

acts

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

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ANIMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

N. 322
year LXVIII
july-september
1987

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**Editrice S.D.B.
Edizione extra commerciale**

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Via della Pisana, 1111
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1. LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

THE MARIAN YEAR

Introduction. - Why a Marian Year. - Dynamic ecclesial perspectives. - The mother and son relationship in Christ's testament at Golgotha. - Our Act of Entrustment to Mary. - The three elements in the prayer of entrustment. - The Marian aspect of our Profession. - Special commitment of the Salesian Family. - Conclusion.

Rome, Solemnity of Pentecost, 7 June 1987

My dear confreres,

I am writing this letter on the feast of Pentecost. May the Holy Spirit dwell in your hearts and give you interior growth!

This day, the Solemnity of Pentecost, sees the beginning of the special Marian Year declared by the Holy Father in his encyclical letter "Redemptoris Mater" (RM). The jubilee will continue until the Solemnity of the Assumption of Our Lady into heaven of the year 1988.¹ It is the Pope's wish that the "fullness of grace" of her "the one who has believed" should enlighten and guide the Church's faith as she passes through these last years of the twentieth century.

The Holy Spirit dwelt in Mary from the first moment of her conception, and the Blessed Virgin was intimately aware of his presence. She, the Mother of Jesus by the power of the Spirit, lived the experience of Pentecost with the Apostles and saw her motherhood extend to the whole of the Church. With the Spirit and in the Spirit she brings us to Christ, and with Christ and in Christ she leads us to the Father.

¹ Cf. RM 49-50

This Marian Year will serve to deepen and increase our faith.

For a period of no less than seven months it coincides with our Don Bosco centenary celebrations. In this way it will enable us to emphasize and live more intensely some characteristic and important aspects of Mary's initiatives and presence in the vocation and mission of the Salesian Family.

To this end I now invite you to reflect on the significance this Marian Year can have for us, by recalling and considering some reflections I would like to make on the Act of Entrustment of the whole Congregation to Mary Help of Christians which we made in solemn form on 14 January 1984.

Why a Marian Year

We may wonder in the first place why the Pope has proclaimed this extraordinary jubilee in Mary's honour.

In the encyclical "Redemptoris Mater", of 25 March last, he himself gives us the explanation. As well as recalling two historical and ecclesial events of particular significance, he gives as the fundamental reason the saving fact that even at the present day Mary continues to go before the People of God "as a figure or model"² in its pilgrimage.

The two historical and ecclesial events are:

— "*the twelfth centenary of the Second Ecumenical Council of Nicaea* (787). Putting an end to the well-known controversy about the cult of sacred images, the Council defined that, according to the teaching of the holy Fathers and the universal tradition of the Church, there could be exposed for the veneration of the faithful, together with the

² RM 5

Cross, also images of the Mother of God, and of the saints”;³

— and “*the Millennium of the Baptism of St Vladimir, Grand Duke of Kiev (988)*. This marked the beginning of Christianity in the territories of what was then called Rus’, and subsequently in other territories of Eastern Europe ... as far as the northern territories of the Asian continent”.⁴ This recalls with an ecumenical sensitivity of some importance two facts which will move us to intensify our prayer for a growth of faith and Christian unity in the Soviet Union.

But the main reason for the proclamation of the Marian Year is the *mystery of the “fullness of time”*.

“The expression ‘fullness of time’ (says the encyclical in a note) ... means not only the conclusion of a chronological process but also and especially the coming to maturity or completion of a particularly important period, one directed towards the fulfilment of an expectation, a coming to completion which thus takes on an eschatological dimension. According to Gal 4,4 and its context, it is the coming of the Son of God that reveals that time has, so to speak, reached its limit. That is to say, the period marked by the promise made to Abraham and by the Law mediated by Moses has now reached its climax, in the sense that Christ fulfils the divine promise and supersedes the old law”.⁵

We may also add that from the time of that “fullness” onwards time has been enriched by a new dimension, which gives it a permanent capacity for rejuvenation; in fact, into its irresistible horizontal forward movement (as measured by clock and calendar) Christ has inserted the vertical dynamism of the resurrection (or in other words of eter-

³ RM 33

⁴ RM 50

⁵ RM 1, note 2

nity), which enriches it with eschatological energy. And so in the “time of the Church” the People of God will make their earthly pilgrimage passing from one beginning to another (as the Fathers say) until the final beginning, i.e. through a series of periods of renewed youth until they eventually reach the definitive youth of the final resurrection. In this way “the Church journeys through time towards the consummation of the ages and goes to meet the Lord who comes”.⁶

RM 2

The circumstance which moved the Pope to draw attention to this subject “is the prospect of the year 2000, now drawing near, in which the Bimillennial Jubilee of the birth of Jesus Christ at the same time directs our gaze towards his Mother. Mary appeared on the horizon of salvation history before Christ. The fact that she ‘preceded’ the coming of Christ is reflected every year in the liturgy of Advent. Therefore, if to that ancient historical expectation of the Saviour we compare those years which are bringing us closer to the end of the second Millennium after Christ and to the beginning of the third, it becomes fully comprehensible that in this present period we wish to turn in a special way to her, the one who in the ‘night’ of the Advent expectation began to shine like a true ‘Morning Star’. For just as this star, together with the ‘dawn’, precedes the rising of the sun, so Mary from the time of her Immaculate Conception preceded the coming of the Saviour, the rising of the ‘Sun of Justice’ in the history of the human race”.⁷

And so the main reason for the proclamation of this Marian Year is that the Holy Father feels *the prophetic need “to emphasize the unique presence of the Mother of Christ in history, especially during these last years leading up to the year 2000”.*⁸

RM 3

RM 3

It is a vista of memory and prophecy, of thanksgiving and hope. While in fact we are preparing to commemorate with immense gratitude the bimillennial anniversary of the birth of Christ, we look upon the beginning of the Third Millennium as a time of rejuvenation of the Church's life, one of those new beginnings which exploit the energy of the resurrection definitively inserted in time by Christ. The prediction, stimulus and source of this new beginning is the visit made to the Church by the Holy Spirit in the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council.

In the Congregation, following on the labours of the General Chapters which have taken place in the postconciliar period, we are now experiencing the auspicious results of the Council. Our sincere efforts at renewal provide the salesian contribution to the rejuvenation of the pilgrim Church.

Dynamic ecclesial perspectives

The Pope tells us in the encyclical that "the Church is called not only to remember ... but also, on her own part, to prepare for the future: for the end of the Second Christian Millennium opens up as a new prospect".⁹

The appeal to look towards the year 2000 is not, as some journalists have implied, an apocalyptic obsession, as though what was in mind was some kind of catastrophe in line with the medieval "a thousand years and the world will come to an end". It is rather an "eschatological view" opening onto new times and how the Church must be rejuvenated so as to evangelize them.

As at the start, so in every new beginning there is the indispensable "maternal cooperation of the

⁹ RM 49

Mother of God".¹⁰ This is an element willed by God in salvation history. It is an objective reality, a way leading to a better future.

¹⁰ RM 49

It is the Pope's wish that this jubilee year shall extend from Pentecost to the Assumption, to indicate the space of time during which Mary accompanied the newborn Church; it was the period during which Our Lady was constantly in prayer with the apostles and disciples, and lived the consummation of her faith as "mother", as the new Eve, following upon the last will and testament of Jesus on the Cross: "Woman, behold your son".¹¹

¹¹ Jn 19,26

The Pope's encyclical is a biblical and theological meditation on Mary's role in salvation history in the light of Chapter 8 of "Lumen gentium".

He has chosen as the key to the understanding of this role Elizabeth's prophetic declaration: "*Blessed is she who believed*".¹²

¹² Lk 1,45; cf. RM 12

The path to be followed on the journey towards God finds its most sublime expression in Mary's pilgrimage of faith. It is not a static kind of faith, as though it had achieved its entire objective on the day of the Annunciation, but a faith in continual growth between obscurity and new lights, open to the discovery of an ever deeper collaboration; not the simple possession of a satisfied mind, but the ardent seeking of a thirsty heart. The starting point is the great "Yes" of the Incarnation, but how many new situations had to be examined and what a long night had to pass until Pentecost and the Assumption! The veil which covered her Son did not become completely transparent until she saw him in heaven. Like the faith of Abraham, that of Mary grew continuously as she hoped against all hope.

"At the Annunciation Mary entrusted herself to God completely, with the 'full submission of intel-

lect and will', manifesting 'the obedience of faith' to him who spoke to her through his messenger. She responded, therefore, with all her human and feminine 'I', and this response of faith included both perfect cooperation with 'the grace of God that precedes and assists' and perfect openness to the action of the Holy Spirit, who 'constantly brings faith to completion by his gifts'.¹³

Her method of cooperation with God's grace gradually became concentrated into collaboration with Christ's work of redemption. Already at the marriage feast at Cana Mary collaborated as a "Woman" (it was by this name that Jesus addressed her on that occasion), as though to indicate in her the second Eve, interceding and helping. At the foot of the Cross, with the New Covenant just beginning, she experienced the indescribable paradox of the obedience of faith: "this is perhaps the deepest 'kenosis' of faith in human history".¹⁴ She is the second Eve who "becomes in a certain sense the counterpoise to the disobedience and disbelief embodied in the sin of our first parents. Thus teach the Fathers of the Church and especially St Irenaeus, quoted by the Constitution 'Lumen Gentium': 'The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience; what the virgin Eve bound through her unbelief, Mary loosened by her faith'".¹⁵

And it is precisely in this obscure fullness of faith that Mary attains the summit of "mother of the living". Christ's testament on the Cross reveals the mystery of "Mary's new motherhood", generated by faith through her most intimate and painful sharing in the redemptive love of her Son.

"The words uttered by Jesus from the Cross (says the encyclical) signify that the motherhood of

¹³ RM 13

¹⁴ RM 18

¹⁵ RM 19

her who bore Christ finds a ‘new’ continuation in the Church and through the Church, symbolized and represented by John. Thus she remains in the mystery of Christ as the ‘woman’ spoken of by the Book of Genesis (3,15) at the beginning, and by the Apocalypse (Rev 12,1) at the end of the history of salvation. In accordance with the eternal plan of Providence, Mary’s divine motherhood is to be poured out upon the Church ... as a reflection and extension of her motherhood of the Son of God”.¹⁶

¹⁶ RM 24

The mother and son relationship in Christ’s testament at Golgotha

John Paul II states in the encyclical that “motherhood in the order of grace” preserves the analogy of the mutual relationships between mother and son and applies the principle to Christ’s testament on the Cross expressed in the singular to the apostle John as representative: “Behold your son!”.

The Pope considers as an essential element of motherhood the fact that a personal relationship is established with every child, a relationship which is mutual, unique and unrepeatable. “Even when the same woman is the mother of many children (he says), her personal relationship with each one of them is of the very essence of motherhood. For each child is generated in a unique and unrepeatable way, and this is true both for the mother and for the child. Each child is surrounded in the same way by that maternal love on which are based the child’s development and coming to maturity as a human being”.¹⁷

¹⁷ RM 45

And so the spiritual motherhood of Mary, while appearing as a gift which Christ offers personally to every human being in raising Mary to the status of

the “Second Eve”, is presented as a christian element of the New Covenant which links the disciple’s pilgrimage of faith with the motherly care of the “One who believed”, and who has become the co-redemptrix through a cooperation of love sustained by the greatest human faith. In this way the Virgin Mother shares objectively, in a special but subordinated manner, in the universal mediation of the Redeemer, the one and only true Mediator. “Taken up to heaven,” says the Constitution ‘*Lumen Gentium*’, “she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into their blessed home. Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress and Mediatrix”.¹⁸

And this motherly solicitude continues through the centuries until “all things come together under Christ as head”.¹⁹

John Paul II sees in Christ’s testament on the Cross the solemn and public investiture of the motherly mediation of Mary, which in consequence implies a related response of Marian filiation in the life of Christ’s disciples. And so their entrustment to Mary as their Mother is a christian fact which had its beginning at Golgotha.

“At the foot of the Cross”, says the Pope, “there begins that special entrusting of humanity to the Mother of Christ, which in the history of the Church has been practised and expressed in different ways ... The Marian dimension of the life of a disciple of Christ is expressed in a special way precisely through this filial entrusting to the Mother of

¹⁸ LG 62; cf. RM 38-41

¹⁹ Eph 1,10

Christ. *Entrusting* himself to Mary in a filial manner, the Christian, like the Apostle John, welcomes the Mother of Christ ‘into his own home’ and brings her into everything that makes up his inner life, that is to say into his human and Christian ‘I’: he ‘took her to his own home’. Thus he seeks to enter the sphere of action of her ‘maternal charity’”²⁰

²⁰ RM 45

Among the different ways of expressing and practising the entrustment of Christ’s disciples to Mary, we recall with particular joy and satisfaction the “*Act of Filiation*” promoted and recommended by Don Bosco in one of his little booklets published in 1869 in the Catholic Readings series, for the clients of Mary Help of Christians. The formula he drew up for making the Act situates the client concerned precisely at the foot of the Cross alongside the apostle John.

In the circular I wrote to you concerning the Entrustment to Mary in preparation for the GC22, I added that “the date and content of this Marian text composed by Don Bosco suggest a natural connection between the act of filiation and the distinctive name he gave to ‘his’ Sisters, the ‘Daughters of Mary Help of Christians’, whom he wished to show an exemplary filial trust in her”.²¹ Almost on the eve of the Marian Year they celebrated (9 May 1987) the 150th anniversary of the birth of St Mary Domenica Mazzarello, an auspicious anniversary for the whole Salesian Family.

²¹ AGC 309, p. 10-12

We know that our Father and Founder had an extraordinary Marian sensitivity, which matured through that strong ecclesial sense which led him to look on Our Lady as the “Help of Christian People” and “Mother of the Church”.

Our relationships of filiation towards Mary are

deeply ecclesial and dynamic in outlook for an apostolic activity of a youthful and popular kind. We are convinced of Mary's solicitous presence among us,²² of her continual intercession,²³ of her wise guidance as our teacher;²⁴ we look upon her always as the supreme model of the believer;²⁵ she is for us the "star of evangelization":²⁶ "we walk side by side with the young so as to lead them to the risen Lord. The Virgin Mary is present in this process as a mother. We make her known and loved as the one who believed, who helps and who infuses hope".²⁷

²² Cf. C 8

²³ Cf. C 84

²⁴ Cf. C 20

²⁵ Cf. C 92

²⁶ EN 82

²⁷ C 34

Our Act of Entrustment to Mary

On Saturday 14 January 1984, before the beginning of the GC22 which had to complete the great post-conciliar work of the rewriting of our Rule of Life, all the communities of the Congregation joined in spirit with the Chapter members, and the latter in the name of the provincial communities and as representatives of all the confreres made at Rome in the Generalate Chapel the Act of Entrustment to Mary.

This was done in the awareness that we were on the threshold of the year 2000,²⁸ or in other words at the dawn of a new period in the life of the Congregation in the Church's long pilgrimage.

On the occasion of this Marian Year that has been proclaimed by the Pope, it is very fitting that we should call to mind and consider more deeply the significance of that historic gesture we made.

The new text of the Constitutions has codified its contents: "The Virgin Mary showed Don Bosco his field of labour among the young and was the constant guide and support of his work, especially

²⁸ Cf. AGC 309, p. 8-9

in the foundation of our Society. We believe that Mary is present among us and continues her 'mission as Mother of the Church and Help of Christians'. We *entrust ourselves to her*, the humble servant in whom the Lord has done great things, that we may become witnesses to the young of her Son's boundless love".²⁹

²⁹ C 8

Though we did this three years before the announcement of the present Marian jubilee, we feel ourselves to be in joyful harmony with the fundamental reason for its proclamation, with the content of the encyclical which illustrates it and with the dynamic outlook in which we are invited to prepare for the beginning of the Third Christian Millennium.

I think that the famous "fair copy" of which our Father spoke as he looked into the future development and maturing of the Congregation lies precisely in the post-conciliar adaptation of his charisma "lived, preserved, deepened and constantly developed in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in a process of growth".³⁰

³⁰ MR 11

We must cultivate our faith awareness concerning the powerful and ceaseless intervention of the Lord's Spirit in the story of the life of Don Bosco and in these hundred years of development and apostolic work of his Family.

The Second Vatican Council was certainly an extraordinary visit of the Holy Spirit; we see him in the life of the Church, and we feel his presence ourselves in the renewal of the Congregation, even if it is only at its early stages. We are indeed witnessing the inception of a prophetic new beginning.

Our faith awareness invites us to become conscious of the special responsibility that devolves on us at this point in history, as though we found our-

selves invested with a real but unsought role of re-founding the Congregation, called to do “great things”. Let us recall what Don Albera wrote to the confreres at Easter 1918, quoting our great patron St Francis de Sales: “*Entrust yourself to Mary’s protection, Let us not be afraid to undertake great enterprises: if we have a burning love for her, she will obtain for us all we desire*”³¹

³¹ Circular
1965, p. 286 Letters,

All the “great things” we have to do to translate into practice our whole plan of renewal we expressed to Our Lady when in January 1984 we entrusted ourselves to her as individuals and as a Congregation. To bring them back clearly to your mind, I invite you to read with me once again the Act of Entrustment.

The three elements in the Prayer of Entrustment to Mary Help of Christians

The prayer expressing our solemn Act of Entrustment to Mary (reproduced as an appendix to this letter) is made up of three complementary elements: the first is one of adoration and praise of the Trinity, the second one of supplication and recalling of the memory of Christ, and the third an expression of filial trust and dedication to Mary Help of Christians.

I think it will be useful if we concentrate our prayerful attention on the formula of this Act of Entrustment. It provides rich matter for meditation: it manifests the very essence of the salesian spirit and is an invitation to follow confidently the path of renewal.

— **First element:** *God as seen in salesian contemplation.*

Praise and adoration of the infinite Love of the Trinity is expressed in sentiments of the heart of Don Bosco himself: a heart burning with apostolic zeal which finds in the contemplation of God its secret foundation and the stimulus that animates all its holiness, the “*da mihi animas*”. No one will ever understand Don Bosco unless he is first immersed in the mystery of the Trinity, to marvel at the infinite love of the Father who creates the world, gives everything to man and pardons him; the infinite love of the Son who becomes man in order to be like one of us, solid with us in everything (even suffering and death) and thus setting sinful man free, beginning with the poor and the humble; and finally the infinite love of the Holy Spirit who enters history, knocking on the heart of every individual and guiding the Church for the transformation of man, of society and of the world, and so offering to the Father a Kingdom of justice, peace and joy.

The Father is the God of mercy, the Son the God of liberation, the Holy Spirit the God of sanctification: one only God who is Love, a love wholly addressed to Man.

The contemplation of God seen in this fashion prompts the person who prays to collaborate fully and generously in the saving mission of Christ and of the Church; it gives rise to saints like Don Bosco who live oblivious to themselves in the ecstasy of apostolic activity.

“*We Salesians*”, proclaimed the members of the GC22, “*gathered together in the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, adore and give thanks with the heart of Don Bosco to the Father*

of infinite Love who so loved the world that he gave his only Son and sent the Holy Spirit for the redemption and sanctification of mankind.

Glory to you, merciful Father, redeeming Son and Sanctifying Spirit, the one and threefold saving Love!".

And in this sublime apostolic vision of praise and adoration the Salesian next turns his gaze to Mary and contemplates her person and role, to admire in her the masterpiece of a Mother and Helper linked with the infinite Love of God inserted in human history.

"We praise you, divine Trinity", the prayer continues, "for having given Mary a part in your saving work of redemption, raising her up to be the Mother of God and our Mother too".

This first “trinitarian element” is the fundamental attitude constantly present in a salesian heart, which gives dynamic energy to its efforts by repeating with Don Bosco in every enterprise: “da mihi animas”.

— **Second element:** *Christ's feelings in the salesian heart*

The plea in the second element of our Prayer of Entrustment, which at the same time brings Christ to mind, takes us to Calvary to pronounce that deep “Act of Filiation” which was proposed, as we have seen, by Don Bosco.³² We appeal directly to Jesus on the Cross to renew his legacy in favour of each one of us, when (as the Pope writes) “the Redeemer entrusts his mother to the disciple, and at the same time he gives her to him as his mother. Or in other words “the role of a son was attributed to the disciple in response to the love of the Mother”.³³

³² Cf. AGC 309, p. 11-12

³³ RM 45

The power of the Holy Spirit, sent to us by the risen Christ, can renew us too and inculcate in us the same sentiments of Christ.

Jesus is the new Man, the first fruit of the new world, who made his Mother the new Woman, the second Eve, who opens up with him the destinies of the new Humanity. We ask him to help us to be daily aware of this Marian filiation as a new pledge of hope and commitment:

“And you, Lord Jesus, Son of Mary and first fruit of the new creation, give us your Spirit so that he may enkindle in our hearts a share of your love. We beg you to renew for us your wondrous testament uttered on the Cross, when in title and endowment you made the Apostle John the son of your own Mother Mary. Repeat also for each of us those words: ‘Woman, behold your son’ so that we may always live with Mary in our home!”

In the encyclical the Holy Father notes that “the expression ‘took her to his own home’ goes beyond the mere acceptance of Mary by the disciple in the sense of material lodging and hospitality in his house; it indicates rather a *communion of life* established between the two as a result of the words of the dying Christ”.³⁴ For this reason he goes on to say that “entrusting himself to Mary in a filial manner, the christian, like the apostle John, ‘welcomes’ the Mother of Christ *‘into his own home’* and brings her into everything that makes up his inner life, that is to say his human and christian ‘I’: he ‘took her to his own home’. Thus the christian seeks to be taken into that ‘maternal charity with which the Redeemer’s Mother ‘cares for the brethren of her Son’”.³⁵

³⁴ RM 45, note 130

³⁵ RM 45

Now for the Salesian, the “things of his own home”, the great values of his spiritual heritage,

are what is contained in the apostolic consecration by which he is dedicated to pastoral work among the young and the poor, with a sense of Church and with kindness of method, which must now be renewed and intensified in preparation for the great jubilee of the year 2000.

This is why we add in our prayer to Christ:

"May she (Mary) remain with us as our mother; may she take us by the hand and be our inspiration as we bring the gospel message to the 'poor and the little ones'. May she help us to be living stones in the spiritual house of the Church and order our lives and activities in union with the Pope and the Bishops. May she help us to be attentive to God's word, zealous in the apostolate, and true prophets of hope in the coming third millennium of our Christian faith. May she teach us creativity in our pastoral concerns, and help us achieve that persuasive kindness and mortification that will make us skilled promoters of dialogue and friendship, especially among the young who are most in need".

And so this second element of supplication to Christ will obtain for us, through Mary, the ability to be more authentically salesian in this pregnant period in our history.

— **Third element:** *Salesian riches entrusted to Mary*

This third element of the prayer manifests an attitude of filial trust and confidence, and the entrustment to Mary of our principal salesian riches means that we give them to her in the joyful certainty that they will thus be given sure protection and will be developed by her solicitous and moth-erly intercession.

For this reason with Don Bosco we proclaim her our “Teacher and Guide”.

Among our own cherished possessions which we entrust to her, the principal ones are:

- our own persons in the first place, both individually and as communities;
- then our renewed Rule of Life to which we intend to bear witness in the different forms of communion in unity;
- commitment to sanctification in the daily liturgy of life;
- the flourishing of vocations and responsibility as regards formation;
- missionary generosity;
- the ability to give animation to the Salesian Family;
- and finally, as a practical synthesis and summit of everything, a burning pastoral love for the young.

The adoration of the Trinity at the beginning and the burning supplication to Christ, Son of Mary, have led our heart, in harmony with the Father’s plan and Christ’s testament, to respond to their initiative of love with the total and filial entrustment of ourselves and all we have to the Mother and Helper of the Church.

We shall have to return frequently on what is included in this gesture, and consider each of these principal “possessions” of ours which we have placed in Mary’s hands so as to live and foster them in communion of life with her.

This is the meaning we give to our prayer:

“O Help of Christians and Mother of the Church, we Salesians of Don Bosco entrust ourselves today to your kindly intercession on our behalf as individuals and as communities. We place

in your care the priceless riches of our Constitutions, our pledge to be faithful and united in our Congregation, the sanctification of all our members, the work by which we worship in intention and in act, the increase of vocations, the heavy responsibility of formation, the courageous and generous labours of our missionaries, the animation of the Salesian Family, and especially our assiduous ministry of predilection for the young.

With joy we proclaim you ‘Teacher and Guide of our Congregation’.

Don Bosco has assured us that the Blessed Virgin is the “foundress” of our Congregation and that she will be its “support”,³⁶ that only in heaven will we come to know with amazement what she has done for us,³⁷ that she will certainly continue to protect our Congregation if we maintain our trust in her³⁸ and that we will never go astray while she is truly our “Guide”.³⁹

We do well too to recall here that the famous dream of the “august personage” wearing a mantle with ten diamonds which presents the model of the true Salesian,⁴⁰ was considered by Don Bosco as a precious gift from Our Lady because it took place at San Benigno Canavese on the feast of the Holy Name of Mary; he chose to relate it on the feast of the Presentation of Our Lady in the Temple,⁴¹ so as to indicate that on Mary’s feasts he always expected special lights from heaven.⁴²

Entrustment to Mary, therefore, is a genuine expression of the heart, of a lived experience, and hence of intimate feelings dear to our holy Founder. Let us try to frequently renew our awareness of this fact; it will be an excellent way of moving with the Church towards the Third Millennium.

With Mary we shall not go astray: we shall

³⁶ BM 7, 197

³⁷ BM 10, 585

³⁸ MB 17, 261

³⁹ MB 18, 439

⁴⁰ Cf. AGC 300, April - June 1981

⁴¹ MB 15, 183

⁴² Cf. MB 18, 247

travel the true path of Christ for the building of the Kingdom.

Our prayer began in a descending manner from the Trinity through Christ to Mary, and it is fitting that it should end with the invocations of pilgrims who are moving upwards in the Spirit along the paths of history from Mary to Christ and with Christ to the Father.

In the prayer's conclusion we address ourselves to the Virgin Mother and ask for her help in our upward climb:

"Accept, we beg you, this filial Act of Entrustment and help us to participate ever more zealously in the final wish of your Son on Calvary: through him, with him and in him we resolve to live and labour untiringly to establish the Kingdom of our Father in the hearts of all men."

Mary Help of Christians, pray for us! Amen".

These reflections on the three complementary elements in our Prayer of Entrustment will prompt us to have greater trust and boldness in undertaking the "great things" which the Church, with the poor and the little ones, is expecting from us.

The Marian aspect of our profession

Among "our own special things" which we have entrusted to Mary our salesian Profession stands out as a fundamental reality.

In a certain sense it is the synthesis of all we are and all we have: it sums up the way in which we live as disciples of Christ; it traces out for us the way that leads to Love; it sets the evangelical dimension of our vocation and outlines the ecclesial project of our mission.

Our act of entrustment is meant to signify that

we carry out our profession in communion of life with Mary.

The consecration of the Father, who seals us “through the gift of his Spirit”,⁴³ brings it about also that Mary too “is present among us”⁴⁴ and guides us,⁴⁵ helping us “with her intercession”⁴⁶ “to love as Don Bosco did”,⁴⁷ to welcome and ponder the Word of God as she did so that it will bear fruit,⁴⁸ to grow “to the fullness of our offering”, to have “courage for the service of our brethren”, and to imitate “her faith, her concern for the needy, her fidelity at the hour of the cross and her joy at the wonders wrought by the Father”,⁴⁹ and so with her as Mother and Teacher we gradually become day by day true pastors and educators of the young⁵⁰ in accordance with what we have professed.

In the month of May 1988 (which occurs in both the Marian Year and the centenary year of Don Bosco) there will be a significant date that we want to solemnize with extraordinary spiritual intensity throughout the Congregation: it is that of Saturday, the 14th!

As has been already announced,⁵¹ that will be the “Day of the Salesian Profession”.

While we commemorate the religious profession of Don Bosco and the first 22 young confreres, which they made in 1862, we shall all renew our Profession.

Preparations are in hand in every province. The study and deeper analysis of the new text of the Rule of Life is the first obligation of every community in the urgent vocational task of responding to the challenges of the times. Ongoing formation is indispensable in every era, but it is especially so in this age of rapid changes if we want to ensure our vocational identity in the face of the questions

⁴³ C 3

⁴⁴ C 8

⁴⁵ Cf. C 20

⁴⁶ C 24

⁴⁷ C 84

⁴⁸ C 87

⁴⁹ C 92

⁵⁰ Cf. C 98

⁵¹ AGC 321, p. 42-44

which are continually emerging. The renewed text of the Rule of Life is the identity card of the Salesian of the new times, and for this it is very important to absorb its contents so that the intention to put it into practice may prove to be genuine and efficacious.

Next May 14 we want to relaunch our vocation and mission by renewing, all of us together, our religious Profession “according to the way of the Gospel set out in the salesian Constitutions”.⁵²

⁵² C 24

May Mary Help of Christians assist us and may St Mary Domenica Mazzarello, whose holy death we shall commemorate on that day, intercede for us so that we may be able to repeat with Don Bosco: I offer myself “in sacrifice to the Lord, ready to bear anything for his greater glory and the welfare of souls, particularly the souls of the young”.⁵³

⁵³ BM 7, 102

Special commitment of the Salesian Family

Among the members of the Central Committee for the Marian Year, appointed by the Holy Father on 11 February last, was Mother Marinella Castagno, Superior General of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. This is a gesture which gives honour to our Family and imposes a duty on us.

The FMA represent in living and enduring form Don Bosco's great love for Our Lady. It was his desire that the FMA should be a 'living monument' of his gratitude to the Help of Christians, and he asked them to be his 'thank- you' throughout all time.⁵⁴ The Sisters know that in our Family they have in a special way the task of deepening and developing the Marian dimension of all the members.

We "collaborate with them in deepening our

⁵⁴ FMA Const.4

⁵⁵ R 37

understanding of Don Bosco's spirituality and pedagogy, and particularly in keeping alive the Marian dimension of the salesian charism".⁵⁵

It will be a good thing, therefore, if during the Marian Year we join the FMA in promoting initiatives prompted by what the Pope offers us in his Encyclical, and brings to the young and to people in general the characteristics of Don Bosco's special Marian devotion.

With Mary, the Salesian Family will grow very much in mutual communion, in apostolic industry and in evangelizing impact.

Our Provincials will try to come to suitable arrangements with their FMA counterparts for studying together this matter with a view to common and opportune initiatives.

Article 74 of the Regulations speaks of our Marian devotion as an element to be taken into consideration also in the Provincial Directory, and adds: "The members, both individually and as a community, should feel the obligation of zealously spreading devotion to Mary Help of Christians". The same article recommends among other things that importance be given in our houses to the recitation of the Rosary: let us all keep it in mind!

The proclamation of this Marian Year to foster the Church's commitment for a new beginning, is therefore something particularly opportune and beneficial for the life of our Congregation and of the whole Salesian Family.

Conclusion

My dear confreres, I would like to bring these Marian reflections to a close by recalling the centenary of the Consecration of the temple of the

Sacred Heart, which took place in Rome on 15 May 1887. On Monday 16th, the day following the solemn consecration of the church, the by then old and ailing Don Bosco went down into the church to celebrate the Eucharist *at the altar of Mary Help of Christians*.

“No fewer than fifteen times during the holy sacrifice”, note the Biographical Memoirs, “he stopped, overcome by emotion and shedding tears. Don Viglietti who was assisting him had to recall his attention periodically so that he could continue. (When he was asked afterwards) what had upset him so much, Don Bosco replied: I saw very vividly before my eyes once again the scene I first saw about the age of ten when I dreamed of the Congregation. I saw again my mother and my brothers asking me questions about that dream...

It was then that Our Lady had said to him: ‘in due time you will understand everything’. Since that time he had lived through sixty-two years of fatigue, sacrifice and struggle, and then a sudden light had revealed to him in the erection of the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome the crowning of his mission, so mysteriously foreshadowed in the early years of his life”.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ MB 18, 341

Not by chance was his biographer Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, who knew him intimately, in an effort to understand why our Father was so magnanimous in his initiatives, why he was so daring in his enterprises for the Church and came up against so many problems and grave financial difficulties, led to declare: “Between the Madonna and Don Bosco there must have been an agreement; and we can believe that she frequently appeared to him and showed him what he should do and how to do it”.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ BM 10, 72

We are convinced that not only the temple of the Sacred Heart in Rome and every stone in the Basilica at Valdocco proclaim a grace from Our Lady,⁵⁸ but all the Works of Don Bosco, and in particular our Congregation, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Association of Salesian Cooperators, owe their inspiration to Mary, the Teacher and Guide who led Don Bosco to found the Salesian Family in the Church.

Mgr Costamagna recalls a phrase of our Father which is a magnificent synthesis of his conviction in this respect: “Mary has done everything!”.⁵⁹

In his mission as Founder our Father showed very clearly that he was not closed in on himself, nor confined to his own environment, time and culture (even though he was naturally incarnated in them), but he felt that he had permanent values to pass on to others, a patrimony and evangelical spirit to diffuse, pedagogical and pastoral criteria that were valid also for the future. He had in fact to convince himself that he was called personally to be a “Founder”, to project himself beyond his own times.

A charism is a living experience and it is as something alive that it must be passed on; in other words it is something fluid and capable of further development, always needing a creative intelligence for new incarnations in other times and other cultures, a spiritual legacy from the leader of a new school, enriched with further uninterrupted personal charisms organically incorporated into his own, according to the always consistent plan and call of the Holy Spirit.

A pliant and submissive approach of this kind links his mission as a Founder with the risen Christ and Mary who inject into time the energy of the

⁵⁸ Cf. BM 7, 280; BM 18, 338

⁵⁹ E. Valentini, “Scritti di vita e di spiritualità salesiana” LAS 1979, p. 144

resurrection, influencing events through the centuries and thus giving to history a texture of salvation and the innovative human and flexible physiognomy of Christ's Passover.

Such eschatological vitality is perceivable especially at the time of new ecclesial beginnings as is this tail end of the second millennium.

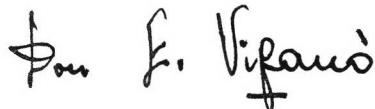
At Rome in May 1887 Don Bosco understood all that Mary had given him as his Teacher and Guide, and through that overall panorama of his seventy-two years of life he had a prophetic intuition (as he had had at other times) of the future of the Charisma he had been given. Like him, let us too put our trust in Mary for the fulfilment of the responsibilities laid upon us at this so significant moment in the history of the Church and the life of the Salesian Family.

At the end of this letter I would like to recall once again the 150th anniversary of the birth of St Mary Domenica Mazzarello, which was commemorated on 9 May last; the date not only recalls the designs of God in the preparation of the holy Co-foundress of the FMA, but reminds us in a living and permanent form of the Marian dimension in the whole Salesian Family, entrusted to the Help of Christians, Mother of the Church.

Let us ask this dear Saint to join Don Bosco, whom she always looked upon as her guiding star, in interceding for us that we may be given greater sensitivity in considering the Madonna as constantly present among us, and to help us to renew and live in a more ecclesial manner our apostolic consecration.

My hearty greetings to all of you in communion
of commitment and prayer. May the Holy Spirit
abound in our hearts and our communities

Affectionately in Don Bosco,



The signature is handwritten in black ink. It consists of the prefix "Don", followed by "F.", and the name "Viganò". The signature is fluid and cursive.

**Prayer for the Solemn Act
of Entrustment of the Salesian Congregation
to Mary Help of Christians**

(14 January 1984)

(Adoration and praise of the Trinity)

We Salesians, gathered together in the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, adore and give thanks with the heart of Don Bosco to the Father of infinite Love who so loved the world that he gave his only Son and sent the Holy Spirit for the redemption and sanctification of mankind.

Glory to you, merciful Father, redeeming Son and sanctifying Spirit, the one and threefold saving Love!

We praise you, divine Trinity, for having given Mary a part in your saving work of redemption, raising her up to be the Mother of God and our Mother too.

(Invocation of Christ and the recalling of his memory)

And you, Lord Jesus, Son of Mary and first fruit of the new creation, give us your Spirit so that he may enkindle in our hearts a share of your love. We beg you to renew for us your wondrous testament uttered on the cross, when in title and endowment you made the Apostle John the son of your own Mother Mary.

Repeat also for each of us those words “Woman, behold your son”, so that we may always live with Mary in our home!

May she remain with us as our mother; may she take us by the hand and be our inspiration as we bring the gospel message to the poor and the little ones. May she help us to be living stones in the spiritual house of the Church and order our lives and activities in union with the Pope and the bishops. May she help us to be attentive to God’s word, zealous in the apostolate, and true prophets of hope in the coming third millennium of our christian faith. May she teach us creativity in our pastoral concern, and help us achieve that persuasive kindness and mortification that will make us skilled promoters of dialogue and friendship, especially among the young who are most in need.

(Confidence in Mary and Entrustment to her)

O Help of Christians and Mother of the Church, *we Salesians of Don Bosco ENTRUST OURSELVES* today to your kindly intercession on our behalf as individuals and as communities. We place in your care the priceless riches of our Constitutions, our pledge to be faithful and united in our Congregation, the sanctification of all our members, the work by which we worship in intention and in act, the increase of vocations, the heavy responsibility of formation, the courageous and generous labours of our missionaries, the animation of the Salesian Family, and especially our assiduous ministry of predilection for the young.

With joy we proclaim you “Teacher and Guide of our Congregation”.

Accept, we beg you, this filial Act of Entrustment and help us to participate ever more zealously in the final wish of your Son on Calvary: through him, with him and in him we resolve to live and labour untiringly to establish the Kingdom of our Father in the hearts of all men.

Mary Help of Christians, pray for us. Amen.