

□ Reading time: 5 min.

*A school corridor in Mumbai, and a point-blank question: “What do you want to do in life?”. The boy replied that he dreamt of becoming a scientist; the headmaster looked at him in horror. From that brief exchange was born the vocation of Fr. Ashley Miranda, born in Udupi (Karnataka, India) in 1965, a Salesian since 1983 and a priest since 1993. For twenty years a philosophy lecturer at Divyadaan, in Nashik, then rector, bursar and principal, provincial delegate for formation, and finally vicar. Since 8 September 2025, he is the twelfth Provincial of “St. Francis Xavier” Province of Mumbai. In this interview, he talks about the teachers who believed in him before he believed in himself, the stammer overcome through obedience, and the conviction that remains the heart of his ministry: gentleness persuades more than force.*

### **How would you introduce yourself to the readers of the Salesian Bulletin?**

I am Fr. Ashley Miranda, a Salesian. I was born in 1965 in Udupi, in the state of Karnataka, India. I made my first religious profession in May 1983 and was ordained a priest in December 1993. In over thirty years of priesthood, I have been asked to serve in various roles: rector at Divyadaan, the post-novitiate house in Nashik (six years), and at the Don Bosco parish in Nashik (three years); bursar of the Salesian novitiate in Nashik (six years) and of the same parish (three years); principal of Divyadaan (three years) and philosophy lecturer in the same institute for twenty years. I was then provincial councillor and delegate for formation from 2008 to 2014, vice-provincial from 2019 to 2025 and, since September 2025, Provincial.

### **When did you first feel the call, and what brought you to the Salesians?**

I felt the call to become a Salesian when I was attending the tenth class, the equivalent of the first year of Italian upper secondary school. The rector of the school where I was studying, Don Bosco in Borivali, told me that I had to become a Salesian priest, and he would take no excuses. One day he met me in the corridor and asked me point-blank what I wanted to do in life. I thought about it for a

moment and replied that I would like to become a scientist. He looked at me with horror in his eyes, as if I had confessed to wanting to be a gambler or a street thug. "What?! You don't want to become a priest?" He made it clear that, in his opinion, I had to become a priest and nothing else. And that is what I am today: a Salesian priest!

**Is there an episode or a person that had a particular impact on your decision?**

That rector was Fr. Elias Dias. He believed in me even when I didn't believe in myself. As a boy, I was struck by his enthusiasm and his dramatic "proofs of the existence of God" – even if, truth be told, for me and my classmates, the existence of God was not a big problem back then.

**Do you remember any educator in particular?**

I remember with gratitude many Salesians who loved me and supported me all along the journey up to this point. Each of them had something precious to teach me about Salesian life. One virtue united them all: enthusiasm for life and the conviction that God loves us and takes care of us.

**Have there been moments of crisis or doubt along the way? How did you overcome them, and what did you learn from them?**

Yes, there have been some moments of crisis and doubt. Every time, the Lord sent me someone to support and encourage me, to help me see things more clearly and in the right perspective, and to make me realise how blessed I am to be a Salesian. Family members, confreres, superiors, spiritual directors, and friends have helped me. I realised that all my doubts and all my crises stemmed from the narrowness of my vision and the tendency to trust myself more than the Lord.

**Is there an episode in your Salesian formation that left a particular mark**

**on you?**

Many episodes come to mind that have left their mark on my conscience. For now, I will choose one: my first obedience, after my philosophy studies. The provincial at the time, Fr. Chrys Saldanha, asked me to obtain a licentiate in philosophy, with the aim of then returning to the studentate to teach the confreres. I liked philosophy very much, but I had a pronounced stammer and speaking in public was difficult for me. When I pointed this out to him, he dismissed it as a minor impediment. With his unmistakable style, he asked me if I knew how to reason logically. When I answered yes, he told me not to worry at all. He assured me that the stammer would disappear. And it did, in less than a year! Perhaps today my problem is the opposite. I tend to speak a little more than necessary.

**What, in your opinion, are the Gospel priorities for young people today?**

I think young people today appreciate the Gospel values of integrity of life, humility, and gentleness. They expect you to do everything possible so that your life matches your words. They cannot stand being patronised. They open up more willingly to those who know how to listen and do not act like a master.

**Which prayer practices or devotions do you feel are most yours?**

Journaling is a very precious prayer practice for me. Along with this, I find the time spent in silence before the Blessed Sacrament, the prayer of the Rosary, and the celebration of the Eucharist particularly meaningful.

**What is the most important thing you have learned from your experience of Salesian life?**

I have learned to appreciate the value of prayer, of fraternity within the community, and the persuasive power of gentleness and meekness.

**Are Christians persecuted in your regions?**

Christians are a small minority in the regions that make up our province. I wouldn't say that we are persecuted at this moment, but we are certainly challenged to live our Christian life well and thus bear witness to Jesus and his Gospel.

**How would you describe Salesian spirituality in a few words?**

I think Salesian spirituality is founded on the truth of God's eternal, universal, and unconditional love. We Salesians, by living the preventive system, are called to be signs and bearers of this unconditional love towards the young and the poor.

**What are the most urgent needs of the young people and the local area?**

The most urgent needs of young people are a sense of meaning in their lives and economic self-sufficiency. They need to be helped to discover something worth living for. And they need to know that there are good people behind them as they try to take their rightful place in society.

**What advice would you give to a young person who feels called to religious life?**

Live with a spirit of gratitude, count your blessings, and trust in God. If you feel that God is calling you to religious life, give yourself to Him generously. You will discover that he will bless you in countless and unimaginable ways.