

**“So now Israel, give heed...
...so that you may live
to enter and occupy the land that the Lord,
the God of your ancestors...” (Dt 4:1)**

My dear confreres,

I have been invited to preside at this Mass at the beginning of my service as Rector Major. I renew my thanks to the Chapter members for the great trust you have placed in me and to all of you for your affection and support.

As I said last night in the Goodnight, this is not the time for a programmatic presentation. I want to continue with the sharing of the heart, taking up the dialogue once more between God who loves us so much, and ourselves.¹

1.

I feel that the Lord is saying to me yet again: **“So now, my son give heed...”**

He is asking me to listen attentively, give heed to all of you, the entire Salesian Family, the cry of the young...

And he is asking me to listen together with my brothers, together with you and never without you. Just like in our Chapter work, first of all, listening...

How could a pastor, a shepherd walk on ahead, amidst or either behind his sheep without listening? His Word and His presence amongst us is an evident sign of His love.

Don Bosco was a man who listened: he knew how to interpret the needs of his most abandoned boys. When he was a young priest, he attended courses at the Pastoral Institute (*Convitto*), then later he visited prisons and heard the cry of the young there and began to think of a more appropriate way to respond:

“On such occasions I found out how quite a few were brought back to that place; it was because they were abandoned to their own resources. “Who knows?” I thought to myself, “if these youngsters had a friend outside who would take care of them, help them, teach them religion on feast days ... Who knows but they could be steered away from ruin, or at least the number of those who return to prison could be lessened? I talked this idea over with Fr Caffasso. With his encouragement and inspiration I began to work out in my mind how to put the idea into practice, leaving to the Lord's grace what the outcome would be. Without God's grace, all human effort is vain”².

2.

Invited to listen **so we will live**.

Is this not the keen desire that each of us has? The keen desire of every young person? The reason for their cry? To live fully, live a high standard of Christian life, live as holy people. True men and true men of God³: holiness together, community holiness because it is in the light of the Trinitarian experience.

During our pilgrimage to Don Bosco's places at the beginning of the Chapter, we recalled Don Bosco's first circular to the Salesians (9 June 1867):

“The first aim of our Society is the sanctification of its members. Therefore let each one as he enters strip himself of any thought, any other concern”⁴.

¹ Cf. Evangelii Gaudium, 137

² Memoirs of the Oratory, Ch 27

³ Cf. C. 21

⁴ Ai soci Salesiani, pp. 33-36 (OE XXIX, pp. 231-234)

Our way of living out our holiness is by offering a vital and significant response to the needs of the young, especially those who are loneliest, most disadvantaged, most at risk because no one cares about them.

And certainly this is a response we experience together, as brothers at their service, as consecrated and lay, members of a vast movement of people⁵ who go about witnessing to the radical approach of the Gospel of this part of the Church: the Salesian Family.

3.

Finally, listening and living so we can enter and take possession of the land the Lord gives us: the land of the world of the young in all its different aspects, in the new digital world and also in the ancient and traditional places where we find them.

The land of the **global playground** where our Congregation dwells and expresses itself today. Entering into possession of the land does not mean being its owners but being servants, as Moses was on Sinai, taking off our sandals because the life of the young is sacred, indeed the life of the young is really the burning bush from which the Lord speaks to us in our hearts and awaits us to encounter Him.

Listen, live, enter into the land pointed out by the Lord.

Only with the power of the Spirit manifested through us in these days, in our discernment and Chapter work can we listen with the heart, live as the Gospel wants – radically, and serve the young, our holy land, as God's humble farmers.

May Mary our Help and our Mother accompany us along every step.

Don Ángel Fernández Artime
Rector Major
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⁵ Cfr. Cost. 5