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of the Superior Council  
of the Salesian Society  
of St John Bosco

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OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ANIMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

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## 1. LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

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Father Egidio VIGANÒ

A. **News items:** 1. New Economer General.

2. Beatification of Bishop Luigi Versiglia and Father Callisto Caravario.

B. **MARTYRDOM AND SUFFERING IN THE APOSTOLIC SPIRIT OF DON BOSCO.** Importance of suffering in a spirituality of the active life — The Christian significance of suffering — Frightening demands of sin — The splendour of martyrdom — Bloodless martyrdom in the spirit of Don Bosco — The apostolic value of all suffering — Care, respect and affection for our sick and suffering confreres.

Dear Confreres,

At the time of writing we are preparing for the Easter celebration. My prayer is that we may all profit by our Lenten conversion and reconciliation and our meditation on the passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. I pray also that Easter and Pentecost of this Holy Year will strengthen our sense of worship; and that the Holy Spirit will be with our future capitulars to help them in the exacting and historic task of drawing up the definitive text of the Constitutions and Regulations.

Please accept the good wishes of the members of the Superior Council who are now gathered at the Generalate and engaged in the various preparatory stages of the forthcoming General Chapter. You are all remembered in our prayers.

Before offering you a few spiritual thoughts I have two items of news for you.

### 1. **New Economer General**

On 8 December last, the feast of Mary Immaculate, Father Roger Pilla, after lengthy discussion

with the Rector Major, the Superior Council, and other trustworthy advisers, made an official request to be relieved of his office as Economer General on account of failing health and advancing years.

Fr Pilla had agonised for months about making this request, and it went clearly against his salesian sentiments to have to ask to be replaced. You will see for yourselves how he felt and what prompted his decision when you read the letter he wrote (v. p. 54 in these Acts).

On Friday 4 February 1983, in accordance with article 147 of the Constitutions, the Rector Major and his council appointed Fr Homer Paròn to the office of Economer General "until the expiry of the uncompleted term of six years".

This is the second time this Superior Council has had to replace one of its members. It is a task that has been carried out with diligence and with the best service of the Congregation in view; and a task that has brought with it both sorrow and hope.

We all owe a great debt of gratitude to Fr Pilla. We have been edified by his love of Don Bosco, his spirit of dedication, his competence, his salesian poverty, his magnanimity, initiative and gentleness, his deep culture and his profound charity. These qualities imbued all his fine work.

Fr Pilla has been an outstanding educator; he has held the office of rector and provincial; and he has been Economer General for twenty years during a period when the Congregation was undergoing massive expansion throughout the world. For ten years before this mandate he had been the right-hand man of his predecessor Fr Giraudi. Thus he has given thirty years — the equivalent of a lifetime — to the responsibilities of a labour that is complex, evolving constantly and becoming



increasingly more intricate and difficult. Fr Pilla's ability and exactitude have been a source of admiration for us all — as have also his energy, advice, achievements and successful solving of the many grave problems that confronted him.

Thank you Fr Pilla on behalf of the whole Congregation. You have merited the gratitude and esteem of all and we wish to show our recognition by our affection and generous prayers.

Whilst expressing our deep gratitude to Fr Pilla, we take occasion to welcome with confidence Fr Homer Paron, who has generously agreed to shoulder the burden of office; he is already engaged in his new work and has accepted his mandate with cheerful self-sacrifice.

Fr Paron has been provincial economer and then for six years provincial of St Mark's province, Veneto-est. We see in him a man of competence, salesian loyalty and brotherly kindness; and he is blessed with good health and zealous commitment. We assure him of our total solidarity and collaboration. We ask Don Bosco to bless him and obtain for him the grace of being an efficient economer after our Founder's own heart.

## **2. Beatification of Bishop Luigi Versiglia and Father Callisto Caravario**

As already communicated to you, the Holy Father will beatify our first two martyrs on Sunday 15 May, Feast of the Ascension; they were missionaries in China.

This is a source of great joy for all the Salesian Family. All members will prepare for the event with deep earnestness, with apostolic dedication,

and with worthy celebrations. Naturally the most imposing solemnity will be held in St Peter's, Rome.

I hope you will all be able to make suitable preparations for this great event, and that as many as possible will be able to take part in it. The Holy Year begins a few weeks before and will include the beatification; and this Holy Year should be seen as a very special kind of Advent, a period of preparation for the 3rd millennium of Christianity (this particular concept is one of John Paul II's favourite inspirational themes). It is to be hoped that the beatification will be the harbinger of a renewed Christian presence in China, for the blood of martyrs is certainly the fertile seed of evangelisation. We pray especially that this may be so among the youngsters of the vast Chinese nation so dear to the hearts of the two new Beati.

Let us all then make worthy preparations for the beatification celebrations, especially for the Vatican ceremony.

*Martyrdom and suffering in the  
apostolic spirit of Don Bosco*

The martyrdom of our two confreres Bishop Luigi Versiglia and Father Callisto Caravario is the source of profound inspiration for us.

From among the many thoughts for reflection I choose one that at first sight may seem rather unusual; but it is indispensable for our salesian active life, and will bear much fruit. I invite you to explore and contemplate the mysterious theme of *suffering*: it belongs to the very essence of the Christian life.

Christ has redeemed us by his passion, his suffering. Martyrs are venerated by the Church

1. Lk IX 23-24.

because of their suffering; all the saints have answered the call of Christ to suffer willingly. "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it."<sup>1</sup>

There are certain religious institutes within the Church whose special vocation is to contemplate and live the grand values of Christ's passion, to bear witness to them, to proclaim them to the world.

The People of God are imbued with this "martyrdom mystique". In fact baptism implants in the heart of every disciple a kind of instinct for the passion of Christ.

- *Importance of suffering in a spirituality of the active life*

We salesians practise a holiness that goes hand in hand with work. We are called by the Lord to the "life of the apostolate". As we look on Don Bosco we have a special admiration for his "spirituality of work". As we re-read the writings of our patron St Francis of Sales, we take particular pleasure in what he has to say about "ecstasy in action". We have been trained in this particular spiritual way, and experience shows us the necessity of meditating to some extent on the relationship between *activity* and *suffering* — otherwise we could develop false notions regarding the practical demands of the driving force of our salesian spirit.

Meantime the history of Christianity teaches us that there is a close link between the apostolate and martyrdom. The twelve apostles themselves suffered the pains of martyrdom. In their martyrdom in China our two confreres to be beatified gave



magnificent witness to the salesian values and the salesian spirit of their vocation.

We are all deeply impressed — one could almost say disconcerted — when we see that our salesian way of being holy can take on a very special style that is certainly exceptional but still genuinely salesian: I refer to Fr Andrew Beltrami's distinctive way of holiness through suffering; gravely ill, he asked the Lord that he should "not recover, not die, but live to suffer". Despite our wonderment, it is a fact that such a way of sanctity has flourished in one of the groups of the Salesian Family: in Colombia Fr Luigi Variara imbued the Institute of the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts with this special characteristic — their distinctive ethos is permeated with the spirit of oblation and suffering.

Immersed in the flurry of our apostolate, taking work for granted, accustomed to fatigue, we could very easily forget the great values of suffering. But when we come to think of it, Don Bosco's salesian spirit with its *da mihi animas* leads on logically to the mystery of suffering — even to martyrdom itself. Don Bosco tells us, "We must all carry the cross as Jesus did; and our cross is the suffering and distress that we meet with in our daily lives".<sup>2</sup> "Whoever will not accept affliction with Jesus Christ on earth will not rejoice with him in heaven."<sup>3</sup>

Our Constitutions are adamant on this point: speaking of *Tireless zeal and self-donation*, article 42 says "we should be ready to suffer cold and heat, hunger and thirst, fatigue and rejection whenever the glory of God and the salvation of souls require it".<sup>4</sup>

The spirit bequeathed us by our Founder is constantly permeated by a "martyrdom of charity and sacrifice" enlightened and quickened by the

2. MB X 648.

3. MB II 362.

4. Const. 42.

impelling ideal of his heart — “the salvation of souls”. Our salesian martyrdom is generally bloodless of course; but should God so will, we must be ready to sacrifice our lives even to the shedding of blood. Speaking on his favourite topic, the missions, Don Bosco clearly said, “If the good Lord should see fit to call any of us to be martyrs, what should we have to fear!”<sup>5</sup>

And indeed Bishop Versiglia and Father Caravario, faithful salesians, were nothing daunted.

• *The Christian significance of suffering*

Jesus spoke of his passion as “my hour” even though he thought of it with anguish — “Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me”. It was in fact by his passion and death that he redeemed the world. He was his Father’s apostle above all on Golgotha; and we are reminded of this daily in the eucharistic liturgy.

The following thoughts should help us understand the reasons for this.

Jesus lived his divine sonship to the full, open to the will of his Father and in total obedience. He translated his apostolic zeal into an absolute self-oblation — both when the time for action arrived (and he began his public ministry), and when it was the time for suffering in Gethsemane and on Calvary. In both his action and suffering we see a single basic attitude: *his filial love was ever ready for both action and suffering.*

It must be the same with us too as adopted sons of God and living out our apostolic consecration: we must be ready for both action and suffering. What really matters is our self-oblation in the achievement of God’s plans. The culmination of



our sonship must be the same as Christ's: self-donation in action in untiring zeal for the building of the Father's kingdom; and self-donation in suffering, giving first place to the "action of the Father" whenever he so wills.

Urs von Balthasar writes, "Christian availability can be perfect and significant in both action and suffering; and this makes it superior to the great dedication and availability of communism".

It is faith that directs our dedication and availability — we have the certainty that the most dedicated man in all history is Christ.

The awareness of such availability suggests that we explore further the two aspects of our vocation so often under discussion: the importance of *mission* and the importance of *contemplation*.

Apostolic mission does not consist solely in action. Christ's life makes this very clear: his mission as saviour of mankind involved both action and passion closely bonded together, each imbuing the other and totally inseparable.

Much has been said and at great length about *mission*, but not all the discussions have had the mystery of Christ as their starting point. Apostolic mission is possible only with self-donation to the Father for the achievement of *his* plan of salvation. It is far more than our driving energy translated into activity, creativeness and planning: it includes affliction, suffering and death in conformity with the will of God.

*Contemplation*, or more correctly the *contemplative aspect*, is assuredly the vital centre of every religious life. Much of the discussion regarding *action* and *contemplation* has failed to attribute the true Christian significance to these concepts. We

shall better understand matters if we meditate on Christ's passion.

Charity is the driving force of both the apostolic and the contemplative life; and filial availability, lived in suffering, makes us see clearly that the final aim of this charity is total self-oblation in the participation of the mystery of Christ. Thus we can say that total love reaches beyond the active or contemplative life, for in both it aims at complete self-oblation for the Kingdom of Christ and his Father.

Given that the basis of apostolic commitment is in fact filial availability to the Father then every "action-spirituality" is always open to suffering: as though it would affirm that "absolute action" can only derive from the Father.

To quote Urs von Balthasar again, "A Christian cannot separate action and contemplation, for in truth an attentive, receptive and open availability to the Father is the basis of his every action; and this action must strive to surpass itself in a more profound activity — which (in the form of suffering) is the very action of God within man when he is swept beyond his own proper limits. Christian living, then, is always impelled beyond these two aspects (contemplation and action); and these latter do not achieve mutual perfection from without but within themselves by their mutual compenetration. One who sees the Church merely as a sociological entity cannot fathom this compenetration".<sup>6</sup>

In suffering and sickness, old age and infirmity, in anguish and even at the point of death, we shall derive much comfort in knowing that we are not excluded from the apostolate, but rather that we are making a real contribution and furthering its fulfilment. The most important grace we should

6. Urs von Balthasar: *Au delà de l'action et de la contemplation?* in *Vie Consacrée* (March-April 1973-4).

seek is not to avoid suffering but to be utterly at the disposition of our Father so that we can say with St Paul, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church".<sup>7</sup>

7. Col I 24.

St Peter too exhorts us thus, "But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed".<sup>8</sup>

8. 1 Pet IV 13.

### *Frightening demands of sin*

The Christian consideration of suffering may seem quite outmoded in these modern times, when our civilisation is permeated with an ever growing worldliness. The dimming vision of a God among men, and a certain manipulation of the mystery of Christ are gradually whittling away our awareness of sin. This is a fatal loss. The ethics of modern life are becoming more and more relative every day, and moral principles are being aggressively challenged. The forthcoming episcopal synod is timely indeed with its topic of reconciliation and penance. Without a sense of sin man no longer understands the mystery of the cross, the sacrifice of Calvary, martyrdom in the Church, or suffering amongst the faithful.

Christ came not for the just but for sinners. He is the lord of mankind throughout all history — but by means of his redeeming action. "This is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant; it will be shed for you and for all men so that sins may be forgiven."<sup>9</sup>

9. Eucharistic Prayer.

The passion and death of Christ remind us of the enormous abyss created by the sins of mankind, our own sins and the sins of our charges. Christ

the Just One suffered and died for us sinners and left to his Church throughout the centuries the mysterious and salvific mission of taking up the cross daily and following in his footsteps.

Simply to desire to suffer and die could be diagnosed as some kind of pathological deviation. But to be called to participate in the passion and death of the Redeemer is a sublime gift from God and a duty that is indispensable for man's salvation. In order to destroy sin the Father's own Son had to suffer and die; and his Spirit lives in the Body of Christ, the Church, perfecting it in a love that points the way to martyrdom.

### *The splendour of martyrdom*

"Some Christians have been called from the beginning, and will always be called, to give this greatest testimony of love to all, especially to persecutors. Martyrdom makes the disciple like his master, who willingly accepted death for the salvation of the world; and through it he is conformed to him by the shedding of blood. Therefore the Church considers it the highest gift and supreme test of love."<sup>10</sup>

The martyr cannot be reduced to a mere hero; he possesses far more than personality, magnanimity and selflessness. The martyr is humble and full of love; there is no hatred in him, and when he dies he forgives; he seeks neither glory nor fame; he does not presume to teach others what bravery is — maybe he even lacks courage himself; he proclaims no ideologies and seeks no monument; he is no Socrates, no known or unknown warrior. It has been rightly said that the Christian martyr "does not die for an idea, even the most sublime;

10. LG 42.

nor for the dignity of man, nor for liberty, nor solidarity with the downtrodden — though all these motives could be present and play their various parts; fundamentally the martyr dies with Someone who has already died for him”.

His faith, his hope and his charity impel him to witness, even to the shedding of blood, that for him “to live is Christ”, and by baptism he is urged on to be “crucified with him”.

One of the great martyrs of early times, St Ignatius of Antioch, has expressed this concept clearly and earnestly. On his journey to Rome and under sentence of a martyr's death, he wrote to the Christians there, begging them not to try to prevent his supreme act of love, “Be good! I know what is best for myself. Now I am beginning to be a true disciple. Be my good friends and do not hinder me from entering into the true life; do not seek my spiritual death. Do not abandon to the world and material allurements one who wishes to belong to God; let me journey forth to the pure light; let me imitate the passion of my God”.<sup>11</sup>

Martyrdom is not the result of personal planning: it is a *gift of God* accepted in joy and freedom — just as Jesus, though tasting the bitterness of the chalice of suffering, “freely accepted it”.<sup>12</sup>

The whole secret of martyrdom lies in being at the disposition of the Father to the extent of total self-oblation manifested in suffering and death. This willingness to suffer even unto death is the supreme manifestation of charity. “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.”<sup>13</sup> “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”<sup>14</sup> Christ shed his blood for us, and his passion has become a liturgy,

11. St Ignatius to the Romans V 3 & VI 3.

12. v. Eucharistic Prayer II.

13. Jn XIII 1.

14. Jn XV 13.



the sacrifice of the New Covenant to establish in the world the Pasch of Christ.

We have already noted, however, that martyrdom among the People of God is a *gift by way of exception*.

Nevertheless it should be the ideal of all of us to be available to share in the passion of Christ. The Council tells us, "While it is given to few to be martyrs, all however must be prepared to confess Christ before men and follow him along the way of the cross amidst the persecutions which the Church never lacks".<sup>15</sup>

• *Bloodless martyrdom in the spirit of Don Bosco*

Every asceticism has its own particular style of oblation and self-donation in the bloodless sharing in the passion of Christ.

In the spirit of Don Bosco this particular style is countersigned in the light of our *da mihi animas* lived every inch of the way to its extreme consequences — an apostolic life permeated with the mystique of a bloodless martyrdom so as to truly conform to Christ in total self-donation for the sake of the Kingdom.

In November 1877 on the occasion of the 3rd missionary expedition, Don Bosco spoke from the pulpit of the basilica of Mary Help of Christians and alluded to the death of Fr Baccino: "Missionaries must be ready for anything, even to the point of sacrificing their lives for the preaching of the Gospel. So far the salesians have not had to suffer really grave sacrifices or afflictions, with the exception of the death of Fr Baccino. Those who knew him say that he died a victim of the burden and fatigue of the apostolate; he could be called a martyr of charity who sacrificed himself for the good of others.

15. LG 42.

Truly we have lost a hardworking missionary; but we have gained a protector in heaven.”<sup>16</sup>

16. MB XIII 315-316.

Later Pope Pius XI, speaking of Don Bosco, placed special emphasis on the importance of his suffering, saying, “Besides martyrdom of blood there is also the martyrdom that is bloodless; indeed there are innumerable bloodless martyrdoms to be found in the various conditions and degrees in the social ladder”.<sup>17</sup>

17. MB XIX 113.

Among the many bloodless martyrdoms the one that is characteristically salesian is genuine abandonment to the apostolate — Don Bosco refers to “the martyr of charity who sacrifices himself for the good of others”.

Our Founder answered the Lord’s ecclesial call to a vocation of pastoral dedication, and he tailored his self-oblation in accordance with his first and overriding principle: availability to God in the spirit of *da mihi animas*. Don Bosco was not told how he was to die; but he knew well that he had to give himself unsparingly to the apostolate right to the point of death.

We can well imagine our Founder taking his inspiration from St Paul, who considered it a gain to die for Christ, but nevertheless put himself absolutely at the disposition of the Father, and in view of his neighbour’s good he willingly accepted life and the burden of his apostolic mandate, saying, “Life to me of course is Christ; but then death would bring me something more; but then again, if living in this body means doing work which is having good results — I do not know what I should choose ... but for me to stay alive in this body is a more urgent need for your sake. This weighs with me so much that I feel sure I shall survive and stay with you all and help you”.<sup>18</sup>

18. Phil I 21-25.

In this sense the following words of Don Bosco quoted by Fr Barberis are full of significance: "Let us hope in the Lord. In our missionary undertakings we shall go ahead as in all other things — placing all our confidence and all our hope in him, and at the same time not sparing ourselves in energetic endeavour. Every possible means of safety must be employed so that no lives are lost at the hands of the natives. It is true that death is a great reward for a martyr...; nevertheless by staying alive through using greater precautions, missionaries will be able to reach and save innumerable souls who otherwise would not hear the Gospel".<sup>19</sup>

Don Bosco's way of self-oblation in the apostolate consisted above all in the "colossal labours" of an apostle, to use Pius XI's phrase. His pastoral activities were beset with all sorts of hardship and suffering, physical, moral and spiritual — afflictions that even undermined his physical health, as is evidenced throughout his whole life. In 1884 Don Lemoyne wrote to Don Rua, "This morning Don Bosco told me that he was mentally exhausted... In forty-eight years how he has suffered! This is something that should be pointed out to all, great and small, for unfortunately they very easily forget about it".<sup>20</sup>

Such tribulations were accepted by our Founder and in his apostolic ardour they made sense, for the true explanation of his "suffering freely accepted" lay in his *da mihi animas*. All this furnishes us with a practical understanding of Don Bosco's words, "If it should ever happen that *through labouring for souls a salesian should become ill and die*, then you may say that our Congregation has carried off a great victory and will be blessed abundantly by God".<sup>21</sup>

19. MB XII 280.

20. MB XVII 89.

21. MB XVII 273  
VII 487.

As we have seen, this is what Don Bosco means when he refers to our bloodless suffering as a "martyrdom of love and sacrifice for the good of others".

It is this same "apostolic charity for the good of others" that characterised the sufferings and shedding of blood of our two martyrs: they were killed because they were active Christian apostles and particularly because they were defending the human dignity and virtue of three young Chinese girls. It was from this characteristic salesian spirit that Bishop Versiglia and Father Caravario derived their supreme capacity for suffering and the shedding of blood. Indeed we know that Bishop Versiglia had foreseen the fulfilment of his salesian missionary vocation according to Don Bosco's prophetic dream, when he said to Fr Sante Garelli, "You are bringing me the chalice seen by our Founder; it is I who must fill it with blood".

### *The apostolic value of all suffering*

Don Bosco's understanding of bloodless suffering accepted and lived according to the mystique of *da mihi animas* includes the afflictions of sickness, disease, infirmity, old age, and the agony and pains of natural death; it requires that we endure all for love of Christ, for the salvation of souls, in expiation for our sins and those of our charges, for the efficacy of our fellow labourers and co-workers in the undertakings confided to us.

In the August of 1885 when Don Bosco was getting on in years and full of aches and pains, he spoke thus to the young Daughters of Mary Help of Christians at Nizza Monferrato, "You are all so young, and I sincerely hope you will be able to grow

old without the inconveniences of old age. I used to think that old age was possible without so many ailments, but I am only too well aware now that age and infirmities are inseparable. The years roll on and bring with them their aches and pains. We must accept them as our cross sent by the Lord, a cross that generally goes contrary to our will, a cross that is never lacking — especially in the case of rectresses and novice mistresses, who are in a particular way *occupied with the salvation of others*. I must accept willingly and cheerfully all distress and tribulation, for it is the cross imposed on me by the good Lord”.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, Fr Peter Ricaldone assures us that “Don Bosco was a great believer in St Teresa’s saying, and used to quote it often, ‘The sick and infirm draw down God’s blessings on the house’. He showed an infinite care and tenderness for those of his sons who were ill”.<sup>23</sup>

Ailing confreres were for Don Bosco a kind of “paschal mediation” for obtaining the blessings of the Lord on the apostolic activities of the community.

Sufferings accepted in the spirit of *da mihi animas* do not exclude a confrere from the pastoral campaign: in fact they place him in the very front trenches and invest him with a distinctive role. Our active asceticism does not teach us to bypass or eliminate affliction; it accepts it and turns it to good account by transforming it into a means of salvation.

Furthermore, suffering accepted as a participation in the mystery of Christ has an important apostolic value. Naturally it brings with it a certain distress that is understandable (after all, Christ himself was “sad even unto death”); but there is also a deep and vibrant joy in being a participant in the redeeming mission of the Saviour.

22. MB XVII 555.

23. Ricaldone: *Fidelity to St John Bosco*, ASC 1936, no. 74.



A few weeks ago the Holy Father spoke to the sick and infirm, "It may seem strange and contradictory to speak to you of joy, my dear friends; yet this is exactly what the topsy-turvy message of Christianity is all about. The joy I speak of is interior, mysterious, sometimes bedewed with tears: but it is always a living joy because it is born of the certitude of God's love — God is always our Father, even life's pains and adversities; and it is a joy that derives from the knowledge that suffering brings its eternal rewards for mankind, especially those afflicted and distressed and bereft of all human consolation".<sup>24</sup>

24. *Osservatore Romano*,  
13 Feb. 1983.

The secret of such a paradoxical attitude can be nothing other than the passion of Christ. At the conclusion of Vatican II the Council Fathers rightly affirmed in one of their messages, "Christ did not abolish suffering; nor did he lift the veil entirely from its mystery; the fact that he made suffering a part of his own life is enough for us to gauge how valuable it is".<sup>25</sup>

25. *Message to the poor, the sick and all who are suffering*, 8 Dec. 1965.

It could indeed he added that our Christian faith helps us to use suffering as a schooling for maturity: affliction perfects the heart, increases humility, augments wisdom, makes for greater awareness of the transcendency of true love; a man without suffering runs the risk of being less human. In fact, the perfect man is the crucified and risen Christ.

- *Care, respect and affection for our sick and suffering confreres*

Dear confreres, and I address myself especially to confreres who are ailing and suffering, the beatification of our first two martyrs will help us attain further insights and put a much higher value

on the mysterious riches of Christian suffering.

Our faith teaches us that one who has received an apostolic mandate from God never "retires". There is no such thing as a "retired salesian". No confrere should ever consider himself "excluded from the salesian mission".

I quote the words of the Council Fathers to encourage all confreres who are suffering illness and affliction, the distress of weakness or approaching death: "You are the brothers of the suffering Christ; and if you so will, you can be his partners in saving the world... Rest assured that you are not alone, not cut off, not abandoned, not useless; you are called by Christ himself; you are his clear and living image. In his name (the Congregation) salutes you with love, thanks you, assures you of friendship and help, and implores God's blessing on you".<sup>26</sup>

You are a reminder to all that no one becomes holy without the particular cross God gives him, and that there is a close and indissoluble relationship between suffering and mission.

Together let us lift our eyes to Christ. Together let us learn from him that to be true sons of our Father demands self-oblation to the point of death. *This is my body, given up for you; this is my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.*

Suffering is a part of our mission; and it is an element that is precious and efficacious.

There is so much evil to expiate — our own sins and the sins of our charges. There are so many seedlings thirsting for the chalice of the Covenant. There is so much grace we need that must come to us through the mediation of the paschal mystery. Love that is bonded with suffering is a treasure to be prized; it must never be lacking among us.

Pascal had composed a fine "prayer to be said

26. *ibid.*

by the sick". The Pope has invited us to meditate on it: "My God, help me to bow in silent adoration when I contemplate the order of your wondrous providence in the government of life. Give me the grace to join your consolations to my sufferings so that I may suffer as a Christian should. I beg you Lord that I may experience together both the natural tribulations brought about by my sins, and the consolations of your Spirit through your graciousness".<sup>27</sup>

27. *Osservatore Romano*,  
13 Feb. 1983.

I would humbly recall to all confreres that meditation on the apostolic qualities of suffering should be an inspiration to us to live up to our family tradition of well over a century — to tend to our sick and suffering confreres with exemplary charity and kindness.

To quote again from Fr Ricaldone: "Let us treat our ailing and suffering confreres with the same attention and delicacy that we in their place would wish to receive from others. How much pleasure and comfort we can give the suffering with such simple manifestations of fraternal affection as a kind word, some sign of interest and sympathy, a greeting, a promise of prayer.

"It is most important that we should never give the slightest impression that a sick confrere is a burden to us — by an impatient word, by neglect, coldness or gruffness, or worse still by hastening to be rid of him by passing the responsibility on to others.

"When Don Alasonatti became ill, Don Bosco gave himself no peace; he did his utmost to have him restored to health again; and no matter where Don Bosco was, his thoughts were always on his ailing son. What a heart our Fonuder had!"<sup>28</sup>

May these thoughts, suggested by the martyrdom

28. Ricaldone: *Fidelity to St John Bosco*, ASC 1936, no. 74.

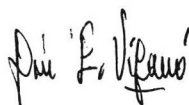
of Bishop Versiglia and Father Caravario, help us to fathom the depths of our apostolic spirituality and realise the importance and fruitfulness of suffering.

We are called to apostolic dedication in the footsteps of Christ; and we are accompanied by Mary whose plenitude of love lay in her availability — “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word”.

Let us ask our two martyred confreres that our Congregation and all the Salesian Family may gain an ever greater knowledge and appreciation of the mystique of our *da mihi animas* lived to its utmost limits and consequences “in blood, sweat and tears”.

I wish you all every Easter blessing.

Sincerely yours in the joy of the beatification of our first two martyrs,



Father EGIDIO VIGANÒ,  
*Rector Major*