 Reading time: 3 min.

Don Bosco knew it well: play and music are the simplest paths to enter the hearts of young people. Even today, in Salesian courtyards all over the world, play creates trust, friendship, and fraternity. This is the meaning of the motto “Forward sport, forward man!”: a sport that serves the person and the community, not the other way around.

Sport has no flag

To say that sport is “without a homeland and without colour” does not mean denying the roots of every discipline, which always originates in a place and a culture. It means recognising that sport carries within itself a value that goes beyond borders. It makes us pass from the “I” to the “we”.

The true homeland of sport is the celebration of the human being and of variety. Its only colour is that of the peoples who practise it. Its only flag is the joy it can arouse.

The fragrance of sport is called peace

Salesian oratories and youth centres offer exactly this: a space where every young person, whatever their origin, social condition, or the colour of their skin, finds friends, brothers, and educators. It is the family spirit dear to Don Bosco: in play, one learns the value of the team, the group, the community.

Our courtyards have something to say to the world of sport. What matters is the person, unity, peace. Saint John Paul II, at the Jubilee of Sportspeople in 1984, invited athletes to make their meetings “an emblematic sign for the whole of society”, an anticipation of the time when no nation will raise the sword against another anymore. If war, Pope Leo XIV reminds us, is always a defeat for humanity, clean sport is a concrete alternative: it builds peace and cohesion among peoples.

Careful, however. When sport loses its character of free, spontaneous, and passionate play, it transforms into its opposite. It becomes a battlefield of interests, violence, racism, corruption, a simple commodity to be consumed. A sport that no

longer unites is an enemy of man.

A school of fraternity

In his letter “Life in Abundance”, Pope Leo XIV reminds us that sporting practice is an activity open to all, which is good for the body and the spirit: a universal expression of the human being.

Sport is truly good when it helps the person to be themselves: free, creative, open, fraternal. The benefit is not only physical and individual: those who grow through sport open up to others and build bonds. Sport is a school of sociality.

But here too there is a risk: the business of sport, “pay to play”, elitism, doping, the mentality of winning at all costs. When sport loses its community dimension and becomes only a search for personal success, it also loses its educational value.

Regarding the 2026 Football World Cup, Pope Leo wrote words on social media that seem designed for our courtyards: football reminds us that “life is not a race in which one tries to shine, alone, but a journey that one learns to travel together”. Those who do not know how to make a pass, even if they have talent, have not yet understood the game. And those who do not know how to live with others and for others, have not yet understood life.

Paul VI already saw in sport much more than physical education: a school of loyalty, of fair play, of discipline, of sacrifice, of courage, and of tenacity. A powerful factor of moral and social education.

A taste of Paradise

Major events like the Football World Cup can become spaces in which to reaffirm the primacy of the person over profit, of dialogue over domination, of the “we” over the ego. It is the prayer intention that Pope Leo XIV has entrusted to the month of June: that sport, in these times of war and polarisation, may be an instrument of peace, of encounter, and of dialogue between cultures and nations.

Respect, solidarity, fraternity: these values find their fullness in God. This is why a

sport that truly serves man speaks, ultimately, of God. And this is why it is without a homeland and without colour: because it celebrates the human community, universal love, and peace. Only in this way can sport truly be, as has been said, a “taste of Paradise”.

Fr. Jerry MATSOUMBOU, SDB

Youth Ministry Sector