

□ Reading time: 4 min.

Friends, readers of the Salesian Bulletin, my affectionate and warm greeting at this Easter time. In a troubled world, shaken by wars and no small amount of violence, we continue to declare, announce and proclaim that Jesus is the Lord, raised by the Father and who IS ALIVE. And we badly need his presence in hearts ready to welcome him.

At the same time, I could see the content of this month's Bulletin, always rich and full of Salesian life. I am grateful to those who produce it. And as I read the pages, before writing my greeting, I came across the presentation of so many Salesian places around the world where Mary Help of Christians has arrived. I must confess that when I found myself in Valdocco, inside the magnificent Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, in this holy place where everything speaks of the presence of God, of the maternal protection of our Mother and Don Bosco, I could not imagine how the announcement of Mary Help of Christians to Don Bosco had come true, saying that from here, from this Marian church, her glory would spread throughout the world. And so it did.

In my service over these ten years as Rector Major I have met hundreds of Salesian presences around the world where our Mother was present. And once again I would like to tell you about my latest experience. It was during my last visit to the Salesian presences among the Xavante people that I was able to "touch with my own hands" the Providence of God and the good that continues to be done and that we continue to do among all of us.

I was able to visit several villages and towns in the State of Mato Grosso. I was in San Marcos, the village of Fatima, Sangradouro, and around these three large centres we visited others, including the place where the first settlement took place with the Xavante people, a people that was afflicted by disease and in danger of extinction, and that thanks to the help of those missionaries, to their medicines and to dozens of years of loving presence among them, it has been possible to reach the situation today with more than 23,000 members of the Xavante people. This is Providence, the proclamation of the Gospel and at the same time a journey with a people and their culture, preserved today as never before.

I had the opportunity to speak with several civil authorities. I was grateful for all that we can do together for the good of this people and others. And at the same time I took the liberty of reminding them, simply but with honesty and legitimate pride, that those who have accompanied this people for 130 years, as the Church has done in this case through the sons and daughters of Don Bosco, are worthy of a respectful gaze, and of listening to his word.

We have done all we can to join the voices calling for land for these settlers. The defence of their land and the faith lived with these peoples (in this case with the Boi-Bororo) was the cause of the martyrdom of Salesian Rodolfo Lunkenbein and Indian Simao in Meruri.

Driving hundreds of kilometres of road, I was happy to see so many signs announcing: "Territorio de Reserva Indígena" (Territory of Indigenous Reserve). And I thought this was the best guarantee of peace and prosperity for these people. And what does what I am describing have to do with Mary Help of Christians? Simply everything, because it is hard to imagine a century of Salesian presence (sdb and fma) among the indigenous Xavantes without them passing on the love for the mother of our Lord, and our mother.

The Help of Christians in the jungle

In San Marcos, all or most of the villagers, together with our guests, ended the day of our arrival with a procession and the rosary. The image of the Virgin was illuminated in the middle of the night in the middle of the jungle. Elderly people, adults, young people and many mothers carrying sleeping children in a basket on their shoulders were on pilgrimage. We made several stops in different parts of the village. No doubt our Mother at that moment, and no doubt at many other times, was passing through the village of San Marcos and blessing her indigenous sons and daughters.

I cannot know if Don Bosco dreamed this scene of the Virgin in the middle of the Xavante village. But there is no doubt that in his heart was this desire, with this people and with many others, whether in Patagonia, whether in the Amazon, whether on the river Paraguay...

And that desire and that missionary dream has been fulfilled in Amazonia for 130 years. As I wrote in the commentary to the Strenna, the feminine-maternal-Marian dimension is perhaps one of the most challenging dimensions of Don Bosco's dream. It is Jesus himself who gives him a teacher, who is his Mother, and that "he must ask her for his name"; John must work "with her children", and it will be "She" who will take care of the continuity of the dream in life, who will take him by the hand until the end of his days, until the moment when he will truly understand everything.

There is an enormous intentionality in wanting to say that in the Salesian charism on behalf of the poorest, most deprived and neglected children, the dimension of treating them with "gentleness", meekness and charity, as well as the "Marian" dimension, are essential elements for those who want to live this charism. Without Mary of Nazareth we would be talking about another charism, not the Salesian

charism, not about the sons and daughters of Don Bosco.

On this feast of Mary Help of Christians, on 24 May, at different times Mary Help of Christians will be present in the hearts of her sons and daughters all over the world, be it in Taiwan or East Timor, be it in India, or Nairobi (Kenya), be it in Valdocco, be it in Amazonia or in the small village of San Marcos, which is nothing to the world but is a whole world to this people who have come to know Mary Help of Christians.

Happy Mary's month. Happy Feast of Mary Help of Christians to all, from Valdocco to the whole world.