

Mary Help of Christians in the city of eternal heat

“Once again I was able to see for myself, travelling in the Salesian world, that Mary Help of Christians – as promised by Don Bosco – is a beacon of light, a safe harbour, the maternal love of her son and of us all.”

Dear friends of Don Bosco, of the Salesian Bulletin and his precious charism, as I often do I want to share with you, in this month of May, an event that I experienced recently and that touched my heart, and at the same time, made me think a lot about the responsibility we have regarding devotion to Mary Help of Christians.

On the day John Bosco entered the seminary, Mamma Margaret told him: “‘When you came into the world, I consecrated you to the Blessed Virgin: when you began your studies I recommended to you the devotion to this Mother of ours: now I say to you to be completely hers: love those of your companions who have devotion to Mary; and if you become a priest, always preach and promote devotion to Mary.’ My mother was deeply moved as she finished these words. ‘Mother,’ I replied, ‘I thank you for all you have said and done for me; these words of yours will not prove vain, I will treasure them all my life.’”

As our Memoirs often recall, Don Bosco threw himself into the arms of divine Providence, like a child into those of his mother.

A Salesian city



At the end of March, when I went to Peru again – Latin America – I wanted to go to the north-western part of the country and visit a city and a very significant Salesian presence. For several reasons.

First of all because Piura is called 'the city of eternal heat' by the locals themselves, or even 'the city where summer never ends.' It is certainly very hot there and the humidity makes it even hotter.

But at the same time it is a very Salesian city. More than a century of presence here has marked the spirit of the people with a very familiar, very simple, in short, very Salesian style of educational and relational ties.

Above all, it is a very Marian city, and within the sphere of the two Salesian presences it is very devoted to Mary Help of Christians.

Finally, I would like to emphasise the magnificent educational service that has been provided since the beginning of the presence with the Don Bosco school and especially, in recent decades, with the Salesian presence in Bosconia, a humble and beautiful presence in one of the most troubled, most peripheral and poorest neighbourhoods, and where, thanks to the commitment of so many people (both in civil society and in the Church) and above all thanks to the charism of Don Bosco, this part of the city continues to be transformed, offering vocational training opportunities to hundreds of boys and girls who, where they would have had no chance, today leave this Salesian home with a profession learned, practised and trained for the world of work.

In Bosconia there is even a magnificent Salesian medical centre run by a branch of our family, the Salesian Sisters. I think I have quickly described what I found in the 'city of eternal heat'. Everything is noteworthy, but I was particularly touched by the deep devotion to Mary Help of Christians. Almost unexpectedly – because only a couple of weeks before had I announced that I would like to come – I found myself at 6pm on a normal weekday in the midst of a crowd of more than three thousand people who had gathered to celebrate the Eucharist in honour of our Mother Help of Christians.

I saw hundreds of children and young people with their parents, dozens and dozens of boys, girls, teenagers from the various local Salesian oratories, teachers, educators, etc.

The 'eternal heat of the city' seemed little compared to the faith, devotion, interiority and prayer, singing and everything else that I imagined filled the hearts of those people, just as it filled mine.

Once again I was able to see for myself, travelling in the Salesian world, that Mary Help of Christians – as promised by Don Bosco – is a beacon of light, a safe haven, the maternal love of her son and of all of us, her sons and daughters. She is ultimately the MOTHER in whom we abandon ourselves and who will always lead us to her beloved Son. I also saw this in Piura.

Our Lady on the balcony

And at the same time I would like to add another small comment with a necessary self-criticism for all of us who are sons and daughters of Don Bosco. It comes down to this: God's spirit reaches where it wills and touches the hearts of his faithful in a way that only he knows how. This is the case with the devotion to the Mother of the Son of God, and my critical note is that not in all parts of the world has the Mother of Heaven, our Mother Help of Christians, been made known in the same way, with the same intensity, with the same apostolic passion. There are places where we have developed schools, where we have taken steps, where we have certainly served the good of the people, but we have not succeeded in making her known and loved.

This would be incomprehensible to Don Bosco. I will tell you that for me it is equally incomprehensible and unacceptable. Because, moreover, if there were people in Don Bosco's family who did not refer to Mary Help of Christians, they would be something else, but they would not be sons and daughters of Don Bosco. She, the Mother, and devotion to Mary Help of Christians as Mother of the Lord and our mother is not optional in the Salesian charism, as it was not for Don Bosco.

It is, quite simply, essential. "Mary Most Holy is the foundress and she will be the supporter of our works," Don Bosco used to repeat continuously, "She will be generous with us with temporal and spiritual gifts. She will be our guide, our teacher, our mother. All the Lord's goods come to us through Mary."

In one of his dreams, Don Bosco saw a very noble Lady dressed royally, who came out on her balcony shouting: "My children, come, shelter yourselves under my mantle."

It is my fervent wish that she, the Mother of the beloved Son, she, the Help of Christians, continue to be as special in all parts of the world as she is in the "city of eternal heat" (Piura-Peru).

Happy Feast of Mary Help of Christians to everyone throughout the world.