

1 Aprile 2014
Homily: Angelo Card. Amato, SDB

1. I am truly honoured to find myself at prayer here in your midst, as you celebrate the 27th General Chapter of our Congregation. Particular thanks to Fr Pascual Chávez for his sacrificial but enthusiastic service as Rector Major of our confreres and the Salesian Family. My congratulations, accompanied by prayer, go to Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, the new Rector Major, and I wish him well in guiding our Family. Pope Francis has often indicated to me his boundless admiration for the Salesians and their work of education and evangelisation of the young in Argentina, especially in the less accessible areas. My congratulations and prayers go to the newly elected superiors or those confirmed in office.

Our Congregation is an extraordinary gift of the Lord to his Church. It arouses and brings acceptance and admiration everywhere. Following Don Bosco's example, Salesians bring an awareness of Jesus to the world combined with the human and professional development of youth.

2. In the Gospel passage today the Lord works the miracle of the healing of the paralytic who has spent 38 years in that condition (Jn 5:1-16). It is an amazing healing, unexplainable to medical science even by today's standards. For us Jesus' healing gesture is an urgent invitation to come out of the lethal sickness of spiritual and apostolic laziness and lethargy to launch out, under the healing touch of the Spirit, into the healing waters of a mission carried out enthusiastically and creatively. At the same time it is also the gesture of your hand, lifting the young out of bother and sadness and restoring them to hope, faith and a future.

This is your apostolate. I read the Salesian Bulletin carefully and with edification; it is a real good news agency reporting so much good that the Salesians are doing around the world.

In the March edition, for example, there is an instructive article on young people educated in the Don Bosco Formation Centre in Swaziland, tackling their professional life with a trade which successfully lifts them out of great social and personal poverty. This is what happened to young Wezi Kunene with his restoration workshop or the 14 year old orphan Sinawe, who provides for himself and his three brothers by producing honey.

This year too in Nigeria they have begun to extend the mechanics and welding in the Salesian Vocational Centre in Akure. This throws open a window on a secure future of work and hope. Fr Italo Spagnolo, the rector of the community, says: "What really moves our heart is that works begun thirty years ago are being maintained, developed and are multiplying, thanks to African Salesians who are gradually taking over positions of responsibility with the enthusiasm and creativity that is properly theirs".

And staying with the Salesian Bulletin I read the story of the Kruczek twins in Poland, both Salesians and both top-shot artists. I recall seeing one of their works – a surprising and realistic natural sized statue of John Paul II – in the Archbishop's Chancery office in Krakow. A feature of the Kruczek twins art is its bright colours, which communicate serenity and joy. In one of their paintings, even Don Rua manages a smile! It is a catechesis of joy through image.

3. Today the first of April is an anniversary to remember. It is the 80th anniversary of Don Bosco's canonisation, carried out by Pope Pius XI on Easter Sunday, linking Don Bosco with the glory of the Risen Christ.

You know that the goodness of a charism in the Church is measured above all by the holiness it causes to flourish amongst its consecrated members. Called to the perfection of

charity, the holiness of religious finds its supreme fulfilment in their vocation to follow Christ.

We can take a look at the situation of holiness in our Family. Strictly speaking, only three Salesians have been canonised thus far: Our Founder, St John Bosco, and the two martyrs, St Louis Versiglia and St Callistus Caravario. The teenage St Dominic Savio, a pupil of Don Bosco's, is the model for youthful holiness which God's grace can lead to and the Salesian system of education at its best. Amongst the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians up till now we have one saint, St Mary Domenica Mazzarello, cofounder of the Institute with Don Bosco. Then belonging to the Salesian Family we have saints such as St Joseph Cafasso, St Leonard Murialdo, St Louis Orione, St Louis Guanella.

As regards Blesseds, up till now we have Blessed Michael Rua, Blessed Philip Rinaldi, Blessed Louis Variara, Blessed Artemides Zatti, Blessed Augustus Czartoryski, Blessed Józef Kowalski, martyred in Auschwitz in 1942 and beatified along with five Polish boys from the oratory in 1999 by Pope John Paul II. The most recent Blessed is the Hungarian Brother, Blessed Istvan Sándor beatified in Budapest in 2013.

Then we have two large groups of Spanish Salesian martyrs, killed out of hatred of the faith during the religious persecution in 1936-37: the first group of 32 martyrs, beatified on 11 March 2001, and the second group of 63 martyrs, beatified on 28 October 2007. An Argentine Salesian aspirant, seventeen years old Ceferino Namuncurá, a chief's son, was beatified on 11 November 2007.

Amongst the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians we have Blessed Madeleine Morano, Blessed Eusebia Palomino, Blessed Mary Romero Meneses, Blessed Mary Troncatti and the thirteen year old Blessed Laura Vicuña, she too, like Dominic Savio and Ceferino Namuncurá, the result of Salesian pedagogy.

Amongst Blesseds in the Salesian Family we have Blessed Alessandrina Maria Costa, Blessed Alberto Marvelli, Blessed Bronislaw Markiewics.

Then there are many Venerables, amongst whom, Fr Andrew Beltrami, Sr Teresa Valsè Pantellini, Mrs Dorothy Chopitea, Mons. Vincent Cimatti, Brother Simaan Srugi, Fr Rudolph Komorek, Bishop Louis Olivares, Mamma Margaret Occhiena, Fr Joseph Quadrio, Sr Laura Meozzi.

There are more than thirty Servants of God.

4. As we can see from this brief panorama, Salesians who are beatified or venerable are more than just a few. Miracles are needed to proceed to beatification and canonisation. This is the task these Servants of God entrust to us: turning to their intercession to be able to move towards beatification and canonisation.

This is the cue for inviting you to make our Saints known and appreciated. They are the real treasures of our Family. Don Bosco is considered as one of the highest peaks of holiness in the Church, on a par with St Benedict, St Francis, St Ignatius of Loyola and so many other great founders of orders and congregations.

This is why he has a privileged place in the Vatican Basilica. If you go into St Peter's you will note that the only Saint accompanied by two young people is in fact St John Bosco. And the two young people are St Dominic Savio and Blessed Ceferino Namuncurá. It is a kind of hymn to Salesian holiness, the holiness of the master and his disciples. This group of saints is found on the right side of the nave, above the ancient bronze statue of St Peter, as if underlining the Saint's great devotion to the Vicar of Christ. Don Bosco's gaze, too, leads down towards the left transept of the Basilica and precisely towards a painting depicting St Mary Domenica Mazzarello. As you can see, it is a real gallery of Salesian holiness.

Allow me a final note. Don Bosco and his educational system are certainly part of Salesian identity but they are not our exclusive property, not "our thing". Don Bosco is not

only a Saint of the Salesians but a Saint of the Church, as is his preventive system. Don Bosco crosses beyond the Salesian boundary. Don Bosco is of the Church and the world. The pilgrimage of his casket around the world has been the best testimony of the influence Don Bosco can still have today.

We are proud of this treasure. Let us make Don Bosco more known. The holiness of Don Bosco and his children is the best form of vocation ministry today.