 Reading time: 4 min.

…without boundaries, like the shores of the sea. I feel that heart beating every day

His name is Alberto. I do not know his young mother’s name.

He lives in Peru. She lives in Hyderabad (India).

What unites these two stories, two lives, is that I met them during my time of service, Alberto in Peru and the young mother in India the following week.

What they have in common is the precious golden thread of God’s caress through the welcome that Don Bosco gave them in one of his houses. The heart of the Salesians changed their lives, saving them from the situation of poverty and perhaps death to which they were condemned. And I believe I can say that the fruit of the Lord’s Passover also passes through human gestures that heal and save.

These are the two stories.

A grateful young man

A few weeks ago I was in Huancayo (Peru). I was about to celebrate the Eucharist with more than 680 young people from the Salesian youth movement of the Province, together with several hundred people from that city, 3200 metres above sea level in the high mountains of Peru, and I was told that a former student wanted to greet me. It had taken him almost five hours to get there and would take another five hours to return.

“I will be very happy to meet him and thank him for his nice gesture,” I replied.

Just before the Eucharist began, the young man approached me and said he was very happy to greet me. “My name is Alberto and I wanted to make this journey to thank Don Bosco in person because the Salesians saved my life.”

I thanked him and asked him why he was telling me this. He continued with his testimony, and each word touched my heart more and more. He told me that he was a difficult boy; that he had given a lot of trouble to the Salesians who had taken him into one of the homes for troubled boys. He added that they would have had dozens of reasons to get rid of him because “I was a poor devil, and I could only expect something bad from the world and from life, but they were very patient with

me.”

He continued: “I managed to make my way, I continued to study and, despite my rebellion, time after time they gave me new opportunities, and today I am a family man, I have a beautiful little girl and I am a social educator. If it had not been for what the Salesians did for me, my life would be very different, perhaps it would even already be over.”

I was speechless and very moved. I told him that I was very grateful for his gesture, his words and his path, and that his testimony of life was the greatest satisfaction for a Salesian heart.

He made a simple gesture and pointed me to a Salesian who was there at the time, who had been one of his teachers and one of those who had been very patient with him. The Salesian came up smiling and, I think with great joy in his heart, confirmed to me that this was indeed the case. We shared lunch together and then Alberto returned to his family.

A happy mother

Five days after this encounter, I was in southern India, in the state of Hyderabad. In the midst of many greetings and activities, one afternoon I was told I had a visitor. It was a young mother with her six-month-old daughter waiting for me at the reception desk of the Salesian house. She wanted to greet me.

The baby was beautiful and, as she was not frightened. I could not resist taking her in my arms and blessing her too. We took some souvenir photos, as the young mother had wished. That was all in this meeting.

There were no more words, but the story was painful and beautiful at the same time. That young mother was once a “throwaway” child, living on the streets with no one. It is easy to imagine her fate.

But one day, in the providence of the good Lord, she was found by a Salesian who had started taking in street children in the state of Hyderabad. She was one of the girls who managed to find home with other girls. Together with her educators, my Salesian confreres made sure that all her basic needs were met and taken care of.

So this little girl, picked up from the street, was able to flourish again, to embark on a life journey that has led her today to being a wife and mother and, so incredibly

important to me, a teacher in the big Salesian school where we were at the time.

I could not help but think how many other such lives, saved from despair and anguish, there are in the Salesian world, how many of my good Salesian confreres and sisters kneel down every day to “wash the feet” of the little and big Jesuses on our streets.

This is the key to how many lives can be transformed for the better.

How can we not see in these two facts the “hand of God” reaching out to us through the good we can do? And that it is all of us who, in any part of the world, in any situation of life and profession, believe in humanity and believe in the dignity of every person, and believe that we must continue to build a better world.

I write this because good news must also be made known. Bad news spreads itself or finds people interested in it. These two real-life stories, so close in time for me, confirm once and a thousand times more how valuable is the good we all try to do together.

And also what a Salesian song poetically expressed: “I say that John Bosco is alive, don’t ever think that such a Father can abandon us. He is not dead, the Father lives, he has always been there and remains, he who took care of abandoned and orphaned youngsters, of street children, alone, whom he helped to change… I say that John Bosco is alive and has undertaken a thousand initiatives. Can’t you see his solicitude as a father now working all over the world? Do you not hear him intoning his hymn to so many daughters, so many sons, who bear these reflections of the Father we love? He lives when his Salesians are like this.” I wish you all a Happy Easter; and to those who feel distant from this certainty of faith, I wish you all well, with much warmth.