

Good Night by Fr Adriano Bregolin
“Mary the Immaculate Help of Christians”
Rome, 1 March 2014

Dear Confreres,

I want to devote this Good Night to Mary the Immaculate Help of Christians and to her place on our journey of spiritual and apostolic renewal.

In former times in the Church and perhaps also in our Congregation there had been a very high profile style of Marian devotion. This attitude did not bear good fruit in so far as such an approach to the Virgin Mary (too pietistic and almost detached from the simple and basic presentation found in the Gospel) had run the risk of distancing her from our own lives, since it did not correctly present her as the model of the one who believes, as the disciple in love, in hope and in the real world. On the other hand, nowadays perhaps we are witnessing a kind of Marian minimalism. A sort of respectful silence, sometimes a fear of demonstrating too openly our attachment to the Mother of God and our Mother too, with the risk that we become deprived of an experience that is unique and singular of Mary in the mystery of salvation and in our own spirituality. Today perhaps we speak little of Mary, very rarely do we refer to her directly: in our communities, even on the great feasts in her honour, we do not always emphasise sufficiently the value of her charismatic presence.

Something, first of all, connected to our foundation

“For us Salesians the person of Mary is not only a question of protection or one "subject" of devotion among others, but a fact connected to our *foundation, part of the charism of Don Bosco*. If all Christians, all religious look to Mary with the eyes of children looking to their Mother; if many Orders and Congregations even bear her name, on our part we recognise the presence of Mary in every part of our lives: in the life of Don Bosco, in the life of the Congregation (the first missionaries ... could only speak about the marvels of the Mother of God), in the life of the Salesian Family (the FMA, "a living monument..." and they used to call themselves the Daughters of the Immaculate), in our method of education (religion, loving kindness) etc.

Don Bosco said so and repeated it very often as when he said: "We have taken no step that was not pointed out by the Madonna", "The Madonna wants us to start a society. We shall call ourselves Salesians (26 January 1854)", "It is the Madonna who wants our Congregation" (1864), "Mary Most Holy is the foundress and she will remain the support of our works" (1862 to Don Cagliero).

And how can we fail to recall the dream at nine years of age, which is at the foundation of Don Bosco's priestly vocation and of his Preventive System? Who among us does not know about his great devotion to Mary, the Mother of his boys, the Teacher of faith and purity, Queen of Heaven etc.?" (F. Motto)

The presence of Mary in the life of Don Bosco

Our Constitutions tell us: “Mary Immaculate Help of Christians leads us to the fullness of our offering to the Lord and gives us courage for the service of our brethren” (C 92).

The two titles are particularly important from the point of view of the charism, and take us to the heart of the devotion that Don Bosco himself had for Mary.

“But what underlines the relationship between the title of the “Immaculate Conception” and Don Bosco is not only an historical or dogmatic coincidence. At the foundation of it we find a fundamental aspect of the “preventive System” which, and we need to remember this once again, is not so much a clever educational insight, as something “inspired by the love of a God who provides in advance for all his creatures, is ever present at their side and freely gives his life to save them. ». And so «Don Bosco passes this on to us as a way **of living** and handing on the gospel message and **of working** (...) It **permeates our approach to God**, our personal relationships and our manner of living in community, through the exercise of a charity that knows how to make itself loved » (C. 20). In my view, - *our Rector Major tells us*- we will never respond sufficiently to the challenge which this way of understanding the “Preventive System” presents us with.

If God “provides in advance for all his creatures “ with his providential Love, this is found in its fullest expression in Mary the one “**full of grace**”. “Grace”, as we know well is above all God Himself; but this expression can also underline the fullness of the *gratuitous nature* of the Love of God in Mary. The text of the dogmatic declaration by Blessed Pius IX says so explicitly. Basically it is question of what St John says: «Not our love for God but God’s love for us » (1 Jn 4,10). We can apply this first of all and in a unique manner to Mary. In this sense it is beautiful to contemplate her, the Immaculate Conception as “the most perfect fruit of *God’s anticipatory preventive system*”.” (Pascual Chavez – This is your Mother – AGC 414 – Rome 2012)

To reflect, pray and invoke Mary with the title of the Immaculate therefore is to enter into the educative logic and the very spirituality of the preventive system.

As far as the title “**Help of Christians**” is concerned (and which here it should be remembered appears in *Lumen Gentium* of the Vatican Council II, united to that of “Mother of the Church”), we know how much importance it had for Don Bosco. ... Don Egidio Viganò wrote: «There is a reason that derives from a characteristic aspect of devotion to Mary Help of Christians: it is a Marian dimension that is of its very nature *for critical times*. Don Bosco himself expressed it to Don Cagliero in his well-known affirmation: “The Madonna wishes us to honour her under the title of ‘Help of Christians’: the times are so sad that we have real need of the most holy Virgin’s assistance in preserving and defending the Christian faith”». ¹(Cf. Pascual Chavez – This is your Mother – AGC 414 – Rome 2012)

There are so many reasons to turn to Mary in the times in which we are living. Certainly one of the most compelling is the desire that she might help us purify our lives, our communities and our Congregation especially from what in these recent years has so deeply wounded us with regard to fidelity to our vocation as consecrated persons and regard to the total respect owed to the lives and to the innocence of those for whom we work.

¹ EGIDIO VIGANÒ, “Mary is renewing the Salesian Family of Don Bosco”, ACS n. 289 (1978), p. 11 [cf. *Circular Letters of Don Egidio Viganò to the Salesians I*, DIREZIONE GENERALE OPERE DON BOSCO, Rome 1996, p. 8]

Then the title of Help of Christians is linked in a special way to our apostolic vocation.

In our mission as educators we are conscious of the special role of Mary in the education of Christians. In «*Marialis cultus*» we read: “Mary offers the men and women of our time the perfect model of the disciple of the Lord: the disciple who builds up the earthly and temporal city while being a diligent pilgrim towards the heavenly and eternal city; the disciple who works for that justice which sets free the oppressed and for that charity which assists the needy; but above all, the disciple who is the active witness of that love which builds up Christ in people's hearts».²

We really believe that Mary is the helper in the formation of Christians in this way; Helper in the great struggle between good and evil, between life and death, between the light and sin; Helper of the young in overcoming their small personal fears and the great cosmic fears looming over them.

Don Bosco again tells us: «Call her Help of Christians. She loves to help us ».³ She is «the Help of parents, the Help of children and the Help of friends ».⁴

The path of the radical approach to the gospel that we are called to follow in our Chapter urges us to rediscover the treasure of this Marian dimension of our spirituality. In particular the Constitutions propose to us the attitudes we need to «contemplate» and «imitate» in Her:

- *her faith* (cf. C. 34), that is to say her way of welcoming the word and pondering it in her heart (as art. 87 mentions): this truth takes us back to the mystery of the Annunciation and to the «fiat» of the «handmaid of the Lord»;
- *her «joy in the marvels worked by the Father »*: of this the “Magnificat” reminds us;
- *her “concern for those in need”*: and we think of the Virgin at the Visitation and her motherly presence at the wedding feast of Cana;
- *her “faithfulness at the hour of the cross”* the decisive moment of her participation in the «salvation» of the world: «At the cross stood his mother » (Jn 19,25).

As *Salesians*, we recognise in Mary other features more explicitly related to our vocation:

- *she is «the teacher of wisdom and the guide of our Family»*: this sends us back to Don Bosco's dream at nine years of age («I will give you a teacher under whose guidance you will learn and without whose help all knowledge becomes foolishness»)⁵ and art. 8;
- *she is «the model of prayer and of pastoral charity»* who invites us to «tireless industry made holy by prayer and union with God » which is our characteristic, as art. 95 says; in fact she has been her Son's mother at home and his disciple;
- in addition we recall the words of art. 34: «The Virgin Mary is present as a Mother» in the journey of our young people towards Christ: «who helps and who infuses hope ».

Let us ask the Spirit to help us to rediscover Mary!

Good Night!

Fr Adriano Bregolin – sdb

² MC, 37

³ BM XVI, 210

⁴ BM XVI, 165

⁵ BM 1, 95