 Reading time: 4 min.

Encounters on Epiphany with wonderful people with a good heart and a radiant faith

Dear friends of the Salesian Bulletin, together with my affectionate greetings I offer you my best wishes for the New Year 2024 that we have just begun. I sincerely hope that it will be a year filled with God's presence in our lives and rich in blessings.

I am in the habit, whenever possible, of writing this greeting by sharing something that I have experienced and that has affected me for one reason or another. Well, on the Epiphany of the Lord, I was in my home town, Luanco-Asturias. In that magnificent corner of the earth, I was pleasantly in touch with my roots and with the sea and nature where I was born and grew up, as well as with my fellow country folk. That day I went to celebrate the Eucharist. The parish priest of the village had kindly granted me this privilege while he went to another of the parishes entrusted to him. Thus we were able to celebrate this solemnity in several Christian communities.

Well, what I want to tell you is that it was a morning in which the Lord prepared some unexpected encounters for me in which, learning about the situation of some people, my heart was filled with the certainty of how the Lord consoles and comforts even when pain, sickness or limitation has settled into some lives.

I started my day, before celebrating the Eucharist, by visiting an elderly person who was a doctor in my village for many years. He was a great family doctor and a believer. Among other things, he had been a Salesian student in Salamanca. For years and years he was one of the people my parents would tell me about when they went to the doctor.

Well, on this family visit I made, responding to his daughter's invitation, I met a man of faith who told me that as a doctor he could only give a part of the much he had received from God and that now, suffering from serious illness, he was only asking the good Lord to prepare him for the Encounter with Him. Such was his conviction and his peace that I went to celebrate the Eucharist having already received my dose of the "good word in my ear".

In God's hands

And at the Eucharist I met, as on other occasions, a young man in his thirties who has been in a wheelchair for years due to an accident. He also went, in his wheelchair, to India with his mother to make contact with the poorest of the poor.

And what strikes me about my young friend is his serenity, his smile, and the joy he experiences in his heart; the same joy with which he participates in the daily Eucharist and with which he receives the Lord. And this young friend would surely have everything to complain about “his misfortune”, or even worse: he could blame God, as we tend to do when something gets the better of us. But no, he simply lives without feeling sorry for himself and is grateful for the gift of life even in a wheelchair. At the end of the celebrations, when I see him, we always greet each other and his words are always words of thanks, but it is rather I who should be thanking him for the great testimony of life and faith in the Lord of life that he gives to us all.
That is how beautiful and evocative it was on my Epiphany day when, as I left the church, a middle-aged couple greeted me and wished me well for the New Year. They too had joyful faces; I saw more joy and serenity in the husband (suffering from cancer) than in his beloved wife (who was suffering for him). But both spoke to me of their certainty that they had to live through this time and illness trusting and abandoning themselves to God.

A mother’s faith

Finally, among all the greetings there is one I have missed. An elderly mother who introduced herself, reminded me that a few years ago she had lost one of her children who had died of an illness, and that she was currently suffering from cancer. She asked me to keep her present before the Lord. I asked her how she was feeling and she told me that she was suffering, but was very much comforted by her faith. I assure you that I had no words to say, because the emotion I felt during the morning and the testimonies of life that came and overwhelmed me were so intense.
And I could not fail to promise my prayers to each one, and I did, and at the same time I realised, once again and in a stronger way, how the Lord continues to do great things in the humble, in the people most affected by life’s situations, in those who feel that only He is truly consolation and help.
And all this seems so important to me that I cannot keep it to myself. It would even seem that it is not something to write about, perhaps because it is not fashionable, perhaps because today we talk about other things, but I rebel against everything that prevents me from sharing and witnessing what is important, profound and hopeful in our lives.
And I don’t know why, but I have an intuition that many readers will feel in tune with what I am telling you and with what I myself have experienced, because what I am telling you, which happened on an Epiphany morning in a small town near the

sea, does not only happen there. In other words, it is part of our human condition and in it the Lord is always at our side, if we allow Him to be.
I wish you all the best, dear friends. And let us continue to believe that in every moment, even the most difficult ones, we have reason to hope.