

**Message of the Rector Major to the young people
of the Salesian Youth Movement**
“Making youthful the face of the Church - the Mother of our faith”

Fr Pascual Chávez V.
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My Dear Young People,

I still remember the enthusiasm that the memory of the young saints in our Family generated during last year, and also that aroused by the journey of the casket of Dominic Savio around the Italian Provinces. Like a flame that catches hold, holiness rekindled in you the joy and the commitment of a life under the guidance of the Spirit.

God's wonders are still to be found in today's world, and the Holy Spirit is the great master who is directing the formation of the new man made according to the measure of the perfect man Jesus. His power enables us to be his convinced witnesses and to dedicate ourselves with enthusiasm and the fresh energy of the new-born Church to the mission of evangelisation, following the example of the first Christian communities who challenged a pagan society and culture not with the force of power or prestige but with the force of a life consistent with the Gospel they proclaimed and with the strength of the enthralling experience of having met the Risen Lord.

Continuing therefore along this route, I offer you as your destination and your task for this year of 2005 *“Making youthful the face of the Church - the Mother of our faith.”*

When I speak about “making youthful” I'm not talking about simply giving her “a face-lift” or cosmetic surgery, about some external changes, about coming to terms with and adapting to today's habits and customs to make her more attractive and similar to other social institutions. It is rather a matter of returning to her origins, to her youth, so that she may acquire credibility and the capacity once again to listen. It is also a matter of making her a home for the young. In fact, the Church will be young when the young are there, especially now when there is a growing sense of disaffection towards her, at least in some parts of the world.

Yes, my dear young people, you are the youthful face of the Church. Fruit of the new Pentecost you are a gift for the Church, and the Church is a gift for you. It is this exchange of gifts that is so exhilarating and calls on you to invest in her all your energies, to love her as “Christ loved her and gave himself up for her.”

It is possible that some things in the human aspect of the Church disappoint you. Maybe you feel you are not understood. Or you are confused by the triumphalism, the formality, the bureaucracy, but also by the weakness, the fear, the silence sometimes to be found in the Pastors themselves. A certain face of the Church deeply disturbs you, because you feel she is yours: like the house where you live, like a Mother you love. For you she is the place where you meet the God of Jesus Christ, those who believe in Him, but also all those men and women you consider to be your brothers and sisters.

It is your task to see that, also through you, the Church continues to become ever more a community renewed by the breath of the Spirit who gives life and renews all things; a community that bears witness to and proclaims the Gospel of Jesus, without fear, with the consistency of a life lived according to the Gospel; a community that is open and welcoming especially towards the poor; a community that with joy and thanksgiving celebrates the presence of the salvation of Jesus in today's everyday world; a community that lives with a passion for life, for freedom, for justice, peace and solidarity; a community that is the leaven of hope for a society worthy of mankind.

You, my dear young people, need to work so that she becomes a Church that lives in the homes of men and women. Indeed, as Don Bosco saw it she herself is a home where the young find a family. The home of those who believe in the Risen Christ and want to bear joyful witness to their faith in Him.

You yourselves set this as an objective in the plans for the future of the World Forum of the SYM in the year 2000: "To make involvement in the Church more obvious and significant." This objective is as important as ever, precisely because here and there a growing tendency can be found to live a Christian life without the Church: Christians who have not given up their relationship with the Church but who do not form part of a community they identify with, like someone going round a supermarket and picking and choosing from what is on offer whatever is to their liking.

This is not an easy task; what is needed is a educational strategy that helps us to recognise Christ in his body the Church, and to recognise her as the place where and the means through which the action of Christ and of the Spirit becomes present, visible and active in our world of today.

- The first step to make the face of the Church youthful must be that of living in your own communities and groups a passion for God who brings the Church together in Christ by means of the Spirit, a sense of brotherhood among all the baptised, a missionary and evangelising zeal, a desire to be of service in society especially to the poorest. Following these great ideals, the Christian community is able to overcome the

temptation, forgetting the standards of the Gospel, to adopt the criteria, values, attitudes and behaviour of a society that has great powers of persuasion and which rather than being influenced by the Gospel has a tendency to erect itself into an idol which can even deceive believers; it can overcome the temptation to be fearful which often leads it to hide behind the Church doors and adopt an attitude of diffidence and even of self-centredness in the face of society; and the temptation to individualism and resignation, or that of an anxious seeking for recognition, a desire for money or a fear of being left outside with the outsiders.

- The tiny signs of the Church being lived in everyday life need to be cultivated: the sign of a cordial welcome that is also evangelising, demonstrating an attitude of generous openness, of unconditional acceptance, of a sincere desire to be of service; the sign of a human and Christian spirit in simple ways of providing assistance, of animating, of voluntary service; the sign of simple but joyful and shared celebrations reflecting the problems and the situations of society; the sign of a sincere and creative openness towards companions at work, in the university, in the local area with a readiness to share their worries, expectations, hopes and difficulties in an atmosphere of trust and clear fidelity to the values of the beatitudes.
- Another important aspect is an effort to know our Church better, overcoming a partial view, received from the surroundings or from a superficial or limited Christian education. In the Vatican II documents "*Lumen Gentium*" e "*Gaudium et Spes*" you will find a positive and attractive view of the Church of Jesus: look them up and spend time reading them carefully.
- As well as a knowledge of the mystery of the Church you also need to know at first hand the practical life of the Church near you: your local churches, your parishes, youth movements and associations, the things they are doing, the people and the community. Take part in what they are doing with your youthful enthusiasm and creativity, bringing to them the specific contribution of the Salesian Youth Movement. Collaborate in giving to all these aspects of church life a face that is more welcoming, closer to young peoples' lives, more committed to being of service to them.

Remember the efforts Don Bosco made, in times that were certainly not easy, to love the Church himself and to help his youngsters to do so. His sense of the Church was above all a personal matter of experience and attitude that led him to bring all his efforts and his resources to bear for the good of the Church and its building up, and which he expressed in a simple and very practical manner with the three ideas: *love for Jesus Christ*, present in the central action of the Church, the Eucharist; *devotion to Mary*, Mother and Model of the Church; and *fidelity to the Pope*,

Successor of Peter. These are three inseparable elements, which throw light on each other and which, for Don Bosco, are translated into a responsible commitment to evangelisation and the transformation of society through the gospel according to one's own vocation from baptism.

This year the process of preparation for the celebration of World Youth Day gives you an excellent opportunity to collaborate in making the face of your Church youthful, sharing with young people from all the continents in the effort to follow in imagination the journey of the Magi and with them to meet the Messiah of all the nations (Cfr. *Message of the Holy Father for the XX World Youth Day*). Let the Magi give you an example. Their whole lives, their whole search, converge on Christ and then return from Christ. On this journey they are accompanied by the star. They were very well acquainted with the stars and yet they understood that that star was not like the others that shed their light and seem very attractive: the light of success, of money, of efficiency, of appearances.

In your life too there is a star: the fatherly and loving presence of God. A discreet presence that respects your freedom and trains your gaze, your mind, your heart and your will. For this to happen the Church offers you the means necessary: the Word, meditated and kept within as Mary did; the personal and the communal meeting with Jesus in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist; missionary zeal that makes you evangelisers of the young. Besides this, you need to entrust yourselves to a guide who will help you to interpret the very personal and individual aspects of your own life.

Take heart, my dear young people, in all this you are not alone. There is also the Community to show you the way, and there is the company of many brothers and sisters who in their friendship continue to point out the stars to you, even when the sky is covered with clouds. You will then discover to your great surprise that also with the "star" there is the One who has come looking for you.

Don't be afraid! Let Christ "take hold of you"! He looks each one of you in the eyes, gazes at you and loves you. It is a loving look from one who chooses you and calls you. A penetrating look that reaches into the depths of your heart where he says: "I have loved you with an everlasting love. Come and follow me."

Listen to this voice, take up your responsibility in the Church for the spreading of the Kingdom of God in the world. Don Bosco wanted his youngsters to be: well informed about the present situation; generous in their choices; dynamic in action; open to the needs of the city, of the Church, of the mission, of the world.

Entrust yourselves to Mary Help of Christians, mother of the Church and mother of our hopes. With you I address my prayer to Her:

Youthful Lady, with tenderness be always with the young.

In faithful toil and in days without end.

In times of communion and in the chill of loneliness.

In moments of joy and in hidden tears.

In the sacramental liturgy and in the unanswered questions.

You, mother of childless mothers, and of children without a mother.

You, Mary, flowing stream of pure water.

Gather together all the trickles of love, scattered, misunderstood, trodden underfoot.

Gather them in your Mother's heart and offer them to Jesus, your Son.