



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE SALESIAN SOCIETY OF SAINT JOHN BOSCO (SALESIANS)**

*Clementine Hall
Monday, 31 March 2014*

Dear Brothers,

Welcome! I thank Don Angelo for his words. I hope that he and the new General Council will ably serve the Salesian Congregation by leading, by guiding and supporting it along its journey. May the Holy Spirit help you to grasp the expectations and challenges of our time, especially those of young people, and interpret them in the light of the Gospel and your charism.

I imagine that during the Chapter — which had as its theme “*Witnesses of the Gospel’s radical demands*” — you had ever before you Don Bosco and the young; and Don Bosco with his motto: *Da mihi animas, cetera tolle*. He strengthened this programme with two other elements: work and temperance. I remember that at boarding school it was forbidden to take a siesta!... *Temperance!* For the Salesians and for us! “Work and temperance” — he said — “will make the Congregation flourish”. When one thinks of working for the good of souls one overcomes the temptation to spiritual worldliness, one does not seek after other things, but only God and his Kingdom. Temperance, then, is a sense of proportion, being content, being simple. May the poverty of Don Bosco and of Mamma Margherita inspire every Salesian and each of your communities to live an austere life based on the essentials, on closeness to the poor, on transparency and responsibility in managing temporal goods.

The evangelization of youth is the mission which the Holy Spirit has entrusted to you in the Church. It is intimately joined with their *education*: the journey of faith is inserted into that of their growth and the Gospel also enriches human maturation. It is necessary to prepare young people to work in society in harmony with the spirit of the Gospel as workers of justice and peace, and to live as active members of the Church. You therefore avail yourselves of needed pedagogical and cultural advancements and updates in order to respond to the current educational crisis. May Don

Bosco's experience and his "preventative system" always sustain you in your commitment to life with the young. May your presence among them be distinguished by that tenderness which Don Bosco called fondness, employing other forms of language too, but well aware that that language of the heart is fundamental for approaching and befriending them.

The vocational dimension here is fundamental. Sometimes a vocation to the consecrated life is confused with a choice of volunteer work, and this distorted view is not good for Institutes. Next year — 2015 — which has been dedicated to the consecrated life, will be a favourable occasion to present its beauty to young people. Partial visions should always be avoided so as not to arouse vocational responses that are frail and based on weak motives. Apostolic vocations are ordinarily the result of good youth ministry. Caring for vocations requires *specific attention*: first prayer, then activities, personalized programmes, courage in making the proposal, guidance and family involvement. The vocational geography has changed and is changing, and consequently more demanding formation, guidance and discernment is needed.

In working with young people, you encounter the world of excluded youth. And this is dreadful! Today, it is dreadful to think that there are more than 75 million unemployed young people here, in the West. Let us consider the vast reality of unemployment, with its many negative consequences. Let us think about the dependencies, which unfortunately are many but which derive from the common root of a lack of true love. Reaching out to young people who have been marginalized requires courage, human maturity and much prayer. The best should be sent to do this work! The best! There can be a risk of getting caught up in enthusiasm, sending people to these frontiers who are keen, but not suitable. Careful discernment and constant guidance are therefore needed. The criterion is this: the best go there. "I need this one to be a superior here, or to study theology...". But if you have that mission, send him there! The best!

Thanks be to God, you do not live or work as isolated individuals but as a community: and thank God for this! The community supports the whole of the apostolate. At times religious communities are fraught with *tensions*, and risk becoming individualistic and scattered, whereas what is needed is deep communication and authentic relationships. The humanizing power of the Gospel is witnessed in *fraternity lived* in community and is created through welcome, respect, mutual help, understanding, kindness, forgiveness and joy. The family spirit that Don Bosco left to you helps greatly in this respect, it promotes perseverance and draws people to the consecrated life.

Dear brothers, the bicentenary of the birth of Don Bosco is almost upon us. It will be a propitious moment to propose your Founder's charism anew. Mary Help of Christians has never failed to help the Congregation, and certainly she will never let it be lacking in the future. May her maternal intercession obtain from God the desired and longed for results. I bless you and pray for you, and, please, pray for me too! Thank you!

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