

Address by Pope Francis in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians.

06/21/2015

(Transcribed from recording the words of the Holy Father in Italian)

Dear Salesian family, I thought a lot about what I wanted to tell you. I also wrote what I wanted to tell you. But it is too formal . So I gave it to the major rector, so that he can make you aware of the text.

I met the major rector in a confessional . But I did not confess him, nor did he confess me. It was during a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Lujan. He had just arrived in Argentina, in October. A friend from the Salesian inspectorate was with him, and he saw a million young people attend the pilgrimage over a 48-hour period. When a penitent left, they approached me and said, 'The new inspector'. I said to them, 'Ah! The one who has come to rule us.' Eventually, we developed good relations, even in bad times . . . and we had bad times. What struck me about him was his [sense of] service and humility. I remember once, we had something to do in the parish . . . He signed it. Later, he came to the Chapter, quiet, before he went back to Spain because he had finished However, they flung a trap on him . . . with the Holy Spirit .

Still, let me tell you about my experience with the Salesians. My family is very much attached to the Salesians. My father, right after his arrival in Argentina, went to the Salesians at the Italian church, at Mary Help of Christians Basilica, in St Charles Parish, where he met many of them. Shortly thereafter, my dad became a fan of a football team, founded by a Salesian! Some 500 metres from the Basilica in St. Charles, the Salesian had founded a football team with Our Lady's red and blue colours. But with street kids, eh? Immediately. For me, it is the best team in Argentina, winner of many championship . . .

Then he met my mother, who lived close by. They were married by a priest who followed me and my father his entire life. [He was a] Salesian missionary from Patagonia, born in Lodi (Italy), a good man and a great confessor from the Salesian family. I used to go for confession to him. He baptised me . . . and helped my vocation. When I transferred from the seminary to the Society of Jesus, he helped me.

I am so grateful to the Salesian Family. After my mother had her fifth pregnancy, she

was paralysed for a year. He sent us, the elder children, to Salesian schools. I finished primary school in one of them. It is there that I learnt to love Our Lady. The Salesians taught me about beauty, work and this is your charisma. They lovingly taught emotional growth, and develop it in boys.

I remember the great and merciful Salesian confessors. In the basilica, there were many of them. Later, my dad died; then this other father died, but every 24 May I used to go to Mary Help of Christians. I brought flowers and prayed to the Virgin Mary. This is something that I received from you. But one thing I remember is emotional growth. I believe that Don Bosco was able to stimulate the boys' emotional growth because he had had a mother who developed his. A good mom, pretty strong, with much love, she taught his heart. It is not possible to understand Don Bosco without understanding his Margherita. He cannot be understood with this. I wonder if Salesians men and women, the whole family, could teach girls as this woman taught her son's heart. I wanted to stress this.

There is another thing. At the time, in the late nineteenth century, this Italian region was Masonic, fiercely anti-clerical, demonic – really demonic! Turin is one of the demonic spots, but how many saints came out of there. Do the math! The Lord gave a mission to many families born here. Today many things have improved. There is a computer, so many things. But the situation of youth situation is more or less the same. What did Don Bosco do? He worked with uneducated, jobless street kids. He put his ministry at risk. For this reason, they badmouthed him.

He put his ministry at risk. “These are second class, and nothing could be done . . .” Today, in Italy, 40 per cent of those under 25 are unemployed. They neither study nor work. You Salesians face the same challenge that Don Bosco faced. Take these boys and girls. What did Don Bosco do? Sports! Sports favours sociability, healthy competitiveness, which leads to the beauty of working together. Then comes education. Don Bosco did not say great things. He had small schools to teach trades. These Salesians schools were *arte y oficio* (arts and craft), where kids learnt the craft.

Can the Salesians train people in these trades today? I really don't know. I just ask the question. I don't know. Can one learn to be an electrician or a plumber in six months when taps break all the time? Education, yes, but it must fit the crisis. Do you think that street kids can get a higher education today? In my homeland, for example. Let us

give them something to do – small jobs that might be here today and gone tomorrow. They might not last long, but [at least they will be] a practical trade. What comes after comes after. This 40 per cent needs something. Salesian creativity should meet this challenge.

There is something else I learnt that could lead them to joy, to Salesian joy; something I never forgot. It is the joy that comes from everything the Lord gives us, which is beautiful. Outreach and education. Let us feed street kids. It is not possible to praise the Lord on an empty stomach, is it? How can we push them? With creativity. Education must be fit the needs of the crisis. This is what I want to tell you.

What did this father, named Lorenzo Mazza, do? He founded a football team in 1908. [He pushed] sports. He gave street kids something mystical. They might be drug traffickers; they might become drug addicts; many of them might commit suicide . . . [but he gave them] something to go forward. This is what I would like to tell you. The current crisis is bad indeed; it even goes against the Church. However, Don Bosco was not ashamed to speak about his three white loves: Mary, the Eucharist and the Pope.

Three loves! He was not ashamed of Our Lady. Because he was never ashamed about his mother. Today many [are] . . . I remember one thing that hurt bad. In the 1980s, I went to Belgium for a meeting with donors of the Catholic University of Cordoba. I was later invited to dinner at a wedding of practicing Catholic professors with four little ones. At the table, they began to talk about theology, Christology, the situation of the Church. At one point, they said, “Our Lady is not appropriate today.’ Thank God we have gone beyond that. Still, they were good people

Even today, and that does not include you, there are some shameless people who do not speak lovingly about Our Lady as Don Bosco did. Our Lady was Don Bosco’s first love. He entrusted himself to God praying to the Virgin, and risked so much. His second love was the Eucharist. The practice of performing well the liturgy is something that the Salesian family is good at, something that it explains well, helping kids enter the Eucharistic mystery. This is also true for the adoration, which the Salesians do many times. This is good, even the pope does so. Because Don Bosco loved the Church, Mary and his mum. To you, consecrated women [belongs] the mystery of women in the Church. Love for the pope is not just love for one person. It is love for Peter as head of the Church. As a representative of the groom of the Church. However, behind the white love

for the pope, there is love for the Church.

I don't know how Don Bosco was able to hide or explain certain scandals. However, he was able to make people love the Church. That he did! For instance, look at this connection: the Church as mother, Our Lady as mother, Margherita, his mother. You prepare young women to become mothers, but they should raise their children to love the Virgin Mary and the Church. Sometimes people ask me, 'Are stronger decisions on women in the Church not needed? Of course, but do you think that appointing a woman at the head of dicastery is a strong decision? Women in the Church have the same job, so to speak, that Our Lady had with the Apostles in the morning of Pentecost. The Apostles did nothing without Mary. As Jesus willed it.

Do not forget the three white loves: don't be ashamed of speaking about Our Lady, of performing the Eucharist and doing so well, and don't be ashamed of the Holy Mother Church. Sadly, she is attacked every day . . . This should teach us about the role of women in the Church. Don Bosco's three white loves always lead us down this path. Then comes trust in God. As I said, Don Bosco always prayed to Mary Help of Christians and then went forward. He did not have any second thoughts.

My Salesian experience is the one I mentioned, in college and nothing more. I did the rest [of my education] in government schools. My family is attached to the Salesians, and Mary Help of Christians. I asked the Salesians to "give me the blessing of Mary Help of Christians" . . . I thank God for this experience, which helped me grow without fear, or obsessions. [This helped me] move forward in joy, and prayer. Your charisma is very relevant at present. Look at the streets. Look at the kids and take risky decisions. Don't be afraid. He wasn't.

Thank you so much for what you do in the Church and for the Church. Thank you so much for being missionary. Many Salesians [are] hidden in Africa . . . This brings back memories of the early days in Patagonia, when nuns travelled there with the dress of that period – as did those women on horses. They evangelised Patagonia. [We then have] the Salesian martyrs of Patagonia . . .

It is not that I am obsessed with Patagonia, but Don Bosco dreamt about it. He sent people there. The first Salesians did a lot of good. Perhaps the rector remembers when he came to us for a beatification meeting, with the bishops of the Standing Committee,

in Aparecida, to find the place to hold it. There was one good proposal, to hold it to Buenos Aires so that former students could come. I opposed it. Do you remember? No, it had to be held in Patagonia! Which is not a city. Card Bertone, who performed the beatification, remembers . . . It was in a field!

Salesians who do not have the concreteness of things . . . lack something. Salesians are concrete, see the problem, think and take charge. Ultimately, I said, "as archbishop I would not allow it" . . . On being a missionary I will tell you one thing: one region in Patagonia was abandoned by priests. It had no Salesians. Over a 15-year period, Evangelicals came . . . The local people were very isolated but also very religious people. They wanted to hear the Word of God and went to see the pastor. They more or less converted. When a new parish priest came, an educated woman was quite cold towards him. Although the Salesians had many missions in the area, they were absent locally.

She accused him of abandoning them and gave him a hard time. In the end, the priest asked for forgiveness and as he left, the woman called him back. She showed him the statue of Mary Help of Christians. "I am evangelical now, but I will not give this up. I hid it so that the pastor won't see it."

This is your missionary work. Thank you very much for all you do in the Church.