

MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR TO THE SYM
FOR THE FEAST OF DON BOSCO 2004

My Dear Young People,

Once again I have the opportunity to address you on the occasion of the liturgical commemoration of our Father Don Bosco.

1. With the 50th anniversary of the canonisation of Dominic Savio and the centenary of the death of Laura Vicuña, proclaimed Blessed by John Paul II in the magnificent setting of Colle Don Bosco in 1988, 2004 becomes for us a kind of jubilee year, as mentioned and celebrated in the Bible: a festive, joyful year, a year in which to recall God's presence in our history, a year in which to commit ourselves with renewed enthusiasm on the path of love for God and for our neighbour.

This is the meaning of the stenna I offered to the whole Salesian Family and which I now want to propose in a special way to you young people: "Live the joy and the call to holiness, as the high standard of ordinary Christian living."

Dominic and Laura tell us: holiness is possible! In a way similar to when you are in the mountains, the summit is high, the path sometimes difficult, you feel tired: but step by step the summit comes closer and, as you look back, gradually the horizon opens up and becomes wider and further away. Perseverance, the ability to make sacrifices and practice in doing so, faithfulness in taking the small but constant steps at every moment, a touch of real effort and stubbornness, and the encouragement of a good guide are the means needed to reach the goal.

At the conclusion of the celebrations for the centenary of the death of St Maria Goretti, on 6 July 2003, Pope John Paul II said: «Marietta – as she was familiarly known – reminds young people of the third millennium that true happiness requires courage and a spirit of sacrifice, the refusal to compromise with evil of any sort, and the readiness to pay the price even with one's life, of fidelity to God and to his commandments. How this message is needed today!»

2. If we extend our gaze beyond those who have already been declared and recognised as saints to others who have grown up at Don Bosco's school, we are amazed and almost surprised. We have a very rich and varied heritage: starting from those known best such as Dominic Savio, Laura Vicuña, Zeffirino Namuncurá, passing on through the list of martyrs such as the five young Poles and arriving at those already crowned such as Blessed Teresa Bracco, Blessed Piergiorgio Frassati and soon Alberto Marvelli, or those without haloes but equally exemplary such as Salvo D'Acquisto, Giacomo Maffei, Sean Devereux, Sigmund Ocasión, Fernando Calò, Ninni Di Leo, Xavier Ribas, Paola Adamo, Flores Roderick, Domenico Zamberletti, Bartolomé Blanco, Petras Pêrkumas, Willi De Koster, Cruz Atempa, Renato Scalandri ...

And from each of them one could choose an example, a word, an attitude.

We could recall again Dominic Savio and his brave decision and determination when, impressed by Don Bosco's words about the possibility of becoming a saint and the happiness that goes with it, he made the request: "Tell me what to do to begin this work."

We are quite bewildered by the decision and the strength of character of Laura Vicuña, a 12 year old girl, who offers her life for her mother's conversion.

How impressive is the will to live of Ninni di Leo, condemned to die from leukaemia, who charms his fellow patients in hospital with his smile.

And we cannot but be moved by the simple approach of Ferdinando Calò who to the question: "And if you die?", replied: "I'm ready, they play football in heaven don't they?"

The sun seems to shine a little brighter when we recall the gaze, the sensitivity, the love for beautiful things of Paola Adamo, who told her friends: "If God is the source of everything, only He can make us really happy, not money, power, pleasure."

You cannot but be thrilled by the plan of life of Xavier Ribas who says: "My current task could be summed up like this: working in the various contexts in which I am living ... in accordance with my faith ... Freeing myself from any kind of slavish habit is absolutely essential for doing this; a commitment to daily prayer which for me means reading the Word of God, praying for friends and relatives, and thinking about my life or some particular situation." And becoming more and more involved in his leader's role with his groups and among his companions in school and at home, encouraged and urged on by the training group in the Youth Centre who helped him to discover his call from Jesus, he remarked: "Looking at my life and without knowing why, since there is

nothing special about it, it seems God has attracted me and called me; on my part I'm trying to follow his path in spite of the difficulties."

How can one forget the fidelity of Teresa Bracco to daily mass at day break, her devotion to Our Blessed Lady in reciting the rosary during her every day work as a shepherd girl ... ?

And again the heroism of the five young Polish martyrs from the oratory, involved as group leaders linked to one another by their shared interests and social and personal lives and who in times of trial live it with courage and fidelity: "God has given us the cross, he is giving us the strength to carry it."

And finally, we cannot forget the example of the volunteer Sean Devereux, a man with a smiling face, a man of courage, of commitment, of integrity, who gave his life working in Africa to improve the expectations and possibilities of the people, to restore their dignity and hope: "While my heart beats I have to do what I think I can do, that is to help those who are less fortunate than us."

3.

In the company of these the word "holiness" should not frighten us as though it meant living in an impossibly heroic way, intended only for the few. In fact, holiness is not something we do, it is the freely given sharing in God's holiness, a grace therefore, a gift before being the result of our efforts. A saint is someone who lets God love him, who entrusts himself to Him in faith in hope and in love; this is done in an every day life lived with love, serenity, patience, gratuitous love, accepting the trials and the joys of every day certain that in the eyes of God everything makes sense, everything is worthwhile, everything is important to Him.

4. Precisely because it is a question of a journey, precisely because the peak is high, but not unreachable, looking carefully at the life of Dominic Savio and of the other saints in our Family, you will discover a call to holiness that is capable of making you boys and girls who are "the light of the world and the salt of the earth" "honest citizens and good Christians", "heralds of the dawn", in fact "the saints of the third millennium."

Here are the central points of this call:

a) Accept life as a gift, develop its best aspects with gratitude and live it with joy.

This means:

attending to our own development, recognising the gifts and talents the Lord has given us, making them grow through trust and perseverance;

getting on well with companions, joining in recreations, sharing the joys of friendship and celebrations;

opening our hearts to an optimistic trust in life, which has been saved and redeemed by Jesus Christ and loved by God.

b) Experience God and his providential presence, friendship with Jesus and a way of life that becomes ever more in harmony with Him as the centre and backbone of one's own life.

This presupposes:

wanting to live a life of personal friendship with Jesus and with Mary his Mother, through simple and regular prayer, frequent reception of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Penance;

deepening one's knowledge of the faith and bringing the light of the Word of God to bear on situations and problems in life, being constant and generous in efforts to grow in the Christian life;

living one's daily obligations of study, of one's job, of family life, with care and perseverance, as a loving response to God and as a service towards others.

c) Be open to society, to service, to solidarity, to charity and to preparing on a plan of life.

When the young people educated by Don Bosco become good they become enthusiastically holy, full of zeal, in other words missionaries among their companions. Don Bosco encouraged them:

to work on behalf of their companions helping them by good example, friendly support in overcoming difficulties, in their school work;

to be open to the great apostolic horizons of the Church and to the needs of society (the missions, peace, solidarity, building a new society of love), doing something immediately practical in the places where they are living and working;

to promote groups, associations and movements in which the young people themselves take the lead and grow in their faith by being concerned about and involved in human development and local improvements;

to grow towards a better understanding of themselves and the drawing up of their own plan of life based on the gospel and a choice of vocation.

5. This is the path followed by Dominic Savio, Laura Vicuña and the many other young saints in our family that I mentioned above and many others that you know in your own places. I invite you to follow in their footsteps to make your own the programme of Christian life offered by Don Bosco and put into practice by them.

In the final message of the World Forum of the SYM you yourselves resolved: "To make everyday life the place to meet God in discovering his presence in the young, especially the poor ones, in order to be able with integrity to live faith and life together, open to choices for gospel holiness."

Have courage therefore, there is a great host of companions walking with you, especially Mary Help of Christians, our Mother and Teacher; each day entrust to her this decision to make your lives what God has in his dreams for you.

This is my wish and prayer for all of you.

Happy Feast of Don Bosco!

Fr Pascual Chávez V.