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Nucleus 33

Friendship and solidarity

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Loving-kindness, which strengthens the bonds of friendship, builds the family spirit and creates solidarity (Statute 4.3, b)

In any part of the world, at any time, when a Past Pupil enters a Salesian house/school, she feels at home. Informative meetings at international or world level, past pupils of different ages and backgrounds easily socialize, feeling immediately as friends and sisters, heirs and participants of the same charisma. Many friendships, born in the school or at the Oratory or in other Salesian structures, are destined to last for life, to grow stronger over time, to become points of reference in the difficulties, in the happy or sad moments of the human experience. Besides, in the great family of the Past Pupils, those who actively participate in the associative life build over time new, intense and lasting friendships because they are based on the spirit of collaboration, on the need to do well.

Friendship, together with prayer, is one of the aspects of Mother Mazzarello's spirituality that influenced her formation. We only think of her relationship with Petronilla, the cousin/friend with whom she shared dreams and research, concerns and joys. Maria understood that Petronilla was the person with whom she could more easily share mutual help in the practice of virtue and chose her as a friend; together they would realize a dream that, for two women of the nineteenth century, might have seemed crazy. Friendship and sharing are the basis of the work of Don Bosco himself, who had said to the young Michele Rua, who had just arrived at the Oratory: "Michelino, you and I will do half of everything."

Friendship and solidarity are two aspects of the family spirit of the Salesian charism. They appear in the first regulations of the Association, as founding elements of the life of the Past Pupils of the FMA. "To relive the memory of the past years in the Oratory encouraging one another to persevere in good principles as well as in their role as family women; to give moral assistance to companions who are starting a new family, and to visit former companions when they fall sick and give them the support they need, as much as possible", so Don Rinaldi, wrote at the beginning.

Since then, the Association, says Mother Yvonne, has lived a very rich history, made of friendship, solidarity, passion, organization, even if the levels of participation of the members are diversified. Past Pupils are never unknown people. It is seen when an FMA finds, at any gathering, celebration, or occasionally, one of them, perhaps for the first time. In their gaze, there is like a business card: "I am a past pupil". A climate of familiarity and sharing is immediately created. This sharing supports in situations of difficulty that life presents and is translated into the mutual aid of which don Rinaldi spoke. No past pupil should be indifferent to other members: solitude, illness, material or spiritual difficulties call you directly. Taking care is a great gesture of love! It is like a quality stamp that allows us to recognize ourselves.

Feeling like sisters and brothers, worthy of love, creates a reciprocity that enriches and promotes. We are called by God to witness the beauty and the joy of growing through humanizing relationships, to be the open house of the Father of which we are all children, where there is a place for everyone, despite the toils and problems of life (cf. EG, 47, 183).

At the beginning of the history of the Association and for a long time, one of the tasks of the members of the local Union was to go and find the companions that were not present, especially those who were materially or spiritually needy, to invite them to return to the house where they had been educated, and helped.

Fraternity, joy and the desire for good, lived together, become occasions for encounter and reciprocity in which frailties are welcomed with mercy, favoring a process of healing and self-giving. "Friendship lived and shared opens the heart to those who knock on our door, enables us to overcome an individualistic vision of life, helps young people understand that it is possible to live in community and testifies to the dynamism that transforms Christianity", says Pope Francis.

The fraternal friendship of the past pupils is consolidated, and the members merge into a "we" always available, even outside the group. Friendship strengthens unity in the face of difficulties. In this way, Don Rinaldi's dream for the Association is fulfilled: "You must help yourself in life as sisters. I would like you to be able to organize yourselves by also forming special social assistance. I would like that in any need of life everyone can count on an effective and generous help in the groups of past pupils, I would like no past pupils to feel alone and forgotten in the world, but that she/he can always find understanding and support in the companions who have more possibilities ". And again: " If you want, one day, the world, admiring your union in faith and mutual help, they will exclaim how once the pagans exclaimed observing the mutual charity of the first Christians: "Only Christians know how to love each other like this." Only Christians know how to be true friends: people who perceive the difficulties of the others, who open their eyes to look at humanity in the face, who create meaningful relationships, bridges of friendship and solidarity, people who know your hands, accompany you and lift you up.

- What does this content awaken in you?
- Which values of friendship do you find stronger in you? What would be important to strengthen?
- How do you live today, what experiences from the first Past Pupils may help you?

Pray and share with the sisters and companions what life has made you known

(From <https://es.aleteia.org/2015/06/26/oracion-de-amistad/>)

Lord:

How nice it is to need people, others.

You have made us limited.

And friendship is a requirement of this limitation.

Well, the limitation requires friendship.

It is this human limitation by divine grace,
that makes us walk to meet us!

It is this human limitation by divine grace,
that makes us less selfish, self-sufficient,
and more humble!

You know, sir,

I feel alone,
defenseless, incomplete, weak and limited;
this need of the other,

leads us inexorably to pure friendship: to you.

Well, you are dialogue, love, communication, and donation!

"In a world that is deserted

we must find a friend”.

And what we need most in life

comes from someone who leads us to execute

what can and should we do.

And it is in this that the function of the true friend consists.

Thank you, Lord, for all that is in our community and us.

Teach us to be a sign and an instrument of your friendship for everyone.

Amen.

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