 Reading time: 5 min.

In the context of the 150th anniversary of the Salesian missions, the testimony of Fr. Osvaldo Gorzegno Davico holds a particularly eloquent value. A missionary in Mexico since 1969, Fr. Osvaldo embodies a quiet and tenacious fidelity to the charism of Don Bosco, lived for almost sixty years among young people, in formation, and on the new frontiers of the mission. The recent bestowing of the missionary cross, received in Valdocco from the Rector Major, is not just a symbolic recognition, but the seal of a life given, guided by Providence and animated by a missionary zeal that has never waned.

The most attentive observers will have noticed that on the list of the 156th missionary expedition, alongside the new Salesian missionaries, was the name of Fr. Osvaldo Gorzegno Davico, with the note “sent in 1969”.
Fr. Osvaldo is the “DIAM” (Provincial Delegate for Missionary Animation) of the Mexico-Guadalajara Province who, curiously, had never received the Salesian missionary cross… and exactly 150 years after the first sending by Don Bosco, in the presence of all the world’s DIAMs gathered for this special event, he has finally sealed his almost 60 years of mission.

Looking back on this long journey, Fr. Osvaldo tells us, “December 1968. I sent a Christmas letter to Mexico to wish a Merry Christmas to a Salesian friend with whom I had lived and shared the years of philosophical formation at the Salesian Pontifical University in Rome. As a postscript, I added, I am willing to offer my service as a philosophy teacher in your formation centre in Guadalajara.” The positive response was immediate and unexpected (“Yes, we are waiting for you!”).

But Fr. Osvaldo’s missionary desire did not just appear out of nowhere; it was a dream he had cherished in his heart for many years. Osvaldo, a boy from Cuneo, attended the Salesian oratory, participating in the missionary group. A fine tradition of the time was to present the splendid work undertaken by missionaries in magazines, an essential tool in an era without social networks and instant communication. Furthermore, missionaries from all continents would periodically arrive at the oratory. The boys were nourished by their adventurous and genuine stories, and Osvaldo felt he was called to imitate them in the future.

During his years of Salesian formation in Rome at the P.A.S. (now UPS), Osvaldo had been able to experience firsthand the internationality of the Salesian charism and a renewed understanding of the Salesian vocation. Don Bosco was truly and

concretely present throughout the world, and in Osvaldo, Jesus's invitation – "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news" – resonated with ever-increasing force. Interculturality is a strength of the Salesian charism, to be maintained and developed to keep the Salesian charism relevant in 137 countries around the world. Thanks to the commitment of many missionaries, the language of the Gospel knows no borders and manages to speak the languages of every human group. Salesian formation houses, international due to the presence of confreres from different parts of the world, are fertile ground on which to plant the seed of missionary spirit, allowing for a broader and more global perspective that goes beyond one's own cultural or national point of view.

Thus, in the life of Osvaldo, a twenty-year-old full of hope, a new and unimaginable horizon opened up. Although he had already made the firm decision to leave in his heart, the approval of his superior was still missing. After a series of providential events and situations, in the courtyard of the mother house in Valdocco, under the gaze of the statue of Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco, on a warm summer afternoon, the response from the provincial finally arrived. It was not an "ad vitam" (for life) prospect but a fixed-term "yes"; three years, coinciding with the period of practical training. Fr. Osvaldo remembers that time with emotion and joy, the beginning of his missionary adventure, three splendid years. So much curiosity, so much grace, and so many discoveries thanks to the abundance of Providence that would forever change Osvaldo's Salesian path. In the meantime, he had taken his perpetual vows in Guadalajara on 6 August 1970, professing his everlasting yes to the Lord in the Salesian Congregation.

As the time for his return to Italy approached, the insistent invitation from the young people Osvaldo had met and also from his confreres grew. "Stay with us." And so, the return home was very brief; a greeting to his family, a visit to his home Province, and then the approved decision to return once more to his mission land, Mexico. Osvaldo would stay there forever, as a missionary. Mexico would become his new land and the young people of Mexico, his new people. Osvaldo could never have imagined that his mission would lead him to create the wonderful Salesian communities along the long and troubled but promising US-Mexico border. He repeats to us that this great project was made possible thanks to the new Salesian missionary communities present on the border and to the numerous volunteers, men and women, who fully believed in it. Today, Osvaldo can affirm that, as Don Bosco said: "…everything was made possible thanks to Our Lady."

Several decades later, Osvaldo returned to Valdocco, to that courtyard where he

received his first approval to leave as a missionary, on a historic occasion. 11 November 1875, Don Bosco sent the first missionary expedition to Argentina, a gesture he himself described as almost an adventure without great prospects. And yet, the Lord's timing has transformed that decision of 150 years ago into a story of unpredictable fruitfulness.
"11 November 2025, in the same place where that first expedition was decided and from where it departed, I had an experience that I can only describe as a true Salesian Pentecost. Different languages, distant cultures, and groups of Salesians from all over the world found themselves united by the same missionary charism of Don Bosco. In that meeting, I felt vividly the presence of the Holy Spirit, who continues to revive the gift of missionary spirit in the Salesian Family, igniting in hearts the fire of zeal and missionary audacity."

In that atmosphere of fraternity, Osvaldo felt Don Bosco to be surprisingly close: present, alive, still capable of uniting us in a single missionary dream that remains a prophecy of light for our future as Salesians. Don Bosco continues to unite us in one heart for the salvation of all young people, especially the poorest, the most fragile, those who in today's world risk remaining invisible. "Commend yourselves at all times to Mary Help of Christians. She is the foundress and sustainer of our works."
In the missionary atmosphere breathed in Valdocco, Osvaldo departs for Mexico with a renewed conviction; the young people of the world are waiting for us. Even if they do not always know how to express it, they carry a deep cry within them; "We want to see Jesus!" And they expect to glimpse him reflected in our lives.
And so, after the younger missionaries, Fr. Osvaldo also heard his name called by Fr. Jorge Mario Crisafulli, General Councillor for the Missions, and received the missionary cross from the hands of the Rector Major, the 11th successor of Don Bosco, Fr. Fabio Attard.

Fr. Osvaldo concludes, "In this Pentecostal context, receiving the missionary cross stirred an intense, extraordinary emotion in me. After 56 years as a missionary, I once again felt the invitation that Jesus has extended to me so many times, 'Come and follow me… go into the world and proclaim the good news.' This moment was like retracing my past and, at the same time, glimpsing what the Lord still expects of me. One certainty, however, has never failed. Jesus has never left me. He has been with me and in me in moments of fragility and in those of audacity, in suffering and in joy, in discouragement and in hope. Always, enveloped in the certainty of his love."

We bid farewell to Fr. Osvaldo, wishing him the best in "his" Mexico. He is keen to

leave us with the words of the “missionary” Paul of Tarsus, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

Marco Fulgaro