 Reading time: 3 min.

Dear confreres,
Fraternal greetings from our Mother House in Valdocco.

As has been the tradition for some years now, today, 18 December, on the day Don Bosco founded our “Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales” in 1859, is a good opportunity to emphasise the missionary spirit as an essential element of Don Bosco’s charism, by sending you my annual missionary appeal.

In 2024 we will celebrate the second centenary of Johnny Bosco’s dream at nine. Don Pietro Stella said that it is the dream that “conditioned Don Bosco’s whole way of living and thinking”. For us today to follow the reflection on Don Bosco’s dream at nine requires us to emphasise his trust in Providence: «In due time you will understand everything». The dream at nine teaches us that God speaks in many ways. God does great things with “simple instruments”, even in the depths of our hearts, through the feelings that move within us. Today the dream at nine continues to make us dream and invites us to think about who we are and for whom we are.

It is interesting to note that in his fifth missionary dream, which took place while he was visiting the confreres in Barcelona on the night of 9-10 April 1886, Don Bosco saw a deep connection with his dream at nine. In his fifth and last missionary dream he saw a large crowd of boys running towards him shouting: “We have been waiting for you. We have waited so long for you. Now you are finally here. You are among us, and you will not flee from us!” The shepherdess who led a huge flock of lambs helped him to understand the meaning by asking him: “Do you remember the dream you had when you were ten years old?”, she then drew a line from Valparaiso to Beijing to highlight the immense number of young people awaiting the Salesians. Indeed, today in all continents there are young people who need to be transformed from ‘wolves’ into ‘lambs’.

Today Don Bosco needs Salesians who make themselves available as “simple instruments” to realise his missionary dream. With this letter I appeal to the confreres who feel in the depths of their hearts, through the feelings that move within them, the call of God, within our common Salesian vocation, to make themselves available as missionaries with a lifelong commitment (*ad vitam*), wherever the Rector Major will send them.

To my appeal of 18 December 2022, 42 Salesians responded by sending me their letter expressing their missionary availability. After careful discernment, 24 were chosen as members of the 154th missionary expedition last September. The others are continuing their discernment. I hope that this year as many, or even more, will generously make themselves available.

I invite the Provincials, with their Delegates for Missionary Animation (PDMA), to be the first to help the confreres to facilitate their discernment, inviting them, after personal dialogue, to place themselves at the disposal of the Rector Major to respond to the missionary needs of the Congregation. Then the General Councillor for Missions, in my name, will continue the discernment that will lead to the choice of missionaries for the 155th missionary expedition which will be held, God willing, on Sunday 29th September 2024, in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Valdocco, as has been done since the time of Don Bosco.

The dialogue with the General Councillor for Missions and the shared reflection within the General Council allows me to specify the urgencies identified for 2024, where I would like a significant number of confreres to be sent:
– to the new frontiers of the African continent: Botswana, Niger, North Africa, etc.
– to the new presences we will start in Greece and Vanuatu;
– to Albania, Romania, Germania, Slovenia and other frontiers of Project Europe;
– to Azerbaijan, Nepal, Mongolia, South Africa and Yakutia;
– to presences among the indigenous peoples of the American continent.

I entrust my last missionary appeal to the intercession of our Immaculate Mother and Help of Christians, that we Salesians may keep Don Bosco’s missionary ardour alive.

I greet you, dear confreres, with true affection,

Prot. 23/0585
Turin Valdocco, 18 December 2023