 Reading time: 3 min.

We interviewed the new inspector of Japan, Don Francesco HAMASAKI. It is always nice to hear news from the geographically distant places from the Salesian origin, from Valdocco.

Can you introduce yourself?
I was born in Nagasaki Prefecture, a region of Japan known for the many martyrs that have been there. I was told that my ancestors were also Christians, so-called “hidden” due to persecution. However, during my childhood, I moved to Nara Prefecture (near Osaka and Kyoto, famous for its ancient temples and shrines) and grew up there. My family consists of seven people: my parents, my four siblings, and me. We are all Catholics, and in particular, my parents are very devout.

What is the story of your vocation?
At that time, the priests serving in Nara Prefecture all came from Australia and were Marist missionaries. The parish priest of my community was Father Tony Glynn, a man who worked hard to become a bridge of peace between Japan and Australia. He was even the protagonist of a film titled The Railway of Love. It was thanks to his influence that I began to desire to become a priest. However, at that moment, I did not yet know the Salesians of Don Bosco, nor Don Bosco himself.
Later, through various circumstances, such as meeting some sisters, I entered the Salesian aspirantate during my first year of high school. A curious event happened just before my entry: I received a magazine every month without knowing who sent it to me. After entering the Salesians, I realized that it was the Japanese Salesian Bulletin (Katorikku Seikatsu; Catholic Life). Even today, I do not know who sent it to me, but I believe it was Don Bosco himself guiding me towards his congregation.
Today I feel very happy. This is because I intensely perceive the greatness and mercy of God, and I find joy in being a Salesian priest. This allows me to live the charism of Don Bosco, that is, to dedicate my life to the young.
Before being ordained a priest, I worked for two and a half years in the editorial office of Katorikku Seikatsu at the Don Bosco Sha publishing house. After ordination, I spent 12 years working with young people in the aspirantate. Subsequently, I worked for 9 years in a school and then for 3 years in a small parish and a kindergarten. Now, I hold the role of inspector.
Wherever I have been, I have found joy in being with young people and have lived many extraordinary experiences and encounters. Among all, the one that

transformed my way of living, thinking, and feeling as a Salesian was the experience of pastoral work in a juvenile prison. Here I understood the importance of Don Bosco's teaching: "It is not enough to love; the young must feel loved." I deeply understood God's love and his infinite mercy.
Even though, due to my current role, I am often far from direct pastoral work with young people, I continue to dedicate myself to ministry in juvenile prisons so as not to forget the heart of Don Bosco.

What are the young people like in your area?
Speaking of today's Japanese youth, like in other countries, they also face various challenges. I believe there are two main issues that require attention:
1. Young immigrants and children of immigrant families: In recent decades, the number of young people from the Philippines and Latin America has increased. Recently, many young people from Southeast Asia, particularly from Vietnam, are coming to Japan. It is estimated that there are about 600,000 Vietnamese youth in the country. Our inspectorate has already committed to ministry for these young people, but with the continued aging of the Japanese population, it is likely that the number of foreign youth will further increase. This will require greater pastoral and spiritual attention for them.
2. Youth poverty: The Japanese economy is becoming weaker, and economic inequalities are growing. More and more young people are living in poverty. For example, there are many "children's cafeterias" in Japan, which offer free meals to needy families. Additionally, the number of young people involved in "illegal jobs," that is, petty crimes that promise easy earnings but turn them into victims of criminal systems, is increasing.
In response to these challenges, I believe it is time for our inspectorate to make courageous decisions and take action, as Don Ángel Fernández Artime, the previous Rector Major and current Cardinal, invited us to do. We must pay special attention to the young people who do not receive the necessary attention from public institutions, collaborating with the Salesian Family and our collaborators.
Finally, I want to emphasize the importance of the Madonna. Without trust and devotion to Mary Help of Christians, how could we convey the heart of Don Bosco to the young? As the years go by, I feel an increasing need for her guidance and help. Like Don Bosco, I often say: "And now, Mary, let's begin."
I ask you to pray for the young people of Japan and for us Salesians in Japan, so that we can continue to convey the heart of Don Bosco to all of them.

Don Hamasaki Atsushi Francesco,

inspector of Japan