

# **ANCHORED IN HOPE, PILGRIMS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE**

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## **ANCHORED IN HOPE, PILGRIMS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE**

Dear sisters and brothers belonging to the different Groups of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco,

My warmest greetings to you at the beginning of this new year 2025!

It is with some emotion that I address each and every one of you in this time of grace marked by two important events for the life of the Church and our Family: the Jubilee 2025 year which began solemnly on 24 December last with the opening of the holy door at St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, and the 150th anniversary of the first missionary expedition at the express wish of our father Don Bosco. This expedition left on 11 November 1875 for Argentina and other countries in the Americas.

These are two important events that find their point of intersection in hope. This is precisely the virtue that Pope Francis identified as a perspective when announcing the Jubilee. Similarly, the missionary experience is a harbinger of hope for everyone: for those who have left (and are leaving) for the missions and for those who have been reached by missionaries.

The year that is given to us is, therefore, rich in ideas for our daily growth in practical terms, so that our humanity becomes fruitful in its attention to others... This will only happen in hearts that place God at the centre, to the point of being able to say, "I have placed you ahead of myself."

I will try to highlight these elements in this commentary, and explore what the Church is invited to experience throughout this year from our charismatic perspective. I will try to emphasise what it is that should guide us, the Family of Don Bosco, towards new horizons.

# 1. ENCOUNTERING CHRIST OUR HOPE TO RENEW DON BOSCO'S DREAM

The Strenna's title involves the interweaving of two events: the ordinary jubilee of the year 2025 and the 150th anniversary of the first missionary expedition sent by Don Bosco to Argentina.

This concurrence of the two events, which I venture to call "providential", makes 2025 a decidedly extraordinary year for all of us and even more so for the Salesians of Don Bosco. Indeed the 29th General Chapter will be held in February, March and April, leading to the election of the new Rector Major and the new General Council, among other things.

Global and particular events, therefore, that involve us in different ways and that we will seek to experience profoundly and intensely, because it is precisely thanks to these events that we can experience the joy of encountering Christ, and the importance of remaining anchored in hope.

## 1.1. The Jubilee

*"Spes non confundit! Hope does not disappoint!"*<sup>1</sup>

This is how Pope Francis presents the Jubilee to us. How wonderful! What a "prophetic" cue!

The Jubilee is a pilgrimage for putting Jesus Christ back at the centre of our lives and the life of the world. Because he is our hope. He is the Hope of the Church and of the whole world!

We are all aware that the world today needs the hope that connects us with Jesus Christ and with our other brothers and sisters. We need the hope that makes us pilgrims, that propels us into motion, and prompts us to start walking.

We are speaking of hope as the rediscovery of God's presence. Pope Francis writes "May hope fill your hearts!", not only warm your hearts, but fill them, fill them to overflowing!<sup>2</sup>

## 1.2. Anniversary of the first Salesian missionary expedition

And this overflowing hope filled the hearts of those who took part in the first Salesian missionary expedition to Argentina 150 years ago.

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<sup>1</sup> FRANCIS, *Spes Non Confundit*. Bull of indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee for the Year 2025, Vatican City, 9 May 2024.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

From Valdocco, Don Bosco throws his heart beyond every border, sending his sons to the other side of the world! He sends them beyond all human security, sends them to carry forward what he had begun, setting out with others, hoping and infusing hope. He simply sends them – and the first (young) confreres leave and head off. Where? Not even they know where! But they rely on hope and obey, because it is God's presence that guides us.

Our current hope also finds new energy in that enthusiastic obedience, and urges us to set out as pilgrims.

That is why this anniversary should be celebrated: because it helps us to recognise a gift (not a personal achievement, but a free gift, from the Lord); it allows us to remember and to gain strength from this memory to face and build the future.

Today, therefore, let us live to make this future possible and let us do it in the only way we consider great: by sharing our journey of encountering Christ, our only hope, with young people and with all the people in our settings (starting from the poorest and most forgotten).

## **2. THE JUBILEE: CHRIST OUR HOPE**

The Jubilee is journeying together, anchored in Christ our hope. But what does this really mean?

Let me pick up some of the elements of the Bull of indiction for Jubilee 2025 that highlight some of the characteristics of hope.

### **2.1. Pilgrims, anchored in Christian hope**

We are convinced that nothing and no one can separate us from Christ.<sup>3</sup> Because we want to and must remain anchored, clinging to him. We cannot make the journey without our anchor.

The anchor of hope, therefore, is Christ himself who carries the sufferings and wounds of humanity on the cross in the presence of the Father.

The anchor, in fact, is the shape of a cross, which is why it was also depicted in the catacombs to symbolise the belonging of the deceased faithful to Christ the Saviour.

This anchor is already firmly attached to the port of salvation. Our task is to attach our life to it, the rope that binds our ship to the anchor of Christ.

We are sailing on troubled waters and need to anchor ourselves to something solid. But the task is no longer to cast anchor and fix it to the seabed. The task is to attach

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Rom* 8:39.

our ship to the rope that hangs down from Heaven, so to speak, where the anchor of Christ is firmly fixed. By attaching ourselves to this rope we attach ourselves to the anchor of salvation and make our hope certain.

Hope is certain when the ship of our life is attached to the rope that binds us to the anchor that is fixed in the crucified Christ who is at the right hand of the Father, that is, in the eternal communion of the Father, in the love of the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

Everything is well expressed in the liturgical prayer for the Solemnity of the Lord's Ascension:

Gladden us with holy joys, almighty God, and make us rejoice with devout thanksgiving, for the Ascension of Christ your Son is our exaltation, and, where the Head has gone before in glory, the Body is called to follow in hope.<sup>5</sup>

Czech writer and politician Vaclav Havel describes hope as a state of mind, a dimension of the soul. It does not depend on prior observation of the world. It is not a prediction.

Byung-Chul Han adds, "Hope is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart that transcends the world that is immediately experienced, and is anchored somewhere beyond its horizons.

"I feel that its deepest roots are in the transcendental... Hope in this deep and powerful sense is not the same as joy that things are going well. We might think that hoping is simply wanting to smile at life because it in turn smiles at you, but no, we have to go deeper, we have to walk that rope that leads us to the anchor.

"Hope is the ability of each of us to work for something because it is right to do so, not because that something will have guaranteed success. It could be a failure, it could go wrong: we do not hope it goes well, we are not optimistic. We work to make this happen. That is why hope does not equal optimism. Hope is not the belief that something will go well but the certainty that something makes sense regardless of its outcome.

"Doing something because it makes sense: this is the hope that presupposes values and presupposes faith.

"This is what gives hope the strength to live, and gives us the strength to feel something again and again, even in despair."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Rom 5:3-5*

<sup>5</sup> *Roman Missal, LEV, Rome 2020*<sup>3</sup>, 240.

But how can you be on a journey while remaining anchored? The anchor weighs you down, holds you back, and pins you down. Where does this journey lead to? It leads to eternity.

## **2.2. Hope as a journey to Christ, a journey to eternal life**

The promise of eternal life, just as it is made to each of us, does not bypass life's journey, it is not a leap upwards, does not propose mounting a rocket that leaves the earth behind and flies off into space, disregarding the road, the dust of the path, nor does it leave the ship adrift mid-ocean without us.

This promise is indeed an anchor that is fixed in the eternal, but to which we remain attached by a rope that steadies the ship as it crosses the ocean. And it is precisely the fact that it is fixed in Heaven that allows the ship not to remain stationary in the middle of the sea, but to move forward through the waves.

If the anchor of Christ were to pin us to the bottom of the sea, we would all stay in place where we are, maybe calm and problem-free, yet stagnant, without travelling or advancing. On the contrary, anchoring life to Heaven guarantees that the promise that gives rise to our hope does not impede our progress or provide a sense of security in which to shelter and confine ourselves, but rather instils confidence as we walk and proceed along our path. The promise of a sure goal, already reached for us by Christ, makes every step in life firm and decisive.

It is important to understand the Jubilee as a pilgrimage, as an invitation to get moving, to come out of self to go towards Christ.

Jubilee, then, has always been synonymous with a journey. If you really want God, you have to move, you have to walk. Because the desire for God, the longing for God moves you to find him and, at the same time, leads you to find yourself and others.

“Born to never die”.<sup>7</sup>

The title of the life of Servant of God Chiara Corbella Petrillo is beautiful and significant. Yes, because our coming into the world is directed to eternal life. Eternal life is a promise that breaks through the door of death, opening us to being “face to face with God”, forever. Death is a door that closes and at the same time a door that opens to the definitive encounter with God!

We know how keen was Don Bosco's desire for Heaven, something he joyfully proposed and shared with the young people at the Oratory.

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<sup>6</sup> BYUNG-CHUL HAN, *El espíritu de la esperanza*, p.18, Herder, Barcelona 2024. The translator, however, has translated here from the Italian text in front of him, with some reference also to the English translation of *The Spirit of Hope*, Polity Press, 2024 (an e-book version).

<sup>7</sup> C. PACCINI – S. TROISI, *Siamo nati e non moriremo mai più. Storia di Chiara Corbella Petrillo*, Porziuncola, Assisi (PG) 2001.

## 2.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF HOPE

### 2.3.1 Hope, continuous, ready, visionary and prophetic tension

Gabriel Marcel,<sup>8</sup> the so-called philosopher of hope, teaches us that hope is found in the weaving of experience now in progress. Hope means giving credit to some reality as a bearer of the future.

Eric Fromm<sup>9</sup> writes that hope is not passive waiting, but rather a continuous, constant tension. It is like crouched tiger which will jump only when the time is right.

To have hope is to be vigilant at all times for everything that has not yet happened. The virgins who waited for the bridegroom with their lamps lit hoped; Don Bosco hoped in the face of difficulties and knelt down to pray.

Hope is ready at the moment when everything is about to be born.

It is vigilant, attentive, listening, able to guide in creating something new, in giving life to the future on earth.

This is why it is “visionary and prophetic”. It focuses our attention on what is not yet, it helps to give birth to something new.

### 2.3.2 Hope is our wager on the future

Without hope there is no revolution, no future, there is only a present made of sterile optimism.

Often it is thought that those who hope are optimists while pessimists are essentially their opposite. It is not so. It is important not to confuse hope with optimism. Hope is much more profound because it does not depend on moods, feelings or sentimentality. The essence of **optimism** is innate positivity. The optimist lives in the belief that somehow things will get better. For optimists, time is closure. They do not contemplate the future: everything will go well and that is it.

Paradoxically, even for **pessimists** time is closure: they find themselves trapped in the time as a prison, rejecting everything without venturing into other possible worlds. The pessimist is as stubborn as the optimist, and both are blind to the possible because the possible is alien to them, they lack the passion for the unprecedented.

Unlike both of them, hope wagers on what can go beyond, on what could be.

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<sup>8</sup> GABRIEL MARCEL, *Philosophie der Hoffnung*, Munich, List 1964.

<sup>9</sup> ERICH FROMM, *La revolucion de la esperanza*, Ciudad de México 1970.

And still, the optimist (just like the pessimist), does not act, because every action involves a risk and since they do not want to take this risk they stay put, they do not want to experience failure.

Hope instead goes in search, tries to find a direction, heads towards what it does not know, sets sail for new things. This is the pilgrimage of a Christian.

### **2.3.3 Hope is not a private matter**

We all carry hope in our hearts. It is not possible not to hope, but it is also true that one can delude oneself, considering prospects and ideals that will never come true, that are just illusions and false hopes.

Much of our culture, especially Western culture, is full of false hopes that delude and destroy or can irreparably ruin the lives of individuals and entire societies.

According to positive thinking, it is enough to replace negative thoughts with positive ones to live more happily. Through this simple mechanism, the negative aspects of life are completely omitted and the world appears like an Amazon marketplace that will provide us with anything we want thanks to our positive attitude.

Conclusion: if our willingness to think positively were enough to be happy, then everyone would be solely responsible for their own happiness.

Paradoxically, the cult of positivity isolates people, makes them selfish and destroys empathy, because people are increasingly committed only to themselves and do not care about the suffering of others.

Hope, unlike positive thinking, does not avoid the negativity of life; it does not isolate but unites and reconciles, because the protagonist of hope is not me, focused on my ego, entrenched exclusively on myself. The secret of hope is us.

Therefore, Hope's siblings are Love, Faith, and Transcendence.



### 3. HOPE, THE FOUNDATION OF MISSION

#### 3.1. Hope is an invitation to responsibility

Hope is a gift and, as such, should be passed on to everyone we meet along the way.

Saint Peter states this clearly: “Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you.”<sup>10</sup> He invites us not to be afraid, to act in everyday life, to give our reasons – how much Salesian spirit there is in this word “reasons”! – for hope. This is a responsibility for the Christian. If we are women and men of hope, it shows!

“Giving an account of the hope that is in us” becomes a proclamation of the “good news” of Jesus and his Gospel.

But why is it necessary to respond to anyone who asks us about the hope that is in us? And why do we feel the need to recover hope?

In the Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee, *Spes Non Confundit*, Pope Francis reminds us that “All of us, however, need to recover the joy of living, since men and women, created in the image and likeness of God, cannot rest content with getting along one day at a time, settling for the here and now and seeking fulfilment in material realities alone. This leads to a narrow individualism and the loss of hope; it gives rise to a sadness that lodges in the heart and brings forth fruits of discontent and intolerance.”<sup>11</sup>

An observation that strikes us because it describes all the sadness that is breathed in our societies and our communities. It is a sadness masked by false joy, the one constantly touted, promised, and guaranteed to us by the media, advertisements, politicians’ propaganda, and many false prophets of well-being. Settling for well-being prevents us from opening up to a much greater, much truer, much more eternal good: what Jesus and the apostles call “the salvation of the soul, the salvation of life”; a good for which Jesus invites us not to fear losing our life, material goods, false securities that often collapse in an instant.

It is regarding these kinds of more or less articulated “questions” (including by young people) that it is our task to “give an account”. What do I want for the young people and for all the people I meet along the way? What would I like to ask God for them? How would I like it to change their lives?

There is only one answer: *eternal life*. Not only eternal life as a sublime state that we can reach after death, but eternal life possible here and now, eternal life as Jesus defines it: “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and

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<sup>10</sup> *1 Pet* 3:15.

<sup>11</sup> FRANCIS, *Spes Non Confundit*, 9.

Jesus Christ whom you have sent”, that is, a defined life, enlightened by communion with Christ and, through him, with the Father.<sup>12</sup>

And we have the task of accompanying the younger generations on this journey towards eternal life, in the educational activity that distinguishes us. An activity that is a mission for us as the Salesian Family. And what drives our mission? Always Christ, our hope.

This educational mission, in fact, has hope at its core.

Ultimately, God’s hope is never hope for itself alone. It is always hope for others: it does not isolate us, it makes us supportive and encourages us to educate each other in truth and love.

### **3.2 Hope demands courage from the Christian community in evangelisation**

Courage and hope are an interesting combination. In fact, if it is true that it is impossible not to hope, it is equally true that courage is necessary to hope. Courage comes from having the same outlook as Christ,<sup>13</sup> capable of hoping against all hope, of seeing a solution even where there seems to be no way out. And how “Salesian” this attitude is!

All this requires the courage to be oneself, to recognise one’s identity in the gift of God and to invest one’s energies in a precise responsibility, aware that what has been entrusted to us is not ours, and that we have the task of passing it on to the next generations. This is the heart of God. This is the life of the Church.

It is an attitude that we find in the first missionary expedition.

I find reference to art. 34 of the Constitutions of the Salesians of Don Bosco very useful: it highlights what lies at the heart of our charismatic and apostolic movement. I suggest to each of the groups in our diverse and beautiful Family that they review the same elements that I offer here, by rereading their respective Constitutions and Statutes.

The article is entitled: Evangelization and catechesis and reads as follows:

“This Society had its beginning in a simple catechism lesson.” For us too, evangelizing and catechizing are the fundamental characteristics of our mission.

Like Don Bosco, we are all called to be educators to the faith at every opportunity. Our highest knowledge therefore is to know Jesus Christ, and our greatest delight is to reveal to all people the unfathomable riches of his mystery.

We walk side by side with the young so as to lead them to the risen Lord, and so discover in him and in his gospel the deepest meaning of their own existence, and thus grow into new creatures in Christ.

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<sup>12</sup> *Jn* 17:3.

<sup>13</sup> *Cf. Rom* 4:18.

The Virgin Mary is present in this process as a mother. We make her known and loved as the one who believed, who helps and who infuses hope.”

This article represents the beating heart that clearly outlines, including for this Strenna, what the energies and opportunities are as the fulfilment and actualisation of the “global dream” that God inspired in Don Bosco.

If living the Jubilee is first of all making sure that Jesus is and returns to being in first place, then the missionary spirit is the consequence of this recognised primacy which strengthens our hope and translates into that educative and pastoral charity that proclaims the person of Jesus Christ to all. This is the heart of evangelisation and characterises genuine mission.

It is significant to recall some opening words from Benedict XVI’s first Encyclical, *Deus caritas est*:

“Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, the encounter with Christ is a priority and fundamental, not the “simple” dissemination of a doctrine, but a deep personal experience of God that urges us to communicate him, to make him known and experienced, becoming true “mystagogues” of the lives of young people.

### **3.3 “DA MIHI ANIMAS”: THE “SPIRIT” OF MISSION**

Don Bosco always kept a sentence before his eyes that young people could read passing in front of his room, words that particularly struck Dominic Savio: “Da mihi animas cetera tolle”.

There is a fundamental balance in this motto that combines the two priorities that guided Don Bosco’s life – and which, significantly, we call the “grace of unity” – that allow us to always safeguard interiority and apostolic action.

If the love of God is lacking in the heart, how can there be true pastoral charity? And at the same time, if apostles were not to discover the face of God in their neighbour, how could they be said to love God?

Don Bosco’s secret is that he personally experienced the unique “movement of charity towards God and towards his brothers and sisters”<sup>15</sup> that characterises the Salesian spirit.

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<sup>14</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Encyclical Letter Deus Caritas Est*, Vatican City 25 December 2005, 1.

<sup>15</sup> *SDB C. 3.*

### 3.3.1 The attitudes of the one who is sent

There are two key dreams in Don Bosco's life in which the attitudes of the apostle, of the one who is sent, are evident:

- the "dream at nine years of age" in which Jesus and Mary ask John, just a child, to make himself humble, strong and energetic, to be obedient and acquire knowledge, asking him to be always kind in order to win over the hearts of young people. He is to always keep Mary as his teacher and guide;
- the "dream of the pergola of roses" that indicates the "passion" in Salesian life that requires wearing the "good shoes" of mortification and charity.

### 3.3.2 Recognise, Rethink and Relaunch

Celebrating the 150th anniversary of Don Bosco's first missionary expedition is a great gift for

- ***Recognising and thanking God.***  
Recognition makes the fatherly nature of every beautiful accomplishment evident. Without recognition, there is no capacity to accept. All the times we do not recognise a gift in our personal and institutional life, we seriously risk nullifying it and "taking it over".
- ***Rethinking, because "nothing is forever".***  
Fidelity involves the ability to change, through obedience, to a perspective that comes from God and from reading the "signs of the times". Nothing is forever: from a personal and institutional point of view, true fidelity is the ability to change, recognising what the Lord calls each of us to.  
Rethinking, then, becomes a generative act in which faith and life come together; a moment in which to ask ourselves: what do you want to tell us, Lord, with this person, with this situation in the light of the signs of the times that ask me to have the very heart of God in order to interpret them?
- ***Relaunching, starting over every day.***  
Recognition leads to looking far ahead and welcoming new challenges, relaunching the mission with hope. Mission is to bring the hope of Christ with clear and conscious awareness, linked to faith, which makes me recognise that what I see and experience "is not mine".

## **4. A JUBILEE AND MISSIONARY HOPE THAT TRANSLATES INTO CONCRETE AND DAILY LIFE**

### **4.1 Hope, our strength in daily life that needs to be witnessed to**

Saint Thomas Aquinas writes: “Spes introcit ad caritatem”, hope prepares and predisposes our life, our humanity, to charity.<sup>16</sup> A charity that is also justice, social action.

Hope needs testimony. We are at the heart of the mission, because the mission is not, in the first instance, to do things but is a testimony, the witness of the one who has gone through an experience and speaks about it. The witness is the bearer of a memory, solicits questions from those who meet him or her, evokes wonder.

The testimony of hope requires a community. It is the work of a collective subject and it is contagious, just as our humanity is contagious, because such testimony is a bond with the Lord.

Hope in the testimony of mission is to be built from generation to generation, between adults and young people: this is the way of the future. Consumerism eats away the future in our culture. The ideology of consumption extinguishes everything in the “here and now”, in the “everything, and immediately”. But you cannot consume the future, you cannot appropriate what is other than you; you cannot appropriate the other.<sup>17</sup>

In building the future, hope is the ability to make promises and to keep them... such a splendid and rare thing in our world. To promise is to hope, to set in motion, that is why – as mentioned – hope is a journey, it is the very energy of the journey.

### **4.2 Hope is the art of patience**

Every life, every gift, everything needs time to grow. So too do God’s gifts take time to mature. This is why in our present time, where everything is instant, in our hurried “consumption” of time and life, we are called to cultivate the virtues of patience, because hope comes to fruition through patience.<sup>18</sup> In fact, hope and patience are intimately linked.

Hope involves the ability to wait, to wait for growth, as if to say that “one virtue leads to another”!

For hope to become reality, to manifest itself in its full sense, patience is required. Nothing manifests itself miraculously, because everything is subject to the law of

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<sup>16</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, II<sup>a</sup>-II<sup>a</sup>e q. 17 a. 8 co.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. E. LEVINAS, *Totalità e infinito. Saggio sull’esteriorità*, Jaca Book, Milano 2023.

<sup>18</sup> For these reflections I drew on the rich reflection of the Abbot General of the Order of Cistercians M. G. LEPORI, *Capitoli dell’Abate Generale OCist al CFM 2024. Sperare in Cristo* available in several languages at: [www.ocist.org](http://www.ocist.org)

time. Patience is the art of the farmer who sows and knows how to wait for the seed sown to grow and bear fruit.

Hope begins in us as waiting, expectation, and it is experienced as consciously lived expectation in our humanity. This waiting, this expectation is a very important dimension of human experience. Human beings know how to wait, are always in a dimension of waiting, because they are creatures who consciously live in time.

Human waiting, expectation, is the true measure of time, a measure that is not numerical or chronological. We have become accustomed to calculating our waiting time, to saying that we have waited an hour, that the train is five minutes late, that the internet has made us wait fourteen endless seconds before responding to our click, but when we measure it in this way we distort our waiting, turning it into a thing, a phenomenon detached from ourselves and what we are waiting for. It is as if the waiting were something in itself, by itself, without any connection. Instead, waiting – and here is the crucial point – is relationship, a dimension of the mystery of relationship.

Only those who have hope have patience. Only those who have hope become capable of “enduring”, of “supporting from below” the different situations that life presents. Those who endure wait, hope, and manage to endure everything because their effort has the sense of waiting, has the tension of waiting, the loving energy of waiting.

We know that the call to patience and waiting sometimes involves the experience of fatigue, work, pain and death.<sup>19</sup> Well, fatigue, pain and death expose the illusion of having time, the meaning of time, the value of time, the meaning and value of our life. They are negative experiences, but also positive because fatigue, pain and death can be opportunities to rediscover the true meaning of life’s time.

And, once again, “to give an account of the hope that is in us”, becoming the proclamation of the “good news” of Jesus and his Gospel.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Rom*, 5:3-5

## 5. THE ORIGIN OF OUR HOPE: IN GOD WITH DON BOSCO

Father Egidio Viganò offered the Congregation and the Salesian Family an interesting reflection on the topic of hope, drawing on our very rich tradition and highlighting some specific characteristics of the Salesian spirit read in the light of this theological virtue. He did this by commenting, in particular for participants at the General Chapter of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, on Don Bosco's dream of the ten diamonds.<sup>20</sup>

Given the depth of the proposed contents, I think it is useful to recall the contribution of the 7th Successor of Don Bosco in reminding us of what we are all called to live, once again from the perspective of hope.

### 5.1 God is the origin of our hope

#### 5.1.1. Brief reference to the dream

We all know the story of this extraordinary dream that Don Bosco had in San Benigno Canavese on the night of 10 September 1881. Let me briefly recall its structure.<sup>21</sup>

The Dream takes place in three scenes. *In the first scene*, the main character embodies the profile of the Salesian: on the front of his cloak there are five diamonds – three on the chest, representing “Faith”, “Hope” and “Charity”, and two on the shoulders, representing “Work” and “Temperance”; on the back there are five additional diamonds indicating “Obedience”, “Vow of Poverty”, “Reward”, “Vow of Chastity” and “Fasting”.

Fr Rinaldi calls this character with the ten diamonds “The model of the true Salesian”.

*In the second scene*, the character shows the adulteration of the model: his cloak “had become faded, moth-eaten, in tatters. In place of the diamonds there were gaping holes caused by moths and other insects.”

This very sad and depressing scene shows “the opposite to the true Salesian”, the anti-Salesian.

*In the third scene*, “a handsome young man dressed in a white cloak woven through with gold and silver thread [...] of imposing and charming mien” appears. He is the bearer of a message. He urges the Salesians to “listen”, to “understand”, to remain “strong and courageous”, to “witness” with their words and with their lives, to “be

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<sup>20</sup> E. VIGANÒ, *Un progetto evangelico di vita attiva*, Elle Di Ci, Leumann (TO) 1982, 68-84.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *The Salesian according to Don Bosco's dream of the ten diamonds*, in *ASC* 300 (1981), 3-37. The complete account can be found in *ASC* 300 (1981), 40-44; or in *BM* XV, 147-152.

careful” in the acceptance and formation of the new generations, to make their Congregation grow healthily.

The three dream scenes are lively and provocative; they present us with an agile, personalised and dramatised synthesis of Salesian spirituality. The content of the dream, in Don Bosco’s mind, certainly involves an important frame of reference for our vocational identity.

So then, the character in the dream – as is well known – bears the diamond of hope on the front, which stands for the certainty of help from above in an entirely creative life, i.e. one committed to daily planning of practical activities for salvation, especially of youth. Together with the other symbols linked to the theological virtues, the figure of those who are wise and optimistic stands out for the faith that animates them; of those who are dynamic and creative for the hope that moves them, and who are ever prayerful and good human beings for the charity with which they are imbued.

Corresponding to the diamond of hope, on the back of the figure we find the diamond of “reward”. While hope visibly highlights the Salesian’s energy and activity in building the Kingdom, the constancy of his efforts and the enthusiasm of his commitment based on the certainty of God’s help made present through the mediation and intercession of Christ and Mary, the diamond of “reward” instead underlines a constant conscientious attitude that permeates and animates all ascetic effort, according to Don Bosco’s familiar maxim: “A piece of paradise will make up for everything!”<sup>22</sup>

### 5.1.2. Don Bosco, a “giant” of hope

The Salesian – Don Bosco said – “is ready to suffer cold and heat, hunger and thirst, weariness and disdain whenever God’s glory and the salvation of souls require it”;<sup>23</sup> the inner support for this demanding ascetic ability is the thought of paradise as a reflection of the good conscience with which he works and lives. “In all we do, our duty, work, troubles or sufferings, we must never forget that... the least thing done for his name’s sake is not left forgotten; it is of faith that in his own good time he will give us rich recompense. At the end of our lives as we stand before his judgement seat he will say, radiant with love: “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master” (Mt 25:2).<sup>24</sup> “In your work and sorrow never forget we have a great reward stored up for us in heaven.”<sup>25</sup> And when our Father says that the Salesian exhausted by too

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<sup>22</sup> *BM* VIII, 200.

<sup>23</sup> *SDB* C. 18.

<sup>24</sup> P. BRAIDO (ed), *Don Bosco Fondatore “Ai Soci Salesiani” (1875-1885). Introduzione e testi critici*, LAS, Roma 1995, 159 (Don Bosco’s ‘To the Salesian Confreres’ from which this is quoted, is also an appendix to the *SDB* Constitutions and Regulations).

<sup>25</sup> *BM* VI, 249.



much work represents a victory *for the whole Congregation*, it seems to suggest a dimension of fraternal communion in the reward, almost a community sense of paradise!

The thought and continuous awareness of paradise is one of the overarching ideas and one of the driving values of Don Bosco's typical spirituality and also pedagogy. It is like shedding light on and furthering the fundamental instinct of the soul that tends vitally towards its ultimate goal.

In a world prone to secularisation and the gradual loss of a sense of God – especially due to affluence and certain progress – it is important to resist the temptation, for ourselves and for the young people with whom we journey, that prevents us from looking up to Heaven and does not make us feel the need to sustain and nurture a commitment to asceticism lived out in our daily work. A temporal gaze is growing in its place, according to a somewhat elegant kind of horizontalism that believes it can discover the ideal of everything within human becoming and in the present life. Quite the opposite of hope!

Don Bosco was one of the greats of hope. There are so many elements to prove it. His Salesian spirit is entirely infused with the certainty and industriousness characteristic of this bold dynamism of the Holy Spirit.

Let me pause briefly to recall how Don Bosco was able to translate the energy of hope in his life on two fronts: commitment to personal sanctification and the mission of salvation for others; or rather – and here lies a central characteristic of his spirit – personal sanctification through the salvation of others. We remember the famous formula of the three “S’s”: “Salve, salvando salvati” (a greeting which in today’s language would be something like ‘Hi! By saving others, save yourself’)<sup>26</sup> It is a simple mnemonic, a pedagogical slogan, but it is profound and indicates how the two sides of personal sanctification and the salvation of others are closely linked.

In the “work” and “temperance” pair, the perception is that Don Bosco experienced hope as a practical and daily programme for the tireless work of sanctification and salvation. In contemplation of the mystery of God his faith led him to prefer his ineffable plan of salvation. He saw in Christ the Saviour of humankind and the Lord of history; in his Mother, Mary, the Helper of Christians; in the Church, the great Sacrament of salvation; in his own Christian growth to maturity and in needy youth, the vast field of the “not yet”. Therefore his heart erupted in the cry, “Da mihi animas”, Lord grant that I may save youth, and take the rest away from me! The following of Christ and the youth mission merge, in his spirit, in a single theological burst of energy that constitutes the supporting structure of the whole.

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<sup>26</sup> MB VI, 227.

We know well that the dimension of Christian hope combines the perspective of the “already” and the “not yet”: something present and something in progress that, however, begins to manifest itself from today even if “not yet” fully.

### *5.1.3. Characteristics of Don Bosco’s hope*

#### *The certainty of the “already”*

When we ask theology what the formal object of hope is, it responds that it is the intimate conviction of the presence of God who helps, aids, and assists; the inner certainty about the power of the Holy Spirit; friendship with the victorious Christ that enables us to say with St Paul, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13).

The first constitutive element of hope is, therefore, the certainty of the “already”. Hope encourages faith to exercise itself in consideration of God’s saving presence in human vicissitudes, of the power of the Spirit in the Church and in the world, of Christ’s kingship over history, of the baptismal values that have initiated the life of resurrection within us.

The first constitutive element of hope is, therefore, an exercise of faith in the essence of God as merciful and saving Father, in what Jesus Christ has already done for us, in Pentecost as the beginning of the age of the Holy Spirit, in what is already within us through Baptism, the sacraments, life in the Church, the personal call of our vocation. It is necessary to reflect that faith and hope interchange in us, their dynamics prompt and complement each other and make us live in the creative and transcendent atmosphere of the power of the Holy Spirit.

#### *A clear awareness of the “not yet”*

The second constitutive element of hope is the awareness of the “not yet”. It does not seem very difficult to have this; however, hope demands a clear awareness not so much of what is evil and unjust, as of what is lacking in the stature of Christ in time, and, therefore, of what is unjust and sinful and also of what is immature, partial or stunted in building the Kingdom.

This supposes, as a frame of reference, a clear knowledge of the divine plan of salvation, onto which the critical and discerning capacity of the one who hopes is grafted. Thus any critique by a person of hope is not simply psychological or sociological but transcendent, according to the theological sphere of the “new creature”; it also makes use of the contributions of the human sciences, and far surpasses them.

With the awareness of the “not yet”, those who hope perceive what is evil, what is not yet mature, what is a seed for the Kingdom of God and are committed to the growth of what is good and to fighting sin with the historical perspective of Christ. The ability to discern the “not yet” is always measured by the certainty of the “already”. Therefore, and I would say especially in difficult times, those who hope urge and stir up their faith to discover the signs of God’s presence and the mediations that guide us

into the sphere that he has traced out. This is a very important quality today: knowing how to identify seeds to help them sprout and grow.

How can one hope if there is not this capacity for discernment? It is not enough to know how to perceive the full weight of evil. We must also be sensitive to the spring “that shines around us”. So in these times, which we call difficult times (and they really are, comparing them with those with a degree of tranquillity that we experienced earlier), hope helps us to perceive that there is also so much good in the world and that something is growing.

### *Salvific industriousness*

A third constitutive element of hope is its need to be put into action accompanied by a concrete commitment to sanctification, inventiveness and apostolic sacrifice. We must collaborate with the “already” that is growing. We need to act urgently and fight against evil in ourselves and in others, especially in needy youth.

The discernment of the “already” and the “not yet” needs to be translated into practice in life, opening up to resolutions, plans, revision, inventiveness, patience and constancy. Not everything will turn out “as we hoped”: there will be failures, setbacks, falls, misunderstandings. Christian hope also naturally shares in the darkness of faith.

#### *5.1.4. The “fruits” of Don Bosco’s hope*

Some particularly significant fruits for the Salesian spirit of Don Bosco derive from the three constitutive elements of hope which I have just indicated.

### *Joy*

*Joy derives from the first constitutive element – the certainty of the “already” – as the most characteristic fruit. All true hope explodes into joy.*

The Salesian spirit takes on the joy of hope through an affinity all its own. Even biology suggests some examples. Youth, which is human hope (and thus suggests a certain analogy with the mystery of Christian hope), is eager for joy. And we see Don Bosco translate hope into an atmosphere of joy for the youth to be saved. Dominic Savio, raised at his school, said, “We make holiness consist in being very cheerful.” It is not a superficial cheerfulness typical of the world but an inner joy, a substrate of Christian victory, a vital harmony with hope, which explodes in joy. A joy that ultimately proceeds from the depths of faith and hope.

There is little to do. If we are sad, it is because we are superficial. I understand that there is a Christian sadness: Jesus Christ experienced it. In Gethsemane his soul was saddened to death, he sweated blood. This is certainly another kind of sadness.

However, the affliction or melancholy through which a Sister gets the impression of not being understood by anyone, that others do not take her into consideration, that they are envious or misunderstand her qualities, etc., is a sadness that must not be fed. This must be contrasted with the depth of hope: God is with me and loves me; what does it matter if others don’t consider me so much?

Joy, in the Salesian spirit, is a daily atmosphere; it stems from a faith that hopes and from a hope that believes, in other words from the dynamic quality of the Holy Spirit that proclaims in us the victory that overcomes the world!... Joy is essential if we are to witness to what we believe and hope in.

This is what the Salesian spirit is, first and foremost, and not something reduced to mere observance and mortification. Hope will also lead us to practise mortification, but as flight training and not as prison jabs! So: from hope, so much joy!

The world tries to overcome its limitations and disorientation with a life filled with exciting sensations. It cultivates the promotion and satisfaction of the senses, a spicy film, eroticism, drugs, etc. It is a way of escaping from a fleeting situation that seems to make no sense, to seek something that borders on a “caricature of transcendence”.

### *Patience*

Another “fruit” of hope – which comes from the awareness of the “not yet” – is *patience*. Every hope entails an indispensable gift of patience. Patience is a Christian attitude, intrinsically linked with hope in its “not yet” quality with its troubles, its difficulties and its darkness. Believing in the resurrection and working for the victory of faith, while being mortal and immersed in the transient, demands an inner structure of hope that leads to patience.

The most sublime expression of Christian patience was what Jesus experienced especially during his passion and death. It is a fruitful patience, precisely because of the hope that fuels it. Rather than initiative and action, patience involves conscious acceptance and virtuous passivity that endures so that God’s plan may be accomplished.

Don Bosco’s Salesian spirit often reminds us of patience. In the introduction to the Constitutions, Don Bosco recalls, alluding to Saint Paul, that the pains we must endure in this life do not compare with the reward that awaits us. He used to say, “So take heart! When patience would falter, let hope sustain us!”<sup>27</sup> “the hope of a reward is what buoys up our patience.”<sup>28</sup>

Mother Mazzarello also insisted on this. One of her first biographers, Maccone, states that hope always comforted her by supporting her in her sufferings, her infirmities, her doubts, and cheered her up at the hour of death: “Her hope was very alive and active. It seems to me” a Sister testified “that she was animated by hope in everything and that she tried to instil this in others. She urged us to carry the small daily crosses well, and to do everything with great purity of intention.”<sup>29</sup>

Hope is the mother of patience and patience is the defence and shield of hope.

### *Pedagogical sensitivity*

From the third constitutive element of hope – “salvific industriousness” - comes another fruit: *pedagogical sensitivity*. It is an initiative of appropriate commitment,

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<sup>27</sup> *BM XII*, 332.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 331.

<sup>29</sup> F. MACCONO, *Santa Maria Domenica Mazzarello. Confondatrice e prima Superiora Generale delle FMA. Vol. I*, FMA, Torino 1960, 398.

both in the context of one's own sanctification (following Christ), and in the context of the salvation of others (mission). It involves practical, measured and constant commitment, translated by Don Bosco into a concrete methodology that involves attention to the following:

- *prudence (or holy "cunning")*: when it comes to initiatives, to solving problems, Don Bosco tries everything without pretending to be perfect but with humble practicality; he often said, "The best is the enemy of the good".<sup>30</sup>
- *Boldness*. Evil is organised, the children of darkness act intelligently. The Gospel tells us that the children of light must be more cunning and courageous. Therefore, to work in the world we must arm ourselves with genuine prudence, that is, with the "auriga virtutum" that makes us agile, timely and penetrating in the application of true fearlessness for the good.
- *Magnanimity*. We must not confine our gaze within the walls of our house. We have been called by the Lord to save the world; we have a more important historical mission than astronauts and scientists do... We are committed to the full liberation of humankind. Our soul must be open to very broad perspectives. Don Bosco wanted us to be "at the forefront of progress" (and when he said this he meant communications media).

We know the magnanimity of Don Bosco in launching youth into apostolic responsibilities; think, for example, of the first missionaries who left for America. Both the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians were little more than boys and girls!

Don Bosco operated within expansive horizons. Neither Valdocco nor Mornese was enough for him; he could not remain only within the confines of Turin, Piedmont, Italy or Europe. His heart beat with the heart of the universal Church, because he felt almost invested with the responsibility of saving all the needy youth of the world. He wanted the Salesians to feel that the most urgent and biggest youth issues of the Church were their own, so they could be available everywhere. And, as he cultivated magnanimity in his plans and initiatives, he was concrete and practical in their implementation, with a sense of gradualness, and modest beginnings.

So magnanimity must always radiate from the face of the Salesian as a mark of sympathy: Salesians must not be narrow-minded without vision, but have greatness of soul because hope abides in their hearts.

Péguy, with his somewhat violent acumen, wrote: "A capitulation is in essence an operation in which one begins to explain instead of implementing. Cowards have always been people of many explanations." The mysticism of decision and the humble courage of practicality must always radiate from the Salesian face, as a mark of sympathy. Don Bosco was determined in being committed to good, even if he could not begin with the best; he said that his works perhaps began in disorder and then tended towards order!

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<sup>30</sup> BM X, 418.

Hope brings the joy of divine sonship to the face of the Salesian, in addition to deep contemplation, the enthusiasm of gratitude and optimism that stem from “faith”. It also instils the courage to take initiative, the spirit of patience and sacrifice, the wisdom of gradual pedagogy, the visionary ideals of magnanimity, the humility of practicality, the wisdom of cunning, and the smile of joy.

## **5.2. God’s faithfulness: to the very end**

So far we have taken a look at what Don Bosco and our Saints and Blesseds have clearly expressed in their lives. These are things that urge each of us personally and as a Salesian Family to bring forth or – to take up the words of Fr Egidio Viganò – to make shine the hope we are called to “give our reasons” for, especially to young people and, among them, the poorest.

The time has come to “peek” a little beyond what is “immediately visible” and try to understand what lies ahead in our lives and gives us the courage to wait diligently as we work together for the coming of the “day of the Lord”.

Therefore, and continuing to take up the candid and poignant analysis of the Seventh Successor of Don Bosco, let us focus our attention on the perspective of the “reward”.

The diamond of “reward” is placed with four others on the back of the cloak worn by the character in the dream. It is almost a secret, a force that operates from within, which gives us the impetus and helps us to support and defend the great values seen on the front. It is interesting to note that the diamond of “reward” is placed under the one of “poverty” because it certainly is related to the “privations” linked to it.

On its rays we read the following words: “If the rich reward attracts you, do not be afraid of the many hardships.” “Whoever suffers with me will rejoice with me.” “Whatever we suffer on earth is momentary, the joys of my friends in Heaven are eternal.”

The true Salesian has the vision of the reward in their imagination, in their heart, their desires, their horizons of life, as the fullness of the values proclaimed by the Gospel. This is why “he is always cheerful. He radiates this joy and is able to educate to the happiness of Christian life and a sense of celebration.”<sup>31</sup>

There was a lot of talk about Heaven in Don Bosco’s house and in our Salesian houses. It was a permanent and ever present idea summarised in some famous

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<sup>31</sup> *SDB C. 17.*

sayings: “Bread, work and Paradise”<sup>32</sup>; “A piece of Paradise will make up for everything”.<sup>33</sup> These were recurrent sayings in Valdocco and Mornese.

Certainly many Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will remember the description Mother Henriette Sorbonne gave of the spirit of Mornese: “Here we are in Paradise, in the house there is an atmosphere of Paradise!”<sup>34</sup> And it certainly wasn’t because of privations or lack of problems. It was like the spontaneous translation, sprung from the heart, of the sign that Don Bosco had put up: “Servite Domino in laetitia”<sup>35</sup>.

Dominic Savio had also perceived the same warm and transcendent atmosphere of life: “We make holiness consist in being very cheerful.”<sup>36</sup>

In the Lives of Dominic Savio, Francis Besucco and Michael Magone, Don Bosco, even when describing their death throes, sought to stress this ineffable joy, combined with a true yearning for Paradise. Much more than the horror of death, his boys felt the attraction of Easter joy.

The thought of reward is one of the fruits of the presence of the Holy Spirit, that is, of the intensity of faith, hope and charity, all three together, although it is more closely linked to hope. It instils a joy and gladness in the heart that comes from above and are beautifully attuned to the innate tendencies of the human heart. We can see this as we live among boys and girls: young people instinctively understand more clearly that human beings are born for happiness.

But we don’t even need to go looking for it among the young. Let’s pick up a mirror and look at ourselves: we just have to listen to the beating of our heart. We are born to achieve happiness, we expect it even without confessing it.

The idea of Paradise, always there in Don Bosco’s house, is not a utopia for naive deceptions. It is not the carrot that tricks the horse into trotting, but the substantial yearning of our being; and it is above all the reality of the love of God, of the resurrection of Jesus Christ at work in history; it is the living presence of the Holy Spirit that urges us toward the reward.

Don Bosco did not despise any of young people’s joys. On the contrary, he gave rise to them, increased them, developed them. The famous “cheerfulness” which holiness consists of is not only an intimate joy, hidden in the heart as the fruit of grace. This is the root of it. It is also expressed externally, in life, in the playground and in the sense of celebration.

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<sup>32</sup> *BM XII*, 443.

<sup>33</sup> *BM VIII*, 200.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in E. VIGANÒ, *Rediscovering the spirit of Mornese*, in *ASC* (1981), 62.

<sup>35</sup> *Ps* 99.

<sup>36</sup> *BM V*, 228.

How he prepared for religious solemnities, name days and feast days at the Oratory! He was even busy organising the celebrations for his name day, not for himself but to create an atmosphere of joyful gratitude in the surroundings.

Let's think about courageous autumn walks: two or three months to prepare them, 15 or 20 days to experience them; then the extended memories and comments: a joy spread out over time. What imagination and courage! From Turin to Becchi, to Genoa, to Mornese, to many towns in Piedmont, with dozens and dozens of young people... Outings, games, the music, singing, theatre: these are substantial elements of the Preventive System which, also as a pedagogical method, embrace an appropriate and dynamic spirituality, the result of a convinced faith, hope, and charity, heavenly values right here on earth.

Heaven was always overlooking the firmament of Valdocco, day and night, with or without clouds. Witnessing to the values of reward today is an urgent prophecy for the world and especially for youth. What has the techno-industrial civilisation brought to the consumer society? A huge possibility of comfort and pleasure, with a consequent heavy sadness.

Among other things, we read in the Constitutions of the Salesians of Don Bosco – but it applies to every Christian – that “the Salesian [is] a sign of the power of the resurrection” and that “in the simplicity and hard work of daily life” he is “an educator who proclaims to the young ‘new heavens and a new earth’, awakening in them hope and the dedication and joy to which it gives rise.”<sup>37</sup>

In Mornese and Valdocco there were neither comforts nor dictatorships and everything breathed spontaneity and joy. Technical progress has facilitated many things today, but the true joy of human beings has not increased. Anguish has grown instead, nausea, a lack of meaning in life has become more acute, something unfortunately that we continue to observe – especially in affluent societies – in the tragic statistics of adolescent and youth suicides.

Today, in addition to the material poverty that still afflicts a very large portion of humanity, it is urgent to find a way to help young people see the meaning of life, the higher ideals, the originality of Jesus Christ.

Happiness, a fundamental human tendency, is sought, but the right path to it is no longer known, and then immense disillusionment grows.

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<sup>37</sup>SDB C. 63. See also E. VIGANÒ, “*Giving reason for the joy and commitments of hope, bearing witness to the unfathomable riches of Christ*”. *Strenna 1994. Rector Major's Commentary*, Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Rome 1993.



Young people, also due to the lack of significant adults, feel unable to face suffering, duty and constant commitment. The problem of fidelity to ideals and one's own vocation has become crucial. Young people feel unable to accept suffering and sacrifice. They live in an atmosphere in which the separation between love and sacrifice triumphs, so that the pursuit and achievement of wealth alone ends up stifling the ability to love and, therefore, to dream of the future.

Rightly, as we said, the diamond of reward is placed below the one of poverty, as if to indicate that the two complement and support each other. In fact, evangelical poverty entails a concrete and transcendent vision of the whole reality with a realistic perspective also regarding renunciation, suffering, setbacks, privation and pain.

What is the inner energy that allows one to face everything confidently and with a cheerful countenance, without getting discouraged? It is, ultimately, the sense of heaven's presence on earth. This sense proceeds from faith, hope and charity, which enables us to reread our whole life with the perspective of the Holy Spirit.

The world urgently needs prophets who proclaim the great truth of Paradise with their lives. Not some alienating escape, but an intense and stimulating reality!

Therefore, in the spirit of Don Bosco, there is a constant concern to cultivate familiarity with Paradise, almost as if to constitute the firmament of the mind, the horizon of the Salesian heart: we work and struggle, sure of a reward, looking towards our Homeland, the house of God, the Promised Land.

It should be made clear that the prospect of the reward does not consist, in some reductionist way, in the attainment of a kind of "recompense", some kind of consolation for a life lived amidst so many sacrifices, so much endurance... None of this! If it were just "recompense," it would resemble blackmail. But God doesn't work that way. In his love he can only offer human beings himself. This – as Jesus says – is eternal life: the knowledge of the Father. Where "knowing" means "loving", becoming fully partakers of God, in continuity with earthly existence lived "in grace", that is, in love for God and for our brothers and sisters.

We are invited to turn our gaze to Mary in this journey, who appears as daily help, Mother, forerunner and helper. Don Bosco was sure of her presence among us and wanted signs that remind us of it.

He built a Basilica for her, a centre for the animation and dissemination of the Salesian vocation. He wanted her image in our settings; he bound every apostolic initiative to her intercession and commented with emotion on her real and maternal effectiveness. We recall, for example, what he said to the Daughters of Mary Help of

Christians in the house at Nizza Monferrato: “Our Lady is truly here, here among you! Our Lady walks in this house and covers it with her mantle.”<sup>38</sup>

In addition to her, we also look for other friends in God’s house. Our Saints and Blesseds, starting with the faces that are most familiar to us and that are part of the so-called “Salesian garden”.

We are not making these choices to divide the great house of God into small private apartments, but rather to feel more easily at home and be able to speak of God, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, Christ and Mary, creation and history, not with the trepidation of those who have listened to the lofty lesson of a dense, difficult and even inscrutable thinker, but with that sense of familiarity and joyful simplicity with which we converse with those who have been our relatives, our brothers and sisters, our colleagues and our workmates. Some of them we have not met in life, but we feel close to them and they inspire us with particular confidence. Speaking with Saint Joseph, Don Bosco, Mother Mazzarello, Father Rua, Dominic Savio, Laura Vicuña, Father Rinaldi, Bishop Versiglia and Father Caravario; with Sister Teresa Valsè, Sister Eusebia Palomino, etc., really is an “in house”, family conversation.

This is what the diamond of reward suggests to us: to feel at home with God, with Christ, with Mary, with the Saints; to feel their presence in our own house, in a family atmosphere that gives a sense of Paradise to the daily settings of our life.

## **6. WITH... MARY, HOPE AND MATERNAL PRESENCE**

At the end of this commentary we can only but turn our hearts and gaze to the Virgin Mary, as Don Bosco taught us.

Hope requires confidence, the ability to surrender and trust.

In all this we have a guide and a teacher in Mary Most Holy.

She testifies to us that to hope is to trust and surrender, and it is true for this life as well as for eternal life.

On this journey Our Lady takes us by the hand, teaches us how to trust in God, how to give ourselves freely to the love passed on by her Son Jesus.

The direction and the “navigation map” that she presents us with is always the same: “Do whatever he tells you.”<sup>39</sup> An invitation that we take up every day in our lives.

We see the achievement of the reward in Mary.

Maria embodies the attractiveness and concreteness of the Reward in herself:

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<sup>38</sup> G. CAPETTI, *Il cammino dell’Istituto nel corso di un secolo. Vol. I*, FMA, Roma 1972-1976, 122.

<sup>39</sup> *Jn* 2:5.

“on the completion of her earthly sojourn, [she] was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen of the universe, that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and the conqueror of sin and death.”<sup>40</sup>

On her lips we can read some beautiful expressions from Saint Paul. Since they are inspired by the Holy Spirit, Mary’s Spouse, they are certainly shared by her.

Here they are:

“It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”<sup>41</sup>

Dear sisters and brothers, dear young people,  
Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco and all our Saints and Blesseds are close to us in this extraordinary year. May they accompany us in living the demands of the Jubilee at depth, helping us to place the person of Jesus Christ “the Saviour announced in the gospel, who is alive today in the Church and in the world”<sup>42</sup> at the centre of our lives.

May they encourage us, following the example of the first missionaries sent by Don Bosco, to make our lives always and everywhere a free gift for others, especially for the young and among them the poorest.

Finally, a wish: that this year the prayer for peace, for a peaceful humanity, may grow in us. Let us invoke the gift of peace – the biblical *shalom* – which contains all others and finds fulfilment only in hope.

My warmest best wishes,

Father Stefano Martoglio S.D.B.  
*Vicar of the Rector Major*

Rome, 31 December 2024

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<sup>40</sup> *LG*, 59.

<sup>41</sup> *Rom* 8:34-39.

<sup>42</sup> *SDB C.* 196.