

THE MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

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OUR SUMMER IN MARY'S NAME

"IT IS SHE WHO HAS DONE EVERYTHING" DON BOSCO USED TO SAY. "I AM CONVINCED THAT THE BLESSED MOTHER CONTINUES TO DO EVERYTHING."

IT IS SHE WHO GIVES US JESUS, AND BY HER PRESENCE, HER CLOSENESS, AND HER HELP URGES US ALL TO LIVE ALWAYS WITH GREAT FAITH

In our hemisphere, summer is almost synonymous with "vacation". I think of so many Salesians and their collaborators who organize summer camps of all kinds during this season.

It is wonderful to note that at the center of this season is a most beautiful Marian Feast: the Assumption of the Blessed Mother into Heaven.

An old story which speaks of a teacher comes to mind. This teacher, leaning out of his window which faced the market place, saw one of his students, a certain Haikel, walking in a hurry and looking very busy. He called out to him and invited him to join him.

«Haikel, have you noticed the sky this morning?»

«No, Teacher».

«And the road, Haikel? Have you noticed the road this morning?»?

«Yes, Teacher».

«And now, do you see it still?»?

«Yes, Teacher, I see it».

«Tell me what you see».

«People, horses, carts, merchants fidgeting about, farmers warming themselves, men and women coming and going, that, that is what I see».

«Haikel, Haikel – the Teacher kindly admonished him –, within 50 years, or within 100 years, there will still be a street just like this one and another marketplace similar to this one. Other carts will carry other merchants for the buying and selling of other horses. But I will no longer be here and you will no longer be here. And so, I ask you, Haikel, why do you run if you do not even have the time to look up at the sky?»?

This is the gift that Mary gives us on the Feast of the Assumption: the invitation to look up to the sky. We cannot forget the first line written by Don Bosco in *The Companion of Youth (Il Giovane Provveduto)*: Lift up your eyes, o my sons, and observe what exists in heaven and on earth».

Mary's Feast Days, as all her apparitions in so many parts of the world, are guides for our life and strong invitations not to forget Heaven - even in the midst of the numerous and pleasant activities, of the time to relax, and to enjoy nature.

The "Missionary Disciple"

A short time ago, I was in Mexico. On May 11, I had the great grace of presiding over the annual pilgrimage of the Mexican Salesian Family and the Solemn Mass in the famous *National Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe*. Once again, I was able to see, feel, and touch with my own hands the faith of God's people and their love for Our Lady, Jesus' Mother and Our Mother, also.

That evening, another even more special gift awaited us: the opportunity to visit the little room in which is kept the image of the Blessed Mother and to be able to contemplate it close up and even to "touch" it. The cloth is made of natural vegetable fibers from the agave plant and is called a *tilma*, a kind of mantle used by the simple indigenous peoples of that area in the 1500s.

I am sure all of you know, more or less, the story of Juan Diego and Our Lady so I will not recount it here. But I will say that from 1531 until today, the icon of the Mother of the Living God continues to be imprinted in an absolutely miraculous and surprising way on a type of cloth which usually lasts no more than 20 years or so, if cared for very carefully. But the tilma of Our Lady of Guadalupe is almost 500 years old. This "Guadalupano event", as it has come to be called, is a series of signs (such as the durability of the cloth and the colors, etc., but also the faith and the devotion of the people) which highlight the relationship between Mary and the people of God, and which extends to all peoples and cultures of the world. It is a relationship characterized by closeness, by presence, by tenderness, by motherhood, and by the help of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Whether on *Tepeyac*, the hill on which She appeared to the Indian St. *Juan Diego*, or in any other corner of the world where She wished to be present in any one of various ways, and, above all in the faith of Her sons and daughters, Her Presence, Her closeness, and Her help are felt and move all to live with profound faith.

From this Guadalupano event of 500 years ago until today, Our Lady wants to be seen as a Mother who carries in Her womb "*the Most True and Only God, He Who is the Author of Life*". She, the humble handmaid, is always presented in reference to Him, Her Son, the Son of God; therefore, She does not want only to "show" Herself but to announce Him - to "show" Him.

This is how She shows Herself to be a *Missionary Disciple* who brings Jesus to all peoples and to us... to us here today and to every son and daughter on the face of the planet.

From the Cupola of the Basilica

Mary of Guadalupe is "our" Help of Christians who draws near to every man and woman and, through the help She gives, "shows" Jesus. On *Tepeyac* hill, She carried Jesus in Her womb, not for Herself but so as to make Him known. At Valdocco, in the magnificent painting of Lorenzone, done according to Don Bosco's inspiration, She carries the babe on Her arm, *giving Him, showing Him, and rendering Him* manifest.

One week later, I was able to celebrate the Feast of Mary Help of Christians in Valdocco, together with 1000s of the faithful who had come from all parts of Italy and of the world. I felt the same emotions there that I had experienced in Guadalupe, with a tone that is totally Salesian because She, the Mother, is proclaimed with the name that was so dear to Don Bosco. It was in those very same courtyards that Dominic Savio, Michael Rua, Philip Rinaldi, Don Bosco, and innumerable

youth of the Oratory, as well as the first Salesians, lived, played, and walked the path to sanctity together.

I am able to see in my mind an invisible bridge between Guadalupe and Valdocco. We prayed at Valdocco for the Mexicans whom I had encountered in Guadalupe. I promised them to do so, and when I made them this promise, the Salesian Family in Guadalupe reacted with a loud, moved – and moving – applause.

At Valdocco, I understood clearly Don Bosco's words that "it was Mary who had done everything" and I know with great certainty that it is She, Our Lady, who "continues to do everything".

From Tepeyac and from the cupola of the Basilica, to the numerous churches consecrated to Her in Africa by the Salesians, Mary keeps vigil over all young people and over the Salesians throughout the world lest anyone lose their way on the road to Heaven where Don Bosco is awaiting us all.