

THE MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

DON ÁNGEL FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME

BENEATH THE MANTLE OF MARY

WE ARE FAMILY AND MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS
IS OUR ATTENTIVE AND CONSOLING MOTHER.
SHE TOOK DON BOSCO BY THE HAND AND TAKES OURS ALSO
TO GUIDE US ALONG THE PATHS OF THIS WORLD

Just the other day I was speaking with a young wife who is going through difficult times. We were speaking about faith and she said to me: “Certainly, I have faith, Father. I intend upon living with and by faith, and I can assure you that every morning when I wake up the first thing I do when I put my feet on the floor is to say my prayer to Mary Help of Christians.” As you can imagine, my thoughts flew immediately to Don Bosco and the absolute trust he had in Mary Help of Christians. It was Don Bosco himself who said many times: “It is impossible to go to Jesus except through the love of Mary,” and also: “Mary has always been my guide. Whoever places his trust in her will never feel let down.”

Almost in jest I once said: “If I ever come to know that one of you has prayed well, but in vain, I am going to write a letter immediately to St. Bernard telling him he was wrong when he said: ‘Remember, O most loving Virgin Mary! That it is a thing unheard of that anyone ever sought your protection or implored your help and was left forsaken.’ But you can be sure that I will never have to write any letter to St. Bernard!” I imagine that for this young bride, and for many others who have absolute confidence in our Heavenly Mother, the feeling is the same; that is to say: trust in Mary Help of Christians is a guarantee that no one will ever be unheard or forsaken.

All this speaks to me of something much more than just a pious thought from Don Bosco. To contemplate, as I have done many times, on the simple devotion of thousands and thousands of people to Mary, the Mother of the Lord, in the numerous and different shrines around the world, truly moves me and I cannot remain indifferent. Furthermore, seeing how significant Mary Help of Christians is in our “Salesian world”, in Valdocco, in the Basilica, touches my heart deeply. My imagination takes off when I think of Don Bosco walking through these very places, through this courtyard – even if the stones were different ones – and helping his boys and his young men and the first Salesians “fall in love” with his same strong and affectionate love for our Heavenly Mother.

I hear him tell me that if we are to walk a sure path as Salesian educators, we cannot do so without helping the hearts of our boys and girls beat strongly for our Blessed Mother. Without this, our education of “good Christians” lacks an absolute essential.

I can assure you that as I travel around the world, I continue to see authentic miracles each and every day which are the fruit of Salesian education - of our Preventive System - which is an act of entrustment to a presence that makes reasonable the demand to make God the meaning in one's life and feel the true affection of educators who seek only the good of these children, teens, and young adults, preparing them for life and helping them grow.

Don Bosco's Virgin is represented with a huge mantle – a mantle which is a shelter, a refuge, a place of protection – in many of his dreams.

In his first dream, Mary “took me by the hand in her goodness.” Don Bosco would never let go of that hand. In this way, the extraordinary would blossom in the midst of the ordinary because this is true faith. We can say: “Where Don Bosco is, there is Mary.” Hers is a concrete presence.

Just like Don Bosco tried to explain to the Sisters gathered in Nizza: “I only want to tell you that the Virgin Mary loves you very much – very, very much. And... you know, she is here in your midst!”

Then Don Bonetti, seeing him moved, interrupted him, and began to say, solely for the sake of distracting him: ‘Yes, it is so... It is so! Don Bosco wants to say that the Virgin Mother is your Mother and that she looks upon you and protects you’.

‘No! No!’ the Saint resumed speaking, ‘I want to tell you that the Virgin Mother is truly here, in this House; that she is happy with you and that, if you persevere with the spirit you have now, that this is what the Virgin Mary wants’...

The good Father was even more moved than before, and Don Bonetti again began to speak: ‘Yes, it is so... it is so! Don Bosco wants to tell you that if you will always be good, the Blessed Mother will be happy with you.’

‘But no, but no’, Don Bosco tried to explain, exerting himself to control his emotions. ‘I want to say that the Virgin Mary is truly here, here right in your midst! The Virgin Mother walks in this House and covers it with Her Mantle!’” (*Biographical Memoirs*, vol. XVII, p. 513)

When it is like this, when one sees that so much life exists in our Salesian Houses around the world and the good that is being done, one can only say: “She has done everything and... Trust in Mary Help of Christians and you will see what Miracles are.” May our Blessed Mother continue to shower you with the love that only mothers know how to give.”