

Dear brothers,

You are very welcome! I thank Fr Angelo for his words. My wish for him and the new General Council is that you may know how to serve by guiding, accompanying and sustaining the Salesian Congregation on its journey. May the Holy Spirit help you to recognise the hopes dreams and challenges of our time, especially of the young, and interpret them in the light of the Gospel and your charism.

I imagine that during the Chapter - whose theme is "Witnesses to the radical approach of the Gospel"- you always have Don Bosco and the young before you; and Don Bosco with his motto: "Da mihi animas, cetera tolle". He reinforced this programme with two other things: work and temperance. I recall that when I was in college, the siesta was forbidden!... Temperance! For the Salesians and for us too! "Work and temperance," he said "will make the Congregation flourish." When we think of working for the good of souls we overcome the temptation to spiritual worldliness, we do not look for other things, but only God and his Kingdom. Temperance, then, is a sense of balance, being satisfied, being simple. May the poverty of Don Bosco and Mamma Margaret inspire every Salesian and every community to an essential and austere life, one that is close to the poor, transparent and responsible in managing goods.

1. The evangelisation of the young is the mission that the Holy Spirit has entrusted to you within the Church. It is strictly bound up with their education: the journey of faith happens as part of growing up and the Gospel also enriches this human growth. We need to prepare young people to work in society in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel, as workers for justice and peace, and to live as people who are active in the Church. This is why you make use of the essential - and updated - pedagogical and cultural research, to respond to the current educational emergency. May Don Bosco's experience and his "preventive system" always sustain you in your commitment to live with the young. May your presence amongst them be marked by the tenderness that Don Bosco called loving kindness, but also by trying out new 'languages', while well knowing that the language of the heart is the fundamental language for approaching them and becoming their friends.

The dimension of vocation is fundamental here. At times, the vocation to consecrated life is confused with the choice of being a volunteer, and this distorted view does not bode well for Institutes. Next year, 2015, is dedicated to consecrated life, and will be a favourable opportunity to present its beauty to young people. We need, always, to avoid partial views so we do not give rise to fragile vocational responses supported by weak motivation. Apostolic vocations ordinarily are the result of good youth ministry. Looking after vocations demands specific attention: prayer above all, then activities which are proper to this task, personalised approaches, the courage to make the proposal, accompaniment, family involvement. The geography of vocation has changed and is changing, and this means new demands on formation, accompaniment and discernment.

2. Working with the young, you encounter the world of exclusion of the young. This is something really terrible! Today it is terrible to consider that there are more than 75 million young people without work, here, in the West. We think of the vast situation of unemployment with its negative consequences. We think of addictions, and unfortunately there are many, but they all have a common root, the lack of true love. Going out to marginalised young people requires courage, maturity and much prayer. You have to send the best people into this kind of work! The best! There could be the risk of being overwhelmed by enthusiasm, sending people of good will into frontiers like this, but they may not be suitable. Therefore it is necessary to have careful discernment and constant accompaniment. The criterion is this: the best should go there. "I need this one to make him superior here, or to study theology...". But if you have that mission, send him there! Send the best!

3. Thanks be to God you do not live and work as isolated individuals but as communities: and thank God for this! The community supports all your apostolate. At times religious communities have tensions running through them with the risk of individualism and a scattered approach, while there is a need for profound communication and genuine relationships. The humanising power of the Gospel is witnessed to by fraternity lived in community, made up of acceptance, respect, mutual assistance, understanding, courtesy, forgiveness and joy. The family spirit that Don Bosco left you has helped you much in this regard, encouraging perseverance and making consecrated life attractive.

Dear brothers, the bicentenary of Don Bosco's birth is already beckoning. It will be a propitious occasion for proposing your founder's charism once more. Mary Help of Christians has never failed to help in the life of the Congregation, and certainly she will not fail to offer her help in the future either. May her motherly intercession obtain from God the hopes and expectations you desire so much. God bless you and I pray for you and, please, pray for me too. Thank you!