

The Rector Major
**Homily at the Mass of the second day of the
International Historical Congress,
Salesian Generalate, Rome
20/11/2014**

Dear brothers and sisters,

Here we are, from the four corners of the earth, each of us bringing his or her own culture, language, history, and our common Salesian history as sons and daughters of Don Bosco. Here we are, aiming to become, each according to his or her ability, gift and readiness, weavers of that beautiful fabric which is just a small piece of God's design in human history.

Each of us brings with himself or herself the places we come from and our own personal and collective memory. At this moment each one of us can recall the skyline back home: someone will think of the sea and its vast and almost infinite horizon; another will think of immense green plains or barren plateaus; and others will think of skylines of different forms and colours produced by mountains or forests....

And we have come here to experience an encounter among ourselves and with our memories, an encounter between our present and our common past, which will strengthen us in our charism that has been enriched by a great variety of natural, social and cultural backgrounds and horizons.

I have had the good fortune of going to the sea with my father on several occasions, and in the last few years, of getting to know the vast plains of the Pampas of South America and the Patagonian plateau. And I have had the experience of feeling like a speck in the midst of an immense horizon where the sea or the land touches heaven.

You know that some biblical traditions hold that the past is in front of us (in so far as we can see it in perspective and know it, thanks to our historical memory) and that the future is behind us (in so far as we do not know the future; it does not allow itself to be seen by our eyes but to be desired and projected in our imagination rather than to be truly known).

Dear friends, I invite all of you to live an intense experience of this meeting as people who weave narratives bearing within them the memory of what they have lived, and who, looking at the vast horizon of the more or less recent past, are able to dream and plan together the future that awaits us and gives meaning to our endeavours every day in every corner of the earth.

Today's reading from the book of Revelation tells us that "***John [saw] at the right hand of the One who sat on the throne a book written on the inside and on the back, and sealed with seven seals.***" The "book written on the inside and on the back" immediately reminds us of Ezekiel and his scroll which "*had writing on the inside and outside*" (Ez. 2:10) and which, by means of words of lamentation, mourning and woe, concealed and revealed God's plan for the world. Of course, we are not expecting lamentations, mourning and woe, but we certainly expect to scrutinize the scrolls of our history and memory in order to prepare ourselves always as best we can for the future that awaits us. And the meeting point of these two horizons of the past and of the future lies is us here today, in our present.

I think that the seals that we are invited to open - with reverence, respect and accuracy - are the seals of our mystery, the intertwining of heaven and earth in each one's daily life, in our institutions and in our whole Salesian Family. They are not something limited to us alone, but concern the Mystery of God, life and history, viz. the interweaving of the lives of all men and women of today. Most of all, they concern us who are called to be faithful to our charism, and therefore to our mission: the young, especially those who are poor, abandoned and at risk. It is for this purpose that we have been born; it is for this purpose that our Salesian presence as a service of

education and evangelization has grown in the previous decades; it is for this purpose that we are alive and strong even today.

It is our fidelity that will be the key to open the seals: fidelity to our origins, fidelity to the path trod by those who have gone before us, and above all, fidelity to God. In fact, it is He, the "***lion of Judah, the Root of David, [who will open to us] the scroll and its seven seals.***" So our fidelity to the history and development of our charism is deeply rooted in our common Salesian vocation lived in different ways and in our personal call to life, the giving of ourselves and our shared mission.

In this way our wider horizon begins in ourselves, in our way of life and the choices we make. And it exceeds by far anything institutional because the point of weaving God's design does not lie in our institutions, but in our own persons and communities. It is there that we shall have to keep alive our precious Salesian charism.

We have heard Luke tells us in today's Gospel that "***Jesus, on drawing near Jerusalem and seeing the city, wept over it.***" I think there are hardly any other pages in the Scriptures that are sadder than this verse. And it is the same Jesus who reveals to us the reason for his sorrowful tears: "***If you only knew, on this day, the One who leads to peace! But now he is hidden from your eyes.***"

Dear friends, we are here these days to see, feel, contemplate and not to close the eyes of our mind and heart in order to take up "*the challenge of the future, which particularly in this bicentenary year of Don Bosco's birth, calls us to ESTABLISH a NEW PHASE of our Salesian history*, as I said to you yesterday in the Good Night.

Dearest Mother, the Help of Christians, help us to have a heart ready to contemplate the mystery, not of our undertakings but of God's grace bestowed on us for the benefit of the young and all mankind. Help us to be ready to continue growing in our creative fidelity to the charism given to us, and in this way to continue walking towards the horizon of a history that is increasingly beautiful, more complete, never triumphalistic, challenging indeed, and open to a better world. Amen.