 Reading time: 4 min.

A new time is given to us: from the Heart of God to the heart of humanity, reflecting Don Bosco's great heart.

Dear friends and readers,
In this December issue I address you with best wishes for a new year! For a new time given to us to live intensely and with 'newness of life', and I make the gift that the Holy Father has given us in recent days my own, as a propitious and timely wish: the Encyclical Letter *Dilexit Nos* on the human and divine love of the Heart of Jesus Christ.
We Salesians are used to singing: 'God has given you a heart as big / as the sands of the sea. / God has given you his spirit: / he has released your love'.
Pope Pius XI, who knew him well, said that Don Bosco had a 'beautiful speciality': he was 'a great lover of souls' and saw them 'in the thoughts, in the heart, in the blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ'. After all, there is a burning heart in the coat of arms of our Congregation.
Pope Francis introduces himself thus in No. 2 of *Dilexit Nos*: 'The symbol of the heart has often been used to express the love of Jesus Christ. Some have questioned whether this symbol is still meaningful today. Yet living as we do in an age of superficiality, rushing frenetically from one thing to another without really knowing why, and ending up as insatiable consumers and slaves to the mechanisms of a market unconcerned about the deeper meaning of our lives, all of us need to rediscover the importance of the heart.'
How powerful this indication from our Pope is, as he shows us a new way of living in a new time that is given to us, the upcoming year.
In no. 21, Pope Francis writes: 'This profound core, present in every man and woman, is not that of the soul, but of the entire person in his or her unique psychosomatic identity. Everything finds its unity in the heart, which can be the dwelling-place of love in all its spiritual, psychic and even physical dimensions. In a word, if love reigns in our heart, we become, in a complete and luminous way, the persons we are meant to be, for every human being is created above all else for love. In the deepest fibre of our being, we were made to love and to be loved.'
And he adds in number 27 of the same Encyclical Letter: 'Before the heart of Jesus, living and present, our mind, enlightened by the Spirit, grows in the understanding of his words and our will is moved to put them into practice. This could easily remain on the level of a kind of self-reliant moralism. Hearing and tasting the Lord,

and paying him due honour, however, is a matter of the heart. Only the heart is capable of setting our other powers and passions, and our entire person, in a stance of reverence and loving obedience before the Lord.'
I will not quote more, hoping to have whetted your appetite to read this splendid Encyclical Letter which is not only a great gift for living the time that is given to us in a new way, and that would already be sufficient; it is also a profoundly 'Salesian' indication.
How much Don Bosco wrote and worked on spreading devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus as divine love that accompanies our human situation.

A magnificent drive

We find the following, referring to Don Bosco, in the *Biographical Memoirs,* volume VIII, 129,: 'A most ardent devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus animated all his activities and rendered his familiar talks fruitful and his sermons and priestly ministry persuasive. Seemingly, the Sacred Heart helped him also by special charisms as he went about his arduous mission.' (Testimony referring to Fr Bonetti)
This testimony of Don Bosco's devotion to the Sacred Heart is manifestly identified with the Basilica of the same name built by Don Bosco in Rome at the request of the Pope of the time.
The physical building recalls and reminds us all of Don Bosco's 'monumental' devotion to the Sacred Heart. Just as it was with Our Lady, so it was with the Sacred Heart; Don Bosco's devotion is manifested in the churches he built, because devotion to the Sacred Heart is the Eucharist, Eucharistic worship.
Don Bosco's heart in constant love with the Eucharist: this becomes a magnificent personal impetus to make this something living and true in the new year, a true and profound wish for the New Year fully lived. As the hymn continues: 'You have formed men / of sound and strong heart: / you have sent them out into the world to proclaim / the Gospel of joy'.
I would like to conclude this brief message by wishing everyone a Happy New Year with the image that Pope Francis gives us in the first pages of the encyclical, referring to his grandmother's teachings on the meaning of the name of carnival sweets, the '*busie*' or 'lies'… 'When she dropped the strips of batter into the oil, they would expand, but then, when we bit into them, they were empty inside'. Like lies, they look big, but are empty inside; they are false, unreal.
May the New Year be full and rich in substance for all of us, becoming real in the acceptance of God who comes among us.
May his coming bring peace and truth, and may what is seen from the outside correspond to what is inside!

Heartfelt best wishes to you all!