

## Homily of Fr. Nicolussi 21<sup>st</sup> February 2014

Dear confreres, at the beginning of GC 26 the first Mass celebrated by Chapter members was the funeral mass for Fr Helvecio Baruffi, who died at 64 years of age on 21 February 2008 just a few hours after arriving at the General House from Brazil. Fr Helvecio was concluding 12 years as a member of the General Council, and as Councillor for the America South Cone Region. I invite all of you, especially those who knew him, to thank the Lord and pray for this confrere who gave such an example of evangelical authenticity, joy in his vocation, strong Salesian identity and constant readiness to serve.

The Word that has been proclaimed encourages us to live joyfully and with the radical approach of the Gospel.

This radical approach of the Gospel is joy before it is anything else: experiencing the joy of having encountered Christ, aware that he is the surest gain we can have, the certain promise of fullness of life. Pope Francis tells us this in the opening words of his Exhortation: "The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. With Christ joy is constantly born anew." This is the good news.

The Gospel's radical approach is courage, too: the cultural and spiritual courage of not being ashamed of Christ and his Gospel even with its puzzling message of happiness: "Blessed (Happy) are you ..." or when it seems to run counter to common sense: "You have been told, it tells us each day ... but I say to you", "Whoever wishes to save his own life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel will save it."

Choosing Christ and his Paschal way as the norm for Salesian life is highlighted in the final article of our Constitutions, which says: "Our living Rule is Jesus Christ, the Saviour announced in the Gospel, who is alive today in the Church and in the world, and whom we find present in Don Bosco who devoted his life to the young." And we could add, 'whom we find so admirably present in so many confreres and communities who are giving their lives to the young each day'. With this final article, the Constitutions seem to be telling each confrere: "keep well in mind that if you want to practise the 195 articles leading up to this you must put Christ at the centre".

For the Apostle James, this radical approach is the testimony of life and not just something we profess with our lips. What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? It is not the one who says but the one who does ... Not the one who writes books on theology or proclaims formulas of faith but the one who lives as a believer; not the one who professes religious life or writes documents on its the radical approach but the one who in his life, works, daily testimony to the *da mihi animas e di cetera tolle*, work and temperance, is proclaiming Jesus and his Gospel.

Echoing James' message and taking up Paul's words our Father and Founder Don Bosco urges us: "brothers, what you have learned, received, heard and seen in me is what you must do".

A GC is not just a large Commission drawing up texts but a believing community open to the Spirit's promptings and feeling responsible for a particular charismatic form of the 'sequela Christi', and which encourages and guides the confreres to an ever more authentic experience.

The radical approach of the Gospel: the joy of following Christ and placing him at the centre of our life, the courage to do this daily through Salesian life spent for the salvation of the young.

The GC is an opportunity for humble recognition of our personal, community and institutional inconsistencies, but in the first instance it is Eucharist, giving thanks. We who represent the entire Salesian world must not forget to give thanks for so many communities and confreres, for so many young people, laity who every day, in very different circumstances, practise the Word we have just heard: may they experience the joy of belonging to Christ, proclaim the faith and the Salesian vocation through their works, to us to be joyful and generous missionaries of the Gospel.

In this Eucharist, through the intercession of the Help of Christians and Don Bosco, let us call down the gift of the Holy Spirit, so that the GC may help us to increase our joy in belonging to Christ and the courage to proclaim him by giving our lives for the young with the fervour of the *Da Mihi Animas* and the radical touch that is work and temperance.