

“I am offering you for reflection over these days an interview I did for the Italian Catholic Daily, L'AVVENIRE, which is under the auspices of the Episcopal Conference. The central issue is the experience and celebration of the Bicentenary of Don Bosco's birth. I hope you like it.”

INTERVIEW FOR L'AVVENIRE' (Italian Catholic daily)

1. A NEW RECTOR MAJOR WITH A BICENTENARY OF DON BOSCO TO MANAGE. DO YOU FEEL ESPECIALLY LOVED BY THE LORD IN THIS STAGE OF YOUR LIFE?

I have felt especially loved by the Lord throughout my entire life, and in my Salesian life. I think a characteristic of my personality is being someone who lives life cheerfully, joyfully, with much hope, and I would also like to live it from a deep Faith perspective.

At the moment, after having been chosen for this service as Rector Major, I feel, along with the surprise that the Lord's choices bring, very much committed to living out this service fully and with a great sense of responsibility. I hope that personally and as a Salesian Congregation in the world, and as a Salesian Family, we may with God's help be very faithful to the Lord, faithful to the charism which the Holy Spirit has raised up through Don Bosco for the good of the Church, and very faithful to the Church, in communion always with the Pope and the local Churches.

2. THE BICENTENARY HAS BEEN GIVEN MUCH CONSIDERATION AND PREPARATION OVER TIME. SO NOW, WHAT IS THE RIGHT SPIRIT IN WHICH TO BE EXPERIENCING THIS SALESIAN HOLY YEAR?

There is no doubt that the Bicentenary has been given much consideration and preparation and with much affection and reflection by my predecessor as Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chávez, along with his General Council. There have been three years of preparation throughout the Congregation and the Salesian Family around the world, delving more deeply into Don Bosco's story, his educational, pedagogical and evangelising approach, and his spirituality.

At the moment, the correct spirit we would like for this '*Salesian holy year*' is precisely that of a deeper, more authentic following of the Lord Jesus through the charism which the Spirit raised up in Don Bosco. Fully in tune with our General Chapter 27, which took place recently, we would like it to be a year, and then a whole ongoing journey, where

we live out our religious consecration from a deep mystical dimension, passing on a keen testimony of Gospel fellowship, so that we can be more radical and always be servants of the young, especially those most in need, the poorest of them, as Pope Francis has reminded us!

3. WHAT CAN DON BOSCO STILL OFFER THE YOUNG AFTER 200 YEARS SINCE HIS BIRTH, GIVEN THAT HE WAS DEEPLY HUMAN AND DEEPLY HOLY?

I believe we can say that there is something that impresses people near and far, those who are part of the Salesian scene and those who know little of it, and it is the attraction and acceptance that Don Bosco continues to bring about in the world. A special feature of this is precisely that he was so deeply human and so deeply a man of God. In any country, in any continent, the SAINT OF THE YOUNG, continues to profoundly touch the hearts of the young. This is why we feel that Don Bosco today, in the Church and the world, still has something to say about education and evangelisation, about communication. Don Bosco continues to seek the happiness of young people in the world, here and now, but also their salvation ('I would like you to be happy now and in eternity').

It is up to the Salesian Congregation, and all the Salesian Family to embody Don Bosco today, with the greatest possible fidelity, and with the heart of Jesus the Good Shepherd, and this means reaching out to every boy and girl around the world where we are. This is what Don Bosco did and this has to be our task and commitment.

4. THE BICENTENARY HAS A PROGRAM, A SERIES OF EVENTS. BUT WHEN EVERYTHING IS OVER ON AUGUST 16, 2015 WHAT HAS TO REMAIN FOR PEOPLE AS THEY RETURN TO NORMAL SALESIAN LIFE?

I believe the following can and should remain:

- a. For the Salesians around the world a feeling, a certain objective, something of the 'Salesian heart' and vocation of each one that has been strengthened and consolidated. So they know they are more Salesian, more 'Don Bosco today', and faithful to their following the Lord Jesus.
- b. For the Salesian Congregation the dream should remain, one of fidelity, being radical and more authentic, and being apostles of the young, especially the poorest of them.
- c. For the Salesian Family the hope is that there remains a journey we take together, a journey of growing communion and participation in this *Gift* which is the Salesian charism which unites us and binds us together.
- d. And for the young people in Salesian presences around the world, it would be wonderful if what remains is the strong desire to

experience their Christian vocation more deeply, their vocation as 'missionary disciples', their commitment to others, their openness to a personal project of life where God is there, whatever it is he is calling them to.

5. WE CAN SAY THAT THE BICENTENARY WILL ALSO BE CELEBRATED IN THE DIGITAL WORLD: WE COULD CALL IT THE "DIGITAL BICENTENARY". CAN SOCIAL NETWORKS AND WEB SITES HELP WITH THIS YEAR OF DON BOSCO?

The answer is very definitely yes!

I am personally convinced that Don Bosco himself, who in his own time sought out the very best machines to run his printing press at Valdocco, and to form his 'young apprentices', would want to be in the vanguard today *in these new playgrounds*, and the digital world is a new 'playground', a new playground where young people in the world meet up amongst themselves and with adults in general.

Certainly communication and the service of the social networks and web sites will help us communicate, share, shorten distances, pass on ideas and experiences. I believe we can see how the 'global village' is also part of the Bicentenary celebrations. It helps make the whole Salesian world, those parts of the Church where the figure of Don Bosco is accepted, see that the gift of his life and charism which he embodied for the good of the Church and young people in the world, is fully relevant to day for the benefit of the new generations.

6. AT THE SAME TIME THE TURIN ARCHDIOCESE IS OFFERING PILGRIMS AN EXHIBITION OF THE SHROUD AND (on an as yet unknown date) A VISIT BY POPE FRANCIS. WHAT WILL THESE TWO FACTORS WITHIN THE SAME GREAT EVENT MEAN FOR THE SOCIAL LIFE OF TURIN, AND THE LIFE OF FAITH OF THOUSANDS OF PILGRIMS?

Undoubtedly the visit of the Holy Father, Pope Francis to Turin archdiocese, and perhaps to Valdocco, will be a true gift for all believers and the thousands of pilgrims who will be in Turin to see the exhibition of the Shroud.

During those days, the gathering of young people of the Salesian Youth Movement from around the world is aimed at being an expression of youthful commitment as keen and active members of the Church. A commitment to proclaiming the Gospel, living the Gospel in loving service of the little ones, the poor, the least.

Without doubt the spiritual experience of these days in Turin will be a very intense one for everyone. Within the Salesian context we want these young people who have been called and are bound up with Salesian presences to have a deep awareness not just that Don Bosco is someone to be admired, but someone to be IMITATED for his experience of FATIH, his priestly ministry, his gift of self, his life and all of his life, for his boys.