

This Homily is not for publication.

We are celebrating this solemn Mass in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in the year of the bicentenary of the birth of our Father Don Bosco. In this place and at this time more than ever, we want to hear and reflect on the words of Mary: “Hic domus mea, inde gloria mea” as they have been presented at this International Congress of Mary Help of Christians: From the house of Mary to our homes. His mercy is from generation to generation.

From her house, Mary, Help of Christians and Mother of the Church, wants to raise the affections of the Church and the Salesian Family to new heights and towards wider horizons. The sacred work of love that is called family has been endangered for too long by emergencies that are increasingly momentous and most urgently in need of help. The Pope now recognises the key importance of the family by bringing the Church together for a Synod to promote understanding and love for the family.

We are meeting in a place of grace. Fr Eugenio Ceria, one of the biographers of Don Bosco, says that the erection of the temple of Mary Help of Christians at Valdocco holds exceptional importance in the tradition of the Salesian Family. It proclaims the certainty of the maternal intercession of the Help of Christians (“Mary has built this house for herself”). This is the “privileged place” of a spiritual and apostolic message (the heart of the spiritual heritage of the Founder) and it becomes the centre of unity and universality (“This is my house. From here my glory goes forth”). Fr Ceria says that with this temple Don Bosco kindled “a mystical fire where generations of Gospel workers, sent far from here to work in the vineyard of the Lord, would return to rekindle their fervour” (E. Ceria, “Annals” I p. 89; See all of Chapter 9). The shrine of Valdocco transcends local geography and is a fruitful centre that extends to the world the riches of a charism of the Holy Spirit, riches that have been preserved and nurtured by the solicitude of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God.

The Gospel reveals how Jesus grew up in a family, worked the first of his signs at the wedding party at Cana, and taught the meaning of marriage as the fullness of revelation that recovers the original plan of God. The story of the wedding at Cana is the Gospel reading proposed for the Mass in honour of Mary Help of Christians. I would like to comment on it in the light of the interpretation that Don Bosco offers in the booklet, “The Wonders of the Mother of God”. This is the most beautiful text written by Don Bosco on Mary Help of Christians and Mother of the Church. Don Bosco writes:

“At the wedding at Cana Mary manifests her zeal and her power of intercession with her son Jesus. Vinum non habent: Mary prays, pleads and intercedes as a tender and merciful Mother. Making the needs of others our own is one of the characteristics of mercy. Concern and diligence in foreseeing and providing the appropriate help at the right moment is an expression of and fruit of the intimate union of the Mother with her Son in the work of salvation. Mary shines forth as a splendid example of faith, a teacher of trust, love and obedience, and an example of humility, promptness and prudence.”

In these few lines our father lists for us a variety of elements that guide our path and give a particular meaning to our Congress, giving us some valuable pointers for the life of our families and for a renewed family ministry.

Mary prays, begs and intercedes. Mary is the woman who intercedes with the power of love. These three verbs describe Mary’s maternal mediation. The power of prayer must sustain us on our journey, in our relationships, in the choices we make, and in the hardships and trials of family life. The family must not deprive itself of the protection of prayer. When the wine of joy, harmony, and peace runs short, prayer must intensify. Many people and many families are marked by loneliness, abandonment and often resentment, because they have run short of the wine of joy that adds flavour to life. The weakness and fragility of the family today is often due to the absence of prayer and the consequent spiritual emptiness. “The family that prays together stays together,” said Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

She is a tender and merciful Mother who confirms the truth of God's love from generation to generation. It is precisely in the daily life of our families, and in marital, parental and fraternal relations, that the merciful love of God must be revealed. Our relationships are often wounded, unhealthy and resentful. They need to experience a love that welcomes, forgives and asks for pardon, a love that is able to rebuild relations and open them and extend them to new horizons.

One of the qualities of mercy is to make the needs of others our own. This insight helps us to understand that true love, the love that heals, comes from the ability to take ownership of the needs of the other. This is compassion, taking to heart and doing something about the tears, the mistakes, the needs of a husband, wife, son, brother, sister, grandparent or relative... healing and renewing the relationships.

Concern and diligence in foreseeing and providing: in this expression we have a wonderful synthesis of our preventive system which Don Bosco learned through the inspiration and guidance of Mary Help of Christians and at the school of

Mamma Margaret. Led by Mary Help of Christians we too learn the art of an attentive intuitive love, like that of a mother, a woman who can foresee and provide discreetly and at the right time. What a lesson for family life! It is the practice of this attentive, prompt and diligent love that builds and strengthens the network of emotional relationships in the family, in the daily exercise of a charity that makes visible the foreseeing and provident love of God. The light it radiates is the light of mercy and salvation for the whole world, the light of truth for every person, for the human family and for individual families. This light encourages us to bring human warmth to those family situations where, for various reasons, peace, harmony and forgiveness are absent. Practical solidarity is also needed, especially towards families who are experiencing difficult situations of illness, unemployment, discrimination, or emigration.

Mary as a splendid example of faith: Mary was present at a wedding feast at the beginning of Jesus' public life. His presence at the beginning of a new family reminds us that Jesus should always have first place at the heart of the family. When parents and children together breathe this atmosphere of faith, they have an energy that allows them to face even the most difficult trials. Faith is a lamp that shines. It has to be transmitted as a precious heritage from generation to generation through the testimony of an authentic gospel life. Teacher of trust, love and obedience: Once again Mary is the teacher at whose school we can learn wisdom, as young John was told in the dream at nine years. She is the teacher of trust, love and obedience as she demonstrated in the miracle of the wedding at Cana. She trusted her Son and turned to him to plead for what was needed. She showed her love for the young couple. She displayed obedience in faith to God's will and she taught the servants to obey, telling them to do whatever he told them. Relationships within the family grow where there is trust, where love given and received becomes the lifeblood of the family, and obedience involves listening, availability and sharing the journey together.

Mary as an example of humility, promptness and prudence. Humility is the foundation of the spiritual life. It is like the foundation of a house. Promptness allows of no delay in responding to the call of God and to the inspirations of the Spirit. It is like the walls of the house that make it grow. Prudence means ordering everything towards goodness. It is like the roof of the house that complete and protects it.

Now I want to mention that it was in the year in which our father Don Bosco was born that Pope

Pius VII established the liturgical feast of Mary Help of Christians. His liberation from imprisonment by Napoleon on 24 May 1814 prompted Pius VII to institute the liturgical memorial, precisely on 24 May. After he crowned the image of the Mother of Mercy in Savona, Pius VII instituted the feast of the Help of Christians as a perpetual memorial of his release. Mary Help of Christians defends the Church and frees it from every danger

from within or without. Today we want to her to be the Help of the domestic church that is the family, defending it from the many attacks that seek to destroy it, and freeing it from all that is not according to God's plan.

Looking at the great picture behind the high altar we see that among the images of the saints surrounding Mary there is also the image of Don Bosco who is holding a model of the Basilica and offering it in homage to Our Lady. This evening I wish every family to do as Don Bosco did by offering their home to Mary Help of Christians, inviting her to be their Mother, Teacher and Guide. At the end of this Eucharist one family representing every continent here present will pay homage to Mary Help of Christians as a sign of the entrustment of our families and of the whole Salesian Family to our Mother and Teacher.

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