

# **HOMILY FOR THE CELEBRATION AT COLLE DON BOSCO**

**16 August 2014**

Most Rev. Bishop.....

Your Honour the Mayor.....

Dear Salesian confreres, Sisters, Cooperators, Salesian Family, dear young people, and all our friends here today.

You are very welcome at this festive, joyful celebration on the day we are commemorating the beginning of the Bicentenary of birth on this very hill, of little John Bosco, our Don Bosco, declared Father and Teacher of Youth by His Holiness John Paul II (today St John Paul II) at the centenary of his death.

As I now speak I pretend to do no more than indicate what will be our prayer on this day, since the liturgy for this solemnity is itself a hymn of praise and thanks to “God who is great and merciful” because “he has raised up St John Bosco in the Church as friend, brother and father to the young” as we will pray in the Preface.

A Don Bosco whose charism we know to be a gift of the Father to the Church and the world. A Don Bosco formed over time since he was in Mama Margaret's arms, then by good teachers of life, shaped according to the heart of the Good Shepherd, imitating Jesus his Master in his every day life with young people.

That boy, John Bosco, who grew up in these Becchi hills felt, in the depths of his heart, that his life was not just about wheat, vineyards and hayfields when so many young people were like sheep without a shepherd. That boy, John, had a teacher very early on in life, Our Lady, who would accompany him, enlighten him, lead him until he was the elderly Don Bosco worn out by a life spent until his final breath, knowing that it was She had who done everything.

But that boy John also had a mother by his side who had not given in to her heart's desire, and in a marvellous joint effort between mother and son, did everything possible so that her beloved son, whom God had already cast his gaze on, would not remain amidst the crops and the handful of animals the family had. This mother, looking forward to just being a grandmother eking out her days at the Becchi, had no doubt when she looked at the Crucifix, that she should leave the peace of her own home and be a mother to Don Bosco's 'urchins' until she breathed her last.

A Don Bosco thus 'forged' as 'father and teacher of the young' (collect) is a sign of God's Providence. 'Inspiring every good proposition' (solemn blessing), God sees to it there is no lack

of men and women in his Church who make the Gospel and the Mystery of the Incarnation real in the here and now.

Obedient to this action of the Spirit, Don Bosco went looking for and welcomed any child without a home, shelter, father or mother. Amongst these young people he invited the most generous of them to cooperate with him in his work, giving birth to the *Society of St Francis de Sales*; together with Mary Domenica Mazzarello he founded *the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*; with good Christian lay men and women he created the *Salesian Cooperators* to consolidate and support this plan of God's on behalf of the young, thus anticipating new forms of apostolate in the Church. Through the action of the Holy Spirit it all developed into what we know today as the Salesian Family in the Church and in the world, this great tree extending its branches around the world, a reason for hope with a deep sense of humanity, and a reason for salvation for so many young people and others of the People of God.

Don Bosco took the words of Genesis as his motto (Gn 14:21) "Give me the people and take the possessions for yourself". '*Da mihi animas, cetera tolle*' became a program of life for him, an educational style and pastoral practice based on reason, religion and loving kindness - his Preventive System. This way he led his youngsters to maturity as human beings, to an encounter with Christ, education in the Faith, sacramental practice, a deep experience of their own youthfulness and their ability to put their best energies in to their work and citizenship, as well as serving others.

His 'union with God' and his unlimited trust in Mary Help of Christians who inspired him and sustained his work, gave him all the strength to give of himself tirelessly, working for the young, seeking only their good, their happiness here and in eternity.

Our God, as he had proclaimed already through the Prophet Ezekiel (Ez 34:11 ff.), raised up in Don Bosco a pastor for the young who would lead them to fresh pastures, (pastures of dignified growth as men and women, as children of God). He was their Shepherd and the Lord was their God and they his People, as we read in that prophecy.

Likewise Christ the Lord, the Good Shepherd, continues to make his saving presence felt in the Church by raising up other pastors according to his own heart and entrusting his sheep to them. This is why the celebration of this Bicentenary is not just to contemplate and admire Don Bosco, but to imitate him and commit our lives to those we encounter here and now, taking up the legacy he left us. The Bicentenary is a wonderful opportunity and a challenge to be amongst the children of the world with apostolic and educational passion, recognising in their lives God gift to us and the Spirit active in them. We are to share their dreams, expectations, yearnings and problems and help them to experience how as their educators, brothers and sisters, we are always ready to walk by their side on life's journey, since like Don Bosco, we always seek their happiness now and in eternity. Amen.