 Reading time: 3 min.

The art of being like Don Bosco: “Remember that education is a matter of the heart, of which God alone is the master, and that we can achieve nothing unless God teaches us the art and hands us the key” (BM XVI, 376).

Dear friends, readers of the Salesian Bulletin and friends of Don Bosco’s charism. I am writing you this greeting, I would say almost in real time before this issue goes to press.
I say this because the scene I am about to describe to you happened only four hours ago.
I recently arrived in Lubumbashi. For the past ten days I have been visiting very significant Salesian presences, such as the displaced people and refugees in Palabek – today in much more humane conditions than when they came to us, thank God – and from Uganda I moved on to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to the tortured and crucified region of Goma.
The Salesian presence there is full of life. Several times I have said that my heart was “touched” (*touché*), that is, moved to see the good that is being done, to see that there is a presence of God even in the greatest poverty. But my heart was touched with pain and sadness when I met some of the 32,000 people (mostly elderly, women and children) who are housed in the grounds of the Salesian presence at Don Bosco-Gangi.
But I will tell you about that next time, because I need to let it rest in my heart.

The “papa” of the Goma urchins
Now I just want to mention a beautiful scene I witnessed on the flight that took us to Lubumbashi.
It was an extra-commercial flight in a medium-sized plane. But the captain was someone familiar, not to me, but to the local Salesians. When I greeted the captain on the plane, he told me that he had studied vocational training at our school here in Goma. He told me that those had been years that had changed his life, but he added something else, telling me and telling us: and here is the one who has been a “papa” to us.
In African culture, when you say someone is a papa, you are saying something quite strong. And not infrequently the papa is not the person who fathered that son or daughter, but the one who actually cared for, supported and accompanied him or her.

Who was the captain, a man of about 45, with his now young pilot son accompanying him on the flight, referring to? He was referring to our Salesian brother (a coadjutor, i.e. not a priest but a consecrated layman, a masterpiece of the Salesian charism).
This Salesian, Brother Onorato, a Spanish missionary, has been a missionary in the Goma region for more than 40 years. He has done everything to make this vocational school and many other things possible, certainly together with other Salesians. He got to know our pilot and some of his friends when they were just lost boys in the neighbourhood (i.e. among hundreds and hundreds of boys). In fact, the captain told me that four of his friends, who were practically on the street in those years, managed to study mechanics in Don Bosco's house and are now engineers and take care of the mechanical and technical maintenance of their company's small planes.

The Salesian "sacrament"
Well, when I heard the captain, a former Salesian student, say that Onorato had been his father, the father of them all, I was deeply moved and immediately thought of Don Bosco, whom his boys felt and considered as their father.
In the letters of Fr Rua and Bishop Cagliero, Don Bosco is always called "*papà*" On the evening of 7 December 1887, when Don Bosco's health deteriorated, Fr Rua simply telegraphed Bishop Cagliero, "Papà is in an alarming state." An old song ended: "Long live Don Bosco our Papà!"
And I thought how true it is that education is a matter of the heart. And I confirmed among my convictions that being present among boys, girls and young people is for us almost a "sacrament" through which we also come to God. That is why over the years I have spoken with such passion and conviction to my Salesian brothers and sisters and to the Salesian Family about the Salesian "sacrament" of presence.
And I know that in the Salesian world, in our family throughout the world, among our brothers and sisters there are so many "papas" and so many "mammas" who, with their presence and their affection, with their knowledge of education, reach the hearts of young people, who today are in so much need, I would say more and more, of these presences that can change a life for the better.

Greetings from Africa and all the Lord's blessings to the friends of the Salesian charism.
God bless you all.