

PROVINCIAL CIRCULAR

Salesian Province of Mary Help of Christians, Guwahati, Assam, India

JS – 38/2020

1 June 2020

My Dear Confreres,

Greetings from Valdocco, Turin!

Haruki Murakami, a renowned Japanese novelist-writer observes that “Unfortunately, the clock is ticking, the hours are going by. The past increases, the future recedes. Possibilities decreasing, regrets mounting.” To me, his words seem insightful. However, when one spends time and opportunities creatively and productively, the passing of time seems to open up huge and greater possibilities and leaves one contended and fulfilled. Instead, if time is wasted and since time and tide wait for none, possibilities will certainly wane away, leading consequently to mounting regrets in life.

Lewis Carroll said, “If you don’t know where you are going, any road will get you there.” Post Covid-19 will require charting the uncharted seas and since “none of us is as good as all of us,” planning to reach a commendable destination or achieve a target should better be done, only as a community and never alone or individually.

Theodore A. Dodge, veteran of the American Civil War and author of *Great Captains*, published in 1889, wrote the following lines of Hannibal, who motivated his soldiers with his famous statement, “We will either find a way, or make one.”

“Hannibal earned the fidelity and love of his men by his personal qualities alone. When we consider the heterogeneous elements of which his army was composed, the extraordinary hardships it underwent, the hoping against hope, the struggling against certain defeat and eventual annihilation, the toils and privation, and remember that there was never a murmur in his camp, or a desertion in his ranks . . . it may be said that Hannibal’s ability to keep his body together and fit for work shows the most wonderful influence over men ever possessed by man.”

At this critical moment in history, when humanity is wading through to an unknown future, the role of leaders who play a mature, enlightened and inspiring leadership like Hannibal becomes the need of the hour. With all the praise-worthy services that we render to the society especially in the fields of spirituality and education, our mission and apostolate could pick up pace and proceed, if our planning and execution are community-based, guided ably by the Rectors.

The pandemic times as these - the corona virus, Amphan cyclone, floods, migrant crisis, economic loss, locust invasion, etc., could be moments to say that we are still the masters of our destiny and the resources are all within us to overcome them and rebuild ourselves. We must be thankful to God that He has not failed us and He is the known God of the unknown future. We need to trust in Divine Providence, in one another and be generous with time and resources. Sometimes we spend our days waiting for the ideal path to appear in front of us but what we forget is that, paths are made by walking, not by waiting.

THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

The month of June is traditionally dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The best and concrete symbol of the love of God is the heart of His Son Jesus—which was pierced for us, from which flowed blood and water. In the Scriptures, we read: “The soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water” (Jn 19:32-34).

The Fathers of the Church see in the above passage the birth of the church, blood and water signifying the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist and Baptism. The Church, the Bride of Christ, the New Eve is born from the pierced side of Jesus, the New Adam.

In the Eucharistic Preface for the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart, we read: “For raised up high on the Cross, **he gave himself up for us with a wonderful love** and poured out blood and water from his pierced side, the wellspring of the Church’s Sacraments, so that, won over to the open heart of the Saviour, all might draw water joyfully from the springs of salvation.”

The feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is really a celebration of God’s wonderful love; it is the feast of God’s love. God Himself is love. (God is love itself.) There is no hatred or anger in God. His love for us does not change. God will never stop loving us. Nothing can stop God from loving us.

When we look at the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we see his heart is out in front. Maybe it’s terrible art, but it’s great theology. Jesus’ heart is given to us, his love is out in front. He wants to connect to us in love, his heart burning and yearning for us always. We humans need to be connected in the same way—in love, and even wear our hearts on the sleeves.

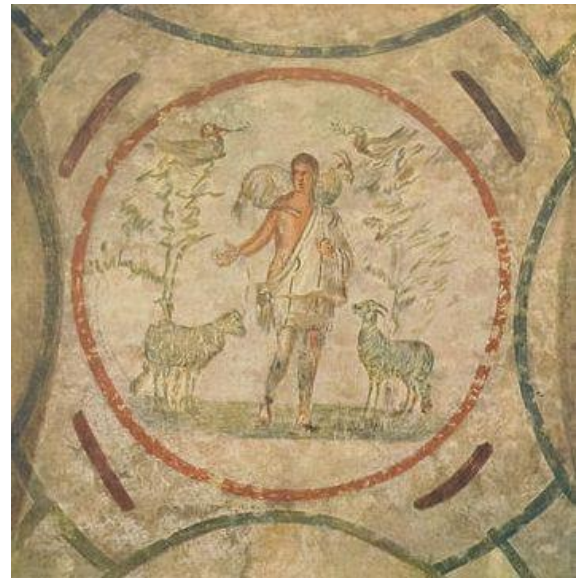


The cross and Jesus' death are nothing but the total expression of God's unfailing love. Jesus takes our sinfulness; he gives himself completely. Blood and water flow out of his heart for our salvation. Jesus thus becomes the Sacrament of God's marvellous and unconditional love. Out of his broken side, from within his heart, Jesus begets us all—his believers and followers.

PASTORAL CHARITY

What we Salesians try to incarnate in our life and mission is the same pastoral charity derived from Jesus, the Good Shepherd and His Sacred Heart.

Article 11 of our *Constitutions* reads thus: "The Salesian spirit finds its model and source in the very heart of Christ, apostle of the Father. Reading the Gospel we become more aware of certain aspects of the figure of the Lord: gratitude to the Father for the gift of a divine vocation offered to all people; predilection for the little ones and the poor; zeal in preaching, healing and saving because of the urgency of the coming of the Kingdom; the preoccupation of the Good Shepherd who wins hearts by gentleness and self-giving; the desire to gather his disciples into the unity of fraternal communion."



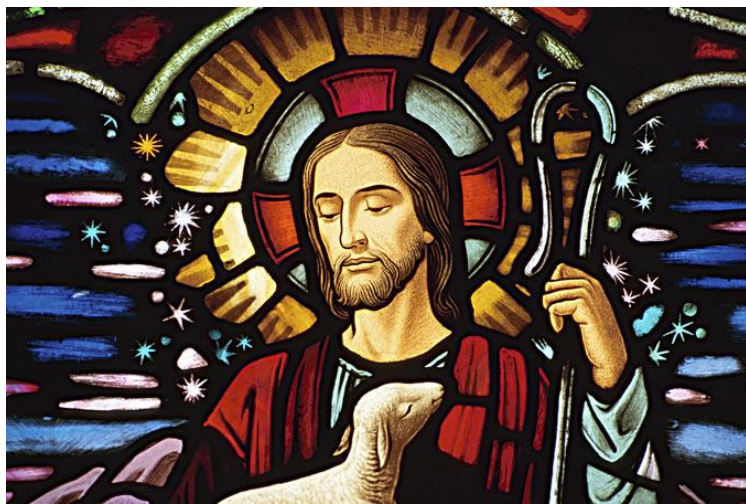
The Salesian spirit is summed up and centred in pastoral charity, characterized by that youthful dynamism which was revealed so strongly in Don Bosco, our Father and Founder, and at the beginnings of our Society. It is an apostolic impetus that makes us seek souls and serve God alone (C 10).

We imitate Jesus the pastor (shepherd) and his merciful love (charity) which is symbolized in the Sacred Heart. This is Salesian pastoral charity. This is our spirit and charism. This is gifted to us in our vocation, in our following of Don Bosco.

Don Bosco used to say that prayer is the first of all works; it leads to union with God, from whom proceeds the intensity of pastoral charity with the vital gift of the "grace of unity." Without prayer there can be no synthesis between faith and life. Prayer, in fact, is a personal experience of God, it leads from listening to sharing; it lifts from meditation to contemplation; it unleashes an internal process by which love gets the upper hand and leads us directly to the heart of God, bypassing dialogue to become "unitive love" (AGC 341).

Salesian prayer that originates from pastoral charity compels us to go much further. It becomes mature and perfected in the union with God that leads us to live pastoral charity as hard-working witnesses for the Kingdom. Its horizons therefore extend also to us and our activities (AGC 341). In prayer we see our work, in work we live our prayer.

Our *Constitutions* say, “Immersed in the world and in the cares of the pastoral life, the Salesian learns to meet God through those to whom he is sent. He draws on the love of the Good Shepherd, whose witness he wants to be, and shares in the spiritual riches offered him by the community” (C 95).



As Fr Egidio Viganò writes, “It is a wonderful and stimulating thing for us to see the spiritual life (and hence the practice of prayer) situated within apostolic commitment and to hear it stated that between consecration and mission (between prayer and work) there is a mutual organic compenetration. Mission is not extraneous to consecration or juxtaposed to it, but represents its

intrinsic and vital purpose: consecration is for mission. In this sense, **not only consecration but mission as well is under the seal of the Spirit** and the influence of his sanctifying power. This was the case in Jesus’ life. This was the case in the lives of the Apostles and their successors. The essential and permanent demand for unity between interior life and the many activities and responsibilities of the apostolate finds its full and adequate response precisely in the energy of pastoral charity, to which our prayer tends of its very nature (AGC 341).

In his presentation of Strenna 2014, Fr Pascual Chavez states, “Christian spirituality has charity at its core, the very life of God himself who is Agape, Charity, Love at the very depths of his being. Salesian spirituality is no different from Christian spirituality; it too finds its focus in charity; in this case we speak of ‘pastoral charity,’ the charity that urges us to seek ‘the glory of God and the salvation of souls’: *‘caritas Christi urget nos.’*”

“Salesian charity” is pastoral charity because it seeks the salvation of souls, and it is an educative charity because it finds a resource in education that allows it to help young people to develop all their energies for good; in this way young people can grow up to be upright citizens, good Christians and future inhabitants of heaven.

Don Bosco’s spirituality consists in a pastoral and educative charity; it finds its model in Christ the Good Shepherd and its prayer and programme for life in Don Bosco’s motto

“Da mihi animas, cetera tolle.” Thus we will be able to discover “Don Bosco the mystic,” whose spiritual experience lies at the basis of our way of being today, our Salesian spirituality according to the different vocations which take their inspiration from it.

We need to remember that our pastoral charity, our efforts to love like the Good Shepherd, does not originate in our hearts. It is no mere human effort to thirst for souls and to love the youngsters and the poor. The source of all charity is God himself; He is the only one who inspires it and takes it forward. We could not love God had he not loved us first so we might know him and have a taste and desire for him, and have the intelligence and will to measure up to it. We would not even be able to love our neighbour and see God’s image in that person, had we not had personal experience of God’s love.

The more we are able to receive God’s love, the more we are able to love God and others. The more we are able to accept that we are loved beyond all imagination (that we are God’s Beloved), the more we will be able to embrace all humanity in true and selfless love.

Pastoral charity, moreover, is an expression of charity with many manifestations: maternal love, conjugal love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, etc. It indicates a specific kind of charity. It recalls Jesus the Good Shepherd, not just for the way he acted: kindness, seeking out the lost one, dialogue, forgiveness; but also and especially for the substance in this ministry: revealing God to every man and woman. It is more than evident how different this form of charity is to other forms whose preferential focus is on particular needs of people: health, food, work. The element typical of pastoral charity is proclamation of the Gospel, education to faith, formation of the Christian community, bringing the yeast of the Gospel to our different settings.

Salesian pastoral charity, then, has its own further special characteristic, documented from the very beginnings of our story: “On the evening of 26 January 1854 we gathered in Don Bosco’s room and it was proposed that we engage, with the help of God and of St Francis de Sales, in an experiment in the practical exercise of charity towards neighbour. From that evening the name Salesians was given to those who chose and would in the future choose to engage in such an exercise.” **Pastoral charity is the core and synthesis of our spirituality**, and finds its departure point in the spiritual experience of Don Bosco himself and in his thirst for souls—*Da mihi animas, cetera tolle*.

PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

We know that God calls every human person for a specific purpose and plan. But it is also true that many human persons never discover the divine designs behind their existence; and as a result their share of happiness goes unclaimed. In our pastoral and educative charity, we Salesians are called to guide people in their vocational discernment. We are called to help people find the meaning of their lives, and follow Jesus according to their inclination and accept God’s will for their lives. In this context, one of the most burning

concerns throughout the Congregation continues to be that of vocations to the Salesian way of life. To a certain extent, we in the Province too have not been able to invite more and more young people to follow Christ in the footsteps of Don Bosco. Don Bosco has remained a brand name, that touches only some aspects of the young lives. The numbers joining our ranks are limited. Even the lay persons involved in the Salesian charism as Co-operators, VDBs, ADMA members, etc., have been limited to very few.

In this connection, I invite each and every community to pray for vocations. Without prayer any charism will lose its vitality. We need to keep knocking at the door for more and more answers if we are really interested in helping the youngsters and the people of North East. Even as we thank the Lord for the gift of many generous men to our Province, let us intensify our prayers for vocations.

Perhaps some of the communities are not using the traditional prayer to the Sacred Heart of Jesus for the gift of more apostolic vocations, found in the concluding prayers to the spiritual reading or its Latin form in the hymn *Cor Jesu Sacratissimum*. I request that all the communities take up the task of praying for vocations, especially by using the Salesian traditional form during this month of June, dedicated to the Sacred Heart. I reproduce the prayer here for ready reference:

**Most Sacred Heart of Jesus,
guide into the Salesian Congregation
many good and zealous apostles
and help them to persevere in their vocation.**

(Cor Iesu Sacratissimum ut bonos et dignos operarios, pia Salesianorum Societati mittere et in ea conservare, et in ea conservare, et in ea conservare digneris te rogamus audi nos).

I need to reiterate that it is not about “reciting” prayers for vocations, but rather it is about sincerely “praying” for vocations. May we plead more insistently to the Lord of the harvest—both at the personal level and at the community level—to send out labourers into his harvest, as the harvest is plentiful and the labourers very few.

EXCERPTS FROM THE SPECIAL CIRCULAR

The **DAYS AHEAD** or the **FUTURE**, as is evident, will need greater and more focussed planning. Planning could involve everyone in the community, the Parish Council, the House Council and the Governing Body or Managing Committee. All the sectors of our mission could be covered in such planning. I appreciate the confreres who have consulted experts or competent people too. I request the Rectors to take the initiative in this regard.

While I sincerely appreciate every community for whatever you have done for the needy and the vulnerable – the slum dwellers, the migrants, the villagers, the stranded people etc., I appeal that we continue to render such help and service, as long as there is a need. Helping people in their dire need could cost and pinch us, not only in terms of physical tiredness and exhaustion but also financially. This is the real service we could be rendering.

Religious discipline especially as regards finance could be adopted by each community, as stringently as possible. Frugality, saving mentality, simpler personal and community life style, curtailment of unnecessary journeys, cutting down on expenses on food, etc., could all be considered.

With Pope Francis declaring the celebration of *Laudato Si'* for one year, let us explore the possibility of maximum use of the land available with us.

I hope travelling will gradually be opened up. Many of our aspirants have already been at home for long. At the earliest opportunity, let us bring them back and resume their formation.

As we have not been able to conduct the vocation camps for Class XI this year, we ask the Rectors and Parish Priests to make a special effort to find suitable candidates from our own parishes and also from the neighbouring parishes and make the selection by yourselves, keeping in mind certain criteria which have been sent to you.

CONDOLENCES

We offer our sincere condolences to *Fr George Mudakkampuram (MC)* who lost his younger sister *Mrs Philomina* (65) to Covid-19 on 1st May 2020. She was working in Oxford University Hospital, London, as staff nurse for many years, and had contracted Corona virus. She was treated in the hospital for 22 days, before her demise. We earnestly pray for the eternal repose of her soul, and also especially for the bereaved family in this moment of tragedy.

We offer our condolences to the Provincial and confreres of the Vice Province of Sri Lanka at the passing away of *Fr Shiran Karawgodage* on 23rd May 2020. He was 55. May God grant him eternal rest!

We also offer our heartfelt condolences to the Provincial and confreres of Mumbai at the passing away of *Fr Byron Anthony D'Silva* on 27th May 2020 at Mumbai. He was 77 years old. May the Lord grant him eternal peace!

CONCLUSION

On 5th April 1880, Pope Leo XIII invited Don Bosco to take the initiative to build a church at Rome in honour of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, specifying that he had no funds to offer

him. Don Bosco accepted on one condition: expanding the Salesian work to include “a large hostel, where poor young people, extremely numerous, especially in this very neighbourhood, can be housed, and started off in schools for the arts and crafts.” The building cost the elderly Don Bosco an incredible effort—even accelerated his death, but on 14th May 1887, it was eventually consecrated. The Saint of Young People celebrated Mass there for the last time on 16th May 1887, at the altar dedicated to Mary Help of Christians. It was during this Mass that he wept and shed tears, contemplating on his life and achievements, and how the Lord had led him marvellously. A Mass of many tears and interruptions!

For Don Bosco there was no devotion that was not grounded in mission and charity. There was nothing abstract or sentimental about his devotion to the Sacred Heart; it found its expression in the concrete intervention for the poor youth. Prayer and mission were inseparable for Don Bosco. And interestingly, the present campus of the Sacred Heart, Rome has become the Salesian headquarters. The Generalate community today are continuing to take care of poor youth and poor migrants through various ministries, even as they are taking care of the Sacred Heart Basilica—Masses, confessions, liturgies, prayers, etc.

In this month of June, let us try in a special way to imitate the kind and compassionate heart of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. All our efforts will be in vain if they don’t come from a kind heart. If we want all our apostolic efforts to succeed, then we need to transform the anxieties and irritations of our hearts into compassion, kindness, meekness and humility. Through the instrumentality of prayer and relationships we may discover in ourselves spots of hate and violence, trying to take control of the various moments of our lives. If we don’t deal with them, then we will be merely passing on our anxieties to others—and not achieve the real purpose of our mission. Unless we are able to allow God’s love to flood our hearts, we won’t be able to give ourselves totally to others. Let our self-giving be genuine, let our efforts bear abundant fruit! Let our earnest prayer, especially in this month, be: “O Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto thine.”

God bless you!

Yours affectionately in the Lord,



Fr Januarius S Sangma, SDB
Provincial

