

# acts

**of the General 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. ACTS OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

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### **"CHARISM AND PRAYER"**

- Introduction. - Fascination of charisms. - The individual in a praying dialogue. - The originality of christian prayer. - Through Christ with Christ and in Christ. - The cornerstone of christian prayer is "mental prayer". - The "goal" of prayer according to St Francis de Sales. - Let us renew our prayer. - Three cardinal points to be given priority. - May the Holy Spirit and Mary give us their help.

Rome - Solemnity of Assumption of Our Lady  
15 August 1991

My dear confreres,

During the recent months of June and July we have examined in the plenary session of the General Council various aspects of the life of the provinces at the present day. One of these, linked to some extent with our renewal, is the following: "Salesian spirituality and ecclesial Movements". This is a topic that can give us food for thought which will intensify our identity and, in some cases, save us from deviations.

A survey of the situation led to the conclusion that it is difficult to be exact concerning the consistency of the numerical participation of confreres in specific Movements. Some are involved in them in the role of ecclesiastical assistants (especially in our parishes); others take part in meetings only sporadically.

dically for information purposes; still others take part regularly, with the declared purpose of recharging their spiritual batteries; and finally there are some – few in number, I hope – who are so strongly attached to them as to imply a disaffection as regards the spirituality of their own proper charism.

We wondered what the reason was for this attraction towards such Movements. It seemed to us that in some cases it could be a reaction against a certain style of superficiality that may obtain in some houses: a kind of lack of religious authenticity in apostolic consecration, a felt need for greater interior conviction as against certain forms of activism. Some of those taking part in such movements feel a certain satisfaction because they claim to find in them a kind of immediate contact with the gospel, a deep rationality, a spiritual protagonism. But among the causes can also be an insufficient grasp of the nature of our own spirituality, which is realistic without excessive emotional aspects, balanced and practical, and aimed at developing educative activity in daily life. It is a spirituality in no way inferior to the others because, different modes of expression apart, every model of spiritual life approved by the Church represents an authentic road to holiness. Externally it appears quite ordinary; it has often been said that it is extraordinary precisely in being ordinary, composed of apparently small items which form nevertheless a vital organic whole rooted in a strong spiritual personality.

I invite you, therefore, to consider again and with greater attention the plan of our salesian spirituality (which for many years now we have been studying more deeply), and to concentrate your at-



<sup>1</sup> Cf. P. RICALDONE, *La Pietà: Vita di Pietà; l'Eucaristia*, vol III, in the series «Salesian Formation» - Colle Don Bosco 1955

tention on the life-giving element in all interior activity, which is that of prayer or, as we used to put it at one time, of the "spirit of piety".<sup>1</sup>

In considering so vital a matter we shall be spurred on by the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the beginning of the charisma of Don Bosco's Oratory which occurs on 8 December of this year.

### **Fascination of charisma**

It is a wonderful feeling to be involved in the renewing presence of the Holy Spirit. The People of God are at present in a charismatic period.

For years our renewal has followed this line, as also has that of many other religious Institutes. But in the Church have arisen also new charismata, like "ecclesial Movements". The Synod on the Laity (1987) dealt explicitly with this question.<sup>2</sup>

The Pope and the Bishops consider them in general as something positive: they dispel apathy and generate enthusiasm, they prompt creativity and lead to the acceptance of gospel responses to the challenges of the times.

But as in all human concerns, even spiritual ones, this phenomenon can give rise to erratic expressions of a strongly emotional kind, markedly intimistic in form, and insisting on the direct "guidance" of the Holy Spirit, without the need for mediation by authority or the community. It can even pose a risk at times at a pastoral level: either by substitution, or confusion, or monopolization by certain groups.

In this present number of the Acts the Vicar General, Fr Juan Edmundo Vecchi, indicates some

<sup>2</sup> CL 24

criteria for discernment in the light of the influence that participation in such movements can have on our identity.

Contact with other charismata should always serve to intensify attachment to our own.

The motivation underlying the participation of confreres in these Movements is especially that of seeking a greater interior spirit and more genuine prayer. For this reason let us reflect a little on "salesian prayer". *Charism and prayer* are inseparable from one another and together form a trait with a particular physiognomy. Every charism gives a particular tone to prayer, and at the same time demands its intense exercise.

Now to reflect on prayer we must first move beyond charisms, but nevertheless it will be useful to make some basic points about the relaunching of our own; they shake us up a good deal: without prayer no one can have a synthesis between faith and life; for us there is no reciprocal relationship between education and evangelization; there is no unity between consecration and professional work; there is no correspondence between interior disposition and external activity. In other words, without a prayerful interior: work is not sanctifying, human competence is not evangelical witness, educative commitments have no pastoral effect; and daily life is not religious. These statements may seem extreme or excessive, but they touch a sore point.

Lack of true prayer would be, for us, defeat on every front. Don Bosco himself has told us in writing: "Church history shows us that religious orders and congregations have all flourished and promoted the good of religion, as long as piety was maintained in vigour among them; on the other hand, we have seen not a few fall into decay, and others

cease to exist – and when? Only when the spirit of piety grew lax and their members began to seek the things that were their own and not the things which are of Jesus Christ (Phil 2,21), as St Paul lamented concerning certain christians”.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Regole e Costituzioni della Soc. di S. Francesco di Sales, «Introduzione»* - Turin 1885.

### **The individual in a praying dialogue**

But the fundamental attack on prayer comes from outside: it springs from the secularist interpretation of the present anthropological turnabout that characterizes cultural changes. The evolution of the signs of the times has a direct incidence on prayer: in both a bad and a good sense. Let us look at the two opposing results.

One effect is the secular interpretation that understands the emerging values only in anthropocentric form: it leads to agnosticism or various kinds of unbelief. In the secular world prayer is belittled; activity leads to a forgetting of the essential.

The other effect is the christian one which accepts the anthropological turnabout and considers man as the centre of the world; it interprets him in a way that makes sense; he is the protagonist of history; he bears in himself the mystery of being God's image; “you chose to create man in your own image,” we read in the Fifth Preface for Sundays in Ordinary Time, “setting him over the whole world in all its wonder. You made man the steward of creation, to praise you day by day for the marvels of your wisdom and power, and glorify you, Father and Creator, through Jesus Christ our Lord”.

And so Christ is, with us and for us, the “Man of Prayer”.

The christian faith has an all-round concept of man; it considers him not only as superior to other animals ("homo sapiens"), it not only admires his industrious nature ("homo faber"), nor his organizational and administrative ability ("homo oeconomicus"), nor does it stop at the progress he has made in science and technology ("homo technicus"), but detects the supreme dignity of his being in his ability to dialogue with God, in whose image he was formed. Endowed with such dignity, man discovers in the Creator and Saviour the "transcendent You" with whom he enters into relationship; he considers the world as a gift received from him and so feels himself loved and is filled with gratitude; this attitude makes him the "liturgist of the universe". Rightly has he been defined by one scholar (B. Haring) as "homo orans". A man who certainly esteems intelligence and culture, who dedicates himself to science and technology, who promotes social organization and political association, but who is also convinced that everything is not merely an "object" to be known, developed and exploited, but also the "gift" of Someone who loves him.

### **The originality of christian prayer**

Among the many definitions that have been given of prayer, a popular one is that of St Augustine: prayer is a dialogue with God.<sup>4</sup> But what kind of God? and what kind of dialogue?

<sup>4</sup> cf. PL 22, 411

In replying to this question we discover the originality of christian prayer. At the basis of everything is the objective nature of the world, reality and history. Praying does not mean evading reality, but rather penetrating it.

A religion with a concept of no more than an anonymous transcendence could result in a kind of alienation and reduce prayer to mere formulas of words to be repeated (or shouted, as Elias suggested to the false prophets). Who listened to them no one knows; idols – says the psalm – have eyes but do not see, and no sound comes from their mouths.

Christianity is specifically a “faith”: i.e. a glance that penetrates the reality and adheres to the mystery to be found in historical persons and events. This encounter gives rise in man to prayer as a dialogue of response to the “You” of the Creator and Saviour who loves him and continually challenges him.

This faith is completely centred on the man Christ and, in him, on the history and reality of the world. In Christ one understands who God truly is, and what the relationships are of the world and history with him; man feels himself to be in the situation of the prodigal son; he discovers that a pact of friendship exists, a Covenant to be lived in thrilling dialogue.

And so if we are to speak adequately of prayer we must go back first of all to the praying attitude of Christ, as the mature development of the experience of the former historical Covenants: Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses.

We must recognize the fact that Israel was the people of true prayer; it taught how to pray as a dialogue with God the Provident Creator; it was a very realistic people, that enjoyed the experience of God in its life. The blessings, psalms, various rites and festivals – the expressions of the prayer of this people – made the presence of God in time and in the world something that was felt: they had a taste for blessing and joy, adoration and thanksgiving,



praise and supplication, lamentation and asking for pardon, bold sentiments and the burden of obscurity, distress on account of the many difficulties and the living and convinced sense of trust, a whole universe of human and religious sentiments opened towards God.

A Jewish author, Robert Aron, describes in detail the intensity of his people's prayer: It made the day, the week and the months sparkle with stars; it filled the temple with dialogue with God. The study of this author can help us to imagine how assiduously pious Jews like Jesus, Mary and Joseph, used to pray.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> cf. ROBERT ARON, *Così pregava l'ebreo Gesù* - Mondadori 1988

To live without praying in an authentic and truly significant form leads to the sad result that we are not aware of the mystery of history and of the genuine significance of the world.

In the phenomenon of the Movements can be discerned, with special relevance to the present day, a strong reaction against the prevalent anthropocentrism, so terribly destructive of human dignity and vocation. To react against a climate which would seek to make the "homo orans" something merely marginal is certainly a fundamental part of teaching the faith at the present day.

### **Through Christ with Christ and in Christ**

Against the background of this complex overview of prayer, the question arises: but what kind of dialogue is christian prayer? Since it is something that takes place within the New Covenant, it must be said that at the centre is Jesus Christ, the Mediator. Faith unites us to him. With the Father he sends his Spirit who incorporates us into him:

<sup>6</sup> cf. Jn 15,1-7

“Remain in me as I in you. I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for whatever you please and you will get it”.<sup>6</sup>

Like faith, true prayer is a gift. It is at one and the same time personal, communal and liturgical. It has its own particular identity; to understand its essential elements it will be helpful to concentrate our attention on the *celebration of the Eucharist*.

Here we find the characteristic stages that reveal the dynamics of christian prayer.

— First there is a period that begins with a *penitential self-criticism*, supported by faith in the Father’s mercy: of great importance is a sincere attitude of humility in the face of one’s own shortcomings and limitations.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Jn 4,10

— Then there is a space for *listening to the word of God*, “who first loved us”,<sup>7</sup> with a comment of meditation which applies the Lord’s suggestions to the actual circumstances of life (the enlightening role of the homily!).

— This is followed by the *convivial symbolism* of the offertory and setting of the table, which leads to the dialogue in which ourselves and our work are offered through the symbolism of bread and wine (things small in themselves but of great significance: they will become food and drink for eternal life!); the prayer gives shape to the attitude of self-donation.

— Then begins the *personal dialogue* with the “You” of the Father (“Te igitur”): he is the great Friend to whom the whole celebration is directed and of whom are proclaimed the wonders of a creative, liberating and transforming love (adoration, praise, thanksgiving, trust).

— And so is reached the culmination of the cele-

bration in the "*memorial*" which, by the power of the Holy Spirit, makes present here and now the Passover event of the death and resurrection of Christ, the brother who is solid with everyone: this is the supreme human act of self-donation in man's response to God; the supreme liturgical moment of all in Christ; the high point of the Covenant; it is the existence conferred upon us: "Grant that we who are nourished by his body and blood, may be filled with his Holy Spirit, and become one body, one spirit in Christ. May he make us an everlasting gift to you".<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Eucharistic Prayer III

— Then is recited the "*Our Father*" with its two aspects of adoration and request. In the first part, after listening to what has been said of the Father's infinite kindness the heart erupts in a wonderful proclamation of hope: hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done. In the second part, a clear awareness of the concrete situations of our existence leads spontaneously to that "Give us this day" which includes in the prayer in a realistic manner both the present and past history, offences, forgiveness, temptations, etc.); the good Lord well knows how frail we are.

— Finally, we make our "*communion*" with the sacrament of the bread and wine, so as to form together a single Body and live and work for the salvation of others. And rightly the celebration ends with being *sent out in "mission"* to collaborate through our life and works for the full realization of the Covenant.

I think that this synthetic glance at the eucharistic celebration may prove enlightening to us as we try to go more deeply into the particular nature of christian prayer. We are struck at once by the fact that the starting point is in the humility of "listen-

ing” and leads eventually to being sent on the “mission”, passing through a living incorporation into the mystery of Christ: we become sons in the Son and solid with all our brethren. In this way the “homo orans”, brought back to the dignity of his first origin and far beyond it, causes God’s image to shine out in him.

### **The cornerstone of christian prayer**

On the part of the believer, it is indispensable that the dialogue of the Covenant begin with a listening attitude, prepared by penitent humility. The authenticity of prayer, as the beginning of a first response, is rooted in a *personal experience* of God: think, for instance, of Moses before the burning bush. His attitude was one of discovery and almost of surprise. It is the Lord who says: “Look, I am standing at the door knocking. If one of you hears me calling and opens the door, I will come in to share a meal at that person’s side”.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Rev 3,20

This attitude of attentive listening is found to be particularly fruitful in the form we know as “mental prayer”, to which the great Spanish saints of the sixteenth century gave its most developed form. Mental prayer is not in fact a practice reserved to monks and hermits, but the very foundation of all prayer; in fact faith is before all else an act of *listening*.

There is no prayer – just as there is no life of faith – without the intervention of the conscience and freedom of each individual. We know from experience that the most intense moments of prayer are often those involving our personal interior: moments of meditation more than of feelings; mo-

ments of silence rather than speaking; moments of contemplation rather than of reasoning; in fact: "the word of God is something alive and active: it cuts more incisively than any two-edged sword".<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Heb 4,12

"When you pray, go to your private room, shut yourself in, and so pray to your Father who is in the secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you".<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Mt 6,6

This in no way detracts from communal prayer, which is so important and has its most perfect ecclesial expression in the eucharistic celebration, but emphasizes the prior condition for an authentic participation in that too.

Mental prayer evolves gradually from meditation to contemplation; it is an interior attitude through which one enters into relationship with the love of God. St Teresa has described it as dealing with the Lord on friendly terms.

Paul VI gave it the following fine description: "The effort to fix the eyes and heart on God, which we call contemplation, becomes the most lofty and complete of all acts of the spirit, the act which even today can and must give hierarchical order to the immense pyramid of human activity".<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> PAUL VI, 7.12.65

We must not think that "contemplation", to which meditation leads, is something granted only to a few privileged souls. It is not our purpose here to present it with difficult abstract definitions, nor to list its different kinds and degrees with their delicate problems, but to look at the example of those Saints who have lived our own spirituality. To form a concrete image it is enough for us to look at Don Bosco: "we study and imitate him, admiring in him a splendid blending of nature and grace. He was deeply human, rich in the qualities of his people, open to the realities of the earth; and he was just as



deeply the man of God, filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and living 'as seeing him who is invisible'.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> C 21

Meditation becomes contemplation when the love, born of listening, gains the ascendancy and penetrates directly into the Father's heart.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> cf. C 12

### **The "goal" of prayer according to St Francis de Sales**

Having now reached this point, we can make a further step forward in an effort to understand more deeply the *intensely prayerful element in the "da mihi animas"*, which reflects Don Bosco's own prayer. We refer to the deep and enlightening testimony of St Francis de Sales. His prayer led him to a "union with God" translated into a life of tireless apostolic work, while at the same time plumbing the depths of its nature with penetrating doctrinal reflection.

This he did with impressive originality in the sixth and seventh books of his "Treatise on the love of God", a work that was dear to the first generations of our Congregation. In his reflections he uses the word 'ecstasy', but does not give it the meaning of loss of consciousness and disjunction from reality, as is the case in certain paramystical phenomena; the holy bishop had no time for emotional escapism which can be hallucinatory and reduce to false illusions.

"When you come across a person," he writes, "who gets so carried away in prayer that he seems to leave himself and get raised so high above as to reach God; who nevertheless has no similar ecstasies in his ordinary life, i.e. does not lead a higher life linked with God through the mortification of

worldly desires and of his will and natural inclinations through a disposition of interior kindness, simplicity and humility, and especially through unfailing charity, believe me, Theotimus, all his ecstasies are very dubious and dangerous; they are more likely to create wonder among others than to increase the holiness of the person experiencing them".<sup>15</sup>

By the use of the term 'ecstasy' St Francis de Sales gives a deeper indication of the goal that mental prayer should reach. The objective is the "getting outside oneself" through which God draws us and raises us up to himself; and this he calls ecstasy in so far as through it we remain above ourselves.

In these reflections St Francis attains the deepest aspects of his analysis of the kind of spirituality that after him has been called "salesian".

Prayer leads to the development of an interior attitude which goes beyond dialogue and becomes *unitive love*. The response of the one to the Other is no longer either words or feelings but an exchange of life: moving out of oneself towards the Beloved; not as an emptying but a joyful replacement which leads to the experience of what the Apostle describes when he says: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me".<sup>16</sup> It is a life that exceeds human motivations and forces, because it is nourished by God. In this way *prayer develops into love*; it is the indispensable way to it; it is its fruitful mother, so to speak, but a mother forgetful of herself for the fullness of life of what she has generated, i.e. "union with God".

St Francis de Sales goes so far as to declare that this "unitive love" is not to be measured by prayer alone (which could become quietism); nor is it to

<sup>15</sup> S. FRANCIS DE SALES, *Treatise of the love of God* - Ed. Paoline 1989, p. 527

<sup>16</sup> Gal 2,20

be simply identified with some activity (which could lead to activism), but translates into *a life and activity of love*; it fosters intentions rather than words. It means living not in ourselves but above ourselves; "and since no one can get out of and above himself in this way unless the eternal Father draws him (Jn 6,44), it follows that such a manner of life must be a continual rapture and a perpetual ecstasy of action and activity".<sup>17</sup> Hence the necessity for continual renewal of prayer to ensure unitive love, which is not difficult; it begins from the lowest degrees to grow without limit.

<sup>17</sup> o.c. p. 525

St Francis de Sales lists three kinds of rapture in prayer, three "ecstasies": "one regards the intellect, a second the affections, and a third activity". The third ("the ecstasy of life and action") is the crown of the other two, which would remain incomplete without it: "there has never been a saint who did not experience ecstasy or the rapture of life and action, overcoming himself and his own natural inclinations".<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> o.c. p. 528

It is true that the "ecstasy of the intellect" through encounter with enlightening truth can foster a special contemplation. And also "ecstasy of the affections" can stir up an enthusiasm of fervour far above normal. But both are naturally ordered to touch off witness of life and collaboration of action; they are linked to the third, but unfortunately not necessarily so.

If the rapture of the intellect, says the Saint, is more froth than substance, more speculative than affective, based more on knowledge than experience, more on appearance than underlying substance, it remains very questionable. And if rapture of the affections is more a matter of feeling than of commitment, smacking more of fervent admiration than self-sacrifice, owing more to sensitivity than to

industrious activity, more pretty theory than practical application, it looks dangerously superficial.

There are two principal ways", he writes, "of exercising our love for God: one affective and the other effective. By virtue of the first we love God and what God loves; in virtue of the second we serve God and do what he commands... Through the first we *conceive*, through the second we *generate*; with the one we insert God in our heart..., with the other we put him on our arms, like a sword of predilection by which we can carry out every act of virtue".<sup>19</sup> And he goes on further to say: "there are heavenly inspirations for the fulfilment of which it is not only necessary that God should raise us above our own strength but also that he raise us above our natural instincts and inclinations as well. Such inspirations, in fact, though not opposed to human reason, surpass and overcome it; they are superior to it: so that in such cases we live not only a civil life that is upright and christian but one that is superhuman, spiritual, devout and exuberant, or in other words a life which is in any case outside and above our natural condition...

<sup>19</sup> o.c. p. 427

To abandon all our goods, to love poverty and call and regard it as a glamorous master; to consider ignominy, disdain, abasement, persecutions, and martyrdom as joys and beatitudes; to keep oneself within the limits of an absolute chastity; and finally to live this mortal life in the world against all its maxims and opinions, and against the worldly tide with continual resignation, renunciation and self-denial, is to live not according to human nature but far above it".<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> o.c. pp. 523-4

Union with God is therefore *the true goal of prayer*; it has many degrees and is in continual growth; it begins in a small way with many defects

and gradually increases: it is "a light that expands like the dawning of the day".

These reflections of St Francis de Sales plunge us into the realism of salesian prayer.

One expert on St Francis de Sales, Andre Ravier, asserts that this deep vision, fruit of the Saint's personal experience, implied in his own time a kind of mental capsizing: "at one fell swoop 'devotion' (i.e. spirituality) was set free from controversial views that saw opposition between contemplation and action, internal and external cult, piety and canonical norms, asceticism and mystique, the service of God and that of men and, at a deeper level, the monk and the lay person".<sup>21</sup>

Here we may recall some statements by Don Bosco and his successors on the importance for us of the testimony and doctrine of St Francis de Sales.

"If the Salesians were really to live their faith," said Don Bosco in a conference to the confreres, "as St Francis de Sales understood it in his zeal, charity and meekness, I could be truly proud, and there would be reason to hope for a vast amount of good to be done! In fact I might say that the world would come after us".<sup>22</sup>

Don Albera, the second successor, spoke frequently of our Patron; in his circular on the "spirit of piety" he dealt with the practice of "continual prayer" and insisted especially that there should be practised in the Congregation the "active piety to which St Francis de Sales often refers, and which was the secret of Don Bosco's holiness".<sup>23</sup>

And Don Rinaldi, the third successor, speaking of the indulgence for sanctified work wrote: "Note that this favour was bestowed on us on the third centenary of the death of our heavenly patron St

<sup>21</sup> St. FRANCOIS DE SALES, *Oeuvres - Bibliothèque de la Pleiade* - Ed. Gallimard, 1986: "Introduction à la vie de votes", p. 8

<sup>22</sup> BM 12, 630; cf. 18

<sup>23</sup> *Lettere di don Paolo Albera*, ediz. 1965, p. 40



Francis de Sales, whose gentle doctrine is entirely permeated by this comforting thought. He could also be called the *apostle of the sanctification of the present moment*".<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> ACS 1923, n. 17, p. 36

For St Francis de Sales, therefore, prayer is indispensable for attaining, in Christ, to unitive love with the Father; this leads to the loosing of the energy which is *pastoral charity*: "that charity," says Vatican II, "which is, as it were, the soul of the whole apostolate".<sup>25</sup> Yes: the soul of the salesian apostolate is pastoral charity!<sup>26</sup> That is the objective to which we must give pride of place in the renewal of our prayer!

<sup>25</sup> AA 3

<sup>26</sup> cf. C 10

It is not characterized by special external expressions; there is no affectation in its attitudes; it does not emphasize high intellectual reflections, even though it draws nourishment from them; it does not give priority to singular or unusual sentimental manifestations, even though it moves deeply the affections of the heart; it concentrates on effective identification with the saving will of God so as to translate it into practical attitudes. Its intellectual contemplations and fervent feelings orientate everything about it to the mission of salvation: as St Francis de Sales says: with it one "conceives" in order to "generate", or in other words to cause blood to flow from the heart to give strength to arms and hands.

And here I think it will be useful to recall how this doctrine of our patron coincides substantially with that of those two great teachers of union with God: St Teresa and St John of the Cross (the fourth centenary of whose death will be celebrated next December). They bore witness to and communicated the experience of God which accompanied them in the arduous task of reforming religious.

Despite the profound differences between the Carmelite and Salesian charismata, they are at one in having the way of unitive love as their objective. It is a coincidence that proclaims a truth: that of a union with God who has become “everything” and of the emptying of oneself who has become “nothing”; as though to say: “I live, but no longer in myself”.

It is another way of speaking of one and the same “ecstasy”.

### **Let us renew our prayer**

In the light of the reflections of St Francis de Sales we can see very clearly that Don Bosco’s charism and salesian prayer are inseparable; they constitute a vital unity in such a way that neither aspect makes sense without the other, because they are fused in a single spiritual expression.

Our recent General Chapters had as their objective the relaunching of the Founder’s charism in the new conciliar orbit; and Vatican II has given rise to its own providential shake-up with its renewal of the Church’s prayer. The conclusion was inevitable that the relaunching of every charism called for priority to the renewal of prayer, giving back to it its vitalizing role in the ecclesial communion of believers.

And so we are obliged to make a qualitative leap in the renewal of our prayer. The excellent “Introduction” to the Italian manual for community prayer<sup>27</sup> provides a careful synthesis of the process that has been followed in the Congregation with respect to the “practices of piety”: there you will find emphasized the genuine thought of Don Bosco, the profound substantial renewal desired by the Special

<sup>27</sup> *In dialogo con il Signore*  
- LDC 1990, pp. 7-15

General Chapter, and the continuity of a living tradition which comes from the Founder and is able to adapt itself to new ecclesial eras.

It has been a delicate work that was crowned with success; and after the practical experience extending over two six-year periods, it was codified by the GC22 in the renewed Constitutions.

Certainly, christian prayer – like the global vocation of the Church and the specific nature of the faith – is substantially common to all believers; but, just as cultural differences and sound historical heritage have an influence on the liturgy, in a similar way the particular facets of the Founder's charism, and the well tried genuine traditions which have established it in the world, have influenced the various kinds of prayer.

In face of the challenge of the prevailing secularism and the courageous examples of christian reaction provided by various ecclesial Movements, we must ask ourselves in what renewed prayer consists for us, and how we live it: what are the vital nuclei we must foster so that it may be truly the animating principle of our vocation.

"Prayer," we read in the above-mentioned Introduction,<sup>28</sup> "is the place of the absolute, the place of God; or, to be more precise, the place in which the "Word of God" assumes its true sense and, with it, our entire existence. It is the place of identity and true dialogue, in which our own mystery touches the mystery of God... And if prayer must be a human reality it cannot fail to emerge in history at a determined place and time; it cannot fail to become a practical exercise."

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.* pp. 20-21

If we now look at the text of that part of the Rule which deals with "dialogue with the Lord", we can better emphasize its more characteristic and vital aspects.

We may begin by pointing out that Chapter 7 of the Constitutions was not put at the end because it dealt with something of minor importance, but it is at the end of the second part as a kind of vertex containing a synthesis of everything that had gone before; it is as though to say that the “mission”, “community” and “practice of the evangelical counsels” (or in other words our ecstasy of life and action), because of the very nature of their participation in the mystery of the Church, cannot live without the energy of the union with God and of the pastoral charity that proceed from prayer.

The first thing to emphasize is that the model to which we must turn our attention is certainly Don Bosco: “we learn from him”.<sup>29</sup>

Let us read together once again a page from the Commentary on the Constitutions: “Don Bosco is generally put before us as a model of activity and less frequently as a model of prayer... (but) many have borne witness to Don Bosco’s spirit of prayer. It can be said, declared Don Barberis, ‘that he was always praying. I have seen him hundreds of times in prayer as he went up and down stairs. He prayed as he went from one place to another. On journeys, when he was not correcting printers’ proofs, I saw him always praying’. And Don Rua added: ‘Many times I came across him absorbed in prayer during his brief moments of respite’... He gave it absolute priority. ‘Prayer is the most important thing’, he used to say; ‘nothing is begun well unless it starts from heaven’. Prayer was for him the work par excellence, because ‘it obtains everything and triumphs over everything’.”<sup>30 31</sup>

Cardinal Cagliero declared: Don Bosco prayed always, because everything he did was directed to God’s glory and done in his presence. And so for him prayer included also his continuous, holy and

<sup>29</sup> C 86

<sup>30</sup> *Guide to the Salesian Constitutions* - Rome 1986, pp. 672-3

<sup>31</sup> *Note:* It would be well to read again from time to time CERIA’S study on «Don Bosco con Dio».

incredible amount of work; he united to perfection the contemplative and active lives”.

The fundamental trait that shines forth in our Founder is that in him “praying and living were spontaneously united”.<sup>32</sup> It is a characteristic insisted on in various articles of the Constitutions,<sup>33</sup> which go so far as to say that we must accustom ourselves to “celebrate the liturgy of life, attaining that ‘tireless industry made holy by prayer and union with God’ that should be the characteristic of the sons of St John Bosco”.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> C 86

<sup>33</sup> cf. C 86, 87, 89, 92

<sup>34</sup> C 95

Such a characteristic presupposes a style of prayer with elements of simplicity, joy and hope; without resorting to emotive manifestations of a rather strange kind, but fostering that attractive atmosphere (the splendour of the liturgy) which leads unconsciously to a taste for sacrifice in self-donation.

Art. 12 of the Constitutions provides an explicit description of the goal of our prayer: working for the salvation of the young, the Salesian gains a living experience of the Covenant: he “prays without ceasing” and “does everything for love of God”!

It will be worth our while to quote some further lines from the Commentary already referred to: “To plumb the depths of this kind of union with God, we must hark back to that ‘grace of unity’ of which we spoke in connection with our vocation. It is not found primarily in activity, nor even in the ‘practices of piety’, but in the interior of a person of whom it pervades the whole being; before finding expression in activity or in praying, it is a kind of ‘spiritual dynamism’, in so far as it is a conscious participation in the very love of God through self-donation in practical availability for the work of salvation. It is an interior attitude of charity direc-



ted towards apostolic activity, in which it becomes concrete, is made manifest, grows and is perfected".<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> *Guide to the Salesian Constitutions*, p. 174

And so it finds a place at a higher level than the famous distinction between "contemplation" and "action": two terms which tradition itself have always passed on to us together, as though the sense of each of them depended on their being joined and not separated. The Council too affirmed this when dealing with the ministerial priesthood.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> cf. PO 14

The meaningful expression of the Jesuit Girolamo Nadal: "simul in actione contemplativus" applied to his Founder St Ignatius (MESI, *Epistolae et Monumenta* P.J. Nadal, V, 162), we can interpret in the light of the experience of Don Bosco, our model, who translated "da mihi animas" into the witness of his whole life, both in contemplation and action, and very much in "passion" too, i.e. in the constant attitude which he called a "martyrdom of charity and sacrifice for the good of others".<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> cf. ASC 308 (1983)

This salesian way of doing things shines with special brilliance in the life of Mother Mazzarello, co-foundress of the Institute of the FMA.<sup>38</sup> She was able to quite naturally make her own the secret of Don Bosco's apostolic interior feelings, already evident in his first pieces of advice: "pray by all means, but do all the good you can, especially to the young"; "Grow in the exercise of the presence of God; love work; bring kindness and joy to everyone; be helpers in the Church for the salvation of souls".

<sup>38</sup> cf. ASC 301 (1981)

He once summed up the most characteristic trait of an FMA in the words: "In her the active and contemplative lives should go side by side, recalling Martha and Mary, the life of the Apostles and that of the Angels".

It is a stimulating fact for us Salesians to see in Mother Mazzarello the characteristics of our interior life, carried to great heights in intense simplicity, by a heart enriched with precious feminine values.

"Truly," wrote Fr Ricaldone, "there was evident in Mother Mazzarello such a spirit of piety that she was always aware of being in the presence of God, not only at times of vocal prayer and meditation, but also in material work". Her daughters testified of her: "to see the Mother *was to see a soul that revealed God himself...* with such limpid simplicity that the love of God seemed like second nature in her".<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> P. RICARDONE, o.c. p. 316

And so, if we want to renew our prayer at the present day, we must first become convinced that Don Bosco's apostolic charism requires us to *concentrate strongly on union with God* or, in other words, to foster all those expressions of prayer "in simple and cordial dialogue" which lead us to the *love of charity*. Rightly did Pope John Paul II in his famous address to the members of the GC23 on 1 May 1990, declare: "The more a Salesian reflects on the mystery of the Father who is infinitely merciful, of the Son who so generously became our brother, and of the Holy Spirit who powerfully renews the world by his presence, so much the more does he feel impelled by this unfathomable mystery to dedicate himself to the young for their maturing as human beings and for their salvation".<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> GC23 332

### Three cardinal points to be given priority

But we have to ask ourselves whether the renewal of prayer has been effective on the part of all the confreres and in every community. It is not by

any means fanciful to recognize that there are backward areas in the Congregation which give rise to problems and difficulties. Instead of profiting by the experiences of others, assimilating them and harmonizing their values with the requirements of our charism, communities approach them negatively and in a half-hearted fashion. Formalism in the practices of piety, ingrained mentalities, the negative effect of occasional examples of neglect of the practices of piety, the absence of the vital theme of prayer in ongoing formation, little attention given to important items of our prayer life, lack of concern about a genuine liturgical renewal, the crisis of penance and the falling off of asceticism – and this precisely at a time when a special period of the Holy Spirit is being experienced in the Church – can easily lead us to understand why in certain cases something more vital is sought.

There is an urgent need to give greater attention to the renewal of prayer. To bring this about we must concentrate our efforts on three dynamic points, complementary among themselves though at three different levels: that of the *individual* in mental prayer and asceticism; that of the community in incorporation to Christ through the liturgy; and that of *ministerial presence* in apostolic and loving activity among those to whom our mission is directed. Among these three points arises a kind of dynamic and mutually reciprocal circle for the intensification of pastoral charity.

But first of all let us make a preliminary observation that will help us to a greater appreciation of the need to develop these three points.

Union with God, which is at the centre of everything, is capable of a wide gradation of expression; they range from the so-called acquired contemplation (in various degrees) to so-called infused con-

temptation (even to high mystical levels). All can reach it in some degree.

The reflections of St Francis de Sales help us to appraise the intensity of our union with God so as to strive to raise its intensity. We have already considered the significant use he makes of the term "ecstasy": it implies getting out of oneself so as to live in Christ. Now, if we apply the concept of "ecstasy of life" to the way we live in community, to our practice of the counsels, to our communion in one heart and one soul, it will not be difficult to assess how far the truth of "ecstasy" has progressed when we detect in ourselves elements of individualism, arbitrariness, coldness, dangerous compensations, etc. So too, if we apply the concept of "ecstasy of action" to our work, an objective evaluation will easily lead us to discover more than a few defects which oppose our getting outside ourselves: selfishness, touchiness, intentions that are merely natural, yielding to pride and concupiscence, activism shorn of witness, etc.

Such an examination of conscience prompts us to continual concentration on the three points indicated, so that they may truly express our pastoral charity of union with God: more prayer, a better consecrated life, greater pastoral quality, are things that *go together*. In this way we come to understand that the matter of prayer must, in fact, be a constant and always renewed commitment to which the attention of every confrere and every community must be directed. This is the most vital formative aspect calling for attention, revision and a permanent pedagogy of growth. It will compel us to decide on practical criteria for coordinating "community life" and "apostolic activity" in intimate harmony with the practice of prayer. Failure

to do this would not only be harmful to the witness of the praying community, but also to the reality of its consecrated life and pastoral efficacy.

We have three points, therefore, that are mutually inclusive; their vitality is measured by their constant reciprocal relationship, which has its source in prayer and its goal in charity.

Don Bosco used to say – as we have already seen – that “nothing is begun well unless it starts from heaven”. As we read in the *Imitation of Christ*: “left to ourselves we sink and perish. But if you are with us we live and rise again. Yes: truly we are weak and inconstant, but you give us stability. We are prone to go cold, but you give us new fire”.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> *Imitation of Christ*, III, n. 2

Let us look more closely, therefore, at some aspects of these three fundamental points.

1. – *The cardinal point of the person or individual* refers evidently to every confrere and is at the foundation of all the rest. Without the individual there is no prayer.<sup>42</sup> This cannot be evaded by placing the blame on others.

<sup>42</sup> cf. C 93

This is a commitment which demands its own elbow-room, distinct from that of ordinary working activity and dedicated entirely to direct conversation with God. His word must be listened to anew each day (meditation, the reading of God’s word, taking part in communal prayer, individual initiatives); particular times must be set aside for interior renewal (monthly, quarterly and annual retreats); a living participation is needed in the liturgical year with its celebrations of the events of salvation history; there must be a sedulous consideration of the mysteries of Christ in the recital of the rosary; etc.

The fundamental attitude is always one of listening through mental prayer. The Word of God is

precisely Jesus Christ, whom we contemplate as the Good Shepherd.<sup>43</sup> He speaks to us in many ways and always in a manner relevant to the prevailing circumstances. But his central and supreme proposal – which constitutes his Memorial – is his paschal testimony: “this is my body which is given up for you; this is my blood which is shed for you”. This is the most sublime “ecstasy of life”!

<sup>43</sup> cf. C 11

We cannot listen to this Word of God, reflected in all the challenges we meet, and remain passive. Life unfolds in a complex manner, but Christ’s Memorial is crystal clear. A kind of listening that leads to pastoral charity cannot avoid sacrifice, and still less can it let itself be carried away by ideologies and fleeting fashions. In all the many vicissitudes we repeat always with the psalmist: “I seek your face, Lord; do not hide yourself from me.”

A personal aspect, intimately united to mental prayer, is the responsible commitment to asceticism and penance that must be made by every confrere. Let us never forget that *sin, the lack of self-discipline, lukewarm and unmortified conduct, and a worldly spirit are the death of prayer*. The self-criticism implied in examination of conscience for a sincere attitude of personal conversion and a keen “sense of sin” – so out of line with today’s anthropocentric mentality – fosters an indispensable awareness of the mystery of the Father’s mercy, and bestows the joy and hope of pardon.<sup>44</sup> This in turn will give rise to many personal initiatives for intensifying the particular asceticism of “make yourself loved” that characterizes us as apostolic educators.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> cf. C 90

<sup>45</sup> cf. AGC 326 (1988)

Moses, the Prophets, Jesus himself, the Saints and in particular the great founders (Benedict, Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola, Dominic Guzman, Teresa of Avila, etc.) united intense prayer

with fasting, ascesis and penance. When we look carefully at Don Bosco we are deeply impressed by his practice of humility, his spirit of sacrifice, his concrete sense of mortification, his acceptance of physical and moral suffering, and the incalculable demands of his motto "work and temperance".<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> cf. C 18

Here I would like to recall the importance St Ignatius of Loyola gave in spiritual direction to personal efforts at ascesis and penance; it was clear that he esteemed mortification of the passions greater than the time spent in prayer; he used to advise "greater mortification of self-love than abstention from meat; and more mortification of the passions than prayer"; and he added: "*for a person who keeps his passions mortified, a quarter of an hour should be sufficient for an encounter with God*".<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup> MI, *Fontes narrativi*, II 419, 24; and I 644, 196

Whenever, therefore, conversation turns to the indispensable nature of the "personal" aspect in prayer, a vast horizon of commitments is opened before every single confrere.

2. – *The cardinal point of the community* demands a second vital level linked with the liturgical renewal. At its vertex is incorporation to Christ through the Eucharist: that is where the community builds itself as such and receives from the Holy Spirit the daily energy it needs to be a true "sign of faith", "school of faith" and a "centre of communion and participation".<sup>48</sup> The community becomes in Christ an *animating nucleus*, like a small basic church called to bring about evangelical fermentation in the locality and in those for whom we work.

<sup>48</sup> GC23 216-7

It is true that without personal prayer there can be no praying community, but there is more to be said. It is not a question of an agglomeration of individual prayers, but rather of prayer made together. The Council has asked us to make a qualita-

tive leap of a communal kind. And so we need to foster a liturgical animation appropriately brought up to date.

The hoped-for "community day", promoted by the GC23<sup>49</sup> for an ongoing formation that is lively and practical, should have at its centre in every house the most significant weekly concelebration. Time must be given to its preparation, and to promoting the participation in it of everyone.

<sup>49</sup> GC23 222

Liturgical prayer makes us feel that together we form a little Church, and reveals to us the charismatic originality of our consecration, through which "our apostolic mission, our fraternal community and the practice of the evangelical counsels are the inseparable elements of our consecration which we live in a single movement of love towards God and towards our brothers".<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> C 3; cf. also C 24, C 50

It is from the awareness of this "apostolic communion" that arises our commitment to the common "pastoral project".

A practical observation, that I am anxious not to overlook, is that in every house there should be a *worthy chapel* enlivened by the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. "Gathered together in the Lord's name", wrote the Pope in a message to the plenary assembly of the Congregation for consecrated life, "religious communities have their natural centre in the Eucharist. It is normal therefore that they be visibly gathered together in an oratory (i.e. place of prayer), in which the presence of the Blessed Sacrament expresses and realizes what should be the main mission of every religious Family".<sup>51</sup>

<sup>51</sup> SCRIS 1980, n. 1, pp. 7-12

3. – *the cardinal point of ministerial presence* among those for whom we work is the other level which is indispensable for the renewal of our prayer.



It is not an entirely simple matter to live the “grace of unity” and understand the mutual bond between interior disposition and external activity in our presence among our beneficiaries. We must be able to reply to two substantial questions. The first is: what significance do our beneficiaries (*Italian: ‘destinatari’*) have for us? And the second: what kind of presence and what kind of activity is ours meant to be?

In seeking a response to these questions we become aware that the word of God presents itself with continually new requirements. In the last ten years there have been innovations under the headings of: the relaunching of Don Bosco’s charisma,<sup>52</sup> the new Evangelization,<sup>53</sup> the new Education.<sup>54</sup> In other words, a vast field has been opened which is inseparable from a careful listening to what the Lord is saying also through the signs of the times, the teaching of the Bishops and the guidelines of the Congregation.

The “*destinatari*” are for the Salesian a kind of “burning bush” which throws light on his special Covenant: he sees in them the image of God; their material needs become his spiritual concern.

The GC23 tells us with reason: “We believe that God loves the young. This is the conviction which is at the origin of our vocation... We believe that Jesus wants to share ‘his life’ with young people: in their expectations they bear the seeds of the Kingdom. We believe that the Spirit is present in them and that through them he wants to build a more authentic and human christian community... We believe that God is awaiting us in the young to offer us the grace of meeting with him and to dispose us to serve him in them, recognizing their dignity and educating them to the fullness of life. In this way

<sup>52</sup> AGC 312 (1985)

<sup>53</sup> AGC 331 (1989)

<sup>54</sup> AGC 337 (1991)

our work of education becomes *the preeminent context in which we meet him*".<sup>55</sup>

<sup>55</sup> GC23 95

This is the first response: in our "destinatari" we seek the countenance of Christ!

And then too, *the presence and activity* of the Salesian make him the sign and bearer of the love of God for the young. It is not, therefore, a matter of just any kind of presence. There are kinds of presence which could take us a long way from prayer; here it is a matter of a "ministerial presence" which makes us hear from the mouth of Christ those words: "I was hungry and thirsty and you gave me food and drink".

As well as this, the presence must be accompanied not by just any kind of activity, which could easily be simply of a humanitarian, cultural, social or political nature, but (as the Council said) by "apostolic and charitable activity",<sup>56</sup> drawing its origin and animation from the Holy Spirit. Only activity of this kind "is of the very nature of religious life, as a holy ministry and work of charity entrusted to the Institute by the Church and to be performed in its name".<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup> PC 8

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

"Apostolic and charitable activity" leads of its very nature to union with God and makes for more intense prayer. It is not an occasion of distraction, but a place of special meeting. But if activity is to be truly apostolic, it must be animated by the fire of pastoral charity: it is in truth the soul of the apostolate, but apostolic activity becomes in its turn the animator of pastoral charity! And in the heart of the Salesian must be found the great secret that feeds this fire.

And so there should be no dualism between work and prayer, because prayer becomes translated into apostolate, and apostolic work intensifies prayer.

This was also emphasized by the Pope in his above-mentioned address to the members of the GC23, speaking of our mission as educators: "First of all I want to emphasize as a fundamental point the *strength of a unifying synthesis* that stems from pastoral charity. It is the fruit of the power of the Holy Spirit which ensures the vital inseparability between union with God and dedication to one's neighbour, between depth of interior evangelical meditation and apostolic activity, between a praying heart and busy hands. Those two great Saints, Francis de Sales and John Bosco, have borne witness to this wonderful 'grace of unity' and brought it to fruition in the Church. Any deterioration on this point opens up a dangerous path to activism or intimism, both of which are insidious temptations for Institutes of Apostolic Life. On the other hand the hidden riches accompanying this 'grace of unity' provide clear confirmation, as amply demonstrated by the lives of these two Saints, that union with God is the true source of the practical love of one's neighbour".<sup>58</sup>

<sup>58</sup> GC23 332

### **May the Holy Spirit and Mary give us their help**

Dear confreres, these reflections are an invitation to us to intensify in the Congregation our commitment to a renewal of prayer in harmony with Don Bosco's charism. In these years that have followed the Council, we have certainly made good progress. Vatican II brought us a new atmosphere: the sense of mystery, the multiform presence of God, of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, the vitality of ecclesial communion, the invaluable renewal of the liturgy, the wonderful significance of creation and also the "world" itself with all its complexities and

the eschatological dimension of history. The General Chapters have presented Don Bosco's charisma anew in this immense orbit of renewed spirituality.

For some time now we have all been undergoing conversion, but there is still much to be done before we are fully converted, especially in the delicate sector of prayer. The secret of praying is to be found in the first place in the individual, whose basic attitude is mental prayer. In this each of us must discover his own "hermitage" for contemplation; and it may be that Providence, at certain periods of our life, may assign us to some "monastery" where our life will be more passion than action, as in sickness or old age.

But if we are to attain to a certain practical facility in salesian mental prayer, each province will need to see to the provision of capable animators, especially as regards the liturgy and the various community practices. The Provincial and the Rector in particular must accept the responsibility for ensuring the means for all to experience an authentic renewal.

If this be done Don Bosco's charism will shine with a particular brilliance. And everything that serves to bring about a greater esteem for its identity and to rejuvenate its deep roots can be welcomed with profit and gratitude. And on the other hand whatever tends to obscure its primacy in our hearts and lessen its attractiveness we should carefully avoid.

Salesian prayer is neither difficult nor complicated; it is made for everyone: for the young and for people in general; it makes plain that the call to holiness is not intended for only a chosen few, nor only for monastic settings; it is inserted in daily life, in ordinary and extraordinary events, in activity

and sickness, in every profession and way of life, in every age and every situation.

Among the Groups that constitute the Salesian Family there are examples of different ways in which their members dedicate themselves to prayer; we rejoiced, for example, when the Visitation Sisters of St Francis de Sales in Italy wanted to be included among our Cooperators; and we admire the designs of God who raises up here and there groups who dedicate more time to a kind of prayer which aims at ensuring in the whole Family an intense pastoral charity. At the Becchi, for example, on Colle Don Bosco, an initiative of permanent prayer has been launched in favour of youth holiness. It takes place alongside the little house of Mamma Margaret where our charism began, at the very place which John Paul II called the "Hill of the youthful beatitudes" and a "school of spirituality". When pilgrims, and especially young ones, come there in search of a message of hope, they willingly join in the adoration and listening, and come to understand that in life it is necessary to be able to pray.

But in particular we must give greater attention in the provinces to promoting youth prayer groups with characteristics proper to the salesian charism. Indeed our pastoral work for the young should be able to foster real schools of active prayer to fight against the loss of the sense of God in so many youngsters. No fostering of a youth spirituality will succeed unless it cultivates the spirit of prayer.

We know, dear confreres, that Don Bosco's charism is a precious gift of the Spirit and of Mary to the Church. In fact, throughout the centuries, the life-giving action of the Holy Spirit has always been accompanied by the motherly intervention of Mary: in the case of our own charisma we have

been explicitly assured of this by the Founder himself.

May the Holy Spirit and Mary teach us therefore to pray with that same salesian style they inculcated in Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello.

I am writing these reflections in the atmosphere of the Solemnity of the Assumption of Our Lady into heaven: the great personal "Passover" of the Madonna, the mystery which began in her on a universal scale her maternal role of Helper in the course of history.

When the Spirit brought about in Mary the capacity to be a mother, there was born in her Jesus, our Lord and Brother, to whom the Father could say in very truth "You are my beloved Son";<sup>59</sup> and the praying heart of Jesus could respond "Behold, Father, I come to do your will".<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Heb 1,5

<sup>60</sup> Heb 10,5

Resembling this attitude of Christ is that of Mary at the Annunciation: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word".<sup>61</sup> This is a praying, "filial" and "missionary" attitude, which extends from a union of love with the Father to the realism of active daily life.

<sup>61</sup> Lk 1,38

Let us ask with insistence of the Holy Spirit, the first Author of our charism, that through the intercession of Mary his Spouse he may enable us to grow constantly in that interior disposition which may bring us too to a state "in which praying and living are spontaneously united".<sup>62</sup>

<sup>62</sup> C 86

Let us have an enthusiastic love for the identity of our vocation and nourish it each day by the authentic "spirit of piety" we inherited from Don Bosco: this is the way that leads us to Love!

Cordial greetings to you all.

With esteem and affection in the Lord,

*Don F. Viganò*