

With Don Bosco Towards the 2015 World Elective Assembly

SEVENTH NUCLEUS Words of Don Riccardo Tonelli to the Delegates and Past Pupils of the FMA

Dearest Past Pupils, we have started the year 2015, the year of the celebration of the bicentenary of the birth of Don Bosco (1815 – 2015) and the year of Consecrated Life as declared by our dear Pope Francis. We have prepared for 2015 through a three-year study and deepening of the life and spirituality of Don Bosco. It is a moment to pause and ask ourselves, as members of the Salesian Family, how was my journey in preparation for this grand event?

I would like to propose the reading and deepening of the 2015 Strenna of our dear Rector Major: “Like Don Bosco with the young and for the young” (www.sdb.org) and visit Becchi, the birthplace of Don Bosco, for those who can.

Let us continue our journey with Don Bosco towards the World Assembly in Mornese. All details regarding this event can be found in our website www.exallievfma.org and even the formative nuclei in the section “associative life.” The seventh nucleus brings us to immerse ourselves in Salesian spirituality, the foundation of our lives on the way to holiness. We have chosen the message that Don Riccardo Tonelli SDB, expert in Youth Ministry, offered us as his last spiritual gift during the European Congress of the Past Pupils in Rome (8-10 September 2013). The Lord of Life called him to eternity on October 1, 2013. We want to say our thanks to him as we remember his spiritual message.

Words of Don Riccardo Tonelli “The Salesian Spirit, the driving force of the family for the society”

I was asked for a theme and for an audacious and challenging title:

- the perspective is taken from the task: to think about the theme of the Salesian spirituality, allowing us to be challenged by serious and grave problems;
- to recognize that the rediscovery of the Salesian spirituality can provide a valuable contribution to address situations in crisis;
- to revisit and deepen the theme of the Salesian spirituality, in order to understand how and in what conditions it can offer valuable tools for intervention.

A discovery as a gift of the Spirit

The term "spirituality" seems to refer only to some aspects of life (those of "religious" nature, and contrary to those related to the logic of "professional competence"). In the experience and in the reflection on the Salesian spirituality we realized that this perspective would not work. And so we started searching, thinking and experimenting, to find a new experience where we can give back the joy and responsibility of being serious disciples of Jesus and at the same time, people engaged in everyday life, in real contact with the people of our time.

And the Salesian spirituality project was born. Designed for the young people, it has produced the rediscovery of a general model of spirituality. I am talking about the shared journey, in order to re-launch and motivate the proposal.

The key question

Our research on spirituality created two basic questions that continually challenge our existence, aware that only a mature response to these questions could make a difference and qualify a project of spirituality:

- God, who are you ... for us?
- Me, who am I ... in your project?

In order to put ourselves in safe footing, we addressed the questions to the disciples of Jesus, convinced that only through sharing the fragments of their life, could we come up with answers, even those only theoretical, which are able to reconstruct a spirituality. We discovered a page for meditation: Acts 3 and 4.

The perspective of the Incarnation

The meditation on this page of the "Acts" has led us to rediscover the Incarnation event as the root and foundation of a project of spirituality which is authentically evangelical.

a. The communication model

Jesus has a way of speaking about God that puts into "crisis":

- the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who thought they knew God because they knew the Scriptures and from this knowledge they judged Jesus;
- Jesus declares that the only decisive revelation of God is He himself (his life, works and words ...); base on these they should have verified and reformulated their idea of God.

b. the content

The responses of Jesus radically overturned the current logic:

- From the face of God to the face of suffering and disfigured slave and the "suffering servant" (Phil. 2); from the God of power, which manifests strongly as force or who wants compliance with the law at all costs, to the God who loves gratuitously and makes the first step to reach out.
- Gives face to the person, recognizing the dignity of each person. They called him "friend of sinners and tax collectors" to accuse him ... instead in this accusation is found the revelation of who a person is in God's plan, in the dignity re-acknowledged and restored starts a more radical conversion.

I invite you to ponder the first verses of Luke 15: Jesus tells the three parables of God's face (lost sheep, lost coin, merciful father) to justify his actions. Echoing the experience of his disciples, as witnessed in the Gospels, we call all this with a formula: "the perspective of the Incarnation." The Incarnation is no longer just one of the many events of Jesus' life; it represents the perspective from which to understand them all.

Spirituality as Vocation

The perspective of the Incarnation helps us to rediscover the fundamental meaning of spirituality:

- is "lived" concretely and daily
- therefore it is the daily life lived in the Spirit that Jesus has given us
- in a way that the mystery of life resounds in our existence

The vocation

The answer to the question "Who am I? What am I here for" must be able to unify our entire existence, too often fragmented into a thousand different aspects and moments.

It is born from a constant reference to the life of Jesus and what the Gospels tell us of him.

What is Jesus' cause? How did it influence your life?

The cause of Jesus is very clear, it has impassioned his entire life and brought him to his death on the cross: to bring life where there is death, in the name and for the glory of God. As he himself said, he has

made the cause of his life, "full and abundant" for all (Jn. 10, 10), the "pearl of great price" to buy one, one should be willing to sell the rest (Mt. 13, 45-46).

What is the "Kingdom of God"?

To say all of these, the gospel uses a precise formula: the Kingdom of God. They remember Jesus especially for his passion for the Kingdom of God. They claim that Jesus is the man of the "Kingdom of God". We are here to build, with Jesus and like him, the "kingdom of God." This is the global project of existence that everyone holds. Of course, we must agree on the meaning to be given to this formula ... if it is life at stake, we cannot allow the risk of being in the wrong direction.

Today, to say the "kingdom of God" we think in a deeper and shared way of the mystery of God and of man.

- The Kingdom of God is recognition of the sovereignty of God over every man and throughout history, and that only in God can one possibly have life and happiness. This God however, of which we proclaim the absolute Lordship, is all for man. He wants a meaningful future for humankind. His goal and expression of His "glory" is the life and happiness of persons.
- Man recognizes Him as Lord when he commits himself to promote life and hope.
- Jesus' goal therefore is a person's abundance and fullness of life in the name of God: a man that is helped and urged to walk with a head held up high, able to live happily in the city of all, entrusted to God in hope, because it is only in God that we no longer have the fear of death.

The purpose of life is entrusted to us

The task that the Father has entrusted to him, Jesus gave it to his disciples. Jesus said to his friends: "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you" (Jn. 20, 21). Linking each person results to a large chain of people committed to the salvation of the world. The disciples call other persons and send them out. And so the chain of those called stretches out: the new disciples call others with the same passion with which they pronounced their yes to the invitation, and send them out. The task entrusted to us is the same that has captivated the existence of Jesus: the purpose of life. According to this task, a Christian measures his/her existence. We are and we exist in order to continue to serve life, as Jesus did.

On Behalf of the kingdom of God in Jesus' way: "Mere Servants"

Jesus recommends a fundamental attitude, decisive to serve the purpose of life as he did. This goes also to all of you! When you have done all you have been commanded, say: "We are only servants. We did what we had to do." (Lk. 17, 10)

The recommendation is of extreme importance to the quality of service to life and of the consequences for life itself. Jesus has a special way of serving ... no one of us can just invent it ... but we have to invent today that which is faithful to the way of Jesus.

He urges us towards a basic attitude: like Mary, we are "mere servants." The Kingdom of God is the fullness of life for every person. This fullness is the fruit of the passionate work of God to give birth to life where there is death. It is his gift, free and unpredictable. But it is a special gift: it urges and supports the responsible cooperation of every person of good will. It requires that every commitment to life be made "according to his plan" because he is the fullness of life and only in him and in his "way" can we build lives in authenticity.

The Salesian dimension of Spirituality

We have come to an important first step in a journey that allows us to rediscover the fundamental meaning of spirituality. The rediscovery of a plan of spirituality by the disciples of Jesus must now be materialized in a Salesian Plan of spirituality in order to determine how to act to be able to build the kingdom of God and how to serve the purpose of life "at the school of Don Bosco." In the story that I'm telling ... we did it with joy and responsibility.

Remembering wisely

Going deeper today, we discover the many beautiful things that show the progressive realization of God's plan in history, but we also discover the signs of death that unfortunately happens in our time. Even the disciples of Jesus experienced in their daily life a series of provocations that require answers and urgent interventions. How to intervene? We certainly cannot remain undisturbed in the presence of the signs of death and challenges. We feel a strong need to act with courage, knowing how to get to the root of evil.

The possibilities for intervention are many. It becomes urgent to choose, knowing where to stand in the right place and time. How to intervene? At this level, we find the Salesian charism. It helps us to see what are the signs of life and what are the signs of death. And above all, it suggests a precise way to take action to change the reality. We are urged towards a "wise" way of remembering:

- the choice to "remember" in order to find in the past (a life lived in suffering and glory, with so many of our friends) suggestions and inspiration to decipher and to deal with the problems of today;
- a special way to remember to avoid the risk of choosing the nostalgic way and the repetition of a season where everything seems so different from what we have experienced and accomplished.

Remembering Don Bosco "wisely", we discover some important dimensions of the "Salesian spirituality." I remember a few of them, those that relate more directly to the questions placed in the title of these reflections.

The trust on education

We want that triumph of life over death be always tangible, while impossible in the prevailing mentality, it becomes progressively possible in the logic of Christ Crucified and Risen.

The ways that make this commitment concretely applicable are many. Don Bosco has taught one very special thing: education, according to the ways that he and the first Salesians have called it "the preventive system."

The choice of educating runs throughout spirituality as the Salesian way to realize commitment in each professional profile. We who want to live a spirituality committed to the service of God's purpose for the sake of man. We make education our passion, the style of our presence, the privileged instrument of our advocacy. we organize our resources around education. In the name of education, the "Salesian Youth Spirituality" calls on all people of good will and to public institutions for the promotion of man and for political and cultural transformation.

Taking our chances of hope in education, we know how to be faithful to the Lord according to the heart of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello. As he did, we believe in the efficacy of the small way for renewal to happen in both personal and collective aspects, and we believe that the person is the subject of renewal.

Hope "in spite of all"

The believer will always be unique even if he finds himself with other people who are committed like him to the promotion of life and the merging of hope. The believer's experience of faith comes from the testimony of the cross and a hope that goes beyond all human wisdom. This urges him to adopt attitudes,

make gestures and words that are uniquely his. He is no longer able to understand those who are only trekking the path of today's logic.

It is not easy to say what attitudes compel the believer to be in solitude while amidst the crowd. This Gospel story is certainly striking: "When they arrived in the crowd, a man approached Jesus, knelt before him and said, 'Lord, have mercy on my son. He is epileptic and when he is in crisis, he often falls into the fire and into the water. I have seen your disciples, but they could not cure him.'

Then Jesus answered: 'Wicked and faithless people! How long must I stay with you? how long can I bear all of you? Bring the boy to me.'

Jesus rebuked the evil spirit: that came out of the boy, and from that hour the boy was cured. Then the disciples came to Jesus, they took him aside and asked him: 'Why we have not been able to drive out the evil spirit?'

Jesus answered: 'Because you do not have faith. If you have so much faith like that of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, Move from here to there, and the mountain will move. Nothing will be impossible for you'." (Mt. 17, 14-20).

Life was at stake: that poor sick boy was seemingly dead. Jesus was bothered because he saw his disciples powerless and resigned to the impending death. He could not stand the victory of death over life. He recognized that this challenge is not easy. Because of this he asked that this problem be abandoned to the great mystery of God. Here the impossible immediately becomes possible. And life triumphs.

Jesus did not only say and accomplish this for others. He believed in the victory of life and liberty in the name of the Father, even in the face of a violent death. Like all of us, he suffered and wept. He shouted all his faith. He has finally conquered death for all of us.

The impossible has become possible for him, for his many friends, for us, because they believed in life and have built in the little things, the signs of great promise.

To the disappointed disciples, Jesus did not suggest a smarter remedy. He summoned instead what faith as small as a mustard seed can do to move mountains. It seems to say that there are no better remedies than a passage from what is apparent to a mystery that lies within. Only in this level, sure and definite, that the impossible victory against death becomes possible.

Daily Contemplatives

We have seen, in faith, that our lives and the world around us is filled with a deep and intense mystery, which is its dimension of truth. We live immersed in God, in the death and resurrection of Jesus. It takes profound seeing, listening and meditation, to discern the meaning of reality beyond appearances. We need silence to penetrate into ourselves, to go beyond impressions, perceptions, resonances and come to the mystery of God and of ourselves.

This is the inner experience of the "Salesian Youth Spirituality": most intimate and personal space, where all voices can resonate, but where everyone has to decide, individually and empty, free of all the securities that gives comfort in suffering. The decision and the renewal of personality are rather born in a space of inner solitude, that allows, evaluates, and renders concretely the "coherence" the unifying choices of its own existence.

The inner being is the place of the Spirit of Jesus who speaks from silence and is called to silence. It is not easy. We need to help each other to attain a new capacity for asceticism that makes us adept to contemplate reality, from the mystery that is carried interiorly. To contemplate is to pierce through things

in order to fully own them, knowing how to combine what you see and what is invisible to the distracted and superficial eyes.

Contemplation is not a reserved gesture for special times, nor special moments. It is about the entire life of a person, because God is present all throughout life and we have to find and meet Him. He who contemplates "in the" daily makes room for God. Instead he who becomes contemplative "of the" daily, recognizes the sacramental nature of his whole life.

Contemplated, life is our book, the place where we see God, the space of our discipleship.

Contemplating it, we find more reason to assume an intense passion for this life.

Worksheet for the Council of the Confederation, the Federation, and the Union, and for all the Past-Pupils of the World

You will find the seventh nucleus and the others in the section "associative life" in the website of the Confederation www.exallievfma.org. Please send your answers to your personal work or group work by e-mail to maritzafma@yahoo.com or by postal mail in this address: Via dell'Ateneo Salesiano, 81 - 00139 Rome RM.

- Read carefully the text of the Seventh Nucleus: "Words of Don Riccardo Tonelli".
- Which operational actions can you suggest to the group in order to live in everyday life some dimensions of Salesian spirituality: trust in education, hope and contemplation in the daily.
- Conclude the meeting by praying Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd.