

I am a Salesian and I am a Bororo

Diary of a happy and blessed missionary day

Dear friends of the Salesian Bulletin, I am writing to you from Meruri, in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul. I write this greeting almost as if it were a journalistic chronicle, because 24 hours have passed since I arrived in the middle of this city.

But my Salesian confreres arrived 122 years ago and since then we have always been in this mission in the middle of the forests and fields, accompanying the life of this indigenous people.

In 1976, a Salesian and an Indian were robbed of their lives with two gunshots (by *facendeiros* or big landowners), because they thought that the Salesians at the mission were a problem so they could take over other properties in these lands that belong to the Boi-Bororo people. They were the Servant of God Rodolfo Lunkenbein, a Salesian, and an Indian Simao Bororo.

And here we were able to experience many simple moments yesterday: we were welcomed by the indigenous community on our arrival, we greeted them – without haste – because everything is peaceful here. We celebrated Sunday Eucharist, shared rice and feijoada (bean stew), and enjoyed amiable and warm conversation.

In the afternoon, I had prepared a meeting with the leaders of the various communities; some women leaders were present (in several villages it is the woman who has ultimate authority). We had a sincere and profound dialogue. They gave me their thoughts and presented me with some of their needs.

In one of these moments, a young Boi Bororo Salesian took the floor. He is the first Bororo to become a

Salesian after 122 years of Salesian presence. This invites us to reflect on the need to give time to everything; things are not as we think and want them to be in today's efficient and impatient way.

And this young Salesian spoke like this in front of his people, his people and his leaders or authorities: 'I am Salesian but I am also Bororo; I am Bororo but I am also Salesian, and the most important thing for me is that I was born in this very place, that I met the missionaries, that I heard about the two martyrs, Father Rodolfo and Simao, and I saw my people and my people grow, thanks to the fact that **my people walked together with the Salesian mission and the mission walked together with my people.** That is still the most important thing for us, to walk together.'

I thought for a moment how proud and happy Don Bosco would have been to hear that one of his Salesian sons belonged to this people (like other Salesians who come from the Xavante or Yanomani people).

At the same time, in my address I assured them that we want to continue to walk alongside them, that we want them to do everything possible to continue to care for and save their culture – and their language – with all our help. I told them that I am convinced that our presence has helped them, but I am also convinced of how good it is for us to be with them.

"Go ahead!" said the Shepherdess

I thought of Don Bosco's last missionary dream: and that Little Shepherdess, who stopped beside Don Bosco and said to him, "Do you remember the dream you had when you were nine? Look now, what do you see?" "I see mountains, then seas, then hills, then mountains and seas again."

"Good," said the Shepherdess, "now draw a single line from one end to the other, from Santiago to Peking, make a centre in the middle of Africa, and you will have an exact idea of what the Salesians have to do." "But how to do all this?" Don Bosco exclaimed, "The distances are immense, the

places difficult and the Salesians few." "Don't be upset. Your children, your children's children and their children will do this." They are doing it.

From the beginning of our journey as a Congregation, guided (and lovingly "urged on") by Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco sent the first missionaries to Argentina. We are a recognised congregation with the charism of education and evangelisation of the young, but we are also a very missionary congregation and family. From the beginning until today, there have been more than eleven thousand Salesian SDB missionaries and several thousand Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. And today, our presence among this indigenous people, which has 1940 members and continues to grow little by little, makes perfect sense after 122 years, because they are on the periphery of the world, but a world that sometimes does not understand that it must respect what they are.

I also spoke with the matriarch, the oldest of them all, who came to greet me and tell me about her people. And after a torrential rainstorm, in the place of martyrdom, with great serenity we sat and prayed the rosary on a beautiful Sunday evening (it was already dark). There were many of us representing the reality of this mission: grandmothers, grandparents, adults, young mothers, babies, small children, consecrated religious, lay people... A richness in the simplicity of this small part of the world that has no power but is also chosen and favoured by the Lord, as He tells us in the Gospel.

And I know that we will continue in this way, God willing, for many years to come, because one can be a Bororo and a son of Don Bosco, and be a son of Don Bosco and a Bororo who loves and cares for his people and his people.

In the simplicity of this meeting, today was a great day of shared life with the indigenous peoples. A great missionary day.