

THE MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

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STABAT MATER. OUR MOTHER IS THERE. ALWAYS.

“It is she who has done everything!” Don Bosco used to say. Our holy Mother continues to radiate her motherly tenderness, just as she did today in Beirut. I’ve seen it!

From Beirut to Valdocco, our Blessed Lady is always present!

Greetings to all our readers!

Today I’m writing to you from Beirut, Lebanon, on the day after April 1, when we celebrated the Pasch of the Lord, Easter Sunday – a very significant day for the Salesian Family in more than one way.

I don’t want to miss this opportunity to make reference, before all else, to Don Bosco and his relationship with Easter. It was precisely on the day of the Lord’s Resurrection in 1846 that Don Bosco obtained the little Pinardi shed (today our Pinardi Chapel in Valdocco), due to the intervention of Divine Providence, after he had suffered a veritable Gethsemane – not knowing where he would be able to gather his 200+ boys on the following Sunday. From that Easter Sunday until today, we have experienced innumerable interventions of Divine Providence and of the Virgin Mary.

It was also an Easter Sunday, a very rainy one, when Don Bosco was proclaimed a saint on April 1, 1934. This year also, April 1 is the day on which our Lord gave us the gift of celebrating Easter around the world and in all our presences, no matter how different the situations among them. Sometimes we celebrate in a beautiful church, and other times under a tree, as in the refugee camps of Palabek in Uganda or Juba in South Sudan, where Salesian communities share life with the least and the rejected. Let us thank the Lord for these signs of life and of the Resurrection because in their poverty and pain they still feel that they are special to the Lord. It is we humans who are responsible for creating the unjust situations which exist – not God.

And Mary is always present also – whether on the Friday of the Lord’s Passion or on the morning of the Resurrection. This is the point I wish to refer to: the attraction that OUR MOTHER awakens in the entire Christian world.

This afternoon in Beirut found me visiting the shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon together with other Salesian confreres. The shrine is in a beautiful place in the mountains where a huge statue of the

Virgin Mary holds her arms open wide to embrace the city of Beirut. We went to a small chapel to pray. There was a big variety of people there, praying. Many were young. This touched me profoundly. My gaze fell on a young mother and her 14-year-old son. The mom was praying with her eyes closed, in deep concentration and devotion. The son stood at his mother's side. It seemed to me that he was already a little tired of standing there in silence, but he just kept looking at his mom – and I at them because the scene moved me. So much faith. Without a doubt, so many feelings flowed from the heart of that young mother to our other Mother, to Jesus' Mother, the Mother of us all.

I contemplated that scene, as well as many others like it, in my heart – in which the same thing always happens. The Blessed Virgin arouses great tenderness, affection, and love in her children throughout the entire world.

In May this year we'll celebrate 150 years since the consecration of the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin, built by Don Bosco in response to the wish of the Virgin Mary. It's a sacred place, the one that gave concrete form to our Mother's words: "Hic domus mea – inde gloria mea." ("This is my house; hence goes forth my glory.")

And her glory does, indeed, continue to go forth today throughout the entire Salesian world, in 134 nations. The Salesian world is dotted with churches, chapels, Marian shrines, and basilicas where our Mother still calls to her children of all cultures and colors to come to her, to encounter her, so that she may hold them in her Mother's heart and lead them always to her beloved Son.

I'm convinced that that scene in Beirut, of the mother with her son at her side, is replicated thousands of times throughout the world every day. While our Mother watches over us, keeping us under her protection and care, we have nothing to fear.

Looking with a Salesian gaze, we recognize and we continue to say today, just as Don Bosco did in his day, that "It's she who has done everything" – and allow me to add that she will continue to do so!

Blessed feast of Mary Help of Christians! On May 23 at Valdocco we will solemnly inaugurate this 150th anniversary celebration. It will be a priceless opportunity for us to unite ourselves to all the shrines, chapels, churches, and basilicas around the world where she, our holy Mother, continues to radiate her motherly tenderness, just as she did today in Beirut. I've seen it!