 Reading time: 4 min.

Why devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is part of the DNA of the Salesian Congregation

A beautiful church that cost Don Bosco much “blood and tears”. He was already worn out by fatigue, and spent his last energies and years building this church requested by the Pope.
It is also a place dear to all Salesians for many other reasons.

The golden statue in the bell tower, for example, is a sign of gratitude: it was donated by former students from Argentina to thank the Salesians for coming to their land.
Also because in a letter from1883, Don Bosco wrote the memorable phrase: “Remember that education is a thing of the heart, and that God alone is its master, and we will not be able to succeed in anything if God does not teach us the skill, and does not put the keys in our hands.” The letter ended: “Pray for me, and always believe in the Sacred Heart of Jesus.”
Because devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is part of the Salesian DNA.
The feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus encourages us to have a vulnerable heart. Only a heart that can be wounded is able to love. Thus, on this feast, we contemplate the open heart of Jesus to open our hearts to love as well. The heart is the ancestral symbol of love and many artists have painted the wound in Jesus’ heart with gold. The golden radiance of love streams out from the open heart towards us, and the gilding also shows us that our labours and wounds can be transformed into something precious.
Every church named after him and every devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus speaks of the Love of that divine heart, the heart of the Son of God, for each of his sons and daughters. And it speaks of pain, it speaks of a love of God that is not always reciprocated. Today let me add another aspect. I think it also speaks of the pain of this Lord Jesus in the face of the suffering of many people, the discarding of others, the immigration of others without horizons, the loneliness and violence that many people suffer.



The statue of Jesus in attitude of blessing, standing above the bell tower of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Rome

I think it can be said that it speaks of all this, and at the same time it blesses, without a doubt, all that is done for the least, that is, the same thing that Jesus did when he walked the roads of Judea and Galilee.
That is why it is a beautiful sign that the Sacred Heart House is now the headquarters of the Congregation.

So many silver hearts

One of the joyful things that undoubtedly gladdens the “Heart of God himself” is one that I was able to see for myself, namely what is being done at the Salesian Don Bosco Foundation on the islands of Tenerife and Gran Canaria. I was there last week and, among the many things I experienced, I was able to see 140 educators working in the Foundation’s various projects (reception, accommodation, job training and subsequent job placement). And then I met another hundred or so teenagers and young adults who benefit from this Don Bosco service as the least among them. At the end of our precious meeting, they gave me a gift.
I was moved by it, because back in 1849 two young boys, Carlo Gastini and Felice Reviglio, had had the same idea and, in great secrecy, saving on food and jealously

guarding their small tips, had managed to buy a gift for Don Bosco's name day. On St John's night they had gone to knock on the door of Don Bosco's room. Think of his wonder and emotion at being presented with two small silver hearts, accompanied by a few awkward words.
The hearts of young people are always the same, and even today, in the Canary Islands, in a small heart-shaped cardboard box, they placed more than a hundred hearts with the names of Nain, Rocio, Armiche, Mustapha, Xousef, Ainoha, Desiree, Abdjalil, Beatrice and Ibrahim, Yone and Mohamed and a hundred others, simply expressing something that came from the heart; sincere things of great value like these:
– Thank you for making this possible.
– Thank you for the second chance you gave me in life.
– I keep fighting. With you it is easier.
– Thank you for giving me joy again.
– Thank you for helping me to believe that I can do everything I set my mind to.
– Thank you for the food and the home.
– Thank you from the bottom of my heart.
– Thank you for helping me.
– Thank you for this opportunity to grow.
– Thank you for believing in us young people despite our situation….
And hundreds of similar expressions, addressed to Don Bosco and to the educators who in Don Bosco's name are with them every day.
I listened to what they shared with me, I heard some of their stories (many of them full of pain); I saw their looks and their smiles; and I felt very proud to be a Salesian and to belong to such a splendid family of brothers, educators and young people.
I thought, once again, that Don Bosco is more relevant and necessary than ever; and I thought of the educational finesse with which we accompany so many young people with great respect and sensitivity to their dreams.
Together we said a prayer addressed to the God who loves us all, to the God who blesses his sons and daughters. A prayer that made Christians, Muslims and Hindus feel at ease. At that moment, without any doubt, the Spirit of God embraced us all.
I was happy because, just as Don Bosco welcomed his first boys at Valdocco, the same thing is happening today in so many Valdocco's around the world.
When we speak of God's love, for many it is too abstract a concept. In the Sacred Heart of Jesus, God's love for us has become concrete, visible and perceivable. For us God has taken a human heart, in the Heart of Jesus he has opened his heart to us. Thus, through Jesus, we can bring our young people to the heart of God.