

Eucharistic Celebration
presided over by Card. Raffaele Farina SDB
International Historical Congress
Salesian Generalate: November 23, 2014

Introduction

Dear brothers and dear sisters,

With this Eucharistic celebration we conclude these four days of study, but also meditation and prayer. Through this celebration we want to thank God for the gifts we have received.

Today, as the conclusion of the liturgical year, we celebrate the Solemnity of Christ the King. The institution of this feast, or better, of this solemnity of Christ the King dates back to the last century. It was established by Pope Pius XI in his Encyclical *Quas Primas*, dated 11 December 1925, and placed on the last Sunday of October. In the encyclical, the Pope stated that through this feast he wanted to assert Christ's sovereign authority over all men and institutions, and in this way he sought to oppose the advancing secularism of modern society.

This "socio-political" description of the Solemnity of Christ the King came to be reinterpreted after the Second Vatican Council in a more spiritualistic and eschatological sense, by rewriting the text of the Opening Prayer of the Mass and by placing this solemnity on the last Sunday of the liturgical year, within the eschatological context of this Sunday.

Homily

Dear brothers and dear sisters,

I shall speak to you again of Don Bosco, even if you are full of him after four long days of work in this Congress. I shall not speak to you as a historian, even if it is difficult for me to hide my profession, but I shall speak as someone who admires and loves Don Bosco. I am addressing you Salesians, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and members of the Salesian Family; and I think I am including in some way all those who through the vows have professed their consecration as a clear expression of their identity. Various paths have led us to Don Bosco, but all of us have a badge of excellence [the name of Don Bosco] that does honour to us but above all commits us.

I would like to leave you two messages.

1. The first message

The first message is about our Founder. The greatness of Don Bosco, his legacy is that of being (I am saying this in the present tense) the Founder of two great religious Congregations and of laying the foundations for the birth of a great Salesian Family. Don Bosco also had a common-sense intuition that became his pedagogy, the *preventive system*; but, keep in mind that this system was also a choice of a particular class of young people, from among whom, without breaking any canonical laws, he could draw as many vocations as he wanted. Let me also add that the young people Don Bosco chose, naturally in keeping with his temperament, were those who could be Salesians in the future and eventually priests or committed lay persons.

The Salesians as such, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the members of the Salesian Family would, through their consecrated life, lifestyle and witness, increase the number of vocations needed for a range of activities far exceeding the simple educational undertaking he embarked upon, we could say, in the first part of his life. Let us therefore rediscover Don Bosco. I repeat: this is the first message I want to convey to you.

The international magazine of the movement Communion and Liberation, "Traces", began in its January issue of 2009¹ to present the figures of some saints who, in difficult social situations, used the means available to them in the reality of their times to create a new humanity. That is to say, they were not afraid to get their hands dirty, and in so doing, they created works that are an inspiration to everyone even today. The magazine, "Traces", began the series of Founders with St. John Bosco, "who," it said, "built oratories, workshops, schools and boarding schools where he educated young people to humanity, to dignity, to be good citizens and exemplary Christians, demanding from his boys and young educators, in spite of their poverty, quality and excellence; with the obvious goal of choosing the best to be his co-workers as priests, nuns and consecrated lay people, in order to create one or more structures that, without any triumphalism, would provide the Church with a service ranging far beyond the important work of educating young people, viz. the missions, educational publishing, making known history in general and particularly the history of the Church, spreading the doctrine of the faith, apologetics and the defence of the Pope, the episcopate, the clergy and the Christian people, aiming in all this at the very best, with the curiosity of someone who is continually experimenting, always shrewd, and yet never surprised at anything."

This is, in short, the Don Bosco that we Salesians in recent years have, allow me to say it, reduced considerably and put away in a corner. We have reduced him - a man of creativity, planning, power of persuasion and farsightedness for whom we can hardly find comparisons and competitors. We have reduced him

¹ Jan. 2009, p. 87-91.

– I am referring to the reality of many situations and not to the publicity we often make of the Don Bosco name and brand - we have reduced him to a mere pastoral researcher and a theoretician of education.

Let us step outside of our houses, my dear friends, and take a look at Don Bosco globally across the spectrum of his activities and at the newness he brings, something which is never-ending and very much to be discovered. Fr. Giussani, the founder of Communion and Liberation, described him in this way: "What are the characteristics of the saint Don Bosco? 1) First of all, a simple ability to affirm reality [a **practical** man]. - 2) Then, an ability to acknowledge and love the purpose of his life [the mission entrusted to him by God and fully assumed by him]. This love brought people and things together towards the same purpose, unleashing **an immeasurable fruitfulness** [vocations without number ...]. - 3) Finally, our saint stands out for a **capability of joy** that enabled him to perceive in this world the prospect of eternity".²

2. The second message

How do we become this Don Bosco today? Let us ask ourselves: Does Don Bosco still attract us? How much do we love him? One of the signs of our love for him is reading. And here is my **second message**: do we still read Don Bosco (what he wrote) and about Don Bosco (what has been written about him)?

There can be no return to Don Bosco nor can there be a lasting, useful and effective reading of his writings if there is no trust, admiration and love for him. "You have to believe the teacher," St. Thomas said, quoting Aristotle from whom he drew his inspiration. The same thing has to be done by us Salesian readers with regard to Don Bosco. To repeat every now and then the name of Don Bosco means for us to browse through our claims to greatness, and this pride has the same beauty and effectiveness as the pride a son experiences towards his illustrious father.

You have to love Don Bosco to be able to draw profit from reading him. I am talking, not of a generic kind of reading, but of a kind that readers do not do sufficiently or do not do at all, except when they love.

Trust, admiration and love for the legacy that Don Bosco has left us in his writings and testimonies, creates between us and him a contact that raises us up, because of his greatness. That contact sets the tone; it accustoms us to aim for the heights; the fact that we read and understand him makes us think that, after all, we are cut from the same cloth. Furthermore, it enables us to understand him deeply, to become one mind and heart with him and discover the core elements, the dominant themes, the Salesian synthesis, and simplicity.³ And finally, it creates that multi-faceted and rich unifying centre in which there

² "I Santi", Grandi Quaderni di *Litterae Communionis*.

³ Sertillanges, *La vita intellettuale* 139.

converge, enlightening and enriching one another, the readings done by everyone. That is, done by all those persons – who are different because of their culture, country, age, sex, psychology or environment – but who nevertheless have been drawn to read out of a feeling of admiration or a sense of duty to study or out of curiosity or out of love for a unique person, Don Bosco.

So, these are the two messages that I want to leave you this morning. I want to underline the fact that they do not exhaust the Salesian vocation, but they recall the urgency for the Salesian Congregation to be reborn in number and quality, by: 1) recovering our consecrated and community life; 2) rediscovering the broad spectrum, the vast range of Don Bosco's apostolic activities and the great number of those to whom our mission is directed, which calls for a multiplication of the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, viz. of those who will consecrate themselves to God in the spirit of Don Bosco; 3) reading Don Bosco, his writings and all that has been handed down about his life, his works, his thinking, his holiness.

3. Conclusion

Dear sisters and dear brothers, after the profession of faith, at the time of the presentation of the gifts, let us renew our religious consecration in the silence of our hearts, and together with it our love for Don Bosco. Let us deeply feel God's presence among us, and direct to him our thoughts and affections. Let us consider today's feast. The apocalyptic readings we have listened to and the prayers that will follow regard the Person who loves us and whom we adore and love, Jesus our Lord and King, and therefore there is nothing to be afraid of.

The liturgy invites us to reflect on the meaning of Christ and of the history of our life and the lives of each of us in the conviction that the boundaries of God's Kingdom lie within us, in the depths of our soul, and are truly known only to God, to the Holy Trinity.

Nevertheless, the community in which we live and to which we belong - the Church - lives from this contemplation of ours and elevates it, astonished and joyful as she is in her identity as the Body of Christ, our Lord and King: she feels herself belonging totally to his liberating lordship. Each of us, every believer, must live this belonging that leads to liberation in the ineffable form of an *interior communion with Him*, and this is realized in the Eucharist, the body of Christ, and in the thanksgiving that pervades every moment of our day and our lives.

Let us be clear: Eucharist means "thanksgiving". Jesus, our King and Lord - let us not forget this - is a jealous God: he grants our requests, he is pleased with our thanksgiving, but most of all, he awaits from us a response of love: each one of us knows what Jesus is asking of him or her.