

Dear friends,

we want to share the homily of Salesians' Rector Major, Don Ángel Fernández Artime, for the final celebrations of VII International Congress of Mary Help of Christians, at Colle Don Bosco.

9 august 2015

“Bicentenary of the birth of Don Bosco”

Homily

“I was born on Assumption day 1815 at Murialdo, a village near Castelnuovo d’Asti. My mother’s name was Margaret Occhiena of Capriglio; my father’s was Francis. They were frugal and honest farmers, who earned their daily bread with the sweat of their brow. With his work, my good father supported grandma, in her 70s and ailing; three boys, of whom Anthony, son of his first wife, was the eldest. Joseph was second-born; I, John, was the third. He also supported two farmhands.” (Memoirs of the Oratory)

It is moving to hear these words of Don Bosco right here in the place where he was born 200 years ago. Although Don Bosco was born on 16 August, he speaks of the day of the Assumption, as if to indicate how his life from the beginning is marked by the maternal providential presence of Mary Most Holy. And after Our Lady he talks about his father Francis and his mother Margaret, his beloved and revered parents. They were farmers who lived by working the land. He also mentions his elderly grandmother, his step-brother Antonio from his father’s first marriage, and his other brother Joseph.

In the second reading St. Paul exhorts the Christians in Ephesus: “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God ... Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you... And walk in love, as Christ loved us.”

The message that I would like to leave, particularly to families, from this place, the birthplace of Don Bosco, is that of the Apostle Paul: “Walk in love.” As you leave Colle Don Bosco today, I would like you to bring to the world the spirit of the family that was born here and raised in the school of Mamma Margaret. Walk in love: nowadays the biggest problem in life is not the shortage of economic assets or the lack of opportunity in life: the biggest problem today is the lack of love. It hurts not to receive a smile or not be accepted. There is a silence that can hurt, sometimes even in the family, the silence that can exist between husband and wife, between parents and children, between brothers and sisters. Without love, every effort costs more, and life becomes intolerable. In the life of a family many beautiful moments are shared: meals, rest, work in the home, fun, prayer, travel and pilgrimages, acts of solidarity... However, if there is no love there is no joy and there is no sense of togetherness.

If love is a relationship, then it is a reality that is constantly growing. We can also say, by way of example, that it is like a house, not built on the sand of feelings that come and go, but on the rock of true love, the love that comes from God. The family that is born from this love that is always growing. It is like a house that is a place of love, help, hope and support.

Walk in love: This means putting God first in family life. It means recognizing that we need God. We need God: all of us, all of us! We need his help, his strength, his blessing, his mercy, his forgiveness. It means praying in the family, and this is what makes the family stronger – prayer.

I would like to make my own three words of Pope Francis:

Excuse me: not intruding into the lives of others, but respecting the mystery of each person. Not intruding into the lives of the spouse, or of a son or daughter, but learning sensitivity to be able to stop on the threshold of the mystery that the other person carries and expresses. Excuse me, what do you think? Allow me...

Thanks: thank your spouse, son, daughter, brother, sister, grandfather, grandmother; thanks for who you are and what you do for me. How beautiful it is to give thanks!

Sorry: We all make mistakes. The word 'sorry' can be difficult to say, but we have to say it. We have to say, "Forgive me!" Love is stronger than any reason we may have to quarrel and so in the family we should never finish the day without making peace. Do not keep grudges and resentment for they are seeds of death that kill relationships.

Sometimes you may feel you are in the desert where many, even many young people, feel like the prophet Elijah that they are "willing to die" rather than to live. To make us able to "Walk in love" at times like this, the Lord offers us bread for the journey.

Jesus commands us, even as we are gathered here on this blessed hill of Colle Don Bosco: "Get up and eat." We need to get up from our fears, our sorrows, our grudges, our grumbling, from our false certainties and our prejudices, and eat the bread of life which is Jesus.

"I am the bread of life"

Dear brothers and sisters, we conclude this International Congress of Mary Help of Christians celebrating, worshipping and eating the bread of life, the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

Let us renew our faith as we resume our journey invigorated by the "living bread come down from heaven."

It is the living bread which always nourished John Bosco. As a saintly educator, he made the living bread one of the pillars of his educational system. On 31 December 1863 Don Bosco told his young people: "Imagine you see a large globe suspended from two pillars or columns. On one is written, Regina Mundi and on the other Panis Vitae ". Then comes the explanation: "The globe represents the world. The two pillars are Mary most holy and the Blessed Sacrament. They are really the pillars that support the world. If it were not for Mary and the Blessed Sacrament, the world would already be ruined "(MB VII, 585-586).

The Eucharist is the food of the soul. It is the life of the Church. It is the strength of our families. In Cattolico provveduto Don Bosco writes: "Do you, oh Christian, want to grow in the life of grace and goodness, to live in union with God, and every day to make yourself more worthy of eternal life? Approach the table of the Lord often and worthily. Jesus Christ instituted this sacrament precisely in order to be for the soul what food is for the body, nourishment to maintain and support the spiritual life."

"With the strength of that food he walked"

Let us walk in our day with Eucharistic and Marian hearts, with hearts passionate for God and for the young, with the faith and love of our father Don Bosco. Let us walk always with this food for the soul to reach the goal to which we are all called and of which Don Bosco said: "I will wait for you all in heaven."