiglia Memorial Room,” where our Protomartyr spent a day during his return from Italy to China-Macau in May 1917.

Don Bosco ‘Ubuntu’ – synodal journey

“We are here thanks to you!” – Ubuntu is one of Southern African cultures’ contributions to the global community. The word in the Nguni language means, “I am because you are!” (Other possible translations: “I exist because you exist”). Last year we undertook the “Eco Ubuntu” project (a 3-year environmental awareness project) involving about 15,000 young people from our 7 communities in eSwatini, Lesotho, and South Africa. In addition to the splendid celebration and sharing of the 2024 Youth Synod, our 300 young people [who participated] especially retain Ubuntu in their memories. Their enthusiasm is a source of inspiration. The AFM needs you: We are here thanks to you!

Don Jose-Luis Carreno, Salesian missionary

Fr. José Luis Carreño (1905-1986) was described by historian Joseph Thekkedath as “the most beloved Salesian of South India” in the first half of the twentieth century. In every place he lived, whether in British India, the Portuguese colony of Goa, the Philippines, or Spain, we find Salesians who cherish his memory with affection. Strangely, however, we still lack an adequate biography of this great Salesian, except for the lengthy obituary letter written by Fr. José Antonio Rico: “José Luis Carreño Etxeandía, God’s labourer.” We hope this gap will soon be filled. Fr. Carreño was one of the architects of the South Asia region, and we cannot afford to forget him.

José-Luis Carreño Etxeandía was born in Bilbao, Spain, on 23 October 1905. Orphaned of his mother at the tender age of eight, he was welcomed into the Salesian house in Santander. In 1917, at the age of twelve, he entered the Aspirantate at Campello. He recalled that in those days, “we didn’t speak much about Don Bosco... But for us, a Fr. Binelli was a Don Bosco, not to mention Fr. Rinaldi, then General Prefect, whose visits left us with a supernatural sensation, like when Yahweh’s messengers visited Abraham’s tent.”

After novitiate and post-novitiate, he did his practical training as an assistant to the novices. He must have been a brilliant cleric, because Fr. Pedro Escursell wrote about him to the Rector Major, “I am speaking at this very moment with one of the model clerics of this house. He is an assistant in the formation of personnel in this Province. He tells me that for some time he has been asking to be sent to the missions and says he has given up asking because he receives no

response. He is a young man of great intellectual and moral worth."

On the eve of his priestly ordination in 1932, the young José-Luis wrote directly to the Rector Major, offering himself for the missions. The offer was accepted, and he was sent to India, where he landed in Mumbai in 1933. Just a year later, when the South India Province was established, he was appointed novice master at Tirupattur; he was only 28 years old. With his extraordinary qualities of mind and heart, he quickly became the soul of the house and left a deep impression on his novices. "He won us over with his fatherly heart," wrote one of them, Archbishop Hubert D'Rosario of Shillong.

Fr. Joseph Vaz, another novice, often recounted how Carreño noticed him shivering with cold during a conference. "Wait a moment, hombre," said the novice master, and he went out. Shortly after, he returned with a blue jumper which he handed to Joe. Joe noticed that the jumper was strangely warm. Then he remembered that under his cassock, his master was wearing something blue... which was now missing. Carreño had given him his own jumper.

In 1942, when the British government in India interned all foreigners from countries at war with Britain, Carreño, being a citizen of a neutral country, was left undisturbed. In 1943, he received a message via Vatican Radio: he was to take the place of Fr. Eligio Cinato, Provincial of the South India Province, who had also been interned. Around the same time, Salesian Archbishop Louis Mathias of Madras-Mylapore invited him to be his vicar general.

In 1945, he was officially appointed Provincial, a position he held from 1945 to 1951. One of his very first acts was to consecrate the Province to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Many Salesians were convinced that the extraordinary growth of the South Province was due precisely to this gesture. Under Fr. Carreño's leadership, Salesian works doubled. One of his most far-sighted acts was the establishment of a university college in the remote and poor village of Tirupattur. Sacred Heart

College would eventually transform the entire district.

Carreño was also the main architect of the "Indianisation" of the Salesian face in India, seeking local vocations from the outset, rather than relying solely on foreign missionaries. A choice that proved providential, first, because the flow of foreign missionaries ceased during the War; then, because independent India decided to no longer grant visas to new foreign missionaries. "If today there are more than two thousand Salesians in India, the credit for this growth must be attributed to the policies initiated by Fr. Carreño," wrote Fr. Thekkedath in his history of the Salesians in India.

Fr. Carreño, as we have said, was not only Provincial but also vicar to Bishop Mathias. These two great men, who deeply respected each other, were nevertheless very different in temperament. The archbishop favoured severe disciplinary measures for confreres in difficulty, while Fr. Carreño preferred milder procedures. The extraordinary visitor, Fr. Albino Fedrigotti, seems to have sided with the archbishop, describing Fr. Carreño as "an excellent religious, a man with a big heart," but also "a bit too much of a poet."

There was also the accusation of being a poor administrator, but it is significant that a figure like Fr. Aurelio Maschio, great procurator and architect of Salesian works in Mumbai, firmly rejected this accusation. In reality, Fr. Carreño was an innovator and a visionary. Some of his ideas, such as involving non-Salesian volunteers for a few years of service, were viewed with suspicion at the time but are now widely accepted and actively promoted.

In 1951, at the end of his official term as Provincial, Carreño was asked to return to Spain to work with the Salesian Cooperators. This was not the real reason for his departure after eighteen years in India, but Carreño accepted serenely, though not without suffering.

In 1952, however, he was asked to go to Goa, where he remained until 1960. "Goa was love at first sight," he wrote in *Urdimbre en el telar*. Goa, for its part, welcomed him into its heart. He continued the tradition of Salesians serving as

spiritual directors and confessors to diocesan clergy and was even patron of the Konkani writers' association. Above all, he governed the Don Bosco Panjim community with love, cared with extraordinary fatherliness for the many poor boys, and once again actively sought vocations to Salesian life. The first Salesians of Goa, people like Thomas Fernandes, Elias Diaz, and Romulo Noronha recounted with tears in their eyes how Carreño and others would go to the Goa Medical College, right next to the Salesian house, to donate blood and thus earn a few rupees to buy food and other necessities for the boys.

In 1961, the Indian military action and annexation of Goa took place. At that time, Fr. Carreño was in Spain and could no longer return to his beloved land. In 1962, he was sent to the Philippines as novice master. He accompanied only three groups of novices because in 1965, he asked to return to Spain. His decision stemmed from a serious divergence of vision between him and the Salesian missionaries from China, especially with Fr. Carlo Braga, superior of the Preprovince. Carreño strongly opposed the policy of sending young Filipino Salesians who had just professed to Hong Kong for philosophy studies. As it happened, in the end, the superiors accepted the proposal to keep the young Salesians in the Philippines, but by then, Carreño's request to return home had already been granted.

Don Carreño spent only four years in the Philippines, but here too, as in India, he left an indelible mark, "an immeasurable and crucial contribution to the Salesian presence in the Philippines," in the words of Salesian historian Nestor Impelido.

Back in Spain, he collaborated with the Missionary Procures of Madrid and of New Rochelle and in the animation of the Iberian Provinces. Many in Spain still remember the old missionary who visited Salesian houses, infecting the young with his missionary enthusiasm, his songs, and his music.

But in his creative imagination, a new project was taking shape. Carreño devoted himself wholeheartedly to the dream of founding a Pueblo Misionero with two objectives: preparing

young missionaries – mostly from Eastern Europe – for Latin America; and offering a refuge for ‘retired’ missionaries like himself, who could also serve as formators. After long and painful correspondence with his superiors, the project finally took shape in the Hogar del Misionero in Alzuza, a few kilometres from Pamplona. The missionary vocational component never took off, and very few elderly missionaries actually joined Carreño. His main apostolate in these last years remained that of the pen. He left more than thirty books, five of which were dedicated to the Holy Shroud, to which he was particularly devoted.

Fr. José-Luis Carreño died in 1986, in Pamplona at the age of 81. Despite the ups and downs of his life, this great lover of the Sacred Heart of Jesus could affirm, on the golden jubilee of his priestly ordination, “If fifty years ago my motto as a young priest was ‘Christ is everything,’ today, old and overwhelmed by His love, I would write it in golden letters, because in reality CHRIST IS EVERYTHING.”

Fr. Ivo COELHO, SDB

Nobody frightened the hens (1876)

Set in January 1876, the piece features one of Don Bosco’s most evocative “dreams,” his favourite tool for stirring and guiding the young people of the Oratory. The vision opens onto a vast plain where sowers are hard at work: the wheat, symbolising the Word of God, will only sprout if protected. But ravenous hens swoop down on the seed, and while the farmers sing verses from the Gospels, the clerics tasked with

guarding it remain silent or distracted, letting everything be lost. The scene, brought to life with witty dialogue and biblical quotes, becomes a parable of the murmuring that stifles the fruit of preaching and a warning to be actively vigilant. With tones that are both paternal and stern, Don Bosco transforms the fantastical element into a sharp moral lesson.

In the latter half of January, Don Bosco had a symbolic dream which he mentioned to several Salesians. One of them, Father Barberis, urged him to tell it at a "Good Night" because the boys loved to hear his dreams, which greatly benefited them and made them feel closer to the Oratory.

"True," Don Bosco replied, "these dreams help a lot and the boys are eager to hear them. My only trouble is that I need lungs of steel. Truthfully, these dreams do shake people up because almost always they touch everybody and each one asks in what condition I saw him, what he is to do and how he should understand the different facets of the dream. They pester me day and night. All I need do to urge them to make a general confession is tell them one of my dreams. Well, let's do this. Next Sunday while I give the 'Good Night' to the boys, you ask me some questions and I then will tell my last dream."

On January 23 he mounted the platform after night prayers, his beaming countenance revealing, as always, his joy at being with his sons. When everybody quieted down, Father Barberis raised his hand. "Excuse me, Don Bosco," he said, "may I ask you a question?"

"Certainly."

"I heard that recently you had a dream about seeds, sowers, and hens and that you told the cleric Calvi about what you saw. Would you kindly tell us too? We'd like to hear it."

"Aren't you nosy!" Don Bosco replied in mock rebuke that provoked general laughter.

"I won't mind your calling me nosy, so long as you tell us the

dream," Father Barberis insisted. "I think all the boys back me up, and I am sure that they are most eager to hear you."

"In that case, I will tell you. I had intended to keep it to myself because of some things which concern some of you personally, things which might even make you uneasy, but since you asked for it, I will narrate it."

"Oh, Don Bosco, if you have a hard knock in store for me, please spare me in public."

"I will tell things just as I saw them and let each one take what pertains to him. Before I begin, just remember that dreams happen during sleep when we have no control over our mind. If you find anything good in this dream, a warning or anything at all, take heed, but do not become ill at ease because of it. I said that I dreamed while I was sleeping because some boys dream while they are awake, much to their teachers' annoyance. [So, let me start.]

I seemed to be in Castelnuovo d' sti where I was born. Before me stretched a vast field set in a beautiful plain. The field was not ours, and I had no idea who owned it. Many people were working with hoes, spades, rakes and other tools; some were plowing, sowing, harrowing and doing other chores. Scattered foremen supervised the work; I seemed to be one of them. Elsewhere a group of peasants were singing. I gazed in astonishment, unable to figure out where I was. Why are these people working so hard? I kept asking myself. Then I answered my own question: To provide bread for my boys. It was truly delightful to see these good peasants working so hard and pursuing their tasks with untiring zest and diligence.

A few, however, were having fun.

As I took in the scene, I noticed several priests and many clerics of ours, some close to me, others farther away. I must be dreaming, I told myself.

My clerics are in Turin, not here at Castelnuovo. But why am I wearing winter clothing? Yesterday the temperature was near freezing, and still these people are sowing wheat. I clapped my hands and began walking off, saying, I am not dreaming;

this really is afield; that cleric over there is so-and-so; that other one I know too. If I were dreaming, how could I see all this?

Just then I spotted nearby a kindly old man whose countenance inspired trust. He was watching me and the other people intently. I went up to him.

"Tell me, my good man," I said, "what's going on over here? What is this place? Who are these workers? Whose field is this?"

"Fine questions you ask!" the man answered. "A priest, and you don't know these things?"

"Please tell me if this is a dream. I feel I'm dreaming and all I see is just unreal."

"What you see is quite real, and I think you are wide-awake. Don't you realize it? You are talking, laughing and joking."

"People can dream that they are talking, listening and acting as though they were awake," I objected.

"Forget that! You are here in body and soul."

"All right, if I am awake, tell me who owns this field."

"You studied Latin. Which is the first noun of the second declension that you learned in Donatus? 1 Do you remember?"

"Surely, but what does that have to do with my question?"

"A great deal. Now tell me what that noun was."

"Dominus."

"And its genitive?"

"Domini."

"Very good! Therefore this field is Domini, of the Lord."

"Ah! Now I see!" I exclaimed.

I was surprised at the old gentleman's explanation. Just then I saw several people carrying bags of wheat grains while a group of peasants sang, *Exiit, qui seminat, seminare semen suum* [The sower went out to sow his seed-Luke 8, 5].

I thought it was a shame to throw good seed into the ground to rot. Would it not be better, I wondered, to grind it into flour for bread or pasta? But then I thought: He who sows not, reaps not. Unless the seed is sown and rots, what can one reap? Meanwhile a large flock of hens were scurrying from all

sides to peck at the wheat that was being scattered, while the peasants were singing, *Venerunt aves caeli, sustulerunt frumentum et reliquerunt zizaniam* [The birds came, ate up the wheat and left the cockle].

I looked about me and observed the clerics. One stood with arms folded, totally unconcerned; another was chatting with his companions; others shrugged their shoulders or looked the other way. There were some who laughed at what they saw and unconcernedly went on with their games or chores. No one tried to shoo the hens away. Resentfully I said to each of them, "What's wrong with you? Don't you see those hens eating up all the seeds and destroying the hopes of these good peasants? What kind of harvest are we going to have? Why do you stand there so mum? Why don't you shoo the hens away?"

Their only response was a shrug of the shoulders and a blank stare. Some did not even move. They had been totally unconcerned with what was going on in the field before I shouted at them, and they were paying no attention now.

"You are a bunch of fools," I went on. "Can't you see that the hens have had their fill? Couldn't you at least clap your hands to scare them off?"

As my words were ineffective, I began clapping my own hands, and this prompted some of them to begin chasing the hens away, while I muttered to myself: Now they chase them away, now that all the wheat has been gobbled up!

Just then the same choir of peasants sang these words, *Canes muti nescientes latrare* [Dumb dogs unable to bark-Is. 56, IO]. Astounded and exasperated, I faced the kindly old man. "Please tell me what this is all about," I pleaded. "I can't make any sense out of it. What does the seed mean?"

"The seed is the word of God."

"What is the meaning of the hens gobbling it up?"

Changing tone, the old man went on, "If you want a full explanation, here it is. The field is the Lord's vineyard as the Gospel says, but it can also symbolize the heart of man. The farmhands are Gospel workers who sow the word of God, especially by preaching. This word can bear much fruit in

people's hearts if they are prepared, but then birds come and pluck it away."

"What do the birds symbolize?"

"They symbolize murmuring. After hearing an inspiring sermon, one lad joins his companions and finds fault with the preacher's gestures, voice, or some word of his. He destroys the good effect of the sermon.

Another will point out a physical or intellectual shortcoming of the preacher or ridicule his pronunciation. Again the sermon is made fruitless. The same can be said about good books; finding fault with them destroys the good they can do. Murmuring is all the nastier because it is generally done on the sly; it grows and thrives where we would least expect it. Wheat, even when sown in a poorly tilled field, will take root, grow and bear fruit. When a storm breaks over a freshly sown field, that field becomes soggy, but it still yields a harvest. Even where the seed is not of the finest quality, it will still grow; it may yield less, but yield it will.

However, when hens or birds flock and peck at it, the field will yield nothing at all. So it is with sermons, exhortations and good resolutions; if they are followed by distractions or temptations, their good effect will be lessened but not destroyed, but if there is murmuring or backbiting or some similar thing, all is wiped out. Whose duty is it to sound the alarm, take a firm stand, cry out and make sure that murmuring and unbecoming talk are silenced? You know the answer."

"What were those clerics doing?" I asked. "Couldn't they have prevented all that?"

"Of course, but they did not," he went on. "Some just stood there watching; others paid no attention; some were unaware of what was going on joined the murmurers and did their share to destroy the word of God.

You are a priest. Insist on this point. Preach, exhort, speak out, and never be afraid of saying too much. Make everybody understand that criticizing those who preach, exhort or give good advice is very harmful indeed. Furthermore, being silent and passive when a wrong is being done and one's duty calls

for action makes one an accomplice in the evil deeds of others."

Deeply impressed by these words, I kept looking for other failings so as to shame the clerics into doing their duty, but they had already begun shoving the hens away. I took a few steps but tripped over an abandoned rake and woke up.

"Now let's draw a lesson from all this," Don Bosco said.

"Father Barberis, what do you think of this dream?"

"I think it's a good reprimand. Let the chips fall where they may."

"It should certainly do us some good," Don Bosco went on. "My dear boys, avoid murmuring because it is a very grave evil. Shun it like the plague and try to make others avoid it too. At times even good advice and excellent deeds are not as effective as is the prevention of murmuring or of harmful talk. Let us bolster our courage and attack these evils openly. There is no greater misfortune than to rob one of the benefit of God's word. One utterance, one smart remark can do just that.

"This dream came several nights ago, but last night I dreamed again and I wish to tell you about it, too. It's only about nine o'clock, and I'll try to be brief."

I found myself somewhere else. I can't remember where. I know I was not in Castelnuovo, but I don't think I was at the Oratory either. Someone dashed over to me. "Don Bosco!" he cried. "Come quickly!"

"Why the hurry?" I asked.

"Don't you know what has happened?"

"No! Tell me!"

"So-and-so is very ill. He is dying. Such a fine, lively lad!"

"Are you joking?" I replied. "Just this morning I was talking with him while strolling about the porticoes and now you tell me he is dying!"

"Don Bosco, I am not trying to fool you. I must tell you the truth: that boy needs you very badly. He wants to see you and

speak to you one more time. Quickly, or you will be too late." With no idea of direction, I hurriedly followed the messenger and came to a crowd of people who in tears begged me, "Hurry! His end is near!"

"What happened?" I asked. I was taken to a room where a boy lay in bed, his face sunken and deadly pale. A racking cough and rattle in his throat barely allowed him to speak.

"Are you not so-and-so?" I asked him.

"Yes, I am."

"How are you feeling?"

"Very sick."

"What happened? Yesterday and today you were walking happily along the porticoes."

"Yes, but let's hurry. I must make my confession because I have little time."

"Do not be upset. You made your confession only a few days ago."

"I know, and I don't think I have any big sin on my conscience, but I want to be absolved again before I go to my Divine Judge."

While hearing his confession I noticed that he was rapidly failing. Phlegm nearly choked him. We must hurry, I thought, if he is still to receive Holy Viaticum and the Anointing of the Sick. Really, he will not be able to receive Viaticum because it would take too long and his cough would keep him from swallowing. I must get the oil of the sick.

I left the room and sent someone for it. Meanwhile the boys around me kept asking, "Is he really in danger? Is he really dying, as people are saying?"

"Unfortunately, yes," I replied. "Don't you see how his breathing has become more labored and the phlegm is choking him?"

"Then it would be better to give him Holy Viaticum too, to strengthen him before sending him to Our Lady's arms."

As I busied myself getting things ready I heard someone say, "He is dead!"

I went back into the room and found the boy lying with his

eyes wide open, no longer breathing.

"Is he dead?" I asked those who had been caring for him.

"Yes," they answered.

"How did it happen so quickly? Isn't he so-and-so?"

"Yes."

"I can't believe it! Just yesterday he was walking with me along the porticoes."

"Yesterday he was walking and now he is dead," they answered.

"Fortunately he was a good lad," I exclaimed. Then, turning to the boys around me, I went on: "See, he was not even able to receive the Last Sacraments. Let us thank the Lord, though, for giving him time to make his confession. He was a good boy and frequented the sacraments. Let us hope he has gone to a better life or at least to purgatory. But if this had happened to others, what would their fate have been?"

We then knelt down and recited the *De Profundis*.

I was about to re-enter my room when I saw Ferraris come in great haste.

"Don Bosco," he cried breathlessly, "do you know what happened?"

"Yes, unfortunately I do know? So-and-so is dead."

"That's not what I wanted to tell you. Two others have died."

"What?"

"Yes!" And he named them.

"When? I don't understand."

"Yes, two others died before you could get to them."

"Why didn't you call me?"

"There was no time. Still, can you tell me when the one you mentioned died?"

"Just a few minutes ago."

"Do you know what day this is and what month?"

"Of course! It's January 22, the second day of the novena of St. Francis de Sales."

"No, Don Bosco," Ferraris countered. "Check your calendar." I looked at the calendar and saw May 26.

"Incredible!" I exclaimed. "We are in January, and I am sure because I'm wearing winter clothing. No one dresses like this

in May, and we would not have the heat on."

"I can't explain it either, but today is May 26."

"Just yesterday one of our boys died, and it was January."

"You are wrong," Ferraris insisted. "It was Easter time."

"That's even more incredible."

"But it was Easter time! He was far luckier than the other two who died in Mary's month."

"You are confusing me," I told him. "Explain things better. I can't make heads or tails of what you are saying."

"I am not lying. Things are just as I told you. If you want to know more and get a better explanation, take heed!"

He spread out his arms and loudly clapped his hands. The sound woke me up.

"Thank heaven," I said, "that it was only a dream. Was I scared!"

That is the dream I had last night. Make what you want of it. I don't care to give it too much importance. Today I checked out the boys who seemed to be dead in my dream, and I found them alive and well. It is certainly not advisable for me to tell you who they are. Still, I shall keep an eye on them and if necessary give them wholesome advice. I'll prepare them with caution and not make them aware of it. If death should overtake them, it will not find them unprepared. But let no one go about saying, "It could be this one or that one." Let each one keep himself ready.

Don't let this dream frighten you. Its only effect should be that one which Our Divine Savior Himself pointed out in the Gospel: "Be ready, because at an hour that you do not expect, the Son of Man is coming." [Luke 12, 40] My dear boys, the warning the Lord gives us is a grave one. Let us always be ready because, when we least expect it, death may overtake us. The unprepared risk a bad death. I shall do my best to keep myself ready, and you should do the same, so that at whatever hour it may please the Lord to call us, we may be ready to pass into eternal happiness. Good night.

Don Bosco was always listened to in religious silence, but

when he narrated these extraordinary things, not a cough or even the slightest shuffling of feet was to be heard from the hundreds of boys present. The deep impression he made lasted for weeks, even months, and radical changes were noticeable in the conduct of certain young scamps. Don Bosco's confessional would also be crowded. It never occurred to anyone that he might have invented these stories to frighten the boys and thus improve their conduct, since his predictions of forthcoming deaths always came true and the states of conscience which he saw in his dreams corresponded to reality. But was not the fear produced by such gloomy predictions a crushing nightmare? It does not seem so. In a crowd of over eight hundred boys the odds against being one of the doomed ones were too great for any one individual to feel unduly threatened. Besides, the general belief that Don Bosco prepared those who were destined to die without frightening them and that those who did die would certainly go to heaven helped to dissipate fears. Then, too, it is common knowledge that young people quickly change their mood. Momentarily they may be shaken, but they soon shake off their fears. Those who lived through those days have unanimously confirmed this.

After the boys had gone to bed, a few confreres gathered around Don Bosco to learn if one of them would be among those to die. Shaking his head with his usual smile, Don Bosco kept them at bay, saying, "Do you really expect me to tell you who it is and risk having someone die before his time?"

Realizing that he would not disclose names, they asked him whether his first dream had shown him any clerics among the murmurers. Don Bosco, who had taken a few steps, stopped and, with a sweeping gaze at his questioners, smiled enigmatically, as if to say, "Yes, a few, but only a few, no more!"

They then pressed him to say at least if they had been among the silent observers. Don Bosco dodged the question, merely saying that they were to avoid murmuring and help others to avoid it along with any kind of wrongdoing, especially unbecoming talk.

"God help the priest or cleric," he said, "who is supposed to

be in charge and sees wrongdoing and does not stop it. I want it to be known and borne well in mind that when I say 'murmuring' I do not mean merely backbiting, but every word and expression that may destroy the wholesome effect of God's word. In conclusion, I insist that it is a serious evil to keep silent in the face of wrongdoing, taking no personal action to stop it or have those in charge do so."

One of the bolder bystanders daringly asked Don Bosco, "How does Father Barberis fit into the dream? You said that there was something in it which concerned him, and Father Barberis himself seemed to expect a reprimand." When Father Barberis seemed to be pleased to have the secret revealed, Don Bosco said, "Well, Father Barberis does not speak enough of this topic; he does not stress it as much as is needed." The latter admitted that for two years he had not specifically dwelt on this topic with his novices.

He was therefore quite grateful for the observation and resolved to keep it in mind for the future.

Then all went upstairs and, after kissing Don Bosco's hand, withdrew to their quarters, except Father Barberis who, as usual, saw Don Bosco to his room. Because it was still early and he knew that he was too deeply stirred by his own narrative to sleep, Don Bosco, contrary to his custom, invited Father Barberis to enter, saying: "It's early. Let's walk in my room a bit." For another half-hour they conversed. Among other things, Don Bosco said, "I saw everyone in that dream, and the part that each played. I use this knowledge when hearing confessions or when exhorting publicly or privately as long as I see it has a good effect. Years ago, I paid no serious attention to these dreams, until I noticed that, generally, they were more effective than a sermon, and in some cases even more effective than a retreat. Now I make use of them, and why not? Holy Scripture says: 'Test everything; retain what is good.' [1 Thess. 5, 21] I see that these dreams do a lot of good and are liked, so why keep them secret? In fact, I notice that they also help to make many boys fond of our Congregation."

"I too have experienced the benefit and help of these dreams," Father Barberis interrupted. "They are even helpful when told to others. Where people know you, we can say that they are your dreams; where you are unknown, they can be presented as parables. I wish that I could gather them together and present them in the form of parables. Both old and young, great and small would eagerly read them and benefit spiritually."

"Yes, I also firmly feel that they would do a lot of good."

"But I suppose no one has put them down in writing," Father Barberis sighed regretfully.

"I have no time," Don Bosco went on, "and some dreams I no longer remember."

"I remember those concerning the progress of our Congregation and Our Lady's mantle," Father Barberis added.

"Ah, yes," exclaimed Don Bosco, and he mentioned several such dreams. Then his countenance became grave and, almost in a worried tone, he went on, "When I think of the responsibilities of my position, I tremble all over... What a fearful account I shall have to give God for all the favors He bestowed on our Congregation!"

(BM XII, 28-37)

Photo: shutterstock.com

Salesian House of Castel Gandolfo

Amidst the green hills of the Castelli Romani and the tranquil waters of Lake Albano lies a place where history, nature, and spirituality converge in a unique way: Castel Gandolfo. In this setting rich in imperial memory, Christian faith, and scenic beauty, the Salesian presence stands as a steadfast

point of welcome, education, and pastoral life. The Salesian House, with its parish, educational, and cultural activities, continues the mission of St. John Bosco, offering believers and visitors an experience of a living and open Church, immersed in an environment that invites contemplation and fraternity. It is a community that, for nearly a century, has walked in service of the Gospel at the very heart of Catholic tradition.

A place blessed by history and nature

Castel Gandolfo is a jewel of the Castelli Romani, located about 25 km from Rome, nestled in the natural beauty of the Alban Hills and overlooking the picturesque Lake Albano. At an altitude of about 426 metres, this place stands out for its mild and welcoming climate, a microclimate that seems prepared by Providence to receive those seeking rest, beauty, and silence.

Even in Roman times, this territory was part of the *Albanum Caesaris*, an ancient imperial estate frequented by emperors since the time of Augustus. However, it was Emperor Tiberius who first resided here permanently, while later Domitian built a splendid villa, the remains of which can still be seen in the papal gardens. The Christian history of the place began with Constantine's donation to the Church of Albano, a gesture that symbolically marked the transition from imperial glory to the light of the Gospel.

The name Castel Gandolfo derives from the Latin *Castrum Gandulphi*, the castle built by the Gandolfi family in the 12th century. When in 1596 the castle passed to the Holy See, it became the summer residence of the Popes, and the bond between this place and the ministry of the Successor of Peter became deep and lasting.

The Vatican Observatory: contemplating the heavens, praising the Creator

Of particular spiritual significance is the Vatican

Observatory, founded by Pope Leo XIII in 1891 and relocated in the 1930s to Castel Gandolfo due to Rome's light pollution. It testifies to how even science, when directed towards truth, leads to praising the Creator.

Over the years, the Observatory has contributed to major astronomical projects such as the *Carte du Ciel* and the discovery of numerous celestial objects.

With further deterioration of observing conditions even in the Castelli Romani, in the 1980s scientific activity shifted primarily to the Mount Graham Observatory in Arizona (USA), where the *Vatican Observatory Research Group* continues astrophysical research. Castel Gandolfo, however, remains an important centre of study. Since 1986, it has hosted the *Vatican Observatory Summer School* every two years, dedicated to astronomy students and graduates from around the world. The Observatory also organises specialist conferences, public outreach events, meteorite exhibitions, and presentations of historical and artistic materials on astronomical themes, all in a spirit of research, dialogue, and contemplation of the mystery of creation.

A church at the heart of the city and of the faith

In the 17th century, Pope Alexander VII entrusted Gian Lorenzo Bernini with the construction of a palatine chapel for the employees of the Pontifical Villas. The project, initially conceived in honour of St. Nicholas of Bari, was ultimately dedicated to St Thomas of Villanova, an Augustinian canonised in 1658. The church was consecrated in 1661 and entrusted to the Augustinians, who administered it until 1929. With the signing of the Lateran Treaty, Pope Pius XI entrusted the same Augustinians with the pastoral care of the new Pontifical Parish of St. Anne in the Vatican, while the Church of St. Thomas of Villanova was later entrusted to the Salesians.

The architectural beauty of this church, a product of Baroque genius, serves faith and the encounter between God and man.

Today, numerous weddings, baptisms, and liturgies are celebrated here, attracting faithful from all over the world.

The Salesian house

The Salesians have been present in Castel Gandolfo since 1929. In those years, the village experienced significant demographic and tourist development, further enhanced by the beginning of papal celebrations in the Church of St. Thomas of Villanova. Every year, on the Solemnity of the Assumption, the Pope celebrated Holy Mass in the pontifical parish, a tradition begun by St. John XXIII on 15 August 1959, when he walked out of the Pontifical Palace to celebrate the Eucharist among the people. This custom continued until the pontificate of Pope Francis, who discontinued summer stays in Castel Gandolfo. In 2016, the entire complex of the Pontifical Villas was transformed into a museum and opened to the public.

The Salesian house was part of the Roman Province and, from 2009 to 2021, of the Central Italy Salesian Circumscription. Since 2021, it has been under the direct responsibility of the Central Office, with a Director and community appointed by the Rector Major. Currently, the Salesians present come from various nations (Brazil, India, Italy, Poland) and are active in the parish, chaplaincies, and oratory.

The pastoral spaces, though belonging to the Vatican City State and thus considered extraterritorial, are part of the Diocese of Albano, in whose pastoral life the Salesians actively participate. They are involved in diocesan adult catechesis, teaching at the diocesan theological school, and in the Presbyteral Council as representatives of consecrated life.

In addition to the parish of St. Thomas of Villanova, the Salesians also manage two other churches: Mary Help of Christians (also called "St. Paul," after the name of the neighbourhood) and Madonna del Lago, desired by St. Paul VI. Both were built between the 1960s and 1970s to meet the

pastoral needs of the growing population.

The parish church designed by Bernini is now a destination for numerous weddings and baptisms celebrated by faithful from around the world. Every year, with the necessary permissions, dozens, sometimes hundreds, of celebrations take place here.

The parish priest, in addition to leading the parish community, is also chaplain of the Pontifical Villas and provides spiritual accompaniment to Vatican employees working there.

The oratory, currently run by laypeople, sees the direct involvement of the Salesians, especially in catechesis. On weekends, feast days, and during summer activities like Estate Ragazzi, Salesian students residing in Rome also collaborate, offering valuable support. At the Church of Mary Help of Christians, there is also an active theatre, with parish groups organising performances—a place of encounter, culture, and evangelisation.

Pastoral life and traditions

Pastoral life is marked by the main feasts of the year: St John Bosco in January, Mary Help of Christians in May with a procession in the St. Paul neighbourhood, the feast of the Madonna del Lago—and thus the Feast of the Lake—on the last Saturday of August, with the statue carried in procession on a boat across the lake. This latter celebration is increasingly involving neighbouring communities, attracting many participants, including motorcyclists, with whom moments of encounter have been initiated.

On the first Saturday of September, the patronal feast of Castel Gandolfo is celebrated in honour of St. Sebastian, with a large town procession. Devotion to St. Sebastian dates back to 1867, when the town was spared from an epidemic that severely affected nearby villages. Although the liturgical memorial falls on 20 January, the local feast is celebrated in September, both in memory of the protection received and for practical and climatic reasons.

On 8 September, the patron of the church, St. Thomas of Villanova, is celebrated, coinciding with the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On this occasion, the feast of families is also held, aimed at couples who married in Bernini's church. They are invited to return for a communal celebration, a procession, and a shared meal. The initiative has been well received and is becoming a lasting tradition.

A curiosity: the letterbox

Next to the entrance of the Salesian house is a post-box, known as the "Mailbox of Correspondence," considered the oldest still in use. It dates back to 1820, twenty years before the introduction of the world's first postage stamp, the famous *Penny Black* (1840). It is an official mailbox of the Italian Post Office still in operation, but also a symbolic invitation to communication, dialogue, and opening one's heart. The return of Pope Leo XIV to his summer residence will surely increase its use.

Castel Gandolfo remains a place where the Creator speaks through the beauty of creation, the proclaimed Word, and the witness of a Salesian community that, in the simplicity of Don Bosco's style, continues to offer welcome, education, liturgy, and fraternity, reminding those who approach these lands in search of peace and serenity that true peace and serenity are found only in God and His grace.

Missionary volunteering
changes the lives of young

people in Mexico

Missionary volunteering is an experience that profoundly transforms the lives of young people. In Mexico, the Salesian Province of Guadalajara has for decades developed an organic path of Salesian Missionary Volunteering (SMV) that continues to have a lasting impact on the hearts of many young men and women. Thanks to the reflections of Margarita Aguilar, coordinator of missionary volunteering in Guadalajara, we will share the journey regarding the origins, evolution, formation phases, and motivations that drive young people to get involved in serving communities in Mexico.

Origins

Volunteering, understood as a commitment to others born from the need to help one's neighbour both socially and spiritually, strengthened over time with the contribution of governments and NGOs to raise awareness on issues of health, education, religion, the environment, and more. In the Salesian Congregation, the voluntary spirit has been present since its origins. Mamma Margherita, alongside Don Bosco, was among the first "volunteers" in the Oratory, committing herself to assisting young people to fulfil God's will and contribute to the salvation of their souls. Already the XXII General Chapter (1984) began to speak explicitly of volunteering, and subsequent chapters insisted on this commitment as an inseparable dimension of the Salesian mission.

In Mexico, the Salesians are divided into two Provinces: Mexico City (MEM) and Guadalajara (MEG). It is precisely in the latter that, starting from the mid-1980s, a youth volunteer project was structured. The Province of Guadalajara, founded 62 years ago, has for almost 40 years offered young people eager to experience the Salesian charism the opportunity to dedicate a period of their lives to serving communities, especially in border areas.

On 24 October 1987, the Provincial sent a group of four young people together with Salesians to the city of Tijuana, in a rapidly expanding Salesian border area. This marked the beginning of Salesian Youth Volunteering (SYV), which gradually developed and became increasingly structured.

The initial objective was proposed to young people around 20 years old, available to dedicate one to two years to build the first oratories in the communities of Tijuana, Ciudad Juárez, Los Mochis, and other locations in the north. Many remember the early days: shovel and hammer in hand, living together in simple houses with other volunteers, afternoons spent with children, adolescents, and young people from the neighbourhood playing on the land where the oratory would be built. Sometimes the roof was missing, but there was no lack of joy, a sense of family, and encounter with the Eucharist.

Those first communities of Salesians and volunteers brought in their hearts love for God, for Mary Help of Christians, and for Don Bosco, demonstrating a pioneering spirit, missionary ardour, and total care for others.

Evolution

As the Province and Youth Ministry grew, the need for clear formation itineraries for volunteers emerged. The organisation was strengthened through:

Application questionnaire: each aspiring volunteer filled out a form and answered a questionnaire that outlined their human, spiritual, and Salesian characteristics, initiating the personal growth process.

Initial formation course: theatre workshops, games and group dynamics, catechesis and practical tools for field activities. Before leaving, volunteers met to conclude their formation and receive their assignment to Salesian communities.

Spiritual accompaniment: the candidate was invited to be accompanied by a Salesian in their community of origin. For a

period, the preparation was carried out together with Salesian Aspirants, strengthening the vocational aspect, although this practice later underwent changes based on the vocational animation of the Province.

Annual provincial meeting: every December, near International Volunteer Day (5 December), volunteers meet to evaluate the experience, reflect on each person's journey, and consolidate the accompaniment processes.

Visits to the communities: the coordination team regularly visits the communities where volunteers work, to support not only the young people themselves, but also Salesians and lay people of the educational-pastoral community, strengthening support networks.

Personal life project: each candidate develops, with the help of the spiritual guide, a life project that helps to integrate the human, Christian, Salesian, vocational, and missionary dimensions. A minimum preparation period of six months is foreseen, with online moments dedicated to the various dimensions.

Family involvement: informative meetings with parents on the SYV processes, to help them understand the path and strengthen family support.

Continuous formation during the experience: each month a dimension (human, spiritual, apostolic, etc.) is addressed through reading materials, reflection, and in-depth work in progress.

Post-volunteering: after the conclusion of the experience, a closing meeting is organised to evaluate the experience, plan the next steps, and accompany the volunteer in reintegration into their community of origin and family, with in-person and online phases.

New stages and renewals

Recently, the experience has taken the name of Salesian Missionary Volunteering (SMV), in line with the Congregation's emphasis on the spiritual and missionary dimension. Some new features introduced:

Short pre-volunteering: during school holidays (December-January, Holy Week and Easter, and especially summer) young people can experience community life and service commitment for short periods, to get a first "taste" of the experience.

Formation for international experience: a specific process has been established to prepare volunteers to live the experience outside national borders.

Greater emphasis on spiritual accompaniment: no longer just "sending to work", but placing the encounter with God at the centre, so that the volunteer discovers their vocation and mission.

As Margarita Aguilar, SMV coordinator in Guadalajara, points out, "A volunteer needs to have empty hands to be able to embrace their mission with faith and hope in God."

Motivations of young people

At the heart of the SMV experience is always the question, "What is your motivation to become a volunteer?" Three main groups can be identified:

Operative/practical motivation: those who believe they will carry out concrete activities related to their skills (teaching in a school, serving in a canteen, animating an oratory). They often discover that volunteering is not just manual or didactic work and may be disappointed if they expected a merely instrumental experience.

Motivation related to the Salesian charism: former beneficiaries of Salesian work who wish to deepen and live the charism more fully, imagining an intense experience like a

long festive meeting of the Salesian Youth Movement, but for a prolonged period.

Spiritual motivation: those who intend to share their experience of God and discover Him in others. Sometimes, however, this “fidelity” is conditioned by expectations (e.g. “yes, but only in this community” or “yes, but if I can return for a family event”), and it is necessary to help the volunteer mature their “yes” freely and generously.

Three key elements of SMV

The Salesian Missionary Volunteering experience is based on three fundamental dimensions:

Spiritual life: God is the centre. Without prayer, sacraments, and listening to the Spirit, the experience risks being reduced to a simple operational commitment, tiring the volunteer to the point of abandonment.

Community life: communion with the Salesians and with other members of the community strengthens the volunteer’s presence among children, adolescents, and young people. Without community, there is no support in times of difficulty nor context to grow together.

Apostolic life: joyful witness and affectionate presence among young people evangelises more than any formal activity. It is not just about “doing”, but about “being” salt and light in everyday life.

To fully live these three dimensions, an integral formation path is needed that accompanies the volunteer from beginning to end, embracing every aspect of the person (human, spiritual, vocational) according to Salesian pedagogy and the missionary mandate.

The role of the host community

The volunteer, to be an authentic instrument of evangelisation, needs a community that supports them, be an

example and guide. Likewise, the community welcomes the volunteer to integrate them, supporting them in moments of fragility and helping them to free themselves from ties that hinder total dedication. As Margarita highlights, “God has called us to be salt and light of the Earth and many of our volunteers have found the courage to take a plane leaving behind family, friends, culture, their way of life to choose this lifestyle focused on being missionaries.”

The community offers spaces for discussion, common prayer, practical and emotional accompaniment, so that the volunteer can remain firm in their choice and bear fruit in service.

The history of Salesian missionary volunteering in Guadalajara is an example of how an experience can grow, structure, and renew itself by learning from mistakes and successes. By always placing the young person’s deep motivation, the spiritual and community dimension at the centre, a path capable of transforming, not only the realities served, but also the lives of the volunteers themselves, is offered.

Margarita Aguilar tells us, “A volunteer needs to have empty hands to be able to embrace their mission with faith and hope in God.”

We thank Margarita for her valuable reflections. Her testimony reminds us that missionary volunteering is not a mere service, but a journey of faith and growth that touches the lives of young people and communities, renewing hope and the desire to give oneself for the love of God and neighbour.

Beatification of Camille

Costa de Beauregard. And afterwards...?

The diocese of Savoy and the city of Chambéry experienced three historic days on 16, 17, and 18 May 2025. An account of the events and future prospects.

The relics of Camille Costa de Beauregard were transferred from Bocage to the Church of Notre-Dame (the site of Camille's baptism) on Friday, 16 May. A magnificent procession then wound through the city streets from 8 pm onwards. After the Alpine horns, bagpipes took over to lead the march, followed by a flower-decked carriage carrying a giant portrait of the "father of orphans." Next came the relics, borne on a stretcher by young students from Bocage secondary school, dressed in splendid red sweaters emblazoned with Camille's words: *"The higher the mountain, the further we see."* Several hundred people of all ages followed in a cheerful, family-friendly atmosphere. Along the route, respectful onlookers paused in awe at this unusual parade.

Upon arrival at Notre-Dame, a priest led a prayer vigil accompanied by hymns from a beautiful youth choir. The ceremony unfolded in a relaxed yet solemn atmosphere. At the vigil's close, everyone filed past to venerate the relics and entrust personal intentions to Camille. A truly moving moment!

Saturday, 17 May. The big day! Since Pauline Marie Jaricot (beatified in May 2022), France had not welcomed a new "Blessed." Thus, the entire Apostolic Region was represented by its bishops: Lyon, Annecy, Saint-Étienne, Valence, etc. They were joined by two former archbishops of Chambéry: Monsignor Laurent Ulrich, now Archbishop of Paris, and Monsignor Philippe Ballot, Bishop of Metz. Two bishops from Burkina Faso had travelled to attend the celebration. Numerous diocesan priests came to concelebrate, along with several

religious figures, including seven Salesians of Don Bosco. The Apostolic Nuncio to France, Monsignor Celestino Migliore, was tasked with representing Cardinal Semeraro (Prefect of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints), detained in Rome for the enthronement of Pope Leo XIV. Needless to say, the cathedral was packed, as were the side chapels, forecourt, and Bocage—over 3,000 people in total.

What emotion when, after the reading of the papal decree (signed just the day before by Pope Leo XIV) by Father Pierluigi Cameroni, postulator of the cause, Camille's portrait was unveiled in the cathedral! What fervour filled that great nave! What solemnity, upheld by the hymns of a magnificent inter-diocesan choir and the grand organ, masterfully played by Thibaut Duré! In short, a majestic ceremony for this humble priest who devoted his entire life to serving the least among us!

Coverage was provided by RCF Savoie (a French regional radio station part of the RCF network, Radios Chrésiennes Francophones), with interviews of key figures involved in Camille's cause, and by KTO (the French-language Catholic TV channel), which broadcast the glorious celebration live.

A third day, Sunday 18 May, crowned the festivities. Held at Bocage under a large marquee, it featured a thanksgiving Mass presided over by Monsignor Thibault Verny, Archbishop of Chambéry, flanked by the two African bishops, the Salesian Provincial, and several priests—including Father Jean François Chiron (13-year president of the Camille Committee founded by Monsignor Philippe Ballot), who delivered a remarkable homily. A considerable crowd gathered to pray and participate. After Mass, a "Camille Costa de Beauregard, Founder of Bocage" rose—selected by alumni and offered to dignitaries—was blessed by Father Daniel Féderspiel, Provincial of the Salesians of France (now available for purchase at Bocage's greenhouses).

After the ceremony, Alpine horns performed a concert until Pope Leo, during his *Regina Coeli* discourse, declared his joy at the first beatification of his pontificate: Chambéry's priest, Camille Costa de Beauregard. Thunderous applause erupted under the marquee!

That afternoon, various youth groups from Bocage—secondary school pupils, children's home residents, and scouts—took turns on stage to enliven the festivities. What a celebration!

And now? Is it all over? Or is there more to come?

Camille's beatification is just one step toward canonisation. The work continues, and you are invited to contribute. What remains to be done? Spread awareness of the new Blessed through every means, for many must pray for his intercession to obtain another miracle unexplained by science, which would allow the consideration of a new process and a rapid canonisation. Camille's holiness would then be proclaimed to the world. It's possible; we must believe! Let's not stop halfway!

Resources of various kinds include:

- the book *"Blessed Camille Costa de Beauregard: Nobility of Heart"* by Françoise Bouchard (Éditions Salvator);
- the book *"Praying Fifteen Days with Camille Costa de Beauregard"* by Father Paul Ripaud (Éditions Nouvelle Cité);
- the comic book: *"Blessed Camille Costa de Beauregard"* by Gaëtan Evrard (Éditions Triomphe);
- Videos on the "Amis de Costa" website and the *beatification footage*;
- Visits to memorial sites at Bocage in Chambéry, are possible by contacting either the Bocage welcome desk or directly, Mr. Gabriel Tardy, Director of La *Maison des Enfants*).

To everyone, thank you for supporting Blessed

Camille's cause—he deserves it!

Fr. Paul Ripaud, SDB

Visit to the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome (also in 3D)

The Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome is a prominent church for the city, located in the Castro Pretorio district, on Via Marsala, across the street from Termini Station. It serves as both a parish church and a cardinal title, with the Central Headquarters of the Salesian Congregation adjacent to it. Its patronal feast is celebrated on the solemnity of the Sacred Heart. Its proximity to Termini makes it a visible landmark for those arriving in the city, with the gilded statue on the bell tower standing out on the horizon as a symbol of blessing for residents and travellers alike.

Origins and History

The idea of building a church dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus dates back to Pope Pius IX, who laid the first stone in 1870 for a building initially intended to honour St Joseph. However, by 1871, the pontiff decided to dedicate the new church to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It was the second major church dedicated to the Sacred Heart after the one in Lisbon, Portugal, begun in 1779 and consecrated in 1789, and predating the famous *Sacré-Cœur* in Montmartre, Paris, France, which was started in 1875 and consecrated in 1919.

Construction began under difficult circumstances: with Rome's annexation to the Kingdom of Italy (1870), work halted due to

lack of funds. It was only through the intervention of St John Bosco, at the Pope's invitation, that construction definitively resumed in 1880, thanks to his tireless efforts to collect donations across Europe and gather resources for the building's completion. The architect commissioned was Francesco Vespignani, then "Architect of the Sacred Palaces" under Leo XIII, who saw the project through. The consecration took place on 14 May 1887, marking the end of the first construction phase.

From its inception, the church has served a parish function: the parish of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Castro Pretorio was established on 2 February 1879 by the vicarial decree "*Postremis hisce temporibus*". Later, Pope Benedict XV elevated it to the dignity of a minor basilica on 11 February 1921, with the apostolic letter "*Pia societas*". More recently, on 5 February 1965, Pope Paul VI established the cardinal title of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Castro Pretorio. Among its titular cardinals are Maximilien de Fürstenberg (1967–1988), Giovanni Saldarini (1991–2011), and Giuseppe Versaldi (from 2012 to the present). The cardinal title strengthens the basilica's ties to the papal Curia, helping to maintain focus on the importance of devotion to the Sacred Heart and Salesian spirituality.

Architecture

The façade is in the Neo-Renaissance style, with sober lines and balanced proportions typical of Renaissance revival in late 19th-century ecclesiastical architecture. The bell tower, conceived in Vespignani's original design, remained incomplete until 1931, when the imposing gilded statue of the Sacred Heart blessing was placed atop it, donated by Salesian alumni in Argentina. Visible from afar, it serves as an identifying feature of the basilica and a symbol of welcome for those arriving in Rome via the nearby railway station.

The interior follows a Latin cross plan with three naves,

separated by eight columns and two grey granite pillars supporting round arches, and includes a transept and central dome. The central nave and side aisles are covered with coffered ceilings, decorated with lacunae in the central register. The proportions are harmonious. The central nave's width of approximately 14 metres and length of 70 metres create a solemn spaciousness, while the granite columns, with their pronounced veining, lend an air of solid grandeur.

The central dome, visible from the interior with its frescoes and lacunae, draws in natural light through base windows and adds verticality to the liturgical space. The side chapels house paintings by the Roman artist Andrea Cherubini, featuring devotional scenes in keeping with the dedication to the Sacred Heart.

Beyond Cherubini's paintings, the basilica preserves various sacred artworks: wooden or marble statues depicting the Virgin Mary, patron saints of the Salesian Congregation, and charismatic figures like St John Bosco.

The Rooms of St John Bosco in Rome

A site of great historical and devotional value is the "Little Rooms of Don Bosco" at the rear of the basilica, where St John Bosco stayed during nine of his twenty visits to Rome. Originally two separate rooms—a study and a bedroom with a portable altar—they were later combined to accommodate pilgrims and prayer groups, forming a living memorial to the founder of the Salesians. Personal items and relics recalling miracles attributed to the saint during that period are preserved here. This space was recently renovated and continues to attract pilgrims, inspiring reflection on Bosco's spirituality and dedication to young people.

The basilica and adjacent buildings are owned by the Salesian Congregation, which has made it one of its key centres in Rome. Since Don Bosco's time, the building next to the church housed the Salesian community and later became home to schools, oratories, and youth services. Today, alongside liturgical activities, the complex hosts significant work with

migrants and disadvantaged youth. Since 2017, it has also served as the Central Headquarters of the Salesian Congregation's governance.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart and Liturgical Celebrations

The dedication to the Sacred Heart of Jesus translates into specific devotional practices. The liturgical feast of the Sacred Heart, celebrated on the Friday following the octave of Corpus Christi, is observed with solemnity in the basilica, featuring novenas, Eucharistic celebrations, Eucharistic adoration, and processions. Popular piety surrounding the Sacred Heart—widespread since the 19th century with its approval by Pius IX and Leo XIII—finds a focal point here in Rome, drawing the faithful for prayers of reparation, entrustment, and thanksgiving.

For the 2025 Jubilee, the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus has been granted the privilege of a plenary indulgence, like all other churches on the *Iter Europaeum*.

We recall that to celebrate the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the European Union and the Holy See (1970–2020), a project was undertaken by the Delegation of the European Union to the Holy See and the 28 Embassies of individual member States accredited to the Holy See. This project consisted of a liturgical and cultural itinerary in which each Country designated a church or basilica in Rome with which it had a special historical, artistic, or pilgrim hospitality connection. The primary goal was twofold: on one hand, to foster mutual understanding among European citizens and encourage reflection on shared Christian roots; on the other, to offer pilgrims and visitors a means of discovering lesser-known or particularly meaningful religious spaces, highlighting the Church's connections with all of Europe. Broadening the perspective, the initiative was later revived as part of the jubilee routes linked to the Rome 2025 Jubilee, under the Latin name "*Iter Europaeum*," incorporating the itinerary among the official pilgrim paths of the Holy City.

The *Iter Europaeum* includes stops at 28 churches and basilicas in Rome, each “adopted” by an EU member State. The Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was “adopted” by [Luxembourg](#). The churches of the *Iter Europaeum* can be viewed [HERE](#).

Visiting the Basilica

The Basilica can be visited in person or virtually.

For a 3D virtual tour, click [HERE](#).

For a guided virtual tour, follow these links:

1. [Introduction](#)
2. [History](#)
3. [Façade](#)
4. [Bell Tower](#)
5. [Central Nave](#)
6. [Inner Façade Wall](#)
7. [Floor](#)
8. [Columns](#)
9. [Central Nave Walls](#)
10. [Ceiling 1](#)
11. [Ceiling 2](#)
12. [Transept](#)
13. [Stained Glass Transept](#)
14. [High Altar](#)
15. [Presbytery](#)
16. [Dome](#)
17. [Don Bosco Choir](#)
18. [Side Naves](#)
19. [Confessionals](#)
20. [Right Side Nave Altars](#)
21. [Side Nave Frescoes](#)
22. [Left Nave Small Domes](#)
23. [Baptistery](#)
24. [Left Side Nave Altars](#)
25. [Left Nave Small Dome Frescoes](#)

- 26. [Sacristy](#)
- 27. [Don Bosco's "Little Rooms" \(previous version\)](#)
- 28. [Don Bosco Museum \(previous version\)](#)

The Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Castro Pretorio is an example of Neo-Renaissance architecture tied to historical events marked by crises and revivals. The combination of artistic, architectural, and historical elements—from granite columns to painted decorations, from the famed bell tower statue to Don Bosco's Little Rooms—makes this site a destination for spiritual and cultural pilgrimage. Its location near Termini Station renders it a welcoming symbol for those arriving in Rome, while pastoral work for the young continues to embody the spirit of St. John Bosco: a heart open to service, formation, and lived spirituality. A must-visit.

Interview with the Rector Major, Fr. Fabio Attard

*We had an exclusive interview with the Rector Major of the Salesians, Fr. Fabio Attard, looking back over the key stages of his vocation and his human and spiritual journey. His vocation began in the oratory and was consolidated through a rich formative journey that took him from Ireland to Tunisia, Malta, and Rome. From 2008 to 2020, he was General Councillor for Youth Ministry, a role he carried out with a multicultural vision acquired through experiences in different contexts. His central message is **holiness** as the foundation of Salesian educational action: 'I would like to see a holier Congregation,' he says, emphasising that professional efficiency must be rooted in consecrated identity.*

What is your vocation story?

I was born in Gozo, Malta, on 23 March 1959, the fifth of seven children. At the time of my birth, my father was a pharmacist in a hospital, while my mother had started a small fabric and dressmaking shop, which over time grew into a small chain of five shops. She was a very hard-working woman, but the business always remained a family affair.

I attended local primary and secondary schools. A very beautiful and special part of my childhood was that my father was a lay catechist at the oratory, which until 1965 had been run by the Salesians. As a young man, he had attended that oratory and had remained there as the only lay catechist. When I started attending at the age of six, the Salesians had just left. A young priest (who is still alive) took over and continued the activities of the oratory in the same Salesian spirit, having himself lived there as a seminarian.

We continued with catechism, daily Benediction of the Eucharistic, football, theatre, choir, trips, parties... everything you normally experience in an oratory. There were many children and young people, and I grew up in that environment. In practice, my life took place between my family and the oratory. I was also an altar boy in my parish. So, after finishing high school, I turned towards the priesthood, because I had had this desire in my heart since I was a child.

Today I realise how much I was influenced by that young priest, whom I looked up to with admiration. He was always there with us in the courtyard, in the activities of the oratory. However, at that time the Salesians were no longer there. So, I entered the seminary, where at that time there were two years of preparatory studies as an intern. During the third year – which corresponded to the first year of philosophy – I met a family friend about 35 years old, an adult vocation, who had entered as a Salesian aspirant (he is still alive today and is a coadjutor). When he took this step, a fire was lit inside me. And with the help of my spiritual

director, I began a vocational discernment. It was an important but also demanding journey. I was 19 years old, but that spiritual guide helped me to seek God's will, and not simply my own. So, in my last year – the fourth year of philosophy – instead of following him to the seminary, I lived as a Salesian aspirant, completing the required two years of philosophy.

My family environment was strongly marked by faith. We attended Mass every day, recited the Rosary at home, and were very close-knit. Even today, although our parents are in Heaven, we maintain that same unity among brothers and sisters.

Another family experience marked me deeply, although I only realised it over time. My brother, the second in the family, died at the age of 25 from kidney failure. Today, with advances in medicine, he would still be alive thanks to dialysis and transplants, but back then there weren't many options. I was by his side during the last three years of his life. We shared the same room and I often helped him at night. He was a peaceful, cheerful young man who lived his fragility with extraordinary joy.

I was 16 when he died. Fifty years have passed, but when I think back to that time and that daily experience of closeness made up of small gestures, I realise how much it has marked my life.

I was born into a family where there was faith, a sense of work and shared responsibility. My parents are two extraordinary examples for me. They lived their cross with great faith and serenity, without ever burdening anyone, and at the same time, they knew how to convey the joy of family life. I can say that I had a very happy childhood. We were neither rich nor poor, but always modest and discreet. They taught us to work, to manage resources well, not to waste, to live with dignity, elegance, and above all, with attention to the poor and the sick.

How did your family react when you made the decision to follow your vocation as a religious?

The time had come when, together with my spiritual director, we had made it clear that my path was that of the Salesians. I also had to tell my parents. I remember it was a quiet evening; we were eating together, just the three of us. At one point I said, "I want to tell you something. I have made my discernment and I have decided to join the Salesians."

My father was delighted. He replied immediately, "May the Lord bless you." My mother, on the other hand, began to cry, as all mothers do. She asked me, "So you're leaving?" But my father intervened gently and firmly, "Whether he leaves or not, this is his path."

They blessed me and encouraged me. Those moments will remain etched in my memory forever.

I particularly remember what happened towards the end of my parents' lives. My father died in 1997, and six months later my mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer.

At that time, my superiors had asked me to go and teach at the Pontifical Salesian University (UPS), but I didn't know what to do. My mother was not well and was nearing the end of her life. Talking to my brothers, they said to me, "Do what your superiors ask you to do."

I was at home and talked to her about it. "Mom, my superiors are asking me to go to Rome."

With the clarity of a true mother, she replied, "Listen, my son, if it were up to me, I would ask you to stay here, because I have no one else and I don't want to be a burden on your brothers. But..." – and here she said something that I carry in my heart – "You are not mine; you belong to God. Do what your superiors tell you."

That sentence, spoken a year before her death, is a treasure for me, a precious legacy. My mother was an intelligent, wise, and perceptive woman. She knew that her illness would lead to her death, but at that moment she was able to be free inside. Free to say words that confirmed once again the gift she

herself had given to God: offering a son to the consecrated life.

My family's reaction, from the beginning to the end, was always marked by deep respect and great support. And even today, my brothers and sisters continue to carry on this spirit.

What has been your formative journey from novitiate to today?

It has been a very rich and varied journey. I began my pre-novitiate in Malta, then I did my novitiate in Dublin, Ireland. It was a truly beautiful experience.

After the novitiate, my companions moved to Maynooth to study philosophy at the university, but I had already completed my studies. For this reason, my superiors asked me to remain at the novitiate for another year, where I taught Italian and Latin. After that, I returned to Malta for two years of internship, which were very beautiful and enriching.

I was then sent to Rome to study theology at the Pontifical Salesian University, where I spent three extraordinary years. Those years gave me great open-mindedness. We lived in the student residence with forty brothers from twenty different countries: Asia, Europe, Latin America... even the teaching staff was international. It was the mid-1980s, about twenty years after the Second Vatican Council, and there was still a lot of enthusiasm in the air. There were lively theological debates, liberation theology, and interest in method and practice. Those studies taught me to read faith not only as intellectual content, but as a choice of life.

After those three years, I continued with two more years of specialisation in moral theology at the Alfonsian Academy with the Redemptorist fathers. There, too, I met significant figures, such as the famous Bernhard Häring, with whom I formed a personal friendship and went to talk to him regularly every month. It was a total of five years – between my bachelor's and licentiate degrees – that deeply formed me from

a theological point of view.

Afterwards, I volunteered for the missions, and my superiors sent me to Tunisia, together with another Salesian, to re-establish the Salesian presence in the Country. We took over a school run by a female congregation which, having no more vocations, was about to close. It was a school with 700 students, so we had to learn French and also Arabic. To prepare ourselves, we spent a few months in Lyon, France, and then devoted ourselves to studying Arabic.

I stayed there for three years. It was another great experience because we found ourselves living the Salesian faith and charism in a context where we could not speak explicitly about Jesus. However, it was possible to build educational programmes based on human values: respect, availability, truth. Our witness was silent but eloquent. In that environment, I learned to know and love the Muslim world. Everyone – students, teachers, and families – were Muslims, and they welcomed us with great warmth. They made us feel part of their family. I returned to Tunisia several times and always found the same respect and appreciation, regardless of our religious affiliation.

After that experience, I returned to Malta and worked for five years in the social field. In particular, I worked in a Salesian house that welcomes young people in need of more attentive educational support, including residential care.

After these eight years of pastoral work (between Tunisia and Malta), I was offered the opportunity to complete my doctorate. I chose to return to Ireland because the subject was related to conscience according to the thinking of Cardinal John Henry Newman, now a saint. After completing my doctorate, the Rector Major at the time, Fr. Juan Edmundo Vecchi – of blessed memory – asked me to join the Pontifical Salesian University as a professor of moral theology.

Looking back on my entire journey, from aspirant to doctorate, I can say that it has been a combination of experiences not only in terms of content but also in terms of very different cultural contexts. I thank the Lord and the Congregation for offering me the opportunity to experience such a varied and rich formation.

So, you know Maltese because it is your mother tongue, English because it is the second language in Malta, Latin because you taught it, Italian because you studied in Italy, French and Arabic because you were in Manouba, Tunisia... How many languages do you know?

Five or six languages, more or less. However, when people ask me about languages, I always say that it is a bit of a historical coincidence.

In Malta, we grow up with two languages: Maltese and English, and we study a third language at school. In my day, Italian was also taught. Then, I had a natural aptitude for languages, so I also chose Latin.

Later, when I went to Tunisia, I had to learn French and Arabic.

In Rome, living with many Spanish-speaking students, my ear got used to it, and when I was elected Councillor for Youth Ministry, I also studied Spanish a little, which is a very beautiful language.

All languages are beautiful. Of course, learning them requires commitment, study, and practice. Some people are more gifted than others; it is part of one's personal disposition. But it is neither a merit nor a fault. It is simply a gift, a natural predisposition.

From 2008 to 2020, you served two terms as General Councillor for Youth Ministry. How did your experience help you in this mission?

When the Lord entrusts us with a mission, we bring with us all the baggage of experiences we have accumulated over time.

Having lived in different cultural contexts, I did not run the

risk of seeing everything through the filter of a single culture. I am European; I come from the Mediterranean, from a Country that was a British colony, but I have had the grace to live in international, multicultural communities.

My years of study at UPS also helped me a lot. We had professors who did not just impart knowledge, but taught us to synthesise and develop a method. For example, when studying Church history, we understood how essential it was to understand patristics. When studying biblical theology, we learned to connect it with sacramental theology, morality, and the history of spirituality. In short, they taught us to think organically.

This ability to synthesise, this architecture of thought, then becomes part of your personal formation. When you study theology, you learn to identify key points and connect them. The same applies to pastoral, pedagogical or philosophical proposals. When you meet people of great depth, you absorb not only what they say, but also how they say it, and this shapes your style.

Another important element is that, at the time of my election, I had already had experiences in missionary environments, where the Catholic religion was practically absent, and I had worked with marginalised and vulnerable people. I had also gained some experience in the university world and, at the same time, I had devoted myself a lot to spiritual accompaniment.

Furthermore, between 2005 and 2008 – just after my experience at the UPS – the Archdiocese of Malta asked me to found a Pastoral Formation Institute, following a diocesan synod that had recognised the need for it. The archbishop entrusted me with the task of starting it from scratch. The first thing I did was to build a team of priests, religious, and lay people – men and women. We created a new formation method, which is still used today. The institute continues to function very well, and in some ways that experience was a valuable

preparation for the work I did later in youth ministry.

From the beginning, I have always believed in teamwork and collaboration with lay people. My first experience as a director was precisely in this style: a stable educative team, today we would call it a CEP (Educative-Pastoral Community), with regular, not occasional, meetings. We met every week with educators and professionals. And this approach, which over time has become a method, has remained a reference point for me.

Added to this is my academic experience: six years as a lecturer at the Salesian Pontifical University, where students came from over a hundred countries, and then as an examiner and director of doctoral theses at the Alfonsian Academy. I believe that all this has prepared me to live this responsibility with clarity and vision.

So, when the Congregation asked me to take on this role during the General Chapter of 2008, I already had a broad, multicultural vision. This helped me because bringing together diversity was not difficult for me; it was part of normality. Of course, it wasn't simply a matter of making a 'fruit salad' of experiences; it was necessary to find the common threads, to give coherence and unity.

What I was able to experience as General Councillor was not a personal achievement. I believe that any Salesian, if he had had the same opportunities and support from the Congregation, could have had similar experiences and made his own generous contribution.

Is there a prayer, a Salesian goodnight ritual, a habit that you never fail to do?

Devotion to Mary. At home we grew up with the daily Rosary, recited as a family. It was not an obligation; it was something natural. We did it before meals, because we always ate together. Back then it was possible. Today perhaps it is

less so, but back then that was how we lived, the family together, shared prayer, the common table.

At first perhaps, I did not realise how deep that Marian devotion was. But as the years passed, when you begin to distinguish what is essential from what is secondary, I realised how much that maternal presence had accompanied my life.

Devotion to Mary is expressed in different ways: the daily Rosary, when possible; a moment of pause before an image or statue of Our Lady; a simple prayer, but one made from the heart. These are gestures that accompany the journey of faith.

Of course, there are some fixed points: daily Eucharist and daily meditation. These are pillars that are not discussed; they are lived. Not only because we are consecrated, but because we are believers. And faith is lived only by nourishing it. When we nourish it, it grows in us. And only if it grows in us can we help it to grow in others. For us, as educators, it is clear: if our faith does not translate into concrete life, everything else becomes a facade.

These practices – prayer, meditation, devotion – are not reserved for saints. They are an expression of honesty. If I have made a choice of faith, I also have a responsibility to cultivate it. Otherwise, everything is reduced to something external, apparent. And this, over time, does not hold up.

If you could go back, would you make the same choices?

Absolutely yes. There have been very difficult moments in my life, as there are for everyone. I don't want to come across as the 'victim of the moment'. I believe that every person, in order to grow, must go through phases of darkness, moments of desolation, loneliness, of feeling betrayed or unjustly accused. And I have experienced these moments. But I have had the grace of having a spiritual director at my side.

When you go through certain hardships accompanied by someone else, you can sense that everything God allows has a meaning,

a purpose. And when you come out of that 'tunnel', you discover that you are a different, a more mature person. It is as if, through that trial, we are transformed.

If I had been alone, I would have risked making wrong decisions, without vision, blinded by the fatigue of the moment. When you are angry, when you feel alone, it is not the time to decide. It is the time to walk, to ask for help, to be accompanied.

Going through certain passages with someone's help is like being dough put in the oven; the fire cooks it, makes it mature. So, when asked if I would change anything, my answer is no. Because even the most difficult moments, even those I didn't understand, have helped me become the person I am today.

Do I feel like a perfect person? No. But I feel that I am on a journey, every day, trying to live in the mercy and goodness of God.

And today, as I give this interview, I can say with sincerity that I feel happy. Perhaps I have not yet fully understood what it means to be Rector Major – it takes time – but I know that it is a mission, not a walk in the park. It brings with it its difficulties. However, I feel loved and esteemed by my collaborators and by the whole Congregation.

And everything I am today, I am thanks to what I have experienced, even in the most difficult moments. I would not change them. They have made me who I am.

Do you have any projects that are particularly close to your heart?

Yes. If I close my eyes and imagine something I really want, I would like to see a holier Congregation. Holier. Holier.

I was deeply inspired by Fr. Pascual Chávez's first letter in 2002, entitled "Be saints". That letter touched me deeply and left a mark on me.

There are many projects, all of them valid, well structured, with broad and deep visions. But what value do they have if they are carried out by people who are not holy? We can do excellent work, we can even be appreciated – and this, in itself, is not a bad thing – but we do not work to achieve success. Our starting point is an identity; we are consecrated persons.

What we offer only makes sense if it comes from there. Of course, we want our projects to be successful, but even more than that, we want them to bring grace, to touch people deeply. It is not enough to be efficient. We must be effective in the deepest sense, effective in our witness, in our identity, in our faith.

Efficiency can exist without any religious reference. We can be excellent professionals, but that is not enough.

Our consecration is not a detail. It is the foundation. If it becomes marginal, if we put it aside to make room for efficiency, then we lose our identity.

And people are watching us. In Salesian schools, people recognise that the results are good – and that is good. But do they also recognise us as men of God? That is the question.

If they see us only as good professionals, then we are only efficient. But our life must be nourished by Him – the Way, the Truth, and the Life – not by what ‘I think’ or ‘I want’ or ‘what seems right to me’.

So, rather than talking about my personal project, I prefer to talk about a deep desire, to become saints. And to talk about it in concrete terms, not in an idealised way. When Don Bosco spoke to his boys about *study, health, and holiness*, he was not referring to a holiness made up only of prayer in the chapel. He was thinking of a holiness lived in relationship with God and nourished by relationship with God. Christian holiness is the reflection of this living and daily relationship.

What advice would you give to a young person wondering about their vocation?

I would tell them to discover, step by step, what God's plan is for them.

The vocational journey is not a question you ask and then wait for a ready answer from the Church. It is a pilgrimage. When a young person says to me, *"I don't know whether to become a Salesian or not,"* I try to steer them away from that formulation. Because it is not simply a matter of deciding, *"I'm going to become a Salesian."* A vocation is not an option in relation to a 'thing'.

In my own experience, when I told my spiritual director, "I want to become a Salesian, I have to be one", he calmly made me reflect; *"Is this really God's will? Or is it just your desire?"*

And it is right for a young person to seek what he desires; it is healthy. But those who accompany him have the task of educating that search, of transforming it from initial enthusiasm into a journey of inner maturation.

"Do you want to do good? Good. Then know yourself, recognise that you are loved by God."

It is only from that deep relationship with God that the real question can emerge; "What is God's plan for me?"

Because what I want today may not be enough for me tomorrow. If vocation is reduced to what 'I like,' then it will be something fragile. Vocation, on the other hand, is an inner voice that calls us, that asks us to enter into dialogue with God, and to respond.

When a young person reaches this point, when they are accompanied to discover that inner space where God dwells, then they truly begin to walk.

For this reason, those who accompany them must be very attentive, profound, and patient. Never superficial.

The Gospel of Emmaus is a perfect image. Jesus approaches the

two disciples and listens to them even though He knows they are talking confusedly. Then, after listening to them, He begins to speak. And in the end, they invite Him; *“Stay with us, for it is nearly evening.”*

And they recognise Him in the gesture of breaking bread. Then they say to each other, *“Were not our hearts burning within us while He was talking to us on the way?”*

Today, many young people are searching. Our task as educators is not to be hasty. But to help them, calmly and gradually, to discover the greatness that is already in their hearts. Because there, in that depth, they encounter Christ. As St Augustine says, *“You were within me, and I was outside. And there I sought you.”*

Do you have a message for the Salesian Family today?

It is the same message I shared during the recent meeting of the Salesian Family Council; ***Faith. Let us root ourselves ever more deeply in the person of Christ.***

It is from this rootedness that an authentic knowledge of Don Bosco is born. When the first Salesians wanted to write a book about the real Don Bosco, they did not call it *“Don Bosco, Apostle of Youth,”* but *“Don Bosco with God”*— a text written by Fr. Eugenio Ceria in 1929.

This gives us pause for thought. Why did they, who had seen him in action every day, not choose to emphasise Don Bosco’s tireless work, his organisational skills, his talent as an educator? No, they wanted to portray Don Bosco as a man deeply united with God.

Those who knew him well did not stop at appearances but went to the root. Don Bosco was a man immersed in God.

To the Salesian Family I say: we have received a treasure. An immense gift. But every gift entails a responsibility.

In my final discourse, I said: ***“It is not enough to love Don Bosco, you have to know him.”***

And we can only truly know him if we are people of faith.

We must look at him with the eyes of faith. Only in this way can we encounter the believer that Don Bosco was, in whom the Holy Spirit acted with power, with *dýnamis*, with *cháris*, with charism, with grace.

We cannot limit ourselves to repeating certain maxims of his or recounting his miracles. Because we run the risk of dwelling on the anecdotes of Don Bosco, instead of dwelling on the story of Don Bosco, because Don Bosco is greater than Don Bosco.

This means study, reflection, depth. It means avoiding all superficiality.

And then we will be able to say with truth, **“This is my faith, this is my charism: rooted in Christ, in the footsteps of Don Bosco.”**