 Reading time: 7 min.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the passing into eternity of the Servant of God Fr Andrej Majcen.As a teacher in Radna, he came to the ranks of the Salesians out of love for the young.A life of self-giving.

The first thing is that **Fr Andrej loved young people very much**: for them he consecrated his life to God as a Salesian, a priest, a missionary. Being a Salesian does not only mean giving one's life to God: it means giving one's life for the young. So without the young, Fr Andrej Majcen would not have been a Salesian, a priest, a missionary: for the young, he made demanding choices, accepting conditions of poverty, hardship, worries so that 'his boys' would find a roof over their heads, a plate to fill their stomachs, and a light to guide them through life.

The first message, then, is that Fr Majcen loved young people and interceded for them!

The second is that **Andrej was a young man capable of listening**. Born in 1904, still a child during the First World War, sick and poor, scarred by the death of a little brother, Andrej kept great desires in his heart and above all many questions: he was open to life and wanted to understand why it deserved to be lived. He never discounted questions and was always committed to seeking answers, even in environments other than his own, without closures or prejudices. At the same time, Andrej was docile: he paid attention to what his mother, father, educators told him and asked him… Andrej trusted that others might have some answers to his questions and that in their suggestions there was not a desire to replace him, but to point him in a direction that he would then follow in his own freedom and on his own two feet.

His father, for example, advised him to always be good to everyone and that he would never regret it. He worked for the court, dealt with probate cases, with many difficult things where people often quarrel and even the most sacred ties are offended. From his father, Andrej learnt to be good, to bring peace, to reconcile tensions, not to judge, to be in the world (with its tensions and contradictions) as a just person. Andrej listened to and trusted his father.

His mother was a great woman of prayer (Andrej considered her a religious in the world and confided that she had not achieved her devotion even as a religious). In his teenage years, when he could have lost touch with ideas and ideologies, she asked him to go to church for a few moments every day. Nothing in particular, or

too long: “*When you go to school, don’t forget to enter the Franciscan church for a moment.You can enter through one door and leave through the other; you make the sign of the cross with holy water, say a short prayer and entrust yourself to Mary.”* Andrej obeyed his mother and every day he came to greet Mary in the church even though – ‘out there’ – many companions and lively discussions awaited him. Andrej listened to and trusted his mother, and discovered that therein lay the roots of many things, there was a bond with Mary that would accompany him forever. It is these small drops that dig great depths in us, almost without us realising it!
A teacher invited him to go to the library and there he was given a book with the *Aphorisms* of Th. G. Masaryk: politician, man of government, today we would say a ‘layman’. Andrej read that book and it became decisive for his growth. There he discovered what a certain amount of work on himself, character formation, commitment meant. Andrej listened to the advice and listened to Masaryk, not letting himself be too influenced by his ‘Curriculum’ but seeing the good even in someone far from the Catholic way of thinking of his own family. He discovered that there are universal human values and that there is a dimension of commitment and seriousness that is ‘common ground’ for all.

A teacher at the Salesians, in Radna, young Majcen finally listened to those who – in different ways – gave him the idea of a **possible consecration.** There were many reasons why Andrej could have backed out: the family’s investment in his education; the job he had found only a few months before; having to leave everything and exposing himself to total uncertainty if he failed… He was at that moment a young man looking towards the future, who had not considered that proposal. At the same time, he was looking for something more and different and, as a man and as a teacher, he realised that the Salesians not only taught, but oriented to Jesus, Master of Life. Don Bosco’s pedagogy for him was that ‘piece’ he was missing. Andrej listened to the vocational proposal, he faced a hard struggle during prayer, on his knees, and decided to apply for admission to the novitiate: he did not let much time pass, but he thought seriously, prayed and said yes. He did not miss the opportunity, he did not let the moment pass…: he listened, he trusted, he decided by agreeing and knowing so little of what he was going to encounter.

Often we all believe that we see ourselves right in our own lives, that we hold the keys to it, its secret: sometimes, however, it is precisely others who invite us to straighten our gaze, our ears and our hearts, showing us paths towards which we would never have gone on our own. If these people are good and want our good, obeying them is important: therein lies the secret of happiness. Fr Majcen trusted, he did not waste years, he did not waste life… He said yes. Deciding in time was also the great secret recommended by Don Bosco.

The third thing is that **Andrej Majcen allowed himself to be surprised**. He always welcomed surprises, proposals and changes: the meeting with the Salesians, for example; then the encounter with a missionary that made him burn with the desire to be able to spend himself for others in a faraway land. He also received some not-so-good surprises: he went to China and found Communism there; they chased him out, he entered North Vietnam and Communism did damage there too; they chased him out, he went south, then arrived in South Vietnam; but Communism reached that area too and they chased him out again (it sounds like an action film, with a long chase with sirens wailing!). He returned home, to his beloved Slovenia, and – in the meantime – the Communist regime was established there, and there was persecution of the Church. What is this? A joke? Andrej did not complain! He lived for decades in countries at war or in situations at risk, with persecution, emergencies, mourning… He slept for more than twenty years while outside the window, over there, they were shooting… At other times he cried… Yet – even though he had positions of responsibility and so many lives to save – he was almost always serene, with a beautiful smile, so much joy and love in his heart. How did he do it?

He did not place his heart in external events, into things, into what you cannot control or… into his own plans ('it has to be like this because I have decided so': when it 'isn't like this' you go into crisis). He had put his heart in God, in the Congregation and in his dear young people. Then he was truly free, the world could fall away, but the roots were safe. The roots were in *relationships*, in a good way of *spending oneself for others*; the foundation was in *something that does not pass away*.

So many times, all we need is for them to move a small thing and we get angry because it is not according to our needs, desires, plans or expectations. Andrej Majcen tells me, he tells us: "be free!", "entrust your heart to those who will not steal it or damage it", "build on something that will remain forever!", "then you will be happy even if they take everything away from you and you will always have ALL."

The fourth thing is that **Fr Andrej Majcen made his examination of conscience well**. Every day he examined himself to see where he had done well, less well or badly. When he had the chance (i.e. when there were no more bombs near his home or the Viet Cong at a short distance, etc.) he would take a notebook, write down questions, reflect on the Word of God, verify that he had put it into practice… He would question himself.

Today we live in a society that places great importance on outward

appearances: it too is a gift (e.g. taking care of oneself, dressing with propriety, presenting oneself well), but it is not everything. We have to dig inside ourselves, go deep -maybe with the help of someone.

Andrej always had the courage to look himself in the face, to peer into his own heart and conscience, to ask for forgiveness. In doing so, he has encountered some not very beautiful aspects of himself, on which to work and to entrust: but he has also seen so much good, beauty, purity, love that would otherwise have remained ‘under the radar’.

Many times, it takes more courage to travel within ourselves than to go to the other side of the world! Fr Andrej Majcen faced both of these journeys: from Slovenia he reached the Far East, and yet the most demanding itinerary always remained – right to the end – within his own heart.

St Augustine, a young man who sought the truth in so many ways before encountering it in the person of Jesus, within himself, says: “*Noli foras ire, redi in te ipsum, in interiore homini habitat veritas”* (“Do not want to go outside, return within yourself, the truth dwells in human inwardness”).

And so I have concluded with a little exercise in Latin: a language very dear to Andrej and linked to his vocational discernment. But that would really be…, at least for now, another story!