 Reading time: 9 min.

On 24 September the Rector Major presided at the giving of the missionary cross to the members of the 154th Missionary expedition of the Salesian Congregation. This is the 154th group since Don Bosco presided at the first missionary send-off in Valdocco on 11 November1875.

The missionary send-off in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Valdocco is the way in which the Salesian Congregation renews its missionary commitment before Mary Help of Christians. The heart of this touching celebration is the missionary who receives the missionary cross from the successor of Don Bosco, the Rector Major. In fact, this distinctive Salesian missionary cross is given by the Rector Major only to those who offer the radical and complete gift of self which, by its very nature, implies total availability without any time limits (*ad vitam*).

Receiving the Cross expresses many emotions and spiritual challenges. The life of the missionary is focused on the person of Christ and of Christ crucified. It implies that the missionary first receives and then passes on the great teaching of the Cross: the infinite love of the Father who gives the best of himself, his Son; love to the end that is obedient and generous in giving oneself to the will of the Father for the salvation of humanity. For every Salesian missionary “Our highest knowledge […] is to know Jesus Christ, and our greatest delight is to reveal to all people the unfathomable riches of his mystery.” (SDB Constitutions art. 34).

The Good Shepherd in the Salesian missionary cross reveals Salesian Christology: pastoral charity is the nucleus of the Salesian spirit, the attitude that “wins hearts by gentleness and self-giving” (SDB Constitutions art. 10-11).

Da Mihi Animas cetera Tolle (give me souls, take away the rest): This is the motto that characterised the Sons of Don Bosco from the beginning. In a missionary context this brief Salesian prayer acquires particular significance: leave everything, even one’s land and culture, and the things that give security, in order to devote oneself without limit to those to whom one is sent, to be an instrument of salvation for them.

The Holy Spirit who comes down on the Good Shepherd in the river Jordan, descends now on Christ present in the pastoral dynamism of the Church. Without

the Holy Spirit, and without the light, discernment, strength and holiness that come from the Spirit, all missionary activity is no more than a series of activities, sometimes empty, carried out in distant places.

Finally, the text written at the back of the cross: "*Euntes ergo docete omnes nationes baptizantes eos in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti*" (Mt 28:19) (Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit): the heart of the missionary mandate given by the Risen Lord. The text gives a mandate to teach all people so that they may become followers and disciples of Jesus (the Greek text emphasizes *mathêteúsate*, "make disciples", which is more than just *docete*, "teach"). Evangelisation, the fullness of grace, comes through words and deeds, with the greatest of all the sacramental graces which is baptism that plunges the person into the mystery of communion with God.

In 1875 Don Bosco sent 10 Italian Salesians to Argentina. Today, missionaries come from all populated continents and are sent to all populated continents. Every Salesian, every Province shares responsibility for the missionary activity of the whole Congregation. Thanks to Salesian missionaries, Don Bosco's charism is now present in 134 countries. The reflections of some members of the 154 missionary expedition reveal how much Salesian missionaries have touched people's lives, and in turn, generate new Salesian missionary vocations.

Cl. Jorge DA LUÍSA JOÃO, Salesian from in Bengo, Angola is 31 years old. "The seed of my missionary vocation developed when we watched missionary videos in the Salesian community at Benguela, where I became an external aspirant. Then during my prenovitiate, novitiate and post novitiate this developed with the accompaniment of my spiritual guide. Now that the Rector Major has accepted my missionary application and sends me to Capo Verde. my dream is to give my whole life in the mission land where I will be sent and be buried there, just like the missionaries who gave everything for Angola and whose bodies rest on Angolan soil."

Cl. Soosai ARPUTHARAJ from Michaelpalayam, Tamilnadu. "My missionary vocation began when I was a in the beginning of my initial formation, but I was afraid to tell anyone of my missionary desire. But during the meeting for young Salesians of our Province they spoke to us of missionary experience. This made me ask myself: "Why can't I become a missionary *ad gentes* in the Salesian

congregation?” I am grateful to my Vice-Provincial who guided me to finally make this decision to offer myself to the Rector Major to go wherever he will send me. Thus, I accepted willingly the proposal of the General Councillor for Missions to send me to Romania. I know this is God’s call to me to give my life to the youngsters of Romania.

Cl. Joshua TARERE, 30 years old from, hails from Vunadidir, East New Britain, Papua New Guinea. He is the first salesian missionary from Oceania. “When I was a child I knew only the diocesan priest in my parish. As a secondary student I was not in a Salesian school. But thanks to Salesians from Don Bosco Rapolo who came to my parish for Sunday mass, I was inspired by their missionary work. They came to my country to serve the young people. This experience of service and availability to others helped me identify myself with their missionary vocation.”
“During my novitiate my Novice Master, Fr. Philip Lazatin, encouraged me to discern and clarify my missionary interest. In the Post Novitiate, I continued my discernment with my Rector, Fr. Ramon Garcia, as well as with my spiritual guide, to discover if my desire to be a Salesian missionary is truly a call from God. After a long period of discernment, I finally decided to apply to the Rector Major and make myself available anywhere he will send me to. This I did freely without any pressure from anyone.”
“I am told that I am the first Salesian from Oceania to be a missionary. But to me this is not important. What is important is my availability to respond with generosity to God’s personal call to me. As a missionary to South Sudan, I have a mixed feeling of fear and courage. The media present all negative images of violence, and displaced people in South Sudan. But I am also inspired to be courageous because I know fully well that the Lord who has sent me for His mission will surely take care of me. My fears have not overtaken my great desire to serve, to love and to be one with the new culture and people I am sent to.”

Cl. Francois MINO NOMENJANAHARY from Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar is 25 years old. He is destined for the Vice-Province of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, offers us his testimony today. “I have to admit that I have never heard of Papua New Guinea before, until Fr. Alfred Maravilla, proposed that I go there. I accepted willingly to be sent because I have offered my availability to respond to God’s call to me to be a missionary. I also had to explain to my parents and family where my missionary destination is. Thanks be to God, they came to accept it. Surely, Like everyone else, I have my fears. I am happy to meet missionaries in Papua New Guinea in this course. I am happy to know that the first

Papua New Guinean Catholic priest, Louis Vangeke, was formed in the seminary in Madagascar. This makes me feel also connected to my mission land.

Fr. Michał CEBULSKI from Katowice, Poland is 29 years old. He was ordained a few months ago, in June. “As a young Salesian he spent a year of practical training in Ireland. “Since I was a child I heard stories about missionaries which developed in me the desire to be like them. I am happy that I am sent to Lithuania, the country that shares a border with Poland. Although my country shares the border with Lithuania and we have similarities regarding food and culture, the Lithuanian language will not be easy for me. My new Provincial told me that I will have to learn Italian for some months. But once I will be in Lithuania, approaching the people and understanding their culture will be my priority. I hope that the Lithuanian people will discover God’s love through my service. I want to help young people to live with true joy, which Don Bosco told us, is caused by a pure heart.”

Br. Kerwin P. VALEROSO, a 35-year-old Salesian Brother from Pura, Tarlac, Philippines is going to the new Circumscription of North Africa (CNA). “Once I saw the pictures of the first three missionary expeditions of Salesians. Thinking about the places where they reached, the works they built, the hearts they have touched, and the souls they have saved, I felt that this was my vocation. I am grateful to my formators, mentors, and friends who co-journeyed with me to purify and strengthen my missionary vocation.”
“I am grateful to my family, confreres and friends who made me feel their support, prayers, and well wishes as I embark to respond to my missionary vocation. I do not hide that I have mixed feeling of joy and fear in going to North Africa whose language, culture, or people I do not know yet. I have no knowledge of Islam either. However, my main task now is to learn well this year the French language. I have to say that our confreres in Paris, France have made me really felt welcomed. I am also grateful to my Province of origin (FIN) that despite the multitude of work in the apostolate, has generously encouraged me to offer myself for the missionary works of our Congregation.”

Cl. Dominic NGUYEN QUOC OAT, 30 years old, is from Dong Nai, Vietnam. “I had been interested about the mission since I was in Secondary School. I even shared with my high school classmates about my dream of becoming a missionary. As a young Salesian I had discerned because I believe that God is inviting me to be a missionary for Him and for his people, hence I applied make a lifelong missionary commitment wherever the Rector Major will send me.”

“God has offered me an opportunity to be a missionary in Great Britain. I’m happy to accept my missionary destination although, I have some concerns because I am an Asian who is being sent to Europe. I need to educate myself more about the language and culture of my mission country. But I believe that God who called me to be a Salesian missionary will continue to bless me with his Grace to carry out the mission he has entrusted to me.”

Fr. Andre DELIMARTA, is one of the first two Indonesian Salesians. At 55 years old, he had been Novice Master, Rector, Parish Priest in his Vice Province (INA). He is a member of last year’s 153rd missionary expedition destined for Malaysia, but he will receive the missionary cross only this September 24. “I grew up with Salesians. The loving-kindness, hard work, commitment and the spirit of sacrifice of Salesian missionaries like Fr Alfonso Nacher, Fr Jose Carbonell, Deacon Baltasar Pires and Fr Jose Kusy have had a great impact on me. It was they who taught me Don Bosco, introduced me to the Congregation and made me fall in love with their missionary zeal”.
“When I was in initial formation I wanted to be a missionary but my formators prohibited me because they said Don Bosco has to take root in Indonesia. In fact, as the first Indonesian Salesian I had insisted on making Don Bosco’s charism take root in Indonesia as our priority. But when the insistent appeal for missionaries was relayed to our Vice Province, my missionary vocation was reignited. My love for Don Bosco and for the Congregation made me decide to offer myself as a missionary. If the Congregation needs missionaries, then I want to say: “Here I am! I’ll go!””

Here are all 24 members of the 154th Salesian Missionary Expedition:



– Shivraj BHURIYA, from India (Mumbai Province – INB) to Slovenia (SLO);
– Thomas NGUYEN QUANG QUI, from Vietnam (VIE) to Great Britain (GBR);
– Dominic NGUYEN QUOC OAT, from Vietnam (VIE) to Great Britain (GBR);
– Jean Bernard Junior Gerald GUIELLE FOUETRO, from the Republic of Congo (Africa Congo Province – ACC) to Germany (GER);
– Br Blaise MULUMBA NTAMBWE, from the Democratic Republic of Congo (Province of Central Africa – AFC) to Germany (GER);
– Fr Michael CEBULSKI, from Poland (Province of Cracow – PLS) to Lithuania (Special Circumscription of Piedmont and Valle d'Aosta – ICP);
– Br Kerwin VALEROSO, from the Philippines (Province of the Northern Philippines – FIN) to the North Africa Constituency (NAC);
– Br Joseph NGO DUC THUAN, from Vietnam (VIE) to the North African Circumscription (NAC);
– Fr Domenico PATERNÒ, from Italy (Province of Sicily – ISI) to the North African Circumscription (NAC);

– David Broon, from India (Province of Tiruchy – INT) to Albania (Province of Southern Italy – IME);
– Elisée TUUNGANE NZIBI, from the Democratic Republic of Congo (Province of Central Africa – AFC) to Albania (Province of Southern Italy – IME);
– Fr George KUJUR, from India (Province of Dimapur – IND) to Nepal (Province of India-Calcutta – INC);
– Br Soosai ARPUTHARAJ, from India (Province of Chennai – INM) to Romania (Province of North East Italy – INE);
– Br John the Baptist NGUYEN VIET DUC, from Vietnam (VIE) to Romania (Province of North East Italy – INE);
– Br Mario Alberto JIMÉNEZ FLORENCE, from Vietnam (Province of Central Africa – AFC) to Romania (Province of North East Italy – IME);
– Br John Paul VIET DUC, from Vietnam (Province of India – IND) to Romania (Province of North East Italy – INE);
– Br John Paul L. Mario Alberto JIMÉNEZ FLORES, from Mexico (Province of Guadalajara – MEG) to the Delegation of South Sudan (DSS);
– Sarathkumar RAJA, from India (Province of Chennai – INM) to Sri Lanka (LKC);
– Lyonnel Richie Éric BOUANGA, from the Republic of Congo (Province of Africa Congo – ACC) to the Vice Province of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands (PGS);
– Joshua TARERÉ, from Papua New Guinea (PGS) to the Delegation of South Sudan (DSS);
– Nomenjanahary François MINO, from Madagascar (MDG) to the Vice Province of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands (PGS);
– Jean KASONGO MWAPE, from the Democratic Republic of Congo (Province of Central Africa – AFC) to Brazil (Province of Brazil-Porto Alegre – BPA);
– Khyliait WANTEILANG, from India (Province of Shillong – INS), to Brazil (Province of Brazil-Porto Alegre – BPA);
– Fr Joseph PHAM VAN THONG, from Vietnam (VIE) to South Africa (Vice Province of Southern Africa – AFM);
– Fr Miguel Rafael Coelho GIME, from Angola (ANG) to Mozambique (MOZ);
– Klimer Xavier SANCHEZ, from Ecuador (ECU) to Mozambique (MOZ).