

# ***Salesian Youth Spirituality***

THE  
SPIRIT'S GIFT  
TO THE  
SALESIAN FAMILY  
A GIFT  
FOR ALL  
WHO BELIEVE  
AND HOPE  
IN LIFE

The **Spirit's gift**  
to the **Salesian Family**  
a gift for all who believe  
and hope in life

YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENTS  
FMA-SDB

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## PRESENTATION

*In many ways these pages tell the story of the hope and life we have experienced in our meetings in different parts of the world. Salesian Youth Spirituality was the focus and energy which brought together so many young people, FMA, SDB, parents, lay collaborators and other members of the Salesian Family in Africa, America, Asia, Europe and Oceania. In deed by homing in on our spirituality we have been able to work more closely together as a huge family, not only "for" the young but "with" them and with all who find inspiration in the educational enthusiasm of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarella.*

*This "working document" which we are presenting to you is the fruit of the FMA and SDB Youth Ministry Departments' collaboration together with the Provinces.*

*At the end of 1993 a group of FMA, SDB and young people met to share with us their experience of Salesian Youth Spirituality. The term "Salesian Youth Spirituality" began to be used around 1980, and since then our understanding and sharing of our spirituality has deepened greatly. The young people and educators of those times have become adults with a rich heritage, which has seen them take on leadership roles in initial meetings, Youth gathers, the centenary celebrations of FMA and SDB and in many other initiatives undertaken to share this common spirituality.*

*We became conscious of passing on this heritage and of deepening our spirituality emerging in these years throughout the world. It became urgent to look at how we could guarantee continuity with the early experiences for other young people, for other educators, lay collaborators and members of the Salesian Family*

*This working document is a response to this need, a need expressed by some of our young people themselves.*

*It is not a "text" to add to your libraries, or put on the shelves in some of our houses. It is the outcome of a process of dialogue and reflection carried out in stages:*

*- a **first stage** which brought together some young people, some FMA and some SDB who produced a document which was then sent to the Provinces;*

*- a second stage involved a reflection carried out by groups within the Provinces made up of people with experience and responsibility at the level of Youth Ministry. They looked at the text together underlining positive aspects of the draft document, points they found weak or unclear elements they felt were missing and proposals for eventual inclusion;*

*- a third stage, undertaken by a small group, looked at the observations and comments made regarding the rest for redrafting the document;*

*- the final stage involved rewriting and translating the documents to be sent out to the different Provinces to be "owned" within each context and culture*

*This is then a basic document which attempts to re-read the charismatic experience of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarella within the context of contemporary theological reflection. It presents the basis, the guidelines from which a kind of manual can be build which respects provincial experiences and the journey made in Salesian Youth Spiritually, the needs of the young and of the social and cultural setting.*

*This working document needs to be translated and given some "local" colouring. This is the task we entrust of each of the Provinces and in their Provincial groups so that Salesian Youth Spirituality can in fern, be enriched by the different "face" of each of the continents.*

*This documents of special interest to those FMA, SDB, young people, lay collaborators and members of the Salesian Family who have a role of leadership at local or Provincial level. Through you we hope the text will be presented and shared with the Educating Community, leaving you with the task of finding the best criteria for communicating and understanding ifs contents in the light of your day to day living.*

*The reflection, questions are the end of each section can be used at both personal and group level. They have been prepared with a view of increase our awareness of the gift we have and are called to share with others, enriching it with our experience.*

*This document is a treasure entrusted to each Province to become more precious still.*

*We look forward to seeing the various " manuals" which will come about as a result of your meetings to give this present document the necessary international support and enrichment If needs so that we continue writing together in our daily living the prophetic inspiration of Mother Mazzarella and Don Bosco.*

*Our special thanks are due to all those who contributed time, energy and experience to write this book and present it so well.*

*May Mary, our Help walk with us in our work and in our openness to be like her " the expression and word of God" for all people of our time and in the future.*

*Sr. Georgina McPake*

*General Councillor for Youth Ministry*

*Don Luc Van Looy*

*General Councillor for Youth Ministry*

*Ro me, 1 9 1h March 19 96*

"To dream the impossible dream..." sums up the hope we carry deep within us. Realising that dream is an inner drive which eventually leads us to happiness. Yet often this potential to think 'big' and follow our dream remains suffocated until the right moment comes along and our courage kick starts us into life.

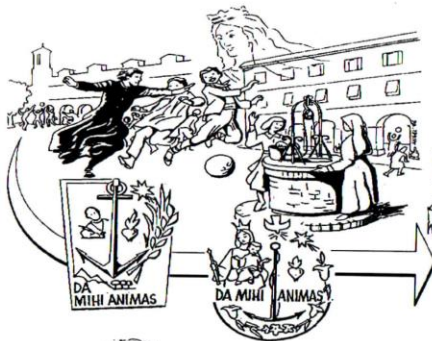
The story of Salesian Youth Spirituality is the story of one such dream and one such right moment.

In the past there have been many who have committed themselves to realising the dream mapped out by Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello in their day. At a certain moment, however, we woke up to the fact that circumstances have changed and it is not enough to repeat what they did and what they said. The world and culture have changed. We need to find ways to reach people in a changed reality. The landscape has altered and while we continue the journey of our friends before us we know we must do so in a new way.

We were hungry for something new. And so "Salesian Youth Spirituality" was born. Essentially it directed us to discover again what had always been with us.

It is this "Salesian Youth Spirituality " which continues to be good news for those seeking life and hope in our world.

We want to proclaim this good news in the belief that all those who, like Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello, put themselves at the service of life in the name of Jesus may find even greater scope for realising their dream



**YESTERDAY**

- Valdocco
- Mornese

A gift of life, joy and hope for all young people



**TODAY**

- Confronto
- Campobosco
- Youthgathers...

...sharing a common spirituality project



Salesian Youth Spirituality



Life is great!  
Your life story  
makes this clear.  
Don't be afraid  
to tell it as it is!

**TOMORROW**

The story continues,  
"what we have seen and heard  
we announce to you..."



# 1 A STORY THAT GOES WAY BACK

Our life is full of questions. Some of these questions come directly from the society we live. In a society which fills us with the desire to possess the goods it markets so successfully. Other questions surface out of our lived experience, from the joys and sorrows which weave their way through the fabric of our existence. There are other questions which form the basis of what we talk about in our circle of friends. These questions are like fragments of humanity, coming out of the fact that we live and hope and love and eventually die. At times the questioning is like a cry of pain, emerging from the hurt caused by our rights being violated. When questions surface in our lives, we become restless and we search for answers.



Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello spent their lives seeking a real and practical response to the questions of the young people of their time. Perhaps their questions were different from ours, but nonetheless serious.

Can we use their answers today, or do we need to look for new answers to the new questions?

**Jesus**  
**Answers our questions**

## **With The Beatitudes**

almost impossible. So what do we do?

The gospel responds in a fairly complex manner to these questions. It gathers up all these questions and points us toward a God who is a father who loves us, wants our happiness and wants us to be full of hope as we commit ourselves to living as his sons and daughters. The gospel has a unique kind of logic, a logic so unique that it could even be termed strange. God takes the initiative. God invites us to experience his love, to believe in it and stake our lives on it. The gospel response challenges us to no half measures. The gospel tells us that life is measured in terms of how much we love it, and the measure of real love is our willingness to give up our life for what we love. Against this background our questions have a different quality about them. We come face to face with questions about the meaning of Life and we seek out reasons as to why we should be hopeful in the face of suffering and death.

Such questions as these gravitate around me as a person: who am I? Is it true God loves me with no strings attached? When am I really alive and not just existing? What is this happiness for which I am so desperately searching? And who is this God who asks me to respond to his love by the way I love the people around me?

Jesus replied to all these questions in such a challenging manner that on reading his reply we are tempted to close the book, except that we already know that Jesus lived the beatitudes long before he spoke them.

" Blessed are the poor in spirit,

There are in circulation plenty of answers to questions about life, so many that choosing is

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
 Blessed are those who mourn,  
 for they will be comforted.  
 Blessed are the meek,  
 for they will inherit the earth.  
 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for  
 righteousness,  
 for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful,  
 for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in  
 heart, for they will see God.  
 Blessed are the peace makers,  
 for they will be called children of God. Blessed are  
 those who are persecuted for righteousness ' sake,  
 for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:3-10).

The beatitudes speak of life and happiness in an unusual way. The first part is so enticing with its promises while the second part is so disturbing with its harsh warnings. The beatitudes are Christ's response to all who suffer. The beatitudes echo Christ's power, a power which manifests God's love by transforming death into life

**Don Bosco and  
 Mother Mazzarello:  
 a gift to the young**

Is it possible to offer the beatitudes to those who are starving, who feel dead in themselves, who desperately seek friends and companionship? Is it possible to propose the beatitudes as a plan of life for those who are seeking

significance and who want to know if, God really has anything to do with our desire for happiness? The same question was put to Don Bosco, a great friend of the



la saint

young people of his day. Don Bosco was dissatisfied with the ideas about life and living current in his time. He tried to rewrite the gospel beatitudes for the poorest and most abandoned young people of his time those no one really cared about. He looked to a saint he was very fond of for inspiration in this task. The saint was Francis of Sales; the name Don Bosco would eventually give to his followers. Don Bosco inspired others with his passion for the good of these young people. One of the first of these was Mother Mazzarello. Together with him and with other courageous young people who eventually came to be called "Salesians" a wonderful story takes shape, a story that has brought life and hope to many people.

The young people who arrived at Valdocco and Mornese "felt drawn into the atmosphere of spontaneity, joy and celebration. They felt they could be themselves. They felt at home". The place was bursting with life and the invitation to get involved in living. It was contagious. These young people were poor and without hope. They discovered again and again that Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello were a gift, an expression of God's love. These two people embodied the gospel beatitudes by their way of living, their friendship with the young people. Truly in Valdocco and Mornese something was present which went way back in time. The Scriptures are full of God's tenderness for his people. God's love is continually shown to the poorest of the poor, and emerges strongest in the moments of greatest difficulty. Don Bosco would often repeat: " without a doubt God loves all of us as expressions of his very own being. He has a special affection for the young and he delights in their happiness". The young people of Valdocco and Mornese really felt this special affection and tender love in the

faces and the lives of those women and men who had agreed to stay with Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello.

As so often happens in the history of God 's presence among his people, the joy, love and acceptance experienced by even the most difficult of the young people slowly transformed them into seeing life more positively, and seeing themselves as worthy of respect. The young were drawn into the atmosphere and became truly ' great'. Michael Magone, Emma Ferrero, Francis Besucco and Emilia Mosca are all witnesses of the transforming power for good present in those early days at Valdocco and Mornese.

Indeed, the happiness they and many others experienced was an overflow of the 'passion' the Salesians and Sisters had for the young, for their growth in joy, true freedom and commitment to others. All this was nothing less than an expression of a tremendous love for God and for life. It was, above all, the effect of viewing and valuing life positively in all its aspects. Quite simply they lived the belief that God shows his goodness in and through life. Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello are a great gift from God for the life and joy and hope of many. They are a gift in a special way for young people, especially those most in need

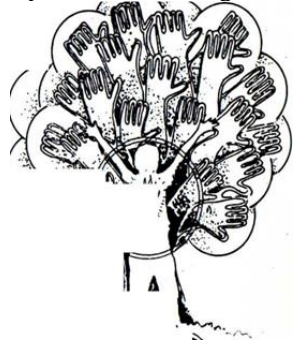
They worked in the Church with great zeal because of their conviction that God had given them the task of caring for the young. When they and the "fruits" of their educational service (Domenic Savio, Laura Vicuna...) were solemnly proclaimed "holy" by the Church it was in recognition of the fact that the Holy Spirit had intervened on behalf of young people in a charismatic way in the human story.

**The gospel  
of the beatitudes  
today**

We come in at this point of the story.

It is by no means easy to try and rewrite the beatitudes today as they were written at the beginning of the Salesian adventure. Our times are so different from those of the beginnings of the Salesian story. The dreams which light up our existence are very different from the dreams of Don Bosco's first friends.

Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello lived in a culture which was fairly religious. In their day believers recognised a certain sacredness about human existence. They read their life experience in the light of God's abiding presence. Today it is not like that. Even if we cannot say with any certainty where we seem to be going, we need to make some clear distinctions as we attempt to make sense out of life.



On the one hand, we are people of our time and have grown and matured as such. We are aware of our responsibility for others. We have discovered our autonomy. We are aware of the fact that we cannot continue to pass the 'buck' on to others. There is another side however, many have tried to take on their responsibilities by distancing themselves from the God of life and from the story of humanity. We have become very presumptuous. We have arrived at the point of being convinced that without God we can do more.

Young people today are searching for life and happiness. Unfortunately, they are searching for these things in a disturbing manner. There are social and cultural reasons for this. It is enough to think of the

situations of poverty, of deprivation, of oppression, of war in our world and our society, or of the role models which western culture presents to the young, all models which tend to equate happiness with material possessions.

Within this cultural context, and in the light of the visionary ideas the Second Vatican Council put forward, the Salesian Family is seeking better ways of being a gift of God to the young, especially the poorest and most abandoned among them.

The letter the Pope wrote to the Salesian Family on the occasion of the Centenary of Don Bosco's death has sustained and encouraged our attempts to rethink a new way of being Christian. The Pope writes: "Don Bosco is the master of youth spirituality because he was able to live the gospel for the young taking into account their needs and expectations" (Juvenum Patris 5).

Little by little the Spirit of Jesus is helping us discover the awesome task entrusted to us.

We cannot just repeat the words Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello used. Doing so puts us on the wrong wave length. Instead we need to speak with the heart of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello to the heart of the life and culture of the young today

The need to do this was clear within the Salesian Family. Many sought a response, but we were like athletes on starting blocks, waiting tensely for the pistol to be fired. The trigger finally came in the form of the two centenary celebrations of FMA's and SDB's. The Salesian Family went back to its origins to re-discover some of the essential aspects of the Salesian charism. At the heart of Don Bosco's proposal is a Christian life

style, a project of spirituality that encompasses the whole of human experience. It is a 'holistic' way of living. Don Bosco summed it up in the words of scripture, "whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do it all for God's glory" (1Cor. 10:31). Initiatives have multiplied. From the first tentative steps an enthusiasm has been aroused. The idea has taken form. In all of this the Salesians, the Sisters and the young people have found themselves reflecting, praying, working and experimenting together on things that really matter. The spirituality project has become a common denominator, something to be shared and enriched in the sharing. It is a point of unity. The different responsibilities, presences and services carried out within the Salesian Family converge on the spirituality. It is important and open to all who want it; it is a new gospel of the beatitudes. It is a way of continuing the story which Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello wrote for the young of their day. It is a way of continuing the journey across today's landscape.

For the past ten years the Salesian Family has called the spiritual experience born of this collaboration "Salesian Youth Spirituality."

## **Salesian Youth spirituality**

Spirituality is an old and richly meaningful word.

Our new way of envisioning spirituality is that it is for everyone and not the prerogative of the chosen few. It does not refer to a style of Christian living which turns its back on daily life to find its place in the desert or behind the walls of a monastery. Spirituality is about living each day immersed in the mystery of God. Jesus revealed to us that God is at the very heart of life. The Spirit of Jesus is at work within the very fibre of our humanness, our actions, our words and our life experiences. Truly spiritual women and men are those who choose to allow the mysterious and all



pervading presence of a living God to give meaning and purpose to their lives, their life choices and their optimism.

This conviction has helped us recognise the gift Don Bosco left us, a spirituality of life and daily living.

Encouraged by the words of the Pope in acknowledging Don Bosco as a "master of youth spirituality", we are taking this proposal and trying to re-write it with the new insights of our times in relation to God, the human person and education. The result of this re-drafting is a "Salesian Youth Spirituality" project. The adjective "Salesian " distinguishes the project from other proposals offered within the Church. The adjective "youth" underlines the fact that this proposal refers to young people and has the characteristics of youth fullness even when it is lived out by adults, as is the case for the Salesians and the Sisters. The noun "spirituality" attempts to reclaim a serious and challenging commitment based on the tradition of discipleship. Finally, we are saying that we want the "Salesian" and "youth" aspects of our spirituality to encourage us to live that gospel radically that has been the mark of so many Christians before us.

## **Signs of the Spirit's presence**

In these last few years the experience of "Salesian Youth Spirituality" has become for many of us a way of growing in our understanding of life as call and response, as vocation. Some have re-discovered their religious vocation in greater depth, others have felt called to commit themselves, the whole of their lives in a radical way to the service of God's kingdom, while others have become more aware of their service as lay people in Don Bosco's style in the Church today.

Many young people have become involved in ministering to their peers, to other young people. They spend time and energy for and with others. These young people are an educating presence according to the best intuitions of the Salesian tradition. The formula and its contents have spread worldwide. There are many who are carrying forward the apostolic mission which Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello entrusted to us, a mission which has education very much at heart. Several of these young people live out this mission on a full time basis, giving at least some years of their lives in one of the many forms of voluntary work. The experience of sharing "Salesian Youth Spirituality " has created an almost indefinable "movement of life" which goes by the name of the Salesian Youth Movement. It is a life style shared by groups and organisations and individuals committed to the task of educating in the different settings (oratory, school, youth centre, parish or local community).

The horizons have widened. From the smallest of seeds, a huge tree has grown. The tree continues to grow wherever there is an educator working with the enthusiasm of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarella for the good of young people

**Points for reflection and discussion:**

- How did your personal story meet up with the Salesian story?
- What were the elements which attracted you?
- What were the life questions which the Salesian story seemed to respond to in some way for you and your life?
- What do you think are the crucial questions that today's young people are asking about life?

- If Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello were alive today what new things do you think they might be doing for our young people?
- From the standpoint of your place and vocation within the Salesian Family what do you feel you can contribute to Salesian Youth Spirituality today?
- What help do you feel you need to make your contribution?
- What prevents you from becoming involved?

# TWO ROADS...



1

...Running away from life



2 ...Living life to the full!



NICODEMUS

Who are you?

...you must be born from above



THE CRIPPLED WOMAN

Walking straight...

...recovering her dignity



THE GOOD SHEPHERD

...lays down his life for the sheep ...ready to give my life



Day to day life, the place where we meet God...

# 2

## AT THE HEART OF CHRISTIAN LIVING

A good spirituality project needs strong roots. It will grow into a huge tree only when it is planted on rich and firm soil.

What are such roots?

The answer is very simple. God's presence is the grounding for such a project. God takes the initiative in loving and seeking us out. We respond to his first move. At the heart of Christian belief is this invitation to live in the light of God's presence, recognising that God alone can make us happy. God is love and surrounds us with love.

We live God's love in our human existence. One thing is certain, this love is not to be found outside our daily living. If I do not love life, convinced that God's presence in my life gives me the right to love everything about it, then naturally I will run away from life. I will try to escape or I will seek to control life's difficulties for fear they might cut me off from myself.

### **The story of Nicodemus**

Nicodemus was an honest and down to earth enough man not to be taken in by passing fads. One day he went to see for himself if this Jesus was really all that people were making him out to be. Jesus ignored Nicodemus' question and told Nicodemus that if he wanted to understand better he would have to "be born from above". What was Jesus' trying to say to Nicodemus in this phrase? John's gospel tells us

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.

Jesus answered him, "very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above".

Nicodemus said to him, " How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother 's womb and be born?"

Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit" (Jn. 3:1-5).

When faced with Nicodemus' question Jesus seeks to lead the man to a deeper level of understanding. Jesus does this through challenging him to be 'born from above'. Then he explains that this re-birth is not a physical one, but one which touches his attitude of mind. Here both heart and head have to change.

The project that Jesus puts before Nicodemus can only be understood in terms of a shift in reasoning. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (Jn. 3:16-17).

Nicodemus' story is a model for the beginning of any exploration into Christian living.

Like Nicodemus we too want to know from Jesus who he is and how far we can really trust him. Life is too precious to be lost chasing the latest craze that emerges. Jesus does not reply in a way which will ensure him popularity. He presents a pre-condition: " you must be born from above ". It is almost as if Jesus is saying only the person who can change his or her reasoning can understand what I am saying. Jesus does not say 'I am this and that' instead he tells us who God is and what his plan for us is.

We are the world that God loves. God loves us. God loves our life and wants us to have that life in all its fullness and abundance (Jn. 10:10).

He became totally and fully one of us and one with us. This is the wonderful good news that Jesus reveals to Nicodemus and through him to us.

### **Standing at a cross-road**

The spiritual person recognises that, like Nicodemus, only God can quench the thirst for life and, happiness that lies within. The spiritual person runs after God as the deer seeks running streams (Ps. 42:2). Continually the question arises, where can we find God and experience his presence and the joy that presence gives?

If I do not love Life, if I am not convinced of God's presence in my life then living becomes an uphill struggle with a bulging backpack. If instead we see life as a well-proven road where God comes towards us, we would take that road come what may.

We stand at the cross-road. Two roads open up before us. One goes uphill. It starts from our daily living and carries us, around a variety of double bends, toward God. The other is like the road the scriptures speak about in describing the Hebrews'

homecoming. God has taken the initiative. In order to make the journey a happier one for the exiles he has levelled off the mountains and filled in the valleys (cf. Lk. 3). He has invented motorways to enable him to reach his sons and daughters more easily.

The first road is the one God takes in coming to meet us. The second is that which leads from us to God. We move towards God because God is coming towards us.

The 'spiritual' person has always been a God seeker and at times that searching has been in darkness. Jesus tells Nicodemus; however, that the initiative is God's not ours. God is the one who seeks us out.

### **Silesian Living; a Specific Direction**

Like so many of the great saints before them, both Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello recognised this fact of life. They spoke often of the experience which made sense of human existence. The formula they used and repeated again and again was " the presence of God". At the heart of Christian living lies the belief that God is present in our lives, in all that happens and in each and every moment.

They lived this " presence of God". The communities of Mornese and Valdocco were rooted in the certainty and experience of this presence. Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello's lives show this even if their way of expressing these truths carry the cultural overtones of their day and perhaps ring badly in our ears today.

These two saints did not remove themselves from life in order to meet the Lord in a better way. For them "living in God's presence" was equivalent to living daily life to the full.



Theirs was an intuition which became a life choice for them.

Accepting young people where they were at in their lives enabled these two saints to save them in a holistic way. They were convinced that God was present in the hearts of the young, even in the hearts of those who seemed to be almost 'evil'.

They lived God's presence in joy and work. Carrying out their duty with patient, loving kindness was their road to self-discipline.

They imbibed God's love through their prayer. It was a joyful encounter between the lover and the loved one and a handing over in trust of all one's needs.

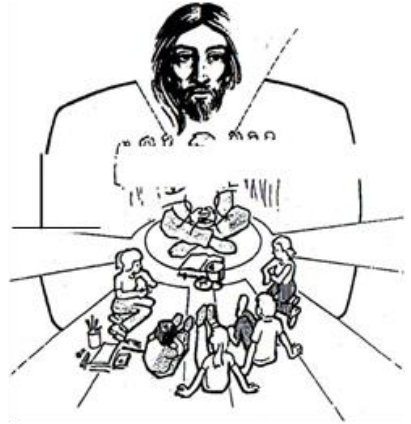
In these communities there was no tension between work and prayer, between God and people, between personal prayer and the awareness of God's presence in life. There was no dichotomy. Daily living was the special moment, the place where they met God and freely accepted to follow his designs.

The challenge they made and continue to make to the Church is that we meet God, not only in prayer in Church, but also in the rhythm of work and daily living. The slogan written on the corridors of Valdocco, "God sees you" and "every stitch an act of love of God" uttered in the work rooms of Mornese were the terms Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello used to describe this conviction.

Our Silesian story has looked long and hard at what the wellspring of "Salesian Youth Spirituality" really is. We reflected a great deal on the meaning of our lives. We looked for this wellspring by trying to understand something of the mystery of God.

**The wellspring:  
discovering the  
Incarnation**

It is not enough to find a clever response to this question. We want one which fits into God's plan. In the centre of it all is the complex model of what we call spiritual life. Contemporary theology presents



us with a model which enables us to reach into the depths of God's saving project for the world. Jesus of Nazareth is the one sure reference point we have in seeking to discover how God comes to meet us in, our humanness, in our day to day living. In Jesus, God becomes flesh, taking on our humanity, making our lives his life.

The Silesian Family moved by Don Bosco's extraordinary pastoral intuitions has always been really alert to those theological models which stress God's presence and love in our daily lives. Certainly God's face is always hidden in mystery.

Some models of thinking present God as close to us, others instead present his splendour and 'otherness'.

Don Bosco taught us to prefer the former to the latter. Thus, when the Church, through the Council in "Gaudium et spes", presented the Incarnation as the criterion for pastoral and theological renewal, we gladly recognised and owned it.

**God's  
closeness through  
the Incarnation**

"Salesian Youth Spirituality" takes on board the insights of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello, exposes these perceptions to the blast of "fresh air" released by the Council and places the Incarnation at the very heart of Christian living.

When believers talk about the Incarnation they are referring to a specific fact of Jesus' life. This fact is that God chose to become one of us in order to save us. Through Mary's openness to God's action in her life, at a specific moment in time and history, God became as we are.

In this sense the Incarnation is a part of Jesus' life, an experience among many others. It is an experience which we relate to easily and one we like very much.

However, this does not mean we can detach it from the other experiences of Jesus' life. The Incarnation carries us towards Easter. God became one of us in order to offer us God's saving power.

The gospels point out that when Jesus' disciples refer to the Incarnation they do not see it detached from everything else. They view it rather as a lens opening up on everything else Jesus did and said. It is a decisive point in Jesus' life which serves to give meaning to all the rest.

Perhaps an example better illustrates this point. If someone wants to take a photograph of a landscape, the first decision to be made is where to position the camera. The choice is a decisive one because the camera will capture only what the lens points towards.

Jesus' disciples viewed the Incarnation as the point where the shot was taken in order to understand the rest of the Master 's life.

They grew in awareness of this fact because Jesus wanted it that way.

It is enough to think of the angry exchanges between Jesus and the doctors of the law who judged his behaviour on the basis of what they knew of God.

Jesus instead tells them that the only way they can know God is through him. Jesus reveals the face of God in the human form that Mary gave him. In Jesus the inaccessible and mysterious, the transcendent and ineffable God takes on a human form and becomes the " word" (cf. DV 13).

In the human form and word of Jesus of Nazareth we can both speak of God and speak to God.

We are able to understand who God is for us and what he is asking of us.

### **Jesus reveals the face of God**

The pages of the gospel reveal the face of a God who is close to people, passionate about life and committed to everyone's happiness. Jesus does not ask us to choose between God and human happiness. Instead Jesus affirms that God's glory is indeed the person who is happy and fully alive. The "jealous" God of many of the pages of the Old Testament becomes in Jesus the God of "love".

Among the many pages of the gospel, there are two in particular that the Salesian tradition homes in on, they are central to our understanding of our faith.

Walk tall, with  
heads held high..."

In these two extracts the Incarnation is seen as the God whom Jesus revealed

A page of Luke's gospel which helps us understand who God is for us and where he stands in relation to us is that of the crippled woman. Indirectly it points towards the aim of our "Salesian Youth Spirituality".

'Now Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight.

When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment".

When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God' (Lk. 13:10-13). Faced then with the anger of the official of the synagogue because he 'had dared to go against the law and heal someone on the Sabbath, Jesus replies, "ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?" (Lk. 13:16).

It is not the only episode in the gospels where such a point is made. Indeed, the whole of the gospel is written in this tone. It reflects Jesus' desire to bring life where there are signs of death. The struggle to enable those who for different reasons are weighed down with burdens to hold their heads high and walk tall seems to be a cause running through the whole of Jesus' life.

In God's name Jesus encourages all who are oppressed to walk tall. He restores dignity to those who have been deprived of it. It is a far cry from

religious experiences which use God to devalue life and human happiness. Jesus is truly the sign of the one who is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the one who says "I the Lord your God, brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves. I broke the power that held you down and I let you walk with your heads held high" (Le v. 26:13).

Jesus works in this way in God's name. Indeed, the angry exchanges between himself and those who found his way of behaving despicable, witness to the fact that Jesus' actions show clearly whose side God is on.

### The Good Shepherd

Don Bosco often spoke to his young people of the Good Shepherd. Like Jesus, Don Bosco was a sign of who God is for them.

Another page of the gospel runs. "Again Jesus said to them, very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason

the, Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father "(Jn. 10: 7- J 8).

Jesus paints a type of self-portrait in the figure of the good shepherd ". In it he depicts God's basic attitude towards his people and asks that we work in the same way.

It is a very challenging proposal. It is a spirituality which attempts to contemplate God in and through action.

We are in good company. The "good shepherd" figure has impressed Christians down the ages. It was a figure drawn onto the walls of the Catacombs to give hope to those facing death because they remained faithful to the name of Jesus. It was carved onto the stones of Cathedral walls through the centuries to remind us of the task we have to accomplish. Don Bosco himself was so struck by the figure of the good shepherd that he declared in words and with his life, "I have promised God that to my last breath I will, spend my life for the good of my poor young people".

Jesus the "good shepherd" reveals who God is for us and who we are invited to be in fidelity to his plan for us. To give one's life for one's sheep, right to the last breath, is to love without any half measures.

God in our  
humanity

The Incarnation Reveals God's face. This discovery is enough to have us praising God for the rest of our lives.

But there is something more that adds another dimension to Christian living. The Incarnation, because it is rooted in the mystery of God, reveals a greatness which has no limits. We, women and men marked with the poverty of our weakness, the betrayal of sin, have become so new as to depict a face of God and speak a word about his passionate love for all. Our humanity is assumed by Jesus. God is revealed and speaks in Jesus, showing how our humanity might become the word and the face of God.

There is a deep compatibility between our humanity, that of Jesus and God. It is this affinity which enables us to say with the gospel, "Whenever you did this for the least important of my people, you did it for me" (Mt. 25:40).

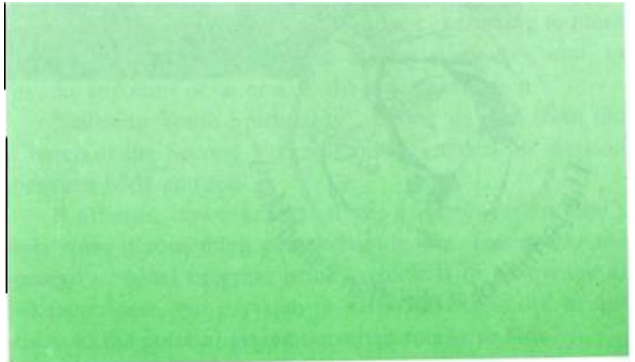
Jesus' humanity which Mary allowed to take shape within her own body reveals God's face. Our humanity is the humanity of Jesus. Undoubtedly Jesus lived his humanity to the utmost. It was not, however, an exclusive way of living it out. We are substantially what Jesus is so totally. Certainly we are this in a way that is poor and often disturbed, but we are as Jesus is, the place of the presence and closeness of God.

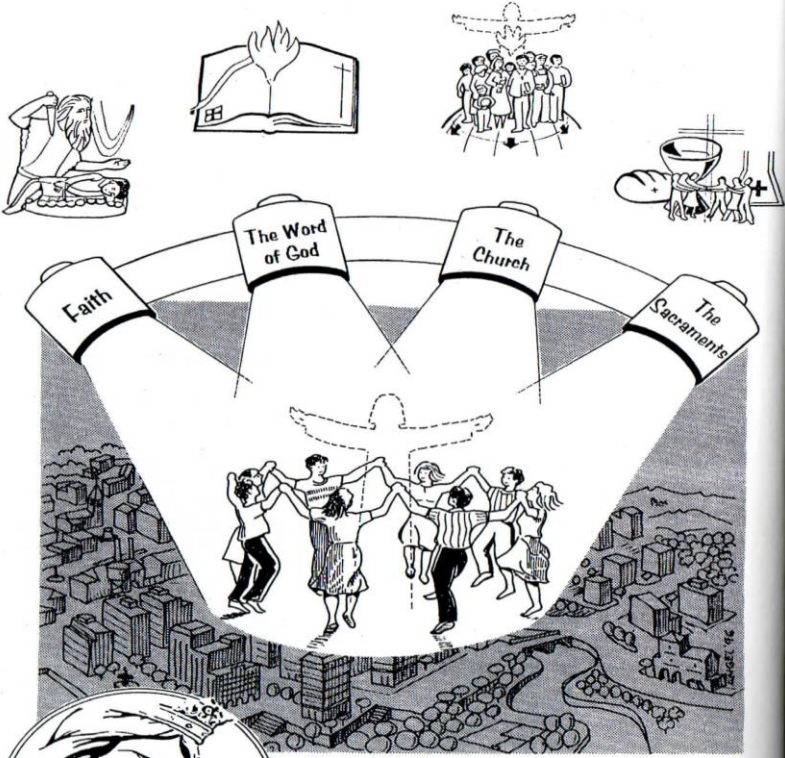
"Salesian Youth Spirituality" is founded on the Incarnation and is a spirituality which loves life. It recognises in humanity and in life the place where God is continually present and close to each of us, like the good and welcoming Father who saves and fills life. Reflecting in this way on our lives and the meaning of our lives impels us to be true to life and to live it to the full.



## Points for reflection and discussion:

- What is your experience of God's presence in your life? Where do you find that presence most easily? Why? What are the difficulties you encounter in living in this presence on a day to day basis?
- In what ways have you experienced God's presence being communicated to you through others? What effects did this have on your life
- The Incarnation shows us how God comes to meet us in our humanity.  
What do you find difficult to understand or believe in this concept?  
Why do you think it forms the basis of our Salesian Youth Spirituality?
- What are the links between the centrality of relationships so clearly a focus of our Salesian Youth Spirituality and this idea of the presence of God?  
What are your experiences of how the two are merged?





The portrait of a christian called Mary



## **LIVING IMMERSED IN MYSTERY**

Christians pondering on the wonderful things that God has done through Jesus often ask, "how do we express our love for God and the gratitude we feel for being loved so incredibly?" The question arises out of an awareness of the mystery that surrounds us.

Contemplating the mystery leads to a new vision of life and a renewed way of living.

I ask myself, what do I do in concrete terms?

Don Bosco's response was partly traditional and partly new. He talked about "saving one's soul".

Saving the person was at the heart of all any good Christian tried to do and be. "What does it really matter if a person inherits the whole world and in doing so loses his or her own soul?" This is the question Christians need to ask themselves when faced with important choices and decisions.

There are some words today that we do not like. We try to avoid using them. The risk we run in rejecting the words of the past is that we lose the substance of the point they are making.

Today we have a tendency to reduce everything to more or less the same level, leaving anxiety about the 'soul' to monks and nuns or, at best, to the older generation.

"Salesian Youth Spirituality", taking its lead from the Church at the Second Vatican Council, makes no division between body and soul.

It affirms, however, that if we want to live in God's love there is something we must not ignore. This is, like the gospel's "pearl of great price" which is to be owned at whatever cost, our decision to make God the Lord of our lives, to the point of giving ourselves totally to him.

In order to understand what this means in everyday life we have to try to penetrate a little that mystery which surrounds God. In trying to do this we are in good company. We have all those who have believed and gone before us to look up to, even though today we use expressions very different from the ones they used.

### **Living in faith**

Don Bosco experienced God's presence in his life as the love with which a father or mother surrounds and protects the children.

For this reason, he loved the young he met, and he loved their life.

In the young and in life, Don Bosco continually discovered signs of God's closeness. His words are full of expressions which verify this.

Don Bosco would greet his boys by saying, "be people who save, help save others, save yourself!" And to Dominic Savio, "be a force for good among your friends". To a certain extent this was an echo of the gospel words of Jesus, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete" (Jn. 15:8,11).

Dominic Savio read this to mean "here, for us, sanctity consists in being always cheerful".

The Incarnation has enabled us to re-discover that our daily living is the place where God is present. "Salesian Youth Spirituality" is a "spirituality of daily living".

The phrase is important. It has become a common reference point bringing to mind a specific model of Christian living.

Not only did Don Bosco believe that there was no need to cut yourself off from life in order to find God. He went beyond this and affirmed that God is found right in the midst of daily Living. He is present in our lives, for us and for our happiness.

"In order to understand and love life as a new reality in which God works as a loving Father, we need to assume the ordinariness of daily living, accepting life's challenges, life's questions and the tensions that growing brings. We need to seek to integrate life's fragments into the kind of wholeness which is the Spirit's gift in Baptism's. We need to work towards overcoming the ambiguity present in day to day experience and make love the basis of all the choices we make" (CG23).

God 's presence  
in everyday  
living

These affirmations sound very good, but are extremely challenging.

Often it is so much easier to write this kind of thing than live it in real life.

How can we claim that God is present in our lives when often our experience is that we do not see him directly, and cannot always find him in our

personal and community stories? Perhaps Don Bosco had his 'dark ' moments.

Surely when oppressed by pain and anguish he would have cried out with the psalmist, "Where are you God?"

It is not enough to say that God is present in our lives, we need to discover the real meaning of this mysterious presence.

We know that there are different models of presence. The friend we are talking to is present with us. Remembering a good friend in moments of difficulty makes that person present in another sense.

The first is a physical presence. The second is wishful thinking.

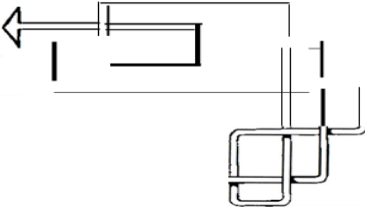
God's presence within human life is neither this physical presence nor is it a sentimental remembering without any definite shape.

We are talking about an indisputable and genuine presence even if we mean a special kind of presence.

There is a mysterious relationship between what we see and can prove easily and what we cannot see with the instruments at our disposal.

Our lives are often defined by what is seen and can be proven. We have a name, a family and a life story. We live in a particular place.

We work, we have a group of friends, we love and we suffer.



All these things are concrete, felt experiences. There is, however, something about our life which always manages to elude description, but is very important. Those who reflect on the Jesus mystery begin to discover that God takes human form and becomes the word. This carries us even further to the heart of God 's existence which he us even further to the heart of

God 's existence which he freely communicated to humanity through the incarnation. In Jesus and through Jesus we too possess these this great mystery.

What we experience, what we produce in our lives is truly ' ours', the fruit of our labour.

In all this there is something much greater than anything we know. It enables us to be who we are, to be ourselves.

This mystery, this ' more true than truth' reality of our nature is where we find God's presence bound up in human nature.

For this very reason God's presence includes even the uncertainty involved in seeing something beyond us. It includes our sufferings and our pain, the sadness brought about by our solitude.

Faith: daily life viewed through the filter of mystery

The vision needed to perceive God's presence in the events of daily living is a very special one. I t is an inner vision which penetrates the surface to the mystery that lies within.

Christians give the name "faith" to this vision which tears away the veil which masks our human existence.

Faith is the Christian's quality of life. A Christian is distinguishable by his or her faith.

There are many ways of thinking about our faith. One which appeals to us because it depicts Don Bosco's faith is the description of him found in the SDB Constitutions, "he was profoundly human, rich in the virtues of his people, he was aware of and open to human reality. He was also very powerfully a man of God, rich in the gifts of the Spirit. He lived as if he actually saw what was not visible to the human eye" (Const. SDB 21).

To begin to understand the expression "seeing the invisible " we need to go to the text which first outlines this aspect of faith.

"To have faith", the Letter to the Hebrews explains "is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see" (Hebrews 11:1).

The Letter to the Hebrews then goes on to relate the adventures of those famous people who lived their lives as if they were "seeing what was not visible to the human eye.

These situations for them, as for Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello, were normal, everyday life situations. In these events what was not visible is that which gives meaning and reason to what was seen and experienced.

Living life by faith demands the courage to read what is happening both personally and



collectively with a vision which is always penetrating, delving beneath the surface of things to the point of arriving at the threshold of mystery.

Believers “Live by Faith” by seeing the deeper meaning in all that happens. Believers live life at depth after pondering the mystery of life itself. Love is the tangible way we experience this.

When two people are in love, the existence of one is continually brought to mind by the other. They do not need to be continually in each other’s presence. The reciprocal presence is so strong that it changes the meaning of life and commitment for them both.

This is Christian Faith, to recognize the mystery which fills life day by day.

The Mysterious  
God at the heart of Life’s  
happening

“What is this mystery?” This is a crucial question. There is no easy answer. Salesian Youth Spirituality recognises that God is beyond classification in human words. Talking about God even when illuminated by his light still leaves us in the dark.

It is Jesus, however, who presents the face and speak the words of mystery of the God.

The gospel contains an extract which is strange in terms of our logic but illuminating in terms of God.

"There was once a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a hole for the winepress, and built a watch tower. Then he let out the vineyard to tenants and went on a journey. When the time came to gather the grapes, he sent his slaves to the tenants to receive his share of the

harvest. The tenants seized his slaves, beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again the man sent other slaves, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all he sent his son to them. 'Surely they will respect my son', he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the owner's son. Come on let's kill him, and we will get his property!' So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him" (Mt. 21:33-39).

The episode finishes in this way but there is a follow up to the story.

The son is killed and his assassins think they have won the day. God raises him from death however.

The son comes out winner because he decided to give his life for love.

Life is what counts. In Jesus the grain of wheat dies under the ground in order to emerge as strong wheat for the good of all.

This is the way God faces the problems of life and death. God's passion for life is what counts in personal and community events.

The one who recognise this mystery is the one who lives the sufferings of daily life in faith.

This is the person who transforms his or her existence into a proclamation of hope in the name and the power of God of Jesus.

**God's word penetrating  
the mystery**

For the one who believes, living by faith is about more than accepting something. It is arriving

at the point of no living for myself, but living for and in God.

The word of God is a recognized and special means through which we reach into the mystery, while embracing all the moments of our existence. God is a Father who wants to communicate with his children. God speaks to us through the Scripture. Scripture makes sense of all the other words of God woven into the fabric of daily living. This way of reading in to, meditating on and praying with is basic to "Salesian Youth Spirituality".

Don Bosco had a particular way of presenting the scriptures. His was an invitation to dwell on them. In this he is to be seen as very much ahead of his times.

He recounted the scriptures to his boys, helping them to understand them, meditate on them, pray them and apply them in their lives. In line with Don Bosco we too meditate, pray and try to put the word into practice. We rediscover our roots in the story of salvation, and we learn words we can use to address God. The words connect us within the silence of our inner being.

We allow God, through his word, to suggest to our hearts the choices, actions, words and above all the meaning we give to life.

Within an ecclesial setting we unite with God's people who throughout history in every part of the world raise songs of praise and petition to God. In this way we try to make our words, our thoughts and our actions more and more like the words and thoughts and actions of Jesus Christ himself.

**The Church:  
people who share the  
cause of Jesus**

Christians live by faith, making their lives a real following of Christ.

We do not do this alone, committed as individuals to a desperate cause.

We live and believe and love and hope in the company of our sisters and brothers, those who have gone before us, those who surround us now and those who, after us, will share the same faith. We belong to a people who share a common cause of Jesus. We are the Church.

Learning from  
the master himself  
-Don Bosco

Don Bosco loved the Church very much. He spent his whole life serving the Church. He explained his love for the Church in the language of his own time. He was a nineteenth century man and for him the Church was above all the Pope and the Bishops. He insisted on giving the Church great respect and obedience. His call is important for us too, especially at a time in the church's history when tensions and presumptions seem to erode fidelity.

Today, however, we do have a precious gift to enable us to know the Church better. This gift points out what it means "to love the Church" and how to live as part of the Church. This gift is the Second Vatican Council. In the Council we discover a renewed style of obedience and a much wider and more universal vision of the Church.

The Church of  
the Council

The Council depicted a face of the Church which placed service of the kingdom of God at centre stage as Jesus had asked.

The kingdom of God is the life and hope for all in the name of God. The Church exists to proclaim this kingdom and to bring this kingdom about in the here and now. We continue Don Bosco's love for the

Church by learning to love and live in the Church



with that passion for the kingdom which marked the lives of Jesus, Don Bosco, Mother Mazzarella and many other friends before us.

To present this image of Church in service of the kingdom of

God, the Council looked for inspiration to the first church community we read about in the acts of the apostles. Those who gathered around the apostles after Easter had a vivid awareness of being a community of people committed to carrying on their Master's cause. They believed in Jesus as Lord and lived this belief in their commitment to be "of one mind and of one heart " and to "share all things in common" according to " what each one needed" (Acts 2:42-45, 4:32-35). This community discovered in "the breaking of the bread" the realisation that in Jesus, life had triumphed and continues to triumph over death (Acts 2:42). In the Eucharist they gave thanks to the living God for the Easter that Jesus had already brought about. They saw this Easter victory manifested also, day after day, as they journeyed towards the future everlasting Easter when "death will be no more" (Rev. 21 :4). The unity of the community was built around the cause' Jesus came to proclaim. The existence of a diversity of viewpoints and activities became even more reason for working at this unity of purpose.

The disciples learnt from Jesus himself to seek unity and communion by accepting and respecting the differences that existed among them. One episode explains this very well. "John said to Jesus, 'Teacher, we saw a man who was driving out demons in your name, and we told him to stop, because he doesn't belong to our group'. 'Do not try to stop him,' Jesus told them, 'because no one who performs a miracle in my name will be able soon afterwards to say evil things about me. For whoever is not against us is for us. I assure you that anyone who gives you a drink of water because you belong to me will certainly receive his reward'" (Mk. 9:38-41). The disciples reasoned as some Christians reason today. They were a little jealous. They wanted to have sole rights with regard to doing all the good possible. It would seem that they were seeking to belong to their group for the joy of finding solutions to the urgent problems at hand. In their minds, unity very easily slips into uniformity. Jesus proposes, instead, a unity which demands much greater commitment, namely, that of being at the service of life by opposing death. Faced with this need one cannot joke or compromise. Diversity is a consequence of the need to serve life to the full. We bring to the task of serving life our sensitivities, our experiences and our reactions to the forms of death which surrounds us.

**Let us love and  
build up the church**

This is the Church we want to serve and love and build up. It is primarily a people we serve and love and build up. We are a people who share Jesus' cause and commit ourselves to bring about that cause in a fellowship which accepts and loves,

in a spirit of  
communion  
which  
reaches far  
beyond  
differences  
of race,  
culture and  
social  
structure.



In this unity of faith and commitment we discover the supportive companionship of the "witnesses" to Jesus' resurrection.

Mary was one of these witnesses, indeed she was foremost among the believers and a favourite, among the disciples of Jesus. The saints are also among these witnesses. They show God's presence and his 'face' to humanity. Through them God continues to speak to us. We turn to them, looking to their lives for example, praying to them for help, certain of sharing with them the great celebration of life. Our friends are also witnesses. We live day by day the same faith adventure with such friends. We share the same passion for the kingdom of God, working with them, collaborating and planning new strategies to enable us to be at the service of life and hope in our world today. There are many others who do not seem to have a great deal in common with the Church but share a passion for life, for justice and for solidarity with us. We feel they are our friends even if they work in ways very different to our own. This company of committed friends helps us to discover who we are and how we can respond to the God who calls to us. They are like fragments of words which become convincing

because they have real faces, the faces of known and unknown friends.

### **The Church's sacraments**

God's saving action works in our lives in a variety of ways. A father and mother who love and want the best for their children do not need help in knowing how to look after others. With great joy we have discovered that daily life is indeed the place where God is present. This means recognising that God comes close and saves us in our living. This model of presence is not the only way through which God saves us. Christian tradition acknowledges other especially solemn and effective ways of manifesting God's saving presence. They are so special that normally when Christians speak about the "sacraments" of God's presence they are usually referring to these. These are God's "written" Word. In her seven sacraments the Church becomes the place of union over and above the "flesh and blood" communion as we read in John's gospel (Jn. 1:13).

We have already talked about the importance of the Word of God and of the ecclesial communion. Let us look a little at the sacraments. Once again we view through the lens of daily life which has helped us to understand the Word of God and the Church.

From this standpoint "Salesian Youth Spirituality" helps us to discover something very wonderful indeed. The sacraments are special moments in our living, pieces of the future running across our present.

### **A change of viewpoint in religious thinking**

Our Salesian tradition reserves a special function for the sacraments. For Don Bosco the



sacraments were the strong points (the 'pillars ' he called them) of Christian education. To be faithful to Don Bosco and to how we have this far managed to present other Christian existence themes, we need to insert the sacraments into our present culture.

Don Bosco saw the sacraments in the context of the religious thinking of his time. It was a theology which was very different to that which the Church presents to all Christians today. In the logic of Don Bosco's day, it was easy to divide daily life from salvation. In this perspective the Sacraments served to bring daily life almost magically into God's saving action.

In the past, faith and the prevailing sense of the sacred pushed people to see salvation in a very dramatic way. Life was seen as a battle between the forces of good and evil. Those on the side of good would use their energies to secure frequent and effective saving action.

Don Bosco's dreams and much of his sermons are full of this awareness.

Today we look at things differently. The Incarnation has helped us to discover God's love which is so much stronger than sin. The Incarnation has restored our right to love our day to day living. For this reason, we do not like to divide God and the world. Neither do we like to think of the sacraments as tearing us away from daily life in order to carry us to the world of the sacred.

The Incarnation has also helped us to discover God 's presence "pervading" our daily living. "Salesian Youth Spirituality" speaks very much about daily living as sacrament.

We cannot, however, diminish the importance of the sacraments and their centrality to Christian living by saying that the whole of existence is full of God 's saving presence. Instead, what we need to do is begin to look at the sacraments from this new vantage point.

This is a way of showing our fidelity to Don Bosco and his teachings.

It is difficult to wrap words around something which will always be a mystery. At times we think we have found the right words and then we realise that they are nothing more than beautiful sentences which say very little indeed.

Love is what best describes the sacraments and their connection to daily living.

When two people love each other, their whole lives are immersed in that love.

The concrete gestures they use to express their love show something of what that love is like and how it affects their whole existence, permeating all they are and all they do. If it was not like this then the words and the gestures would be false, a sham.

At times people in love have to be apart for some reason. Distance or time do not block the love between them. Love has its own rhythm, logic and measure.

Finally, the long awaited meeting arrives. The two are in the arms of one another. Love has remained within them, within their lives. The waiting has not extinguished what they feel for one another. Meeting up again allows their love to explode with all its energy.

That lengthy embrace, the tears that come to the eyes are a special expression of an all pervading and persistent love.

At other times a cloud over-shadows this love. Perhaps a betrayal of some kind has occurred. Something seems to have been shattered. Then the two find each other again.

The embrace this time puts paid to the fear and the smile returns. This too is a sacrament; it is a reconciliation demonstrated through a gesture. It expresses the joy of the reconciliation which rebuilds the very fabric of life itself. The sacraments in terms of the sacramental energy which permeates Christian life are like this.

The sacraments are very special events of God's grace. By celebrating God's presence, the veil of silence is broken. God's voice resounds as the experience of salvation. Without this event the gift would be rendered useless and ineffective.

Without this celebration people would remain dispersed, sad and lonely, cut off from every personal saving experience.

The sacraments: a special time for salvation

There is another aspect which it is vital to keep in mind. Christian tradition holds strongly to this belief. In the excitement of finding a new way of looking at things, omitting this would be serious.

Normally the relationship between something and its meaning is a game where we "pretend" to create something new. This way of behaving does not change reality. Whoever is distant, remains distant and silence continues to shroud us. People are trapped by their own limitations and responsibilities.

Christian tradition holds, however, that in the sacraments God is really present and acts effectively.

It is love which pervades the lives of the two lovers. One day the lovers immerse this love in the mystery of God by celebrating the sacrament of matrimony. There is a change in the leading role. God takes the part of the protagonist giving a new dimension to the love which fills the lives of our two lovers. What begins to open up then is an epic love story in which Jesus, the Church and all people figure.

It is true that God is the prime mover in all human love, as he is in the whole human adventure. Usually, however, he is upstaged by our desire to take the leading role. Celebrating the sacraments, we acknowledge him, we give him space, we entrust ourselves to him. A piece of the Gospel says this so well, "The servant does not deserve thanks for obeying orders does he? It is the same with you; when you have done all you have been told to do, say, 'We are ordinary servants; we have only done our duty'" (Lk. 17:10).

All this brings two sacraments to mind.

The Eucharist  
and Reconciliation

They are the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation, ones with which we have the most frequent contact. Through Reconciliation and the Eucharist, the ecclesial community lays claim to being



the 'place' in which God freely works his saving power and witnesses to the fact that it is possible to live in a way that accepts and welcomes this gift. The church rejects on her part the presumption that we can live without God's saving action in our lives. The church reminds us that each of us is in debt, in everything, to God's great love, given to us in Jesus Christ. This puts personal responsibility at the very centre of every salvific meeting; it recognises that life is a result of salvation. It re-assures our timid hope in salvation and lays before us the secure foundation of God's salvific action.

The Eucharist and Reconciliation are two great pillars on which Salesian Spirituality is built.

The Eucharist is at the heart of the community, links it in love and sends it out to follow Christ's way. The Eucharist becomes, as the 23rd General Chapter of the SDB reminds us, "a meaningful moment of the Preventive System. Young people take from the Eucharist a model of how they can organise their lives in the light of the mystery of Christ who gives himself in love. In the Eucharist they learn to put others first as the spirit of communion demands. In it they are enabled to commit themselves to apostolic activity in keeping with their age and Christian development". The FMA Constitutions are more explicit still when they state "and, nourishing ourselves at the table of his Word and his Body, we become like him 'bread' for our sisters and brothers " (FMA Constitutions 40).

Reconciliation saves us in our poverty and restores us in a new way in the spirit.

"Salesian Youth Spirituality" emphasises this sacrament and points out the need to give it its proper place in the life of the Christian. " Young people, sustained by a love which understands and forgives", declares the 23rd General Chapter, "find the strength to recognise their selfishness and sin, their fragility and their need for support and direction. They learn to resist the temptation to become self-sufficient. They offer pardon to others as an exchange of what they have received from Reconciliation. They are educated to respect others and enabled to form a clear and coherent conscience". These are seen as the educational fruits of the sacrament.

A sense of celebration                      The unifying and liberating love of God gives a certain tone of joy and hope and celebration to these two sacraments. Eucharist and Reconciliation in Salesian style cannot be void of that sense of celebration which is born of the ongoing experience of meeting the Lord of life who has over- come evil and sin.

It is impossible to understand life in Valdocco and Mornese, to understand what lay at the very centre of these two communities of young people, without the Eucharist.

Don Bosco insisted again and again on the importance of this sacrament in his educational system.

For Don Bosco, the Eucharist was something which touched the depths of his art. As a priest and teacher he was convinced that the Lord was the model in educating the young. He was

concerned that his young people received the Risen Jesus often in the Eucharist. It was a Eucharist which was well prepared for by a good confession.

The same experience and educational preoccupation we, present in Mother Mazzarella, In Mornese, the Eucharist was seen as the aim and culmination of the whole day. The "God-with-us" Eucharistic presence was seen as a real and active presence. The young people were encouraged to turn to Jesus with faith in moments of difficulty, they grouped around him in joyful community moments and with him they began and ended each day.

**The portrait of a  
Christian called Mary**

Living in faith means reproducing in our daily lives the kind of existence which marked the saints as special. Earlier we said that Don Bosco lived his existence as if he saw the invisible.

We are all convinced of this and we continue trying to immerse ourselves more and more deeply in the mystery of God so as to give our lives the tone and style which comes from that mystery. Unfortunately, there is more than the problem of coherence to take on board here. It is not easy to evaluate things, people and events from the standpoint of mystery. It is very hard to demonstrate in concrete terms just what this sense of mystery is. Indeed, the difficulties arise out of the discovery that God's mystery is so deep that we only ever manage to glean fragments of it.

Often we are unsure about the quality of our living. We are not clear at times as to whether one way of doing things is better than another. The words we use to dream our dreams are becoming poorer and poorer, overburdened by our limitations and our fears.

Mary, our help

We need someone who can give us a hand.

It may seem strange, but it is true. Even though we are pretty secure people and we do not like others to tell us what we have to do and what we have to avoid, it is strange that when things really matter we look for help, someone we can trust. It is this conviction which has enabled "Salesian Youth Spirituality" to re-discover Mary and re-ignite the great love for her that the Salesian family has inherited from Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarella.

Christians have always had a special place for Mary in their hearts. Don Bosco loved Mary as a son loves his mother. Mother Mazzarella echoed these sentiments with a special enthusiasm. Both of them taught us to recognise Mary as our Help, a strong and powerful helper in times of difficulty.

This way of remembering Mary was linked to an almost physical caring. It was the kind of care a mother shows when she divides herself into four to care for the son or daughter she loves. But it is also an absorption in the serious task of making



sense out of life, and trying to live from the heart of the mystery our lives carry within them.

Mary has a very precise name in "Salesian Youth Spirituality". She is called "our help".

We run to her when we are in difficulty. Above all we



feel she is close to us when we are less than sure about the meaning of our existence.

We live in a time of uncertainty and change, of trepidation and enthusiasm for novelty. Mary, our help, points out the way ahead and inspires us with hope and consolation. We need a help especially at the level of meaning in life and hope. Mary is this help because she shows us the face of a mature and committed Christian; she is the most beautiful portrait we have of a Christian.

Mary's face In order to discover this portrait, we turn to the pages of the gospels. There are but a few which speak of her. Those that are there are very rich and have precious indications regarding Mary.

The *Magnificat* is the great ecclesial prayer of thanks and acknowledgement of God's work of salvation. Luke has Mary declare these truths because he was certain that they truly expressed her experience of God's action in her life.

The *Magnificat* is Mary's song, a song which proclaims her faith experience. It is a model for all Christian prayer. Mary it comes about. What is proclaimed is what happened.

The *Magnificat* offers us a kind of ecclesial portrait of the young woman of Nazareth. She is the one who, after Jesus, has penetrated more deeply God's mystery. As we pray this prayer, as we sing this prayer, we feel Mary close to us, as mother and model of true Christian living.

*"My heart praises the Lord;  
my soul is glad because of God my saviour,  
for he has remembered me, his lowly servant!  
From now on all people will call me happy,  
because of the great things the mighty God  
has done for me..  
He has stretched out his power  
and scattered the proud with all their plans.  
He has brought down mighty Kings from their  
thrones,  
and has lifted up the lowly and the oppressed  
He has filled the hungry and the poor with good  
things,  
and sent the rich away with empty hands (Lk. 1  
:46-55).*

In the *Magnificat* Mary celebrates the fact that God has drawn close, has become one with his people. He is the faithful God, he has made an agreement with his people and he is faithful to that pact.

Mary feels herself immersed in the power of God's love. When she proclaims to herself and to others who she is in God's plan for human beings she has the courage to cry out, God's power and his presence are true and solemn expressions of his human form. It is for this reason that while she feels small and poor and humble and a servant, she is truly great, so great in fact that all generations speak about her.

Even for Mary the mystery of God's presence is great and often impenetrable and disturbing. At the Annunciation she showed she was anxious and fearful (Lk. 1:29 and 34). The prayer of Simeon breaks through to her and leaves her fearful in the face of something so awesome (Lk. 2:32). She was

mortified no doubt at Jesus' reply when Joseph and herself were so anxiously searching for him (Lk. 2:50). Even through her suffering her words were always words of faith in the mystery of God. She is a good companion to have and she is a source of consolation to us in our struggle to live our lives in faith.

In silence and in prayer Mary manages to penetrate the mystery which lies beyond fact. She transformed by totally and courageously owning the cause of her son. It becomes a passion for her so that all might recognise who God is and experience this God as the God of life.

Mary runs to her cousin Elizabeth before being called because she realises how much of a help she can be to her. She would not let the celebration at Cana end abruptly because they had run out of wine and urged her son to intervene. In the Magnificat she sides with the poor to point out that they are specially loved by God.

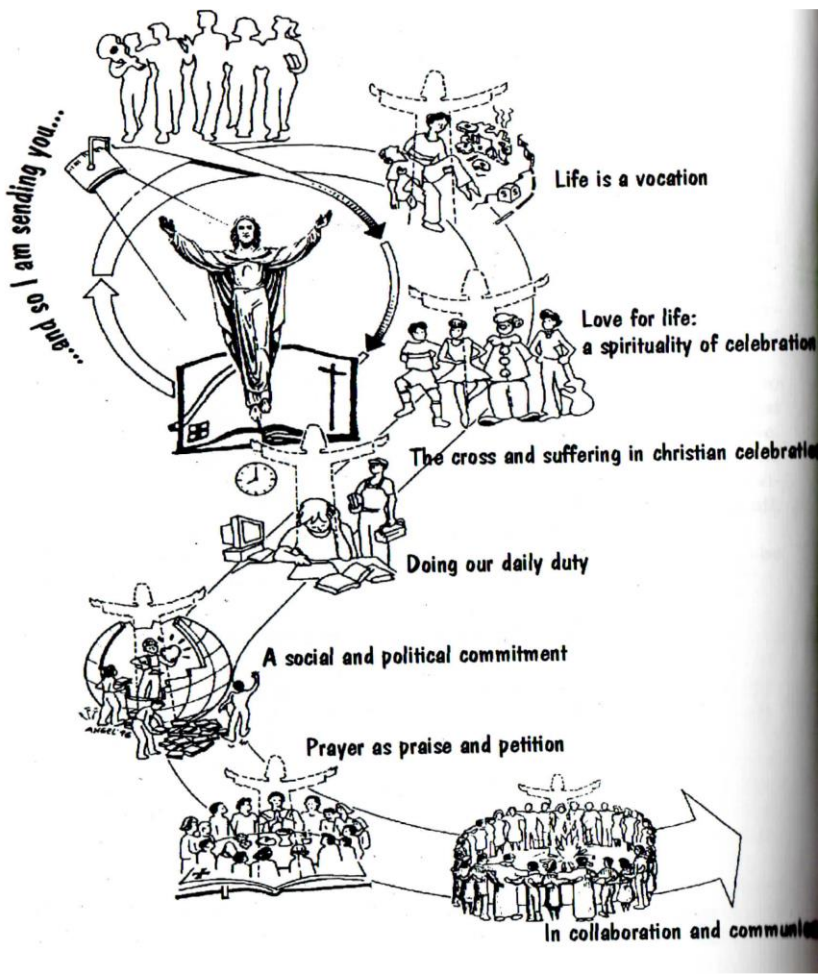
Mary up holds the values of the faithful woman right to the foot of the cross. Such a fidelity to the cross is what Jesus asks of all who have the courage to share his cause. Mary in silent suffering gives her son up to death for the life of all. She accepts having the son she gave birth to violently snatched from her and becomes the mother of all, the source of life for all, with him and in him.

Mary is all of this for us. Because she is all of this she has a very special place in "Salesian Youth Spirituality".

## **Points for reflection and discussion:**

- At the heart of the Salesian dream is the idea of "saving souls". It is an idea which reaches into the very heart of the mystery of God. How can we explain this dream to the young people of today? What are the characteristics of a "saved soul" in today's world?
- Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello believed in young people's ability to be missionaries of other young people, to be like the yeast among the masses. How would you propose we encourage this youth to youth ministry in our more committed young leaders without creating a tier system among our youth?
- Much is said today about the lack of role models present in our society. Salesian Youth Spirituality points out the necessity of being models of the presence of God. How do we go about this?
- What are the helps and the obstacles you have encountered in trying to live by faith in your everyday life?
- The Second Vatican Council created a new image of church which our spirituality calls us to build up and be faithful to. Remembering that Don Bosco's oratory was primarily for the "parish less" boys, what do we need to do especially for the "unchurched" young of today?
- The Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist were pillars of the Salesian way of educating young people in Valdocco and Mornese. How do we continue to draw on their riches to reach out to our young people?
- What Is your experience of Mary as help? How do we present her to our young people today?





# 4

## PASSIONATE ABOUT THE KINGDOM

Christians respond to the discovery of how much God loves them, by proclaiming Jesus as Lord in the context of a community, the church.

This produces a new kind of experience of life. Christians begin to live their life experience as a following of Jesus.

To follow Jesus is not like following other leaders. It is something quite unique, like what happens, for instance, when a sudden flurry of wind scatters our well-ordered papers all over the place.

Jesus asks for something which demands great commitment. He asks us to own and share his cause, a cause which filled every moment of his life and led him eventually to his death. Christian life is "vocation".

It is the courageous decision to respond to Jesus and to launch our existence in the direction of the kingdom of God, towards the triumph of life over death, in the name of the God of life.

Thus faith experience proclaimed in words becomes transformed into life and action.

Life is vocation      The whole of the gospel speaks about the challenge Jesus makes to his disciples. It is a challenge which asks them to put the whole of their existence on the line, for others. It is a challenge which asks them to become people, who are capable of accepting the cry which arises from the very

depths of their life. One page of the gospel in particular summarises this fact very well.

Luke writes,

'Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, " what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.

And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live".

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And

who is my neighbour?"

Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.

Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.

He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought to him to an inn, and took care of him.

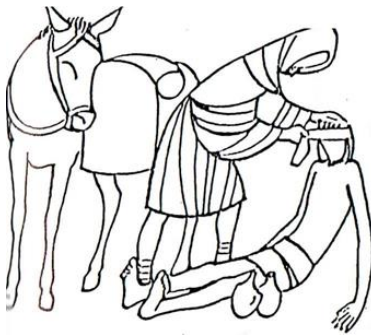


The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the inn keeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend'.

Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"

He said, "The one who showed him mercy". Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise"

The Teacher of the Law asked Jesus, 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?' He was using a well-known expression from the Hebrew Scriptures which referred to what was the most important aspect of our existence in the context of God's plan. Jesus heard the question and the response the man makes regarding the two fundamental conditions which the Law stipulates; love of God and love of neighbour. With this reply it would appear that all had been resolved. Instead, in what follows next, we discover the real 'novelty' of the Gospel. The Teacher of the Law homes in on the more problematic area for him, and he asks, "who is my neighbour" Jesus replies turning the question upside



down. Instead of listing who is and who is not a neighbour and taking off from an objective situation, Jesus asks the man to "make himself the neighbour". The question does not refer to others, but rather goes to the heart of our personal attitude to others. Jesus transforms the situation of physical closeness or apartness into a response, a

vocational one, which challenges

the man to personal responsibility and free choice. Jesus' invitation is a very challenging one. Often the 'other' is helpless, and speechless, without even the strength to ask for help. Jesus gives the needy a voice, inviting us to hear the cry of those who suffer and need support. The parable teaches us that we build our existence by moving out of ourselves and reaching out to others. Human existence, from a gospel viewpoint, means letting go of selfishness for the sake of others and fighting the tendency to enclose ourselves in the tight and restricting circle of personal, group or national selfishness.

We live by love and we are challenged to build up life through acts of love. Like the Samaritan, we already have eternal life because when we love we meet God, who alone is the reason for our salvation.

God is at the heart of this vocation to love which calls out to us from the silence of another's need. In as much as we accept, serve and love people with our whole self, then we proclaim, know and love God.

Called to build  
the Kingdom  
of God

By the words he spoke and above all, by the way he lived his Life, Jesus places before us a role model for every Christian vocation.

This is the model of the Kingdom of God. It is something even greater than that which gives meaning to our lives, or even that which directs us toward living our lives in a serious and authentic way.

Jesus is indeed the man of the kingdom of God because he made the kingdom his life purpose,

that "fullness and abundance of life" for all (Jn. 10:10), that "pearl of great price" (Mt. 13:45-46) which means selling everything else in order to have it.

The kingdom of God is the recognition of God's ascendancy over all people of every age. It is a recognition which goes as far as acknowledging that happiness and life are only found in God.

The God we proclaim in this way is totally committed to people. This God wants a meaningful future for all. This God is glorified when the human person is fully alive and happy.

People recognise God as Lord when they commit themselves to promoting life and hope.

Aware that their problems are God's problems, believers entrust to God their hunger for life and hope.



The God of Jesus is a God who can be trusted. This has been proved in the marvels God has worked in his people, but above all in the marvels he has worked in Jesus.

Where the man of the kingdom appears, anguish and fear of life and death disappear and are replaced by the freedom and the joy of

living in God's name.

The most convincing words about the kingdom of God were pronounced by Jesus from the cross when he entrusted his existence to God.

By dying so that we might have life, Jesus rediscovered life and happiness for all of us. The risen Jesus is the ultimate sign of the fact that our God is totally on the side of life and happiness for all.

Jesus' cause is that every person may have the fullness of life in God's name and be helped to walk tall with head held high and live in hope and joy because in God alone there is no more fear of death.

Jesus entrusted to his disciples the task God entrusted to him. He said to his friends, "Just as the Father, has sent me, so am I sending you" (Jn. 20:21). Link by link, a whole chain of people has been built who have committed themselves to the salvation of the world. The disciples in their turn call others and send them out. Thus the chain is lengthened, new disciples call others with the same passion with which they responded to their call. And these new disciples are sent out. So it continues.

Today, Jesus, his disciples, the first Christian believers, our friends who have educated us are calling you and me. And they are sending us out.

They are giving us the same task, the one which fired Jesus in his life; it is the cause of life.

A special call for the  
kingdom of God

The cause Jesus spent his life for was the kingdom of God. When we meditate on how Jesus brought about the kingdom in his own life we begin

to discover new meaning in our lives and new ways to bring it about.

Today when we speak about kings and queens and royalty we tend to think immediately of ownership and of people who rule over others (or at least make out they do). In Jesus' time it was even worse. At that moment when Jesus had no wish to be funny (cf. John 18) Jesus reminds us that he is King, but not an ordinary King. His reign is not like the kingdoms of this world.

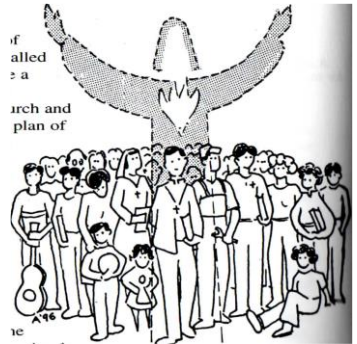
There is a substantial difference. Jesus is King because he served others to the point of giving his life for them, out of love. God's Kingdom is the fullness and abundance of life for all.

It is more than the victory of life over death. It is the victory of the power of God's love and it is a victory gained by loving to death.

To commit ourselves to the kingdom means committing ourselves to life over death, calling directly on God's cause and plan for all. When life is at stake it is not possible to keep God out of things as if everything depended on us. Unfortunately, it is all too easy to forget this basic fact. We have become presumptuous, full of ourselves and our power in the struggle to keep death always at a distance from us. To avoid this dangerous temptation, we need people who are courageous and are capable of witnessing to the irrefutable needs of the Gospel. In the church there are different and very generous people who have a special vocation.

It is impossible to catalogue these special people as one does at an official level in many professional organisations. Some vocations have a

very important responsibility in the logic of the kingdom of God. Among these vocations are teachers, youth leaders, catechists and priests and religious who at a very radical level are responding to Jesus' mysterious invitation to follow him. All these are a special expression of what each of us is called to become. They are a kind of



sacramental revelation in the church and as church, of God's plan for salvation and of the way in which Jesus realised this plan. They are women and men of our time ordinary people. They look to the past and proclaim the marvels God worked for his people. They face the future anticipating in simple everyday ways the cause of their hope. The community (that of the church and in general of all people) is grateful to these people and constantly asks the God of life to continue to inspire many with the courage of this radicality and the perseverance and enthusiasm demanded of this way of life.

Love for life: a spirituality  
of celebration

"Salesian Youth Spirituality" is a spirituality of celebration. It puts life at the centre of the Christian life project. It does this because it has rediscovered within life itself the style and quality of God's presence. By proclaiming God's power at work, through Jesus Christ, in the personal and communal stories of people, this belief in life is transformed into celebrating life as it is constantly

being renewed and saved. Don Bosco often spoke of joy as an expression of gratitude to the Lord of life. Our Salesian tradition is strong on this point. "Be courageous and always happy, this is the sign of someone who loves the Lord greatly." (Letters of Mother Mazzarello, 60) Research on our spirituality has enabled us to rediscover this aspect in terms of being faithful to the Incarnation. We are witnesses to the fact that God has indeed made all things new in Jesus who went to the Cross so that life might be victorious. We can only be witnesses to this if we recognise the signs of life, of this newness, even when we find ourselves surrounded by signs of death. Like



Jesus of Nazareth we too love life, taking on board the ordinary aspects of that life, accepting the challenges, the questions it raises, the tensions involved in growth, the lack of understanding about the future and its different forms of poverty. We work towards the overcoming the ambiguities present in daily living, trying to let love be the basis of our choices in life. Celebration is this sense of living the extraordinary gospel of the victory of life over death. Celebration is doing this even when we find ourselves immersed in a daily living which savours heavily of death.

**The cross and suffering in Christian celebration**

Celebration does not eliminate the presence of the cross. We proclaim it when we cry out with joy at having discovered our right to love life and seek happiness.

In the celebration and the joy which pervades our existence we have many reasons for finding the courage to put Jesus' cross at the heart of our celebration. In fact, in order to live a good spiritual existence, we need to allow the cross and celebration to be part and parcel of our lives. We must allow them to be woven into the fabric of our lives.

Serving  
others

We are alleluia people. We live a spirituality which gives lots of space to celebration because we believe that God's kingdom is already here, among us. We cannot allow our celebration to be consumed by lack of commitment and indifference, because what fires us is our passion for the cause of Jesus. For this reason, our celebration is an experience of solidarity with all people, and it is a vocation to let life be, to let life grow, so that all may find that joy which gives them reason to celebrate. In fact, in our celebrating a special place is given to those who are normally excluded from experiencing joy in their lives. Those who have savoured the joy of living, live their lives as a celebration, and are in duty bound to share that joy with others. This choice, made within our spiritual life project, introduces into our daily experience the more difficult aspects of living. There is a great deal of resistance, both within and outside of us, which needs to be controlled and defeated. This requires the courage of risking death. Only those who live their love of life to the point of the cross can truly build that full and abundant life for themselves and others. Truly this is what Jesus teaches us to do.

Christian  
"mortification"

The life that we love intensely and that we want to have in all its fullness and abundance carries



us towards an acknowledgement of our limitations. We are, to a certain extent, among those who are "condemned to death". We are not sad about our lot however. Death envelops us by the very fact that we are alive. The most wonderful experience we have, that of being alive, carries us in the irreversible direction of limitation. It is vital to remember this so that we can learn to live from the challenge which death throws at us, and live with the quality of life that Jesus demonstrates to us. For this reason, we must never forget death. Death reminds us that the houses we have built in this life, are indeed only tents. Our real home is beyond, in the Father's house. Sometimes our very existence reminds us of this fact when somewhat painfully it brings us face to face with death and sadness and suffering. Sometimes we are the ones who choose to bring this fact to mind. We choose to distance ourselves from the beautiful things of life, not because we do not appreciate them but our awareness of the importance of the "ultimate good" brings home to us the temporariness of the here and now. We stop enjoying that here and now for a few moments in order to take stock of the fact that we are on a journey towards far greater experiences of life. In the Christian experience this need is referred to with an expression which is neither good nor particularly well accepted. We use the word "mortification" to sum this up. We do not make any efforts when life is difficult because, either we prefer death to life, or the struggles we are going through make us reflect a little on the fact that we will eventually have to face death. We look at the prospect of our death and we choose to distance ourselves a little from things so that we can live as people who have overcome death. In other words, we do this so that we can love life more intensely and because we want to "possess" it

more fully. We take up the invitation Jesus puts before us, "If the grain of wheat, falling to the ground, does not die, it will be lost. If instead it dies, it will grow and produce a hundred- fold". This is the way we live our spirituality. Whoever loves life, and is willing to lose it serving others in God's name, plants the cross at the centre of their life.

Doing  
our daily duty

Don Bosco often referred to 'doing our daily duty' as a way of living life to the full

Mother Mazzarella insisted that "true piety consisted in doing one's duty at the time and place allotted and for love of God". Don Bosco 's idea was that this daily duty was to be accomplished well and joyfully. He was able to integrate commitment with joy, holiness with happiness, not only in words but in his own life too. Today we use other words. We prefer to speak about professional responsibility, social commitment, coherence. Undoubtedly, with the passing of time words change. However, their substance does not change even though, today, that can easily happen. We live in an age of easy words which struggle to translate themselves into action, or we tend to adapt our more serious commitments to the subjective feelings of the moment.

Through this element of doing our 'daily duty' we discover once again that this commitment to love life is very serious indeed. It is a commitment to love life, all of it, all the time, and not just when it suits us. In this we discover that life is truly a vocation, not according to certain conditions or circumstances, but a vocation to love life as service and responsibility to others. We are faced with a challenging commitment. It is a commitment which causes our selfishness and our pride to suffer a little. This commitment takes us to Jesus ' cross and to an

undeniable aspect of Christian living. Christians committed to loving others by placing themselves at the service of others do so, even to the point of giving their lives "so that all may have life to the full", as Jesus did. This is the cross we place with great courage at the heart of our daily living.

*Forgiveness* Forgiveness that brings about reconciliation in the midst of tension and division is an important aspect of Christian living. Forgiveness is not foolishness turning a blind eye in the face of evil because of fear of becoming involved. Neither does it justify and reduce everything, putting off facing up to evil to another day. Christian forgiveness is an act of deep awareness that the one who offends another is less human than the one who suffers the offence. Forgiveness is an act which seeks to break with the fascination of evil, shattering to pieces its power over us. Christians forgive so that the evil might be nailed to its own sin, spreading out their own arms in acceptance. Forgiveness is the adventure of Jesus' cross. His act, clear and courageous as it was, denounced evil, fought to overcome it, recognising that the cross is the sure sign of life's victory over death.

**A social and political commitment**

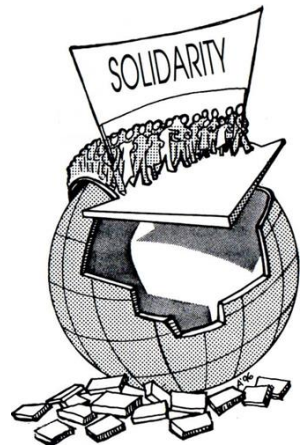
People who love life and want it in abundance in the way God offers it find themselves face to face with situations of daily dying. These situations disturb us and challenge us and urge us, together with others to look for ways and means to bring about the necessary cultural and structural transformations to help those who are violently deprived of abundant life.

For those who are serious about the quality of their lives, such a commitment will be part of everyday life. It is also at the heart of our spiritual experience.

"Salesian Youth Spirituality" is strong on this issue. Social and political commitment are not added extras to Christian living. It is not only for those who are enthusiastic about solidarity. It is an essential for all. Certainly the ways in which it is carried through can vary according to personal and community vocations, but the task is a must for all who claim Jesus as the Lord.

The reason for this rests in the concept of the kingdom of God and its relationship to everyday life which Salesian Youth Spirituality places at the centre of its understanding of Christian commitment. As so often happens, however, it is not enough to recognise the need. Those who are serious about living their spirituality in terms of social and political commitment find themselves faced with the question as to whether or not there are special dimensions which enable their life choice to become action.

Salesian Youth Spirituality in line with what Don Bosco taught, proposes two dimensions. One is an attitude of hope, or optimism which knows how to survive even the most serious and seemingly insurmountable difficulties. The second is a trust and belief in education as the way we live. These two attitudes express our specific political commitment to peace and justice. We live these out with others who share our passion for life. At the same time, we



cannot deny how much faith is needed for us to live as spiritual women and men.

*Hope, "in spite  
of everything*

Believers live out their lives and their commitment to life and hope in many ways. Our faith experience, arising out of the cross and hope in the victory which the cross upholds, is beyond human understanding. This moves us to acquire attitudes, to speak words and make gestures which those who live only on the wave length of contemporary logic cannot understand and share with us.

It is not easy to be specific about what these attitudes are. It is certain, however, that these attitudes set believers apart a little and can force them to feel alone even in the best of company. A page of the gospel makes this clear,

' When they came to the crowd, a man came to him, knelt before him, and said, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly; he often falls into the fire and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him".

Jesus answered," You faithless and perverse generation. how much longer must I be with you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him here to me". And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly.

Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said "Why could we not cast it out?"

He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly I yell you, if you have faith in the size of mustard seed, you will say this mountain, 'Move

from here to there' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you" (Mt. 17: 14-20). It is life which is at risk here. There is a poor epileptic boy. It is almost as if he is dead. Jesus is irritated by his disciples because he sees them lacking power and courage in the face of this death. Jesus will not allow death to triumph over life.

Jesus recognises that this is difficult for them. He tells them that they have to learn to place this within the context of God's plan, of his saving action. Here, and only here, the impossible becomes possible.

It is life which triumphs. Jesus did not only do and say this for others. He believed in the victory of life and freedom, in the Father's name, even when death was part and parcel of his own human experience. He suffered and cried like all of us. He cried out with all his faith. He conquered death, forever, for all of us.

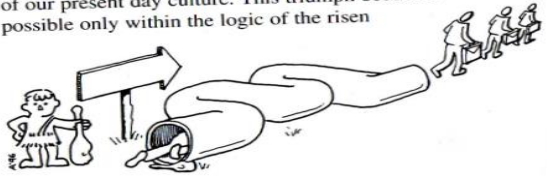
In Jesus the impossible becomes possible for his friends, for us, because we have believed in life and have tried to build life up through little gestures which stand as small signs of the great promise to be fulfilled.

Jesus does not suggest a magical remedy to the disillusioned disciples. He suggests instead that with a little faith one can indeed move mountains. It is almost as if he is saying, 'there are no sophisticated remedies to propose. What is needed is a totally new outlook. What is needed is that you make the passage from what can be seen to the mystery which rests within the visible. Only at this deeper level can you be sure that the seemingly impossible victory over death becomes possible.

Trust  
in education

The triumph of life over death which we want to touch with our hands is impossible within the dominant logic of our present day culture. This triumph becomes possible only within the logic of the risen Christ. There are many ways of making this commitment real and tangible. Don Bosco taught

of our present day culture. This triumph becomes possible only within the logic of the risen



one in particular and staked his life on it. It was his belief in education, education in a specific way which the first Salesian called “the preventive method”

Education in this way is of prime importance to Salesian spirituality. Education is the Salesian way of living out our commitment, whatever our profession. If we



truly want to live a spirituality which commits itself to God’s cause in the lives of people we need to make education a passion in our lives. We need to make education the way in which we are present to one another. We need to make it the special means of furthering the cause of human growth and development. In the name of education, Salesian Youth

Spirituality asks all people of good will and all public institutions to commit themselves to enabling human beings to grow to wholeness and bring about political and cultural transformation. By choosing education we know that we are being faithful to the

Lord according to Don Bosco's heart. We believe, as he did, in the human person as the prime mover in the process of growth and transformation.

**Prayer as praise and petition** Christians have a special way of expressing their faith which we call prayer. All religious people pray.

Christians share this common experience and use it in a special way. Prayer is a dialogue between the person and the God. Assured of God's closeness people share their anxieties and desires, dreams and hopes. It is very like meeting a close friend, one who has the ability to help us out.

Christians are proud to treat their God in this way. Jesus himself taught us to pray in such a way (Mt. 21:22) and this makes Christian prayer unique.

Christians speak to God, immersing themselves in his mystery. They contemplate God, lost in the love which surrounds them, accepting who they are before God. What we discover about ourselves in prayer cannot be described in words that describe day to day experience. We need the language of silence because that is how love is best expressed.

Often our words are inadequate and so we look to the solemn words of the Psalms, of the Church's liturgy and the ancient traditions of our faith. As believers we speak to God, we speak about ourselves and about him. We live and proclaim our faith.

More and more we want to become women and men of prayer. We want to do this in the style of



the spirituality we have discovered. This means looking, yet again, at Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello.

Both experience an intense and particular life of prayer.

Their humble, trusting, apostolic prayer united their faith to their daily living.

Their prayer enlightened by the Word of God, nourished by the mysteries of the faith, enabled them to read their present experience in the light of their beliefs.



For Mother Mazzarello this prayer had a fundamental characteristic, she tells us that it is “true heart-prayer” capable of placing us the young people “in the heart of Jesus”

Our founding saints saw it as a prayer which “adhered to life and become that life itself.”

Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello invite us to make prayer the centre of our living and they teach us to live this prayer in a Salesian style.

Salesian style prayer is the prayer of the 'good' Christian. It is simple, it is 'of the people'. It is rooted in life and capable of making its mark in our

day to day living. It expresses a sense of celebration and seeks to involve young people in the joy of meeting Jesus through experiencing his Spirit.

We know that the whole of our life is a prayer. We know that our prayer depends very much on the way we live, and the way we commit ourselves to the kingdom of God where our prayer culminates. We do need special moments of prayer. We need to find moments within the frenetic pace of our daily living so that we have spaces of silence, or calm, in which we can drink in and delight in God's presence. Our prayer is not something magical. The responsibility is ours, we cannot expect God to produce what we are not prepared to commit ourselves to seeking. He is, however, the good father who gives food to his children and waters the fields of the good and the bad alike. For this reason, we place ourselves and our prayer, our hopes and dreams, in child-like trust in his hands.

We pray " together with " the young and their educators, as did Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello and the first communities which they founded. We pray in a great community of love and commitment. Don Bosco wanted all his young people to become, in their turn, missionaries of other young people. He begged them to pray for their friends.

This is the prayer our Salesian Youth Spirituality promotes and encourages. It is true that many of these aspects are present in Christian prayer, and we are always content to learn from other Christians who are better than us and who have already come a long way in their understanding of prayer. We also recognise that we

need to pray as Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello taught us. To do this we look for that special style implicit in our prayer, knowing it is a small contribution, on our part, to the prayer of the Church.

**Contemplatives  
of daily living**

We have declared, in faith, that the whole of our lives and the things which surround us, together with the events which happen to us, are surrounded and impregnated by a profound and intense mystery which contains a truth. We live immersed in God; in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Such living asks us to look beyond appearances. For this we need a depth of vision and an ability to listen and to reflect on life which in turn will enable us to find the 'inner' and deeper meaning of things.

We need silence to see deep within ourselves, beyond impressions and sensitivities and resonances, to arrive at God's mystery and the mystery of God within us. Salesian Youth Spirituality sees this inner vision resting in that secret and personal space where voices of others may echo.

However, it is the space where we make our choices alone and in poverty, a space where we discover ourselves without the false securities that make us pretend we can face the inevitable suffering inherent in choosing.

It is undoubtedly a precious gift to have someone with whom we can confide and share our problems and difficulties. However, building our personality and making personal choices can only happen in places of inner solitude. It is only in solitude that we can evaluate and really be coherent

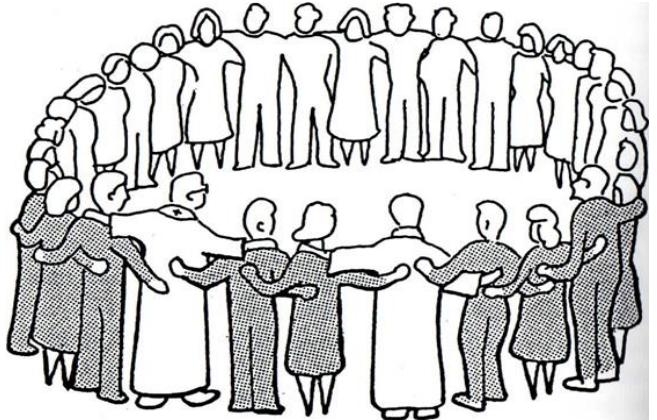
about the choices that bring us to wholeness in our daily living. Deep within us is the place where the Spirit of Jesus speaks out of silence and calls us to silence. It is not easy. For this reason, we need to support one another towards a new asceticism which will enable us to contemplate life from the point of view of the mystery which dwells within us. To contemplate is to pierce the outer shell of material existence in order to arrive at inner meaning.

Contemplation knows how to find what lies at the heart of life in what to the distracted and superficial glance remains invisible. Contemplation, therefore, touches the whole of human life. It is not something reserved for special moments. Daily life is the 'place' where the God of Jesus Christ makes himself present. For this reason, all of life needs to be gathered in and understood from the stand point of that mystery which is contained deep within it. Contemplatives "in" life seek a place apart in which they can draw close to God. Contemplatives "of" daily living instead, acknowledge life's sacramentality by living life to the full. Contemplated on, our life becomes a book, the place where we read God, the road we take in following him. Contemplating life gives us all the more reason to be even more intensely passionate about it.

**A spirituality  
of communion  
and collaboration**

We have lived an experience of intense communion, while trying step by step to re-tell and complete the story of our Salesian Youth Spirituality. The "we" we spoke about at the beginning, was made up of a group of Sisters, Salesians and young people who met to gather together many of the elements written about our Salesian Youth Spirituality in the last few years. The

circle encompassing " us" has extended out. We hope that all who read these pages may discover that they too belong to an " us" who have grown from the time of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello and will grow beyond us into the future.



The cause we serve is a great and challenging one. We can only serve such a cause fully if the circle of those who feel they belong within this project continues to widen. Don Bosco strove to do just this. He discovered that God, in a mysterious way, had presented him with a challenge. God wanted him to work to increase the joy and the life and the hope of the young. Don Bosco realised immediately that he could not do this alone. He set out, with creativity and courage, in search of collaborators. When he met someone he thought could help in this cause he would say, "Would you like to give Don Bosco a hand? " It was taken for granted that he meant "to help save souls" as he put it. Mother Mazzarello repeated often to the young women in Mornese, "are you happy here. Would you like to stay on here, forever?"

Many people have already responded to these questions with a 'yes'. Don Bosco has stirred up a movement which now reaches into all corners of the world.

One thing deeply unites us. We share the same passion for the life of the young and for the Lord of this life. It is the same spirituality life project which unites us.

When a group of Salesians and Sisters got together to make this project even more viable for today's world they discovered that while reflecting on the experience for others, they were immediately challenged at a personal level.

The barriers which traditionally separated the young from adults, educators from students, Salesians from Sisters have been lifted. Together, we discovered the gift the young are to us, and the responsibility every young person has before other young people. This is Salesian Youth Spirituality. It is a spiritual life project which involves others by seeking their collaboration, and by building communion and unity.

While working on our Salesian Youth Spirituality and reflecting and praying together we have come to a better understanding that has touched us personally.

Christian spirituality is often seen as divided. In the past it divided the sacred from the profane, love of God from love of one another, time of prayer from time of work, contemplation from action.

Salesian Youth Spirituality proposes something which is deeply unifying. Alternatives becomes facets of the same reality. Each one has its own dignity and special make up. Work is work and runs according to its own logic. Prayer is something else with different rhythms and expressions and attitudes. Work and prayer, carried out with the same intensity, are the place where God comes close to us and calls us. They are the places where we accept God with the enthusiasm of children. In the depths of our endeavours, we re-discover Jesus' cause because we re-discover his reassuring yet disquieting presence. We re-discover him when we begin to read from within, with the eyes of faith.

The same experience understood in the light of the mystery takes on different shades of meaning. It is a way of making all things new in terms of life. It is the moment of grateful contemplation of a presence which is already transforming all things from death into life. We give our daily experiences their own place, as we struggle for knowledge and wisdom. We then celebrate the fundamental reason which sustains our fragile hope moving us towards a hope which is without limitations.

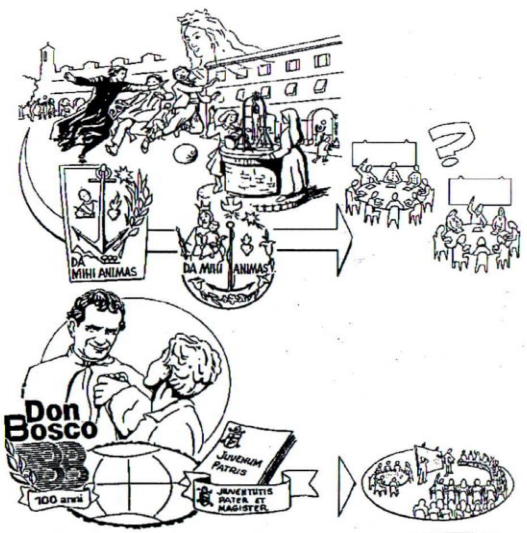
This is one of the most beautiful aspects of our Salesian Youth Spirituality. It allows us to discover that the way we live in the Spirit of Jesus is one which is lived and shared with others. The Salesians, the Sisters and the young people committed to the apostolic educational mission have different roles and duties. They are responding to different callings. What they do have is a common project and they live this out in a unified style and

with the same unique and undivided passion. Salesian Youth Spirituality produces unity in diversity because it puts the things that really count in common.



### ***Points for reflection and discussion:***

- The text speaks about taking up the cause of Jesus, the cause of the kingdom of God. What do I see as the major characteristics of this cause in my life today?
- I am responding to a call to be a member of the Salesian Family. There are different vocations within this Family. What is my role? In what ways can I be helped to live my call more effectively. How can I help others to live theirs?
- One writer has described our society as one which is "running scared of death". In taking up the cause of the risen Jesus I am called to build up the quality of life for others and for myself. What are the elements of my Salesian spirituality which I need to work on in order to bring about the kingdom of God in my day to day life?
- What is the link between the celebration aspects of Salesian Youth Spirituality and mortification? How can we help each other to live these aspects to the full?
- Does it not seem a little dangerous to speak about social and political commitment in the same breath as Salesian Youth Spirituality? Why? Why not?
- What does the statement that Salesian Youth Spirituality is a spirituality of education mean? In what ways am I an educator in my day to day life?
- In what ways would I like my prayer to
  - integrate my total person;
  - increase my awareness of the 'now';
  - be more community oriented;
  - be more compassionate?
- What would help me be a contemplative of daily living?



...and so, with you  
and with all those  
who believe in life and hope  
the story continues...

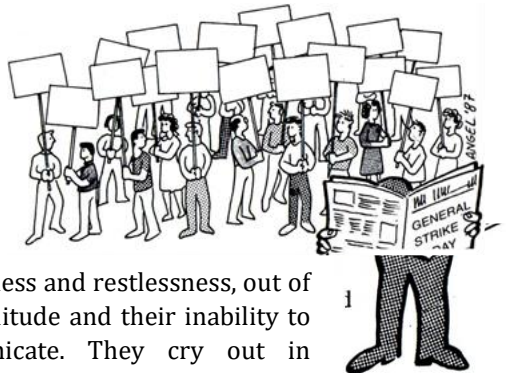


# 5

## AND SO THE STORY CONTINUES...

Salesian Youth Spirituality is contagious. It creates a movement which attracts young people and renews the lives of those who commit themselves to it. We have recounted part of the story because we want that story to continue as a gift of life for all who believe and hope in life.

It happened in the lives of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarella. The same thing is happening today. We feel God is challenging us through the cries of many young people. They are crying out of their



brokenness and restlessness, out of their solitude and their inability to communicate. They cry out in despair; unemployment leaves them on the margins of society or without means to further their studies. They cry out from the violence to which more and more young people succumb. They cry out against experiences which have them escape into drugs and alcohol. In a word, theirs is the cry for "life". It is the hunger which searches for bread, the oppression which seeks freedom, the loneliness which seeks communion, the degradation which seeks dignity, the bewilderment which seeks security, the absurdity which seeks meaning, the

violence which seeks peace... (GC23 p. 88 and GC19 pp. 18-19). This is the inner groaning of the Spirit which dwells in each person. It is at work to generate sons and daughters of the Father. The cry is essentially "the need for salvation". We believe that only Jesus the Lord is salvation. This cry becomes a challenge for us, an appeal, an invocation to be one with and responsible for others. The Pope reminded us of this with great force when he said, 'Now it is up to you to continue the Salesian charism, to collaborate with and work towards an advent heralding a new flourishing of youth sanctity. Does the mission seem too great? Certainly it is not an easy one. It needs generous dedication, a deep spirit of prayer, an openness to God's Word, an acceptance and trust that there is a divine presence at work and that there are some courageous and coherent responses on your part" (John Paul II). We are called to speak for those who have no voice, to become poor with the poor, to fight for justice for those who are unjustly treated and to work together to transform our world which is still a long way off from the kingdom of God (cf. GC23 - SOB p. 88). "In the present historical moment of crisis for feminine and masculine identity we feel the urgency to educate young women so that they can be bearers not only of new needs, but also of new resources, and become conscientious protagonists for the building up of a society worthy of the human person" (GC19 - FMA p. 40).

We are people who have a good story to tell

We want to respond to this cry, this plea for help. How do we go about it?

Salesian Youth Spirituality suggests a way which is both strange and special. It is a story full of words, in much the same way as the pages of the

document you are read in are full of words. But they are not only words. Behind each of these words there is a face, a person; Don Bosco, Mother Mazzarello, many Salesians and Sisters, many young people committed as lay people in the vocation or serving others, all who have filled their own lives and the lives of others with wonderful deeds', not just with words.

We, you and I, are also in this group, along with our friends. Maybe we are not as wonderful as some of those mentioned so far, but we too, in our own little way, have a limitless desire to continue to tell and re-tell this story which has really taken hold of us.

We discovered this while meditating on a page from the story of the Church's early origin, 'One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple.

When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms.

Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us".

And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them.

But Peter said, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk".

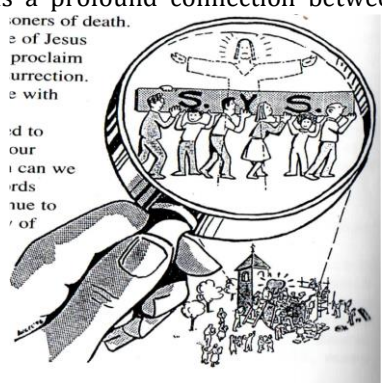
And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

All the people saw him walking and praising God, and they recognised him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him (Acts 3:1-10). At first glance it reads like an account of a miraculous deed. Instead it is very important to read on.

The lame man cries out joyfully and with such energy that he is arrested for disturbance of the peace in a holy place! When the High Priests learn that Peter is behind the disturbance, they bring him in. This is where the heart of the episode lies.

Peter says, do you know why this lame man is cured and can walk? So that all might know that we live through Jesus, the one you crucified and buried, he whom the Father raised from the dead.

There is a profound connection between heading and confessing that Jesus is Lord. Healing resolves physical problems. Confessing one's faith in the risen Christ



overcomes the barriers of physical death and secures an unthinkable fullness of life, despite death. The two moments are linked. They work for one another. The physical healing says something about how serious the problem is. The decision which gives that fullness of life, offered as mysterious gift and accepted in faith, goes beyond the healing. It is to do with freedom and love. It is a 'yes' to the mystery of God's closeness to us. Without this faith decision in the Lord Jesus there is no fullness of life, for without the free choice to believe, even healing and freedom from oppression will not prevent us from being prisoners of death. To be a disciple of Jesus then, means to proclaim him and his resurrection. This is not done with words alone. Our actions need to talk, and so do our lives. Only then can we multiply the words needed to continue to narrate the story of Jesus. Can we continue telling the Salesian Youth Spirituality story in this way?

**Creating  
fragments of  
a living  
story**

Each of us has been entrusted with the task of responding to that question. Three things can make the re-telling of the story of Salesian Youth Spirituality come alive.

First of all, we need to be living witnesses of the story. It is not enough to know the story's plot by heart. Only women and men living their spirituality intensely can tell its story.

Secondly, we need to 'create' places where this story can be experienced and owned by others. We are moving towards this. Many remember the huge Youth gathers to celebrate "Confronto's" or "Don Bosco Camps". Don Bosco's Hill at Becchi has

become the hill of the " beatitudes of the young" and the tiny, humble abode of Mornese speaks even more strongly today of Mother Mazzarello's spiritual experience.

These are all very important, but they are not enough. We need to multiply the places where we can breathe in Salesian Youth Spirituality, where prayer and sharing one's life with others are among the first and most important goods on offer.

We need to multiply places where it is possible to meet people who tell and re-tell the story that Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarella began in those early days with such enthusiasm. Finally, it is important to work at a re-formulation of the story. These pages were born of an attempt to re-tell the spiritual experience of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarella within the problems, hopes, and expectations of our present day. This is a new departure point. It is a task entrusted to a group of Salesians and Sisters, lay people and young people in different continents and different parts of the world. It can be a beautiful story of life and hope. It can fill the world with the hope and passion for life that living its message contains.

The story  
continues...

Only one thing really matters; life and hope in the name of the Lord. The story of our Salesian Youth Spirituality can encourage and re-enforce this life and hope. For this reason, we have told our story. We offer it to our friends as a gift, hoping it inspires other story tellers to take up the story.

Those who find energy in these pages will do what many members of the Salesian Family, what



many young people are doing. They will tell what they have seen and discovered and understood. They tell the story with their lives and with their words in order to explain their work and ensure it is going in the right direction. We are aware that this kind of story telling is tiring and full of responsibilities. Nevertheless, the story has to be told because it comes from a deep inner joy. It is not possible to suppress such a story. It is told with fear and trepidation because it is personal. It might be rejected but it cannot be silenced. The words of this story have the power of our weakness (2 Cor. 1 2:9) and the strength of many who have given their lives witnessing to the way that this story has fascinated them.

We tell this story with great enthusiasm. We tell it in the hope that people will re-discover the true life and real happiness which Jesus gave to the world. We tell the story about a good and welcoming father who is our God and we share our dream that all people will be one in hope and in living life to the full.

### **Points for reflection and discussion:**

- In what ways has the story mapped out in these pages fired me with the desire to renew my commitment to be a much more enthusiastic living fragment of the Salesian story?
  - What training or skills do I need to be a more effective member of the Salesian Family?
  - In order that Salesian Youth Spirituality can be experienced by all, what new "places" can we create?
  - How do I intend continuing the story so that others may have life and hope?
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