

THE MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

DON ÁNGEL FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME

LIKE POPE FRANCIS

“My dear young people: I trust in you and I pray for you. Have the courage to be counter-cultural.” (Pope Francis)

In a world where quite often we silence God and where He is pushed aside, we need the witness of young people for whom the Lord is truly the Lord of their lives and the path to happiness and authenticity.

I recently returned from the Antilles, or more exactly, from the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Cuba, where we celebrated 100 years of Salesian presence and the beautiful feast of Don Bosco. As always, I met with our wonderful Salesian Family, with many lay people who have great affection for Don Bosco as well as for me, the Rector Major, and I also encountered some magnificent young people.

I remember that before I left for this trip, I had sent to all the young people of the Salesian world a message with a theme for the feast of Don Bosco. In that video I shared with them the words which Pope Francis had directed to them during one of his encounters with the young. Just like Pope Francis, and I know just like many of you, dear readers and friends, I trust in the young; I pray for the young; I encourage them to be courageous, to be the protagonists of their own lives, and to swim against the tide, to be countercultural.

I met with many bright young people who are capable of being animators of other youths, of other boys and girls; young people who were already working or who were still studying while working so as to be able to help out at home and at the same time to have greater opportunities in life. These young people, aged 20 to 25, who have no qualms about helping with liturgical celebrations as servers, or taking part in a magnificent choir in the church, or performing at the evening recreation, demonstrating their magnificent talents as actors and dancers. These, too, are our young people.

To these young people I say that there are many adults like us who place great hope in them; that there are many adults who encourage them to be courageous in their life, recognizing that the world which we offer them is not an easy one and that opportunities are scarce. I also tell them that this is no fault of their own. We adults, too, must be self-critical. So, together with Pope Francis, I encourage them to have the strength to “swim against the current,” to be countercultural, when the call to be faithful to themselves and to Jesus resounds mightily within their hearts.

The world needs you

Dear young people, I tell you that the world needs you. It stands in need of those great ideals which are proper to youth and to your youthful dreams. The world, everywhere, on six continents, now more than ever needs young people filled with hope and with courage, who do not fear to live, dream, and seek a profound and true happiness in which God inhabits their hearts. In a world where quite often we silence God and where He is pushed aside, we need the witness of young people for whom the Lord is truly the Lord of their lives and the path to happiness and authenticity.

This world of ours needs young people who feel attracted to make a commitment and are able to sacrifice themselves and love “until it hurts,” as Mother Teresa of Calcutta used to say in her day – she who is now a saint. We need young people who are capable, through their commitment, to give of their time and of themselves.

Is this asking too much? I do not think so. Certainly, I am setting the bar high, but it is the same as Don Bosco asked of his boys at Valdocco – whether in the normal things of everyday life or in the heroicity of attending to those who were ill with the cholera.

I also remind you young people of today that we need you because other young people need you. You are the ones who can best understand and help them because there are many young people who are “tired, bored, or disenchanted,” or who simply never get excited about anything. There are young people who are very weak and fragile and need other young people to speak to them about life, using their language, so as to show them that there are other paths and possibilities open to them. They need others who will help them truly believe that running away from the challenges of life is never a solution. They also need true “missionary disciples” who will help them discover Jesus in their lives and help them believe in Him – in a Jesus, I tell you, who will not sell them “a pig in a poke” (‘no les vende humo’) but will offer them life, authentic life, His life, and His very self.

A short while ago, Pope Francis wrote a message to all the young people of the world in which he said: “I do not fear.... A better world can be built also as a result of your efforts, your desire to change, and your generosity. Do not be afraid to listen to the Spirit, who proposes bold choices; do not delay when your conscience asks you to take risks in following the Master.”

Hence, my invitation in these pages seeks to help many young people of the world be generous. It is also a call to us adults to stand beside them, place our bets on them, believe in them, trust in them, and pray for them – for those whose faith is alive, as well as for those who are seeking or simply feel lost. God never abandons any of His sons or daughters.

Be happy!