**HOMILY for the Eucharist**

**at the commencement of the 2020-2021 academic year**

We all know well that in the journey of faith it is important and indeed essential or fundamental that the Word of God enlighten our life, our thoughts about life and the way we act in life. And it is very important that *we feel the need* on a daily basis to turn to the Word of God and to the God who speaks to us, so that he can enlighten our lives.

We are commencing a rather particular, special academic year while a global pandemic is continuing to affect the planet and the apparent security of the strongest nations, or the development of an economy that has not resolved inequalities, and even less so at the moment.

We cannot think of this academic year in our University without casting a forward-looking and serene gaze on the realities we are experiencing.

I invite everyone, the entire university educative community, to take an in-depth look, to share and come together in accordance with this year’s motto: ‘Shared and convergent research’.

And I encourage you, in the light of the Word of God chosen for today’s celebration, to take – as we have said – an in-depth and not a superficial look at things; to analyse the situation in a much deeper way than we do on many occasions.

Let me offer some examples.

Browsing through some of the news items of recent days, I have been surprised at the way that many cities around the world have chosen to advertise messages in which everything boils down to there being an enemy to be defeated – COVID 19 – messages also demonstrating the pride of that city or nation. But the stakes are much higher. Slogans or catchphrases are not enough.

A bear in Bristol (The Bristol Bears!) accompanies a message that reads: “The art of survival. Stay safe”; on the Tokyo Skytree Tower in Japan we find the following slogan: “Together we can win”. In Mexico City, the Hotel Barceló has an inscription on its façade that reads: “United, Mexico will resist and continue to advance”. And in Antwerp, a Belgian city, the windows of one residence say: “This too will pass. A better time will come. And it will be glorious”.

Dear members of our University Educative Community: in my opinion, these messages lack a deeper perspective, a perspective that seeks justice, a perspective that wisely enlightens the present and the future. A perspective of faith and hope. And they also lack a wisdom that is bound up with reflection, thinking which is both serene and open to the newness of the other.

God’s Word tells us that:

“By wisdom a house is built,
and by understanding it is established;
by knowledge the rooms are filled
with all precious and pleasant riches.
Wise warriors are mightier than strong ones” (Prov 24:3-5)

In this absolutely extraordinary and special world and social set of circumstances, in which we could imagine that the academic year we are opening will not be free from difficulties in the service we are called to render, I would like to invite you above all to pay attention to the other, to others, and to engage in sharing and convergence.

If there is a risk that we must avoid as the UPS university educative community, it is that of allowing ourselves to be “touched” by another very dangerous, strong and ever-present “virus”: *individualism*. This is invisible and yet more widespread than we imagine. Therefore, we must overcome it without isolating ourselves in our own little garden, but, as proposed this year, by joining forces, sharing and forging a path of convergence, not only through new technologies and social networks, but through the construction of authentic human relationships inspired by the Gospel.

Two days ago I saw a comic strip where a young boy was talking as follows with his father (who was busy with his smartphone and computer...):

* Dad!

To which his father replied:

* Yes son.
* Dad, listen to me...

And his father replied:

* I am listening to you, Gianni
* No, dad... LISTEN TO ME WITH YOUR EYES...

And his father commented sometime later elsewhere: “Gianni is five years old AND HE GAVE ME THE GREATEST LESSON OF MY LIFE.... listen with your eyes...”

I believe, dear Salesian confreres, lecturers, members of the university educative community, and especially you, my dear young university students, that this year has to be an opportunity for journeying in search of wisdom, that authentic wisdom that comes from deep within, from reflection, from patient and committed study, and by surrendering ourselves to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit “who is Lord and gives Life”.

I believe it should be a year for directing our efforts in work, teaching, seeking convergence and sharing.

I believe this should be a year in which solidarity, both intellectual and economic, becomes the hallmark of our Pontifical Salesian University, when we look at those who are most affected by this current situation. It is not in our style or charism to take refuge in our castles. Because NO ONE IS SAVED OF THEMSELVES ALONE... as Pope Francis continues to remind us.

And finally, I believe that it will need to be a year in which it will do us a lot of good to LISTEN WITH OUR EYES, that is to say to look deeply into each person, everyone we meet. It is certainly more demanding, but also much more rewarding, MORE HUMAN AND MORE GODLY AND IN GOD. And it is very much our way, very much in line with our Salesian style, just as Don Bosco did at Valdocco: the cradle where the charism was born and has struck deep roots.

May the Holy Spirit help us all to go on a journey of communion, solidarity, of fraternal solidarity and convergence. Amen.