

□ Reading time: 3 min.

The experience of Rodgers Chabala, a young Zambian missionary in Nigeria, starting from the rediscovery of Don Bosco when visiting his places.

Young Salesian Rodgers Chabala is part of the new generation of missionaries, according to the renewed paradigm that goes beyond geographical boundaries or cultural precepts: from Zambia he was sent as a missionary to Nigeria. The missionary course he experienced last September was a powerful moment for him, especially the atmosphere he breathed in Don Bosco's places: a true spiritual experience.



Don Bosco began his work with his own boys, realising that no one was looking after the souls of these young Piedmontese who often ended up in prison for theft, smuggling or other crimes. If these young men had had a trusted friend, someone to instruct them and give them a good example, they would not have ended up

there and so Don Bosco was sent to them by God. We can say that it all began with the dream at nine years of age which Don Bosco gradually understood over time, thanks to the help of many people who helped him to discern. His pastoral desire to care for the souls of the young reached the whole world thanks to the Salesian missionaries, starting with that group of eleven sent to Patagonia, Argentina, in 1875. Initially, Don Bosco did not have a clear intention of sending missionaries, but God in time purified this desire and allowed the Salesian charism to spread to every corner of our earth.

The Salesian missionary vocation is a “vocation within a vocation”, a call to missionary life within one’s Salesian vocation. From the beginning, Rodgers felt a strong missionary desire, but it was not easy to make others understand what his motivations were. At the time of his aspirantate, when he was still unfamiliar with Salesian life, he was greatly impressed by the testimony of a Polish missionary and began to reflect and struggle with himself to decipher the intentions of his own heart. When the missionary asked “who wants to be a missionary?” Rodgers did not doubt and began the path of discernment, starting with the Polish Salesian’s answer to begin by loving his own country. Obviously, many challenges began to emerge and moments of discouragement were not lacking. As with Don Bosco, for Rodgers the help and mediation of many people was essential to distinguish God’s voice from other influences and to purify his intentions. God speaks through people, discernment is not merely an individual process, it always has a community dimension.

Last September, Rodgers attended the formation course for new missionaries, which precedes the official sending out by the Rector Major. Arriving a few days after the others, he met up again, after several years, with some of his novitiate companions and his old Rector from the studentate of philosophy. He joined the group and immediately noticed a special atmosphere, smiling faces and real joy. The reflections on interculturality and other insights provided by the Missions Sector were useful tools to prepare for the missionary departure. During the course, participants had the opportunity to visit Don Bosco’s places, first at Colle Don Bosco and then at Valdocco. Fr Alfred Maravilla, General Councillor for the Missions, asked the newly appointed missionaries: “What effect do these visits to Don Bosco’s holy places have on your life?” When one reads about Don Bosco’s life in books, doubts may arise and one may even be sceptical, but to see those places with one’s own eyes and breathe in the atmosphere of Don Bosco by retracing his story is

something that can hardly be recounted. Besides the historical memory of what happened to Don Bosco, Dominic Savio and Mamma Margaret, these places have the capacity to reinvigorate the Salesian charism and make one reflect on one's vocation. The simplicity and family spirit of Don Bosco show how poverty is not an obstacle to holiness and the realisation of the Kingdom of God. When speaking of Don Bosco we often run the risk of omitting the mystical part, concentrating only on activities and works. Don Bosco was truly a mystic in the spirit who cultivated an intimate relationship with the Lord.

So we arrive at 25 September 2022: Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, today's Don Bosco, presides over the Mass with the Salesians of the 153rd SDB missionary expedition and the Sisters of the 145th FMA expedition in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, in Valdocco. Rodgers recalls meeting, a few days earlier, his new superior of the ANN province (Nigeria-Niger), and feeling the weight of responsibility for the missionary choice he had made. During the mass, says Rodgers, "I received the missionary cross and the desire to be a missionary largely became real." "The missionary vocation is a beautiful vocation, once the journey of discernment is carefully completed. It requires an openness of mind to appreciate the way of life of other peoples. Let us therefore pray for all the missionaries of the world and for those who are discerning the missionary vocation, that God will guide and inspire them in their lives."



*by,
Marco Fulgaro*