

Goodnight

What Salesian holiness has to offer, pastorally and spiritually

27 February 2014

We need to express a deep and religious sense of gratitude and praise for the holiness that has already been recognised in our Family and for what is still in process. The end result of a cause for beatification and canonisation is something with extraordinary relevance for theology and the Church. It is about engaging in discernment on the reputation for holiness of a baptised person who has practised the evangelical beatitudes to an heroic degree or who has given his or her life for Christ. Currently our Postulation is involved (has been involved) with 166 candidates of whom 9 are Saints, 117 are Blesseds, 11 are Venerables and 29 are Servants of God.

Our Constitutions remind us: “The Church has acknowledged God’s hand in this, especially by approving our Constitutions and by proclaiming our Founder a saint” (C.1). “As members of the pilgrim Church we are conscious of our fellowship with our brothers in the heavenly kingdom and feel the need of their help. Don Bosco entrusted our Society in a special way to Mary, whom he made its principal patroness, as well as to St Joseph and to St Francis de Sales, the zealous pastor and doctor of charity. We hold in veneration as special protectors St Dominic Savio, a sign of the wonders that grace can achieve in adolescents, and the other glorified members of our Family” (C. 9). “The confreres who are living or who have lived to the full the Gospel project of the Constitutions are for us a stimulus and help on the path to holiness. The witness of such holiness, achieved within the Salesian mission, reveals the unique worth of the beatitudes and is the most precious gift we can offer to the young.” (C. 25). “Faith in the risen Christ sustains our hope and keeps alive our communion with our brothers who rest in Christ’s peace. They have spent their lives in the Congregation, and not a few have suffered even to the point of martyrdom for love of the Lord” (C. 94).

“One of the key ideas of the renewed impulse that Vatican II gave to evangelisation is that of the universal call to holiness which concerns all Christians as such (cf *Lumen Gentium*, 39-42). The saints are the true protagonists of evangelisation in all its expressions. They are, in particular, also the pioneers and the ones who pull new evangelisation along: through their intercession and example of life, attentive to the imagination of the Holy Spirit, they show people who are indifferent or even hostile the beauty of the Gospel and of communion in Christ, and invite lukewarm believers, to joyfully live in faith, hope and charity, rediscover the taste for the Word of God and the sacraments, especially the Bread of Life, the Eucharist... Holiness knows no cultural, social, political, religious boundaries. Its language – love and truth – can be understood by all people of good will and leads them to Christ, the inexhaustible source of new life”¹.

1. Promoting the legacy of holiness which has spring from the charism of Don Bosco

We are the repositories of a valuable legacy that deserves to be better known and appreciated. The risk is of reducing this legacy of holiness to liturgy, a celebration, not fully appreciating the potential of a spiritual, pastoral, ecclesial, educational, cultural, historical, social, missionary kind... The Saints, Blesseds, Venerables and Servants of God are valuable nuggets dug out of the depths of the mine to shine and reflect in the Church and Salesian Family the splendour of truth and Christ’s love. The **pastoral aspect** touches on the value of these individuals as successful examples of Christianity as lived out in

particular socio-cultural circumstances in the Church and Salesian Family. The **spiritual aspect** implies an invitation to imitate their virtue as a source of inspiration and direction for life. The **pastoral and spiritual care** we take of a cause is a genuine form of a pedagogy of holiness, to which we should, in view of our charism, be particularly sensitive and attentive. Knowing and getting to know these extraordinary figures of the believer generates a gradual involvement in their journey, a passionate interest in what happened to them, a joyful sharing in their plans and the hopes that enlivened their steps, giving rise in Christian communities, Salesian Family groups and others, real spiritual friendships bound together by “spiritual and affective empathy.”

Holiness is the embodiment of the charism and helps us live the Salesian spirit realistically, overcoming the temptation and danger of ideologies and false justifications, by offering us best practice, genuine embodiments of the charism. There is an apologetics of holiness that shows up the beauty and truth of Christ’s Gospel and of the Salesian charism not in words and documents, but in life.

2. Spreading awareness, imitation and intercession of our candidate Saints

While there is no lack of praiseworthy groups and initiatives promoting awareness and prayer with regard to a Saint, Blessed, Venerable or Servant of God, this aspect needs more care in our provinces, in communion with local Churches and the Salesian Family. We are struck by the good number of Venerables (currently 11 of them) who could really have already been beatified, but who are still awaiting the required miracle. A fact we could reflect on is that the last canonisation in the Salesian Family and which our Postulation worked on, was St Dominic Savio (12 June 1954): 60 years ago! The canonisation of Sts Louis Versiglia and Callistus Caravario took place without a miracle, granted by Blessed John Paul II. And the one responsible for that cause was not the Postulator, or some devout individual, but the ecclesial community which, according to its various components (dioceses, parishes, congregations, associations, groups...) expressed interest, enthusiasm and involvement. This invites us to:

- *Encourage prayer and intercession* of the Saint, Blessed, Venerable or Servant of God through holy pictures or medals, brochures, books... disseminated amongst families, parishes, religious houses, retreat or spirituality centres, hospitals, asking for the grace of miracles and favours. We know that a novena in cases of spiritual and material need is very effective. This shows up to values: the value of insistent, trusting prayer and the value of community prayer.
- *Collecting the graces and favours* that have been indicated. In the case of extraordinary healings it is important and indeed urgent to diligently gather all the medical documentation (before and after) and theological information relating to the presumed miracle.
- *See the value of certain events* such as anniversaries, beatifications, etc... We could ask ourselves for example, what impact in our provinces the beatification of Stepehn Sándor had as a witness to the radical living out of his apostolic consecration to the point of giving his life for the young, or for promoting the vocation of the Salesian Brother, testimony to faith in contexts where the Church is persecuted, for the social and political relevance of a testimony of this kind. Or again what effect did the centenary of Fr Rua’s death have, given the abundance of materials that were produced.
- *Pastorally and spiritually promoting and accompanying causes* still under way especially in provinces where our Saints, Blesseds, Venerables or Servants of God were born, or lived or died. There is a geography of Salesian holiness which shows us how the charism is embodied in time and history. Appreciating the location where this took place is a consideration which is not extrinsic to faith, but the conditions for why it was possible for the faith to emerge and grow. Accompaniment of this kind, well planned and organised in

provinces and in communion with the Salesian Family, tells us that there is a keen ecclesial event in progress and not just a formal and bureaucratic process.

3. Initial discernment before a cause begins

The Provincial and his Council in particular should show the greatest diligence in investigating and documenting a reputation for outstanding holiness of a candidate and how relevant the cause might be, with a view to checking on the truth of facts and as a result forming a morally certain reason for going ahead. It is also essential for the cause in question to be of interest to a relevant and significant number of the people of God and not just of a particularity group or even individual. We have to ask ourselves seriously: who would be interested in this cause? Who will promote it? Who really wants this process? This all leads to a more motivated and better documented initial discernment, avoiding dissipation of energy, times, resources. Every cause, once under way requires a lot of effort, care and dedication. The passage of time, change of people (postulator, relators, vice postulators, collaborators...) often slows things down and might even bring things to a stop.

4. In the light of the Chapter theme

Holiness which has been recognised or is in the process of doing so, is already a realisation of a radical Gospel approach and fidelity to Don Bosco's apostolic project and can be seen as a spiritual and pastoral resource, and it is also a strong encouragement for our work as a "way to holiness", or for temperance as an essential condition for holiness, because it brings that freedom of spirit that makes us ready to love to extreme. Our Saints, Blesseds, Venerables and Servants of God are the genuine embodiment of the Salesian charism and the Constitutions in time and in different situations, and overcome the worldliness and spiritual superficiality that threaten our credibility and fruitfulness at the very roots. They are true mystics of the primacy of God in their generous self-giving, as they are also prophets of Gospel fraternity/fellowship in their practice of fraternal correction, looking after confreres, or being creative servants of their confreres.

Experience confirms my belief that promoting and looking after causes of beatification and canonisation in our Family, celebrating holiness together, are dynamics of grace which give rise to Gospel joy and a sense of charismatic belonging, renewing proposals and commitments of fidelity to the call we have received and generating apostolic and vocational fruitfulness.

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