

1. LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

“STRIVE TO MAKE YOURSELF LOVED”

Introduction. - A spiritual event. - A symbol of our Profession. - Don Bosco tells us "Make yourselves loved". - Some essential requirements of our pastoral charity: (a) the centrality of Christ, (b) the oratory criterion, (c) the fostering of vocations, (d) lay involvement. - Entrusted always to Mary. - A centenary, source of blessings.

Rome, 31 May 1988

My dear confreres,

On 14 May last, the anniversary of the first salesian Profession made by 22 courageous young men into Don Bosco's hands in 1862, there took place in every province and community the rite which is for us the most significant of all the manifestations marking the centenary of the death of our Father: the oath of fidelity to his charism through the solemn renewal of our religious Profession.

I had the great pleasure of presiding at the celebration which took place in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians at Valdocco, crowded with almost a thousand confreres from the three Piedmontese provinces with representatives of other houses from around the world. It was a memorable day, rich in hope and spiritual significance, and a day of deep communion with all Salesians in all five continents. At the end we gathered around the casket containing Don Bosco's mortal remains and lis-

tened with emotion to some of the fatherly recommendations from his spiritual testament; we felt the urge to continue with generosity and creativity his mission to the young and the poor, while making a trusting prayer for an increase in vocations. When we came outside afterwards we found waiting for us a numerous group of pilgrims from the Valle-d'Aosta region, led by their Bishop and enlivened by the exhilarating and harmonious music of a boys' band. One of the young musicians, just turned 12 years of age, took the microphone and addressed us briefly in the following unforgettable words: "We thank all of you Salesians for having renewed your consecration for the benefit of young people in Don Bosco's name. We who say this to you are boys from the Valle d'Aosta, descendants of those chimneysweeps to whom Don Bosco gave a home right here at the beginning of his work. Things have changed since then (today we are wearing clean shirts, for instance), but our hearts still feel the same sentiments towards the successor of Don Bosco, to whom we wish every happiness in the constant and self-sacrificing work we know he does for us boys. Thank you!"

And the thought came spontaneously to our minds that those boys from the Valley of Aosta represented so many other youngsters from all over the world, and were interpreting their common feelings as they saw the salesian Profession as "the most precious gift" they are still offered by Don Bosco at the present day.¹

¹ cf. C 25

A spiritual event

The confreres' positive comments have emphasized the deep and significant value of this event. A Congregation so numerous and of such universal extent wanted all its members to renew on the same day their fundamental option and the supreme expression of their own life of faith: the baptismal option for Christ, rethought personally with a clear awareness and defined as a community act in line with the evangelical project of the Constitutions. It is our special covenant with the Lord; a loving encounter which marks and gives direction to the whole of life; the total donation of ourselves to God and to the young; the concrete christian sense of an entire existence consecrated by the power of the Spirit. It is the most expressive act of our freedom as Christ's disciples.

Rightly do the Constitutions tell us that profession "is one of the most lofty choices a believer can consciously make, an act which recalls and endorses the mystery of his baptismal covenant by giving it a deeper and fuller expression".²

² C 23

We well know that from a salesian point of view this was a moment both rich and exacting: the expression of a mature fidelity; an event which makes of the Centenary the launching pad for a spiritual and apostolic renewal. We made a lengthy preparation for it so that the gesture would not be reduced to a mere formality, and we are convinced that on that day the level of grace rose in the Congregation and that we shall soon feel its beneficial effects.

Fidelity to Don Bosco's charism has been our great preoccupation during these decades that have followed Vatican II; we have meditated and discussed a great deal, we have done a lot of work and

made many experiments; God and Our Lady have helped us to make an efficacious revision of our Rule of life with one eye on our origins and the other on the changed needs of the present day. The Apostolic See, by approving the renewed Constitutions, has assured us of the authenticity of the gospel way of life traced out by our Founder, and recognizes in it 'a special benefit for the whole People of God'.³

³ C 192

That is why we have sworn to be faithful. We have done so with joy and hope, convinced that we were making "a response which we continually renew to the special Covenant that the Lord has made with us", while we recalled with trust that "our perseverance is founded entirely on the fidelity of God who loved us first, and is nourished by the grace of his consecration. It is sustained too by love for the young to whom we are sent".⁴

⁴ C 195

A symbol of our Profession

The new "Rite of Religious Profession" for our Society envisages the bestowal of a special symbol of salesian consecration. For this reason, during the ceremony of renewal of profession on May 14, a "medal of Don Bosco" was given to those temporarily professed, and a "cross of the Good Shepherd" to the perpetually professed.

The designer of the medal, the artist Ettore Calvelli, has created a countenance of Don Bosco which reflects his oratorian heart ("Da mihi animas") and his decisive and inspired practical character, as the living model for every newly professed Salesian: a real Master of salesian educative praxis, with a penetrating gaze which draws souls

together in a family communion of ideals and friendship for a joyful and responsible growth in a consecrated apostolic life. The reverse side of the medal has been left blank to allow for the engraving of the name of the confrere receiving it, as a sign of his determination to make a definitive commitment.⁵

⁵ cf. C 24

In turn the engraver of the cross, the artist Giandomenico Sergio, has presented us with what I consider to be the most expressive symbol of our characteristic presence in the Church. In a circle on the obverse of the cross he has created a figure of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, who is the true "inventor" and supreme model of pastoral work. The design was inspired by the famous second century fresco found in the Roman catacombs of Priscilla and recalls the parable of the Good Shepherd in John's Gospel;⁶ it portrays Jesus carrying a sheep on his shoulders with two others at his feet; on each side of the expressive figure the artist has placed two saplings, on each of which is perched a dove with an olive twig in its mouth. It is a captivating engraving, rich in genuine christian tradition, which inculcates trust, teaches kindness and sacrifice, excludes all violence and gives promise of peace and hope. It brings to mind the immortal words of the Gospel: "The Good Shepherd is ready to lay down his life for his sheep. I know my own and my own know me. And there are other sheep I have that are not of this fold, and these I have to lead as well. They too will listen to my voice, and there will be only one flock and one shepherd".⁷

⁶ Jn 10, 1-19

⁷ cf. Jn 10, 14-16

In a similar circle on the reverse of the cross is inscribed a phrase of Don Bosco with his signature: "Studia di farti amare - Sac. Gio. Bosco" ("Strive to make people love you - Fr. Jn. Bosco"). It is the

specification of the salesian spirit and pastoral method for the benefit of the young. This evocative phrase was written by our Father in 1863 in a memorandum which he gave to Don Rua when sending him to be the first rector at Mirabello: "Since I cannot always be at your side ... I write as a loving father who opens his heart to a most dear son"; and he gives him various pieces of advice, among which is that of striving to make himself loved.⁸

⁸ BM 7, 317

That very significant phrase occupies a strategic place in the salesian spirit. Don Bosco would repeat it once again to Don Rua, his designated successor, on his deathbed; the Biographical Memoirs tell us in fact that "one of the last things said by Don Bosco to Don Rua was this: make yourself loved!"⁹ We may also recall that in the well known letter from Rome of May 1884, Don Bosco insists precisely on the fact that it is not enough to love but it is necessary also to make oneself loved.¹⁰

⁹ MB 18, 537¹⁰ MB 17, 107-114

His past-pupils state explicitly that Don Bosco had received from God in the highest degree the gift of making himself loved;¹¹ the point is recalled by Don Albera in an unforgettable circular: "it must be said that Don Bosco loved us in a manner that was unique and all his own: we were irresistibly fascinated by him ... I felt that I was loved in a way I had never previously experienced ... with an affection that surpassed any other: it completely enveloped all of us in an atmosphere of joy and contentment... He drew us to himself by the overflowing supernatural love which welled up in his heart".¹²

¹¹ MB 17, 482

Don Bosco himself used to say that the preventive system is a love which attracts young people to do good: God who is Love itself wants everything to be done through love.

¹² P. ALBERA, *Don Bosco nostro modello*, 18 Oct. 1920, in "Lettere Circolari", Turin 1965, pp. 372-374

Cardinal Cagliero too testifies that when he was given the task of following up the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in its early days, he often discussed problems with Don Bosco and that the latter “in his unfailingly affable manner set my mind at rest by saying: ‘you know the spirit of our Oratory, the preventive system, and *the secret of making oneself loved*’”.¹³

Fr Piano, a past-pupil of the Oratory’s early years who became a theologian and parish priest of the Great Mother of God parish in Turin, was right in saying to Don Bosco on his last feastday in 1887: “this heart of mine will love you as long as it continues to beat; it loves you because we see in you a sign of the love of God”.¹⁴ It is a matter therefore of a “making oneself loved” which is an expression of a spirituality and an apostolic method that was novel and unprecedented.

Don Bosco tells us again “Make yourselves loved”

We must recognize the fact that this prophetic message left to us by the Founder gives an original physiognomy to the whole of our “apostolic consecration”. If on 14 May last we made our common promise to be faithful to our religious profession, we must be able to analyze this message more deeply and give it special importance. This will ensure the continuity of the true identity of the salesian spirit and the authentic methodology of our educative and pastoral praxis.

Let us look at some expressions in the Constitutions which give clear confirmation to what we have said.

¹³ cf. MACCONO, S. Maria D. Mazzarello, I, 274, Ed. FMA, Turin 1960

¹⁴ MB 18, 366

Art.1: The Holy Spirit formed in Don Bosco “the heart of a father and teacher, capable of total self-giving”.

Art.2: The project left us by our Founder is “to be in the Church signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor”.

Art.4: “Inspired by the goodness and zeal of St Francis de Sales, Don Bosco called us Salesians”, a name which specifies our identity as tireless and amiable apostles.

Art.8: The presence of Mary in the history of the salesian charisma and our entrustment to her are aimed at making us “become witnesses to the young of her Son’s boundless love”.

Art.10: The salesian spirit which through God’s inspiration Don Bosco has passed on to us “is summed up and centred in pastoral charity”.

Art.11: The source of this pastoral charity is the very heart of Christ with “the preoccupation of the Good Shepherd who wins hearts by gentleness and self-giving”.

Art.14: “Our vocation is graced by a special gift of God, predilection for the young: ‘That you are young is enough to make me love you very much’. This love is an expression of pastoral charity and gives meaning to our whole life”.

Art.15: Christ the Good Shepherd wants the Salesian to be among young people “open and cordial, ready to make the first approach and to welcome others with unfailing kindness, respect and patience. His love is that of a father, brother and friend, able to draw out friendship in return; his chastity and well balanced attitude open his heart to spiritual fatherhood and give transparent witness to God’s anticipating love”.

Art.16: The family spirit must be characteristic of every salesian house; it “becomes a family when affection is mutual ... and when, in an atmosphere of mutual trust and daily forgiveness, the need and joy of sharing everything is experienced”.

Art.17: Love brings with it optimism and joy; the Salesian “believes in man’s natural and supernatural resources without losing sight of his weakness... He radiates joy and is able to educate to a christian and festive way of life”.

Art.18: The style of loving kindness is sustained and defended by work and temperance: “The Salesian gives himself to his mission with tireless energy; temperance gives him the strength to control his heart, to master himself and remain even-tempered”.

Art.19: The manner of making oneself loved is, in addition, not an easy one and must be continually animated by a spirit of initiative, flexibility and creativity: “In those things which are for the benefit of young people in danger or which serve to win souls for God, I push ahead even to the extent of recklessness”, Don Bosco used to say.

Art.20: The preventive system is described as “a spontaneous expression of love inspired by the love of God... (It is) a way of living and handing on the gospel message, and of working with and through the young for their salvation. It permeates our approach to God, our personal relationships, and our manner of living in community through the exercise of a charity that knows how to make itself loved”.

Art.25: Don Bosco’s “system” is a method for leading people to holiness, as in fact it has already done; “it reveals the unique worth of the beatitudes and is the most precious gift we can offer to the young”.

Art.38: The educative and pastoral activity of the Salesian “instead of using constraint appeals to the resources of intelligence, love and the desire for God, which everyone has in the depths of his being. It brings together educators and youngsters in a family experience of trust and dialogue”.

Art.39: The practice of this method implies our active and friendly presence among youth: “it demands a fundamental disposition on our part: an empathy with the young and a willingness to be with them».

Art.40: Don Bosco’s spiritual and apostolic experience at Valdocco remains our permanent criterion for discernment and renewal: “(his first Oratory) was for the youngsters a home that welcomed, a parish that evangelized, a school that prepared them for life, and a playground where friends could meet and enjoy themselves”.

Art.61: The witness of the evangelical counsels is of extraordinary help in making oneself loved; “by fostering purity of the heart and spiritual freedom, (they) render our pastoral charity more concerned and productive”. And Art.63 adds: “The evangelical counsels, fashioning his heart entirely for the Kingdom, help (the Salesian) to discern and welcome God’s action in history; they transform him into an educator who proclaims to the young ‘new heavens and a new earth’, awakening in them hope and the dedication and joy to which it gives rise”.

Art.81: Don Bosco’s loving kindness demands a secure chastity which becomes a distinguishing sign of the Salesians as the virtue which they must cultivate in the highest degree. “Our tradition has always considered chastity a resplendent virtue, bearing a special message for the education of

youth. Through it we bear witness to the predilection of Christ for the young; it allows us to love them in an open and uncomplicated way, so that they may 'know they are loved', and it enables us to educate them to love and to purity". For this reason the Salesian must have recourse, as is suggested in art.84, "with filial trust to Mary, the Immaculate Help of Christians, who helps him to love as Don Bosco did".

This rapid survey of precise and enlightening statements from the Constitutions highlights the importance of the theme and the characteristic value it gives to our religious profession, justifying our option as an expression of a style of identity. It puts an original emphasis on the salesian spirit and on our educational and pastoral praxis.

Certainly holiness always demands deep humility, which implies self-detachment in the practice of a profitable emptying out of one's self. The Imitation of Christ teaches us to want to be unknown and thought of as nothing ("ama nesciri et pro nihilo reputari").¹⁵ This is a wise monastic counsel, fundamental enough in itself but not applicable to everyone in the same way.

In our ministerial and apostolic life we must keep in mind the demanding maxim of St Paul: "I urge you then, be imitators of me";¹⁶ "be imitators of me, as I am of Christ";¹⁷ "brethren, join in imitating me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us".¹⁸ Paul teaches us that we must put on Christ in such a way that he takes the place of our own self, and we can truly say: "for me to live is Christ";¹⁹ "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me".²⁰

¹⁵ Book I, ch. 2, n. 3;
Book III, ch.15, n.4

¹⁶ 1 Cor 4,16
¹⁷ 1 Cor 11,1

¹⁸ Phil 3,17

¹⁹ Phil 1,21

²⁰ Gal 2,20

This is the apostolic mystique which permeated Don Bosco's heart and ministry. It calls for a very demanding ascesis so that the emptying out of self should result in our own lives acquiring a transparency which may transform them into an "existential sacrament" so that we can be in fact signs and bearers of the love of Christ. It is true that holiness is impossible without humility; but there is also a humility attainable through the practice of particular virtues, especially of a social kind, that can be called "sacramental", in the sense that it makes the existence of the disciple meaningful and attractive as embodying the mystery of Christ and communicating him to others through the disciple's own life. All of this provides a foundation and justification for the spirituality and apostolic method of "making oneself loved": be imitators of me, as I am of Christ!

Some essential requirements of our pastoral charity

The solemn renewal of our religious Profession in this centenary year surely implies the making of resolutions for the future. For May 14 we did not prepare a merely devotional ceremony, but we solemnly expressed our precise intention of being Salesians for the new times, able to respond to the challenges of the present day. I have been asked repeatedly in this sense for an indication of some of the more strategic points to which we should attend throughout the Congregation.

I would like to dwell on some vital aspects, by referring to four articles of the Constitutions, the "observance" of which has a very positive influence

on our renewal. This will lead us to a better understanding of the fact that “observing the Rule” implies an attitude of constant active commitment to know, study, discern, plan, revise, collaborate, work joyfully, and in particular pray a great deal.

a. *The centrality of Christ.*

Art.3 of the Constitutions says that “we live as disciples of the Lord”, and that we offer ourselves totally to God “in order to follow Christ and work with him in building up the Kingdom”. In the light of this offering, which is already in itself a grace we have received, God the Father “consecrates us through the gift of his Spirit and sends us out to be apostles of the young”. The gift of the Spirit permeates our heart with his gentle power and enables us to live the life of disciples in complete fidelity. The secret of success is to be found in the constant consolidation of the bonds of our precious covenant with God. We know very well that this can be weakened by superficiality in spiritual matters and that on the other hand its daily guarantee is the meeting with Christ in the Eucharist.

Now the solemn renewal of profession recalls every confrere to the duty of constantly fostering in his life the central position of Christ: everything from Him, with Him and through Him! It was precisely for this reason (as well as to meet the requests of various confreres) that in my first circular letter of this Centenary Year I decided to provide a careful treatment of the theme: “The Eucharist in the apostolic spirit of Don Bosco”.²¹

I beg you, dear confreres, to make the content of that circular material for your constant meditation, if you want to be able to really “observe” the

²¹ cf. AGC 324, Jan-Mar. 1988

important art. 3, which throws much light on the content of our formula of profession.²²

²² cf. C 24

b. *The oratory criterion.*

Another directive of particular relevance is given us by the Constitutions in *art. 40*, which states that “as we carry out our mission today, the Valdocco experience is still the lasting criterion for discernment and renewal in all our activities and works”.

A criterion of this kind requires in the first place that the starting point be the condition of youth most in need and of the poorer classes in general (“our priority commitment to the poor”!) with christian formation as our main concern (“a parish that evangelizes), but with parallel attention to a welcoming family atmosphere (“home”), to human advancement (“school”), and to a happy common participation in cultural and sporting activities (“playground”). It is a way of doing things which is characteristic of our charisma, and demands from us a programme of revision and pastoral creativity to match the different levels of culture and faith in which our young people are found.

At the highest level there must always be a specific plan of youth spirituality which ensures that among the youngsters there is always a group which will become an effective evangelizing leaven among their companions (“salesian youth movement”). Don Bosco was able to bring about an educational experience of youthful holiness, and provided methodical evidence of the effectiveness of so lofty an objective by the wonderful results it produced. We must be convinced of this and be modern promoters of the same pastoral wisdom without

yielding to “secularist” or “popular” ideas which are sometimes aimed unfortunately at submerging our charism in plans of a purely horizontal approach or in merely social and political tendencies.

c. *The fostering of vocations.*

The Constitutions, in the chapter on those to whom our mission is addressed, recall in *art.* 28 that “many young people are rich in spiritual potential and give indications of an apostolic vocation”. In practice this means that we must be able to site our various works in social environments sensitive to christian values, and furthermore launch specific group movements which will enable us to help many young people “to discover, accept and develop the gift of a lay, consecrated or priestly vocation, for the benefit of the whole Church and of the Salesian Family”.

I think it appropriate in this connection to insist on two explicit indications which involve objectively those who have renewed their salesian profession with a firm purpose of fidelity. The first is the emphasis that among the specific ends of the Congregation is the will to be faithful to Don Bosco in paying “special attention to apostolic vocations”.²³ The second is the responsibility of the provincial community, and hence of every house, to coordinate and evaluate our apostolic work, to encourage collaboration and to stimulate pastoral work for vocations.²⁴ The Constitutions assure us that this is “a work of collaboration with God’s design, the crown of all our educational and pastoral activity, (and) is sustained by prayer and personal contact, above all in spiritual direction”.²⁵

Dear confreres, we must admit with sorrow

²³ C 6

²⁴ cf. C 58

²⁵ C 37

that in some places there has been a falling off among our priest members of their precious ministerial service in the sacrament of Reconciliation, to which Don Bosco gave himself so tirelessly and to which he attached extraordinary pedagogical and pastoral importance, especially for the maturing of vocations.

And then our communities must display a happy atmosphere of a common life and intense work that “enkindles in the young the desire to get to know and to follow the salesian vocation”,²⁶ so that every house may become a “leaven giving rise to new vocations after the example of the first community of Valdocco”.²⁷ Every confrere should feel himself committed to this delicate but indispensable task, beginning with prayer and going on to explicit and pedagogically suitable suggestions.

In this connection every rector has a particular responsibility which he cannot avoid: “he cannot be called a true son of Don Bosco if he does not strive in every way to promote the greatest possible number of vocations in the field assigned to him by Divine Providence”.²⁸

²⁸ cf. *The Salesian Rector*, 1986 edn. n. 123

d. *Lay involvement.*

Finally, *art.5* of the Constitutions obliges us to give strong support to the Salesian Family. Among the latter’s constituent groups, both the Association of Cooperators and that of the Past Pupils are largely made up of lay people. By the will of the Founder we have a particular responsibility in their regard “to preserve unity of spirit and to foster dialogue and fraternal collaboration for our mutual enrichment and greater apostolic effectiveness”. Speaking of the Councillor for the Salesian Family,

the Constitutions declare that "he directs and assists the provinces so that both the association of the salesian cooperators and the movement of the past pupils may develop according to their own statutes in the territory of the province".²⁹

²⁹ C 137

If we want to live our profession to the full by putting into practice art. 5 of the Constitutions we must make our horizons much wider with regard to the laity. This is clearly demanded by Vatican II and was a very concrete pastoral directive of the last Bishops' Synod. We await the Apostolic Letter of the Holy Father to shed further light on this task we have. I have insisted more than once on this theme and have recalled the thought and example of Don Bosco:³⁰ a greater awareness is required of "dynamic observance" in this matter and much more practical dedication at the level of both the province and each local community. Lack of growth in such a sector could be a yardstick indicating a possible lack of fidelity to Don Bosco.

³⁰ cf. AGC 317; 318; 321

This is not a duty which is easy to carry out, nor is it a matter of organization alone; it presupposes a genuine salesian spirit and ardent ecclesial zeal prompted by "da mihi animas". And here I would like to impress strongly on the provincials the urgent need to appoint really valid delegates for this work, and on the rectors the indispensable need for their communities to commit themselves in this regard. The life and growth of these associations is rooted especially in the local centres where there is a greater possibility for intensifying the spirit and fostering activity.

Provincials and rectors can meditate with profit, and with the intention to fulfil them, on the indications given in our General Regulations³¹ with reference to the Cooperators and Past Pupils; they

³¹ R 36, 38, 39

would do well in addition to read carefully what is said in the same connection in the two recently published manuals of government: "The Salesian Provincial" and "The Salesian Rector".³²

³² cf. *L'Ispettore Salesiano*, 342-344; *The Salesian Rector*, 142-144

You can see therefore, dear confreres, that the fidelity we promised on 14 May last has some very practical consequences calling for a depth and creativity which launch the "observance" of our salesian project into an orbit where it must move with the speed the Holy Spirit wants in the Church, and with ever fresh initiatives.

The four aspects we have briefly considered provide further and stimulating evidence of this. The Congregation will raise its level of spiritual intensity to the extent that it is centred on Christ and lives out this centrality through the oratory criterion, the fostering of vocations, and the involvement of the laity.

Entrusted always to Mary

The Don Bosco centenary year (with its unforgettable renewal of religious profession) has coincided so far with the Extraordinary Marian Year proclaimed by the Holy Father in preparation for the year 2000.

Calling to mind the filial Act of Entrustment made by the whole Congregation on 14 January 1984 at the beginning of the last General Chapter which gave us the definitive text of the Constitutions and General Regulations, we believe that what Mary did for Don Bosco at the beginnings of our charisma she has done also with us in the laborious period of postconciliar renewal, and she will continue to do the same as we approach the year

2000 and the Third Millennium. This is stated explicitly in art. 8 of the Constitutions which refers both to the beginnings and to the time still to come.

Entrustment to Mary Help of Christians must be cultivated in the conscience of every confrere; it should be the subject of meditation and frequently renewed as a spiritual stimulus having practical efficacy for the vigour and vitality of our consecration. Mary in fact is a mother who immerses us in the Spirit, helping us to acquire an ever greater awareness that for us "to live is Christ". She is the shining witness, the most concrete and impelling help who involves us in the life-giving presence of the Holy Spirit and the consequent deep and vital bonds with the Lord. No one can manifest to us more clearly than she the action of the Paraclete who incorporates believers into the resurrected life of the Son; no one more than she can lead us more kindly and practically to forget ourselves and live for Him so as to make ourselves loved.

Mary proclaims magnificently in herself the qualitative leap inherent in the Incarnation and Redemption, which unites in definitive fashion the transcendence of the Mystery with the banality of daily life, the consistency between eternity and temporal change, the life of the resurrection with the vicissitudes of mortal man until he reaches that intimate "transpersonalization" through which he puts on Christ and lives in him. Mary has shown forth the mysterious values of this qualitative leap by an attitude of faith so sublime as to earn for her the title "She who believed". Through the work of the Holy Spirit, her faith was concentrated in Christ, conceived and developed within her, who grew and matured with her, involving her ever more explicitly in his mission until the fullness of

Calvary when she became, through Christ's testament, the Mother of humanity.

If the faith of St Paul led him to cry out "for me to live is Christ", with greater reason must the believing heart of Mary have suggested to her: "It is no longer I that live; it is Christ who lives in me. The life I now live in this world I live through faith in the Son of God (who is my son too)!".

Furthermore Mary, assumed into heaven and living eternally with Christ, has an eye on history and intercedes uninterruptedly with her Son with the solicitude of a mother. In her role as "Help of Christians and Mother of the Church" she distributes throughout the centuries the copious fruits of that qualitative leap which began in her womb with the conception of the incarnate Word and reached its fullness in Christ's paschal victory. In this way Mary continues throughout history to bring Christ to birth in the heart of every believer, so that his being may be conformed to Christ, making him a sign and bearer of the divine love and constituting him, in communion with other believers, that "universal Sacrament of salvation" which the pilgrim Church is among all peoples.

Daily awareness of our entrustment to Mary ensures us the help of a Mother, the promptings of a Teacher, the directives of a sure Guide, as well as the genuine indications of what is implied by salesian identity and fidelity; it inspires a timely response to the challenges of our times and strengthens the resources of our pastoral creativity in the light of our demanding mission among the young and the poor. Entrustment to Mary should daily accompany the future perspectives which stem from our profession.

Let us meditate with prayerful attention on

those words of the Constitutions: "The Virgin Mary showed Don Bosco his field of labour among the young and was the constant guide and support of his work, especially 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'".³³

³³ C 8

A centenary, source of blessings

By way of conclusion let us look back over the first four months of this "Year of grace" which we are living as a prophetic memorial of Don Bosco. We are observing with gratitude a real predilection of the Lord.

We may say without exaggeration that the Strenna of the "pedagogy of kindness" has received as a masterly comment nothing less than the magnificent Apostolic Letter of the Pope, "Iuvenum Patris", which has spread the message of Don Bosco's pedagogical holiness to the whole of the Church.

The churches designated for the gaining of our Jubilee Indulgence are receiving an ever growing number of pilgrims (and especially young ones), particularly at Valdocco and the Becchi where the numbers are increasing in quite extraordinary fashion.

The renewal of religious profession and a series of special spiritual retreats have proved to be intense expressions of spiritual depth. The many celebrations at the centre and further afield (those at which I have been present or of which I have had news) have far exceeded all expectations and have served to make Don Bosco better known, to lead

many people to follow his teachings and to re-launch the spirit and zeal of the component groups of the Salesian Family.

The publications which have so far appeared have made a significant addition to our literary patrimony in the fields of history, pedagogy and spirituality.

The salesian Youth Movement has grown in enthusiasm and in the understanding of its own identity, and the "DB88 Appraisal" is being prepared with great seriousness. In many diocese of the different continents there have been initiatives of study, of prayer, and of making plans in the field of youth pastoral work which draw their inspiration from Don Bosco.

In various countries too there have been civic manifestations of great social significance, and commemorative events expressive of gratitude (celebrations, study congresses, monuments, postage stamps, coins, medals, hymns and music recitals, conjuring demonstrations and artistic presentations of various kinds) which have highlighted different aspects of the truly multifaceted figure of our Father: in Mexico I heard a wonderful chorus sung by great crowds of young people: "his heart is great as the shores of the sea, and after a hundred years he has not ceased to love us still"! And still to come are several other events which will certainly be moments of grace.

What is most impressive is to see the deepening understanding of Don Bosco's spirituality, the ever growing interest in his pedagogy, and especially the explosion of friendship and fascination for him shown by countless numbers of young people of so many nations.

Truly the centenary is showing us in a thousand

ways the relevance and urgent need of Don Bosco's charism in the world and the Church! It is up to us to renew our fidelity and spirit of initiative with a humble and intelligent filial attitude. The Constitutions tell us that "the Lord has given us Don Bosco as father and teacher. We study and imitate him, admiring in him a splendid blending of nature and grace. ... These two aspects combined to create a closely-knit life project, the service of the young. He realized his aim with firmness, constancy and the sensitivity of a generous heart, in the midst of difficulties and fatigue".³⁴ And the most outstanding characteristic of his generous heart was the pastoral holiness which enabled him to "make himself so greatly loved".

³⁴ C 21

As we look at the fine "cross of the Good Shepherd", the symbol of our apostolic consecration, let us listen each day to Don Bosco's exhortation: "strive to make yourself loved", as the authoritative indication for our personal and community life.

My cordial greetings to each one of you with the assurance of a daily remembrance in the Eucharist. May Don Bosco intercede for us!

Affectionately in the Lord,

Don E. Viganò