

V MEETING OF THE PROVINCIALS OF EUROPE
“Attentively awaiting the coming of the Lord Jesus”
Rome, 29 November 2014

Dear Confreres,

In these days we have been meeting together to see how we can continue to give new life to Don Bosco's charism in Europe, and to share our ideas about how to carry forward the project for this continent that the GC26 entrusted to us and which the Rector Major with the General Council has re-confirmed for this six year period 2014-2020. The vitality of our charism in Europe, as in fact the GG27 indicated for the whole Congregation, is mainly based on the witness to the Gospel lived in a radical manner according to our vocation.

For this reason, as we are almost at the beginning of the year of consecrated life and in the bicentenary year of the birth of Don Bosco, in this Eucharist we are thanking God for the gift of Salesian consecrated life in Europe, and renewing our commitment to bearing witness to the radical following of the Lord Jesus in the footsteps of Don Bosco. We ask from the Spirit, for European young people, the gift of this vocation in its two forms, lay and ministerial. We entrust ourselves to the Virgin Mary, the Cause of our Joy and our Help, so that she may assist us in living this gift with joy.

We have come to the final day of the liturgical year. In these last two weeks the liturgy has helped us to focus on the end times and on what awaits us at the end of life and at the end of history. Today's readings too propose to us how we should view current historical situations from the perspective of eternal life, and how we should pursue our daily life's journey in view of the goal awaiting us.

1. The Lord's coming

The first reading is a passage from the final, the twenty-second chapter of the Book of the Apocalypse which speaks about the heavenly Jerusalem. This passage is linked to the opening of the Book of Genesis, to the beginnings of history. The stream of living water, clear as crystal, and the tree of life which bears twelve crops and produces fruit every month, are symbols of the fulness and the abundance of life in the Garden of Eden and in the Jerusalem above. The promise of the beginnings is fulfilled at the end of time when the Lord will come.

The throne of God and of the Lamb is placed in the centre of the Holy City; His servants will worship Him and will see His face. God will be the Lord of everything and of everyone for ever. The primacy of God and His dominion will be manifest in history. Every curse will be lifted; it will never be night again; there will be no need for lamplight or sunlight because the Lord God will be shining on His servants and they shall reign for ever and ever. Behold the Lord is coming soon. Blessed are those of us who treasure the prophetic message of this book.

We too are in the same situation as those elect whom the whole Book of the Apocalypse speaks about: we are not frightened by the difficulties arising from the culture in which we are living in Europe, with its tendency to push the Christian faith to the margins and above all to exclude God. The central issue today is that of giving God His rightful place in public life and in society. We must never tire of raising the issue of "starting afresh from God". This is especially the task for us consecrated persons who have chosen to live the primacy of God.

2. The vigilant wait for the coming of the Lord

The Gospel proclaimed today presents the conclusion of chapter 21 of the evangelist Luke. It is an apocalyptic discourse, in which Jesus speaks about the destruction of Jerusalem and of its temple. The persecution that will break out against the elect as a warning sign of the final catastrophe, will give them the opportunity for truly evangelical witness. They will put their own lives at risk enduring the accusations of the leaders, the betrayal of their families and the hatred of everyone. And yet they are not to defend themselves because God will be their defender.

The approach of the Kingdom of God, the imminence of the day of the Lord and the certainty that His words will not pass away, demand from us vigilance, wisdom and prayer. This is what today's Gospel is telling us: "Watch yourselves or your hearts will be coarsened with debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life, and that day will be sprung on you suddenly like a trap." Therefore "stay awake praying at all times for the strength to survive all that is going to happen and to stand with confidence before the Son of Man."

The Kingdom of God and the coming of the Son are present in all the events of history. Christian vigilance is the ability to read the signs of the times, to discern deeply; it presupposes a heart open to discover the presence and the coming of the Lord Jesus in our midst; it focuses our attention and all our efforts so that we are aware when He passes by; it leads us to offer ourselves in obedience even to the cross; it places us within the drama of freedom constantly challenged by God.

As consecrated persons we have chosen to follow Christ with the radical approach of the Gospel, to find Him in every moment of our lives and to encounter Him in all the different circumstances; to see things as He sees them, to take up His style of life, His way of thinking and acting. In Europe especially, the question of God is being raised once more by an encounter with someone who has the gift of faith, with someone who has a living relationship with the Lord. Our contemporaries need to see with their own eyes and touch with their hands how with God or without God everything changes: as consecrated persons we are being called to show this in the present circumstances.

Conclusion

This is the fundamental characteristic of our Salesian consecrated life. Prior to the prophecy of fraternity and of service of the young there is the absolute primacy that we give in our lives to God, and there is our relationship with the Lord Jesus, whom, at His invitation we have chosen to follow in the radical manner of the Gospel: in the Spirit we are seekers of God and disciples of Jesus. We are mystics following the example of Don Bosco.

Only in the Spirit and through the Spirit can we live out this vocation. If we bring our identity to life, we shall be visible and credible. May the Virgin Mary whom today we are commemorating and honouring as the Cause of our Joy, help us to live our Salesian consecrated vocation with joy. AMEN