

Don Bosco's dream is more alive than ever

written by Ángel Card. FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME | February 29, 2024

Faced with everything that I am seeing in the Salesian world, I feel I can say with some authority: Beloved Don Bosco, your Dream continues to be fulfilled.

Dear friends, readers of the Salesian Bulletin, as I do every month I send you my personal greetings from my heart and I am offering you my reflections, motivated by what I am experiencing, because I believe that life comes to us all and that what we share, if it is good, does us good and gives us new enthusiasm.

Lent and Easter invite us to be born again. Every day. To be reborn to trust, to hope, serene peace, the desire to love, work and create, to cherish and cultivate people and talents and creatures, the entire little or large garden that God has entrusted to us.

For us Salesians, Easter always reminds us of the feast in 1846 at Valdocco, when Don Bosco went from the tears of the Filippi field to the poor Pinardi shed and the strip of land around it, where the dream began to become reality.

I have seen the dream continue being fulfilled.

I am writing to you now from Santo Domingo, in the Dominican Republic. I previously made a magnificent, very meaningful visit to Juazeiro do Norte (Recife, northeast Brazil) and these last few days have been in the Dominican Republic.

In a few hours I will continue on to Vietnam, and in the midst of this "hustle and bustle" which can also be experienced with much tranquillity, I have nourished my Salesian heart with beautiful experiences and comforting certainties.

I will tell you about them, because they speak of the Salesian mission, but let me start with an anecdote that a Salesian told me yesterday, which made me laugh, moved me and spoke to me of a "Salesian heart".

A little stone-thrower

A confrere told me that a few days ago, while travelling along one of the roads in the interior of this country, he passed by a place where some children had taken up the habit of throwing stones at cars to cause minor accidents - like breaking a window - and in the confusion, stealing something from the traveller.

Well, that is how it happened to him. He was driving through the village and a child threw a stone to break one of the car windows and succeeded. The Salesian got out of the car, picked up the child and let his parents take him. It was just that there was no father in the family (he had abandoned them long ago). There was only a suffering mother who was left alone with this child and a younger girl. When the Salesian told the mother that her son had broken the car window (which the boy admitted), and that it cost a lot of money, and that she would have to pay him back, the poor woman apologised tearfully, asking for forgiveness, but making him understand that she had no way to pay him back, that she was poor, that she would deal with her son... At that moment, the little girl, the sister of this 'Don Bosco's little Magone', timidly approached with her little fist closed, opened it and handed the Salesian the only almost worthless coin that she had. It was her entire treasure and she told him: "Here, sir, to pay for the glass." My confrere told me that he was so moved that he could no longer speak, and ended up giving the woman some money for a little help for the family.

I did not know quite how to interpret the story, but it was so full of life, pain, need and humanity that I vowed to share it with you. And a few hours later, very close to where I was staying in the Salesian house, I was shown another small Salesian house where we take in children who have no one and who are living on the streets.

Most of them are Haitians. We know well the tragedy that is unfolding in Haiti where there is no order, no government, no law... Only mafias rule over everything. Well, to know that these children who arrived here (nobody knows how), who have nowhere to stay, are welcomed in our house (20 in all at the moment), to then move on to other houses, once stabilised, with other educational objectives (where we have, between various houses and always with Salesians and lay educators, another 90 children) - it filled my heart with joy and made me think that Valdocco in Turin, with Don Bosco, was born this way, and this is how we Salesians were born, and a small group of those Valdocco boys, together with Don Bosco, gave "de facto" life to the Salesian Congregation on that 18 December 1859.

How can one fail to see "the hand of God in all this"? How can one fail to see that all this work is the result of much more than a human strategy? How can one fail to see that here and in thousands of other Salesian places around the world, good continues to be done, always with the help of so many generous people and so many others who share a passion for education?

This year, in Madrid in Spain and other places (including America), the

magnificent short film “Canillitas” was presented, showing the lives of so many of these young people. I was happy to touch this scene with my own hands and eyes. And it is indeed true, my friends, that Don Bosco’s dream is still being realised today, 200 years later.

Then yesterday I spent the whole day with young people from the Salesian world who call themselves and feel themselves to be leaders throughout Salesian Latin America of a movement that seeks to ensure that at least the Salesian educational world takes care of creation and ecology very seriously with the sensitivity of Pope Francis expressed in *Laudato Si’*. Young people from 12 Latin American countries were there (in person or online) in their “Sustainable Latin America” movement. It is beautiful that young people dream and engage in something that is good for them, for the world and for all of us. So that the world may be saved: saving means preserving, and nothing will be lost, not a sigh, not a tear, not a blade of grass; no generous effort, no painful patience, no gesture of care, however small and hidden, will be lost: if we can prevent a Heart from breaking, we will not have lived in vain. If we can ease the Pain of a Life, or soothe a Pain, or help a child to grow, we shall not have lived in vain.

I feel, in the face of all this, that I can say with some authority: beloved Don Bosco, your Dream is still VERY MUCH ALIVE.

Stay well and be happy.