

2021 SALESIAN MISSION DAY

MISSIONARY SOLIDARITY AS INITIAL PROCLAMATION



ONE
FATHER
ONE
FAMILY

SECTOR FOR SALESIAN MISSIONS

WWW.SDB.ORG



EXPLANATION OF THE POSTER:

"One Father, One family": to make this motto a reality, we all need to recognise each other as brothers and sisters and be in solidarity with one another. In the poster of SMD 2021 there are five young people from different countries and cultures, female and male, side by side, with their hands converging towards the same point, **united in diversity**. The joy of their faces is the joy of those who give themselves for those most in need recognising themselves as part of one human family where we are all brothers and sisters because we are children of one God, our Father. The Good Shepherd is the reference point of **solidarity that becomes mission**. As Christians we are called to go out to meet our most needy brothers and sisters and to be close to all of them. This missionary solidarity is intimately linked to initial proclamation because the most important thing we can offer is precisely to foster an encounter with Jesus. The rosary on the wrist of a young person expresses devotion to Mary Help of Christians and the importance of prayer, essential elements of our Christian identity which we are called to transmit. Don Bosco is besides the Good Shepherd. He is close to young people all over the world in order to lead them to Jesus Christ.



As a biblical passage, the Gospel of Luke chapter 6 verses 27-36 propose to us a universal and gratuitous love that knows no boundaries. Many people around the world have shown this in the past months, since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic at the beginning of last year: all of us can extend our hands towards our brothers and sisters to be one great **family in solidarity**.

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TOWARDS A TRULY MISSIONARY SOLIDARITY

11 November 2020


My dearest Salesian confreres from all over the world, young people and members of the Educative-Pastoral Communities, Greetings to all of you on this special day for our Family.

Like Don Bosco, we are called to carry out our work in a time of great social change. Today's world suffers particularly from the COVID-19 pandemic and our great "global village" is often divided into many small "villages" that look at each other with suspicion, building new walls to "defend themselves" from others.

From the perspective of faith, however, we can recognise the gifts of the Lord at this time of crisis. The pandemic has made us rediscover our bonds: we are all part of one family, brothers and sisters, children of one heavenly Father. No one saves himself or herself and we need each other.

This situation leads us to be in solidarity with others and pushes us towards meeting those most in need, awakening in us apostolic creativity. In keeping with the Strenna, the theme of the Salesian Mission Day on missionary solidarity becomes an opportunity, a "place" where we can all find and practice hope: the Salesians, young people and all members of the Educative-Pastoral Communities, no one is excluded.

Don Bosco also faced challenges similar to the one we are experiencing now, like the cholera pandemic in 1854. In a situation that seemed desperate, Don Bosco was able to instill hope by involving his boys in a real contest of



missionary solidarity, always animated by deep faith. The awareness that God never abandons his people provoked acts of courage that were not limited to the material needs of people. Don Bosco's far-sighted vision has transformed young people into protagonists of solidarity with the other poorer and needier youth.

This was Don Bosco's missionary genius: his actions of solidarity were always opportunities to evangelise both the recipients and the benefactors themselves!

Let us learn from Don Bosco that missionary solidarity goes hand in hand with faith. As Pope Francis reminds us, we are not just Institutions that provide social services. First and foremost, we are proclaimers of the Gospel to the young! The witness of solidarity prompts questions and spurs others to examine their own way of life, their values, and their priorities. While we do good, we can never renounce our Christian and charismatic identity, which is the true driving force behind our actions in solidarity. Let us journey together towards missionary conversion through a pedagogy of faith to move from closure to openness, from individualism to solidarity, from isolation to authentic encounter and from mere philanthropy to initial proclamation as a profound expression of our love for Jesus Christ.

Dear confreres and friends, may this Salesian Mission Day help us stir up Don Bosco's missionary ardour in our communities and always reflect the face of Jesus in our actions. May Mary Help of Christians and the holy missionaries of the Salesian Family accompany us in this beautiful mission!

Don Ángel Fernández Artime, SDB
Rector Major

PARTNERSHIP IN THE MISSIONS: PRAYER, SACRIFICE AND SOLIDARITY

Fr Alfred Maravilla SDB
General Councillor for Missions

Instead of a specific missionary reality, the theme of Salesian Mission Day this year leads us to rediscover that each of us can actively participate in the missionary activities of the Congregation, especially through prayer and the offering of sacrifices that come to us through illness or in ordinary daily life. Solidarity for the material and economic needs of the missionary activities of the Congregation is linked to prayer and sacrifice, and never isolated from them.

St Paul VI reminded us that “the task of evangelising all peoples constitutes the essential mission of the Church....Evangelising is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelise” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14).

But evangelisation is deeply linked to human promotion. Since man is not an abstract being, evangelising him also implies promoting his authentic growth. Indeed, Jesus commanded his disciples: “Give them food yourselves” (*Mk 6,37*). This means that every Christian is called to form a mentality that translates into an attitude of active collaboration in promoting the integral development of the



poor, especially through simple, daily gestures of solidarity.

Missionary solidarity is far removed from the paternalistic attitude of welfarism. It promotes initiatives to help the poorest and enable them to gradually take responsibility for their own integral development. On the one hand, there is never charity without justice. It demands and surpasses justice, because to love is to give, to offer "my own" to others. On the other hand, justice is "inseparable from charity" and is intrinsic to it (*Caritas in Veritate*, 6). Precisely because we help the poorest, we cannot keep a closed eye on unjust situations that make them helpless victims.

This year's theme makes us understand that all of us can, in fact, make our contribution in helping the poorest, focusing on commitment and generosity, even if it may seem small and insignificant. Through these concrete gestures of charity, enlightened and inspired by faith, the donor is helped to put his faith into practice, while the recipient has a concrete experience of God's mercy. The clear intention of the donor to help out of love for Jesus, even without saying it, is the deciding factor in missionary solidarity. Therefore, through missionary solidarity both

This year's theme makes us understand that all of us can make our contribution in helping the poorest.



Fr Alfred Maravilla SDB



the donor and the recipient enrich and evangelise each other. The faith of each one grows, is strengthened and revitalised with “new enthusiasm and new motivations” (*Redemptoris missio*, 2). Thus, the activities of missionary solidarity become, for both the donor and the recipient, an initial proclamation and a precious opportunity to form them with the missionary sensitivity.

May the Salesian Mission Day be a fruitful occasion to sensitise everyone – Salesians, young people, lay people, members of the Salesian family – to participate actively in the missionary activities of the Congregation through our prayers, sacrifices and concrete gestures of solidarity.

EXAMPLES OF YOUTH SOLIDARITY

*In 2018 in **Papua New Guinea** the students of Don Bosco Technical School at Port Moresby collected tin cans and sold them for recycling, while the students of Don Bosco Simbu Technical College organised fun games. The funds collected were sent to the SMD Project which was the construction of a training centre in Myanmar.*

*In 2019 the Salesians in **Vietnam** invited people, especially youth, to contribute for the SMD Project of building a chapel in Palabek, Uganda by paying for the cost of one brick.*

In 2020, several young people from our Salesian houses all over the world were involved in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

*In the Borgo Ragazzi Don Bosco in Rome, **Italy**, the young people of the oratory met to collect food parcels to distribute to the people most in need, providing material goods and free time for the most needy.*

*The young animators of the Salesian House St. Anthony of Padua in Cordoba, **Argentina**, started the campaign “Por los Jovenes” (for young people) to create a network with institutions and organisations around the area to help families in difficulty. Through WhatsApp they were able to organise meetings and accompany boys and girls by helping them with their homework, orienting them or simply providing them with a space to share.*

SALESIAN MISSION DAY:

AN ONGOING TRADITION

What does it mean?

Since 1926 the Universal Church has celebrated World Mission Sunday. In 1988, the centenary of Don Bosco's death, Salesian Missionary Day (SMD) was launched where a missionary theme was proposed to the whole Salesian Congregation. All Salesian communities have the opportunity to learn about a specific mission reality. It is a powerful moment for mission animation in the local or provincial Salesian communities, in the Educative-Pastoral Communities (EPCs), in youth groups and in the Salesian Family. It is an opportunity to involve SDB communities and EPC in the dynamics of the universal Church, by **strengthening a missionary culture**.

Why?

To give an impulse to Mission Animation by offering a proposal that becomes a concrete annual project. To help all Salesians and the Salesian Family to learn about the missionary commitment of the Congregation, to open their eyes to new missionary realities, to overcome any temptation to close themselves within their own territory or context and be reminded of the universal breadth of the Salesian charism. "Activities aimed at promoting interest in the missions must always be geared to these specific goals; namely, informing and forming the People of God to share in the Church's universal mission, promoting vocations ad gentes and encouraging cooperation in the work of evangelisation" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 83).

When?

The proposal is that around November 11, the date of the first missionary send-off, we try to create communion in this missionary animation, just as the Universal Church does during the missionary month of October. Should this date really not be possible, the Province shall choose a date or period more suitable to its own rhythm of life and calendar. It is important to propose an educative and pastoral process that lasts a few weeks – of which the Salesian Mission Day is the culminating point. SMD is the expression of the missionary spirit of the whole Educative and Pastoral Community, and is kept alive throughout the year by various initiatives.

How is it animated?

It begins with a Rectors meeting where PDMA explains the objectives and distributes the materials available for SMD in the Province (www.sdb.org/Dicasteri/Missioni/Giornate_Missioni_Salesiane). Thus, all SDB communities are the first recipients of the SMD dynamics. Every year, attention is focused on a concrete aspect of missionary culture; praying for the missionaries presented in SMD and offering concrete economic support for the missions.





Who celebrates it?

The first recipient is the Salesian community and the EPC. Then, according to the different possibilities of the Provinces, there are various ways of organising it, adapting to the settings of the Salesian mission (schools, vocational training centres, parishes, youth groups, especially missionary groups or volunteers) and the Salesian Family (Salesian Cooperators, Past Pupils, ADMA Groups, etc.) and open to the whole Salesian movement and to the friends of Don Bosco.

What materials are available?

As was the case for the previous pastoral year, all Salesian communities are offered: a poster, printed material, videos with films on the subject, with didactic and audio-visual material in various languages. For printed material, contact the Missions Sector, Rome (cagliero11@sdb.org). The videos are available on YouTube, channel "Settore per le Missioni Salesiane".

The Importance of Prayer for the Missions

Missionary activity springs from and is sustained by the encounter with God. All members of the EPC contribute to the missionary activity of the



Congregation and the Church through prayer accompanied by sacrifices made for Salesian missionaries and missionary vocations. Every 11th of the month is an occasion to pray in the light of the monthly Salesian Missionary Intention. Each year, with the SMD theme, a specific prayer is proposed.

The SMD Project

Each year a project is proposed for the entire Congregation. This is an important part of SMD dynamics. The primary objective

SMD: An Ongoing Tradition (1988 – 2021)

1988 Guinea - Conakry: The dream continues

1989 Zambia: Project Lufubu

1990 Timor Leste - Venilale: Young Evangelisers

1991 Paraguay: Street children

1992 Peru-Valle Sagrado Incas: Christ lives on the Inca trails

1993 Togo-Kara: Don Bosco and Africa - a Dream Come True

1994 Cambodia-Phnom Penh: Missionaries, Builders of Peace

1995 India - Gujarat: In dialogue to Share the Faith

1996 Russia – Yakutsk: Lights of Hope in Siberia

1997 Madagascar: Young Man, I say to You, Arise

1998 Brazil: Yanomami: New life in Christ

1999 Japan: The Difficult Proclamation of Christ in Japan

2000 Angola: Gospel, Seed of Reconciliation

2001 Papua New Guinea: Walking with Young People

2002 Missionaries Among Young Refugees

2003 Commitment for Human Promotion in the Mission

2004 India - Arunachal Pradesh: The Awakening of a People

of the SMD project is not just to raise money. Instead it seeks to be an educative experience of concrete solidarity for young people. The Province Delegate for Missionary Animation (PDMA) promotes solidarity through various initiatives, in particular during the intense liturgical seasons of Advent and Lent and during the month of October, or as part of the SMD celebrations. The whole provincial community is equally invited to make a monetary contribution as an expression of missionary solidarity. It is highly appropriate that at the conclusion of the celebration of the SMD, whatever is collected is offered during the Eucharistic celebration, that is, as an offering to God, and for the Salesian missions.

Evaluation

The evaluation after the SMD is as important as the preparation and celebration. Consideration should be given to how SMD was able to foster and promote a missionary culture in the local or provincial community through the year's proposed theme, considering suggestions for improvement in the future.

2005 Mongolia: A New Missionary Frontier

2006 Sudan: The Salesian Mission in Sudan

2007 Sudan: The Salesian Mission in Sudan

2008 HIV/AIDS: The Salesians' Answer - Educating for Life

2009 Missionary animation - Keep Your Missionary Flame Alive

2010 Europe: The Salesians of Don Bosco walk with the Roma-Sinti

2011 America: Volunteers to Proclaim the Gospel

2012 Asia: Telling the Story of Jesus

2013 Africa: Journey of Faith

2014 Europe: We are the others - Salesian attention to Migrants

2015 Lord send me! - Salesian Missionary Vocation

2016 Come to our aid! Initial Proclamation and the New Frontiers in Oceania

2017...And they stayed with us: Initial Proclamation and the Indigenous peoples of America

2018 Whispering the Good News: Initial Proclamation and Vocational Training in Asia

2019 "Without knowing it, they hosted angels". Initial Proclamation among Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa

2020 Europe. Initial Proclamation through Oratories and Youth Centres. "Rejoice..."

2021 One Father, One Family - Missionary Solidarity as Initial Proclamation

THE THEME FOR SALESIAN MISSION DAY 2021

Initial Proclamation

The Initial Proclamation can be defined as the witness of life of every Christian and of the entire Christian community or a set of activities that foster an overwhelming and exhilarating experience of Jesus that can lead to an initial adherence to Him or to the revitalisation of faith in Him.

The Witness of Charity

The witness of charity and the sincere service of every Christian lived with faith, hope and love become a revelation of the merciful face of Jesus. They are primary means of initial proclamation because they inspire, solicit questions and challenge the other to examine his or her own way of life, his or her values and priorities.

The Christian witness that is expressed through concrete commitment to help the sick, the hungry, the marginalised, the oppressed, the struggle for justice, peace, the integrity of creation, etc., through the inspiration of the Spirit, are initial proclamation.





This witness is rooted in the fundamental attitude of respect and appreciation of the human and religious values of followers of other religions who do not know Christ. The witness of charity never causes violence to the conscience of the person nor is it allowed to degenerate into proselytism. In fact, the truth is not in anyone's total possession, nor can it be imposed on others. If a sincere conversion takes place, it is a fruit of the action of the Spirit and not the result of human effort.

Three Important Elements

Initial proclamation focuses on the following elements:

- the person of the **Christian believer**, who lives his faith with commitment as disciple-missionary;
- the personal encounter with **Jesus Christ** of the believer that gives birth to faith in Him;
- the **Holy Spirit** who is the true protagonist of initial proclamation, who works as he wishes, when he wishes and where he wishes.

Then, what counts most is to live one's life as a Christian with missionary sensitivity through a concrete commitment to help the most in need.

For Love of Jesus Christ

It is the intention to do works of charity out of love for **Jesus Christ** that makes these meritorious and a reflection of God's merciful love. **If this faith perspective is missing, our works of charity lose their Christian meaning,** these cease to be an initial proclamation and we become just **mere social workers or an NGO**, not missionaries of Jesus Christ!

Missionary Solidarity

This year's SMD aims to promote solidarity for the poorest, so that they can live worthily as true children of God. By raising the awareness of children, young people, families, Salesians and all members of the EPC, as baptised, to be protagonists of the missions. By responding to the needs of their neighbour, they learn the value and strength of solidarity and mutual support and make the missionary spirit bloom in them. This missionary spirit forms them to be missionary disciples in the society where they live in.

Promoting missionary solidarity among children, young people, families and Salesians

- **Prayer:** promote prayer, especially on mission day every 11th of the month, for the spreading of the Gospel, perhaps for a specific context with the help of the monthly Salesian missionary intention.
- **Collection:** this can be done through different initiatives to raise funds by focusing on the commitment and generosity of each one, even if it may seem small and insignificant. Some examples can be raffles, selling the products of the children, promoting the creation of 'mission coin boxes' and other initiatives to help the poorest. These initiatives of solidarity are fundamental and useful to help everyone understand that we must learn to break the bread we find on our tables every day. Then this "collection" is sent to the

FATHER

Project this year: Salesian Health Centre in Sudan run by the Sisters of Charity of Jesus (SCG).

- ***Missionary Witness:*** Thanks to these expressions of solidarity, many poor people can eat, take care of themselves and, above all, many children, young people and families can bear witness with concrete gestures to God's love for the whole human family.
- ***Missionary vocation:*** solidarity initiatives serve to help children, young people, families and Salesians to understand that our faith must first and foremost be witnessed. These initiatives of solidarity, in turn, offer the favourable conditions for the birth of the missionary vocation.



SOLIDARITY AND CHRISTIAN FAITH

The principle of solidarity is now more necessary than ever.

In an interconnected world, we experience what it means to live in the same "global village"; this expression is beautiful. The big wide world is none other than a global village, because everything is interconnected, but we do not always transform this *interdependence into solidarity*. There is a long journey between interdependence and solidarity. The selfishness — of individuals, nations and of groups with power — and ideological rigidities instead sustain "structures of sin" (*ibid.*, 36).

"The word 'solidarity' is little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity". Much more! "It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few" (*Evangelii gaudium*, 188). This is what "solidarity" means. It is not merely a question of helping others — it is good to do so, but it is more than that — it is a matter of justice (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1938-1949). Interdependence, to be in solidarity and to bear fruit, needs strong roots in humanity and in nature, created by God; it needs respect for faces and for the land.

The Bible, from the very beginning, warns us [of this]. Let us think of the story of the Tower of Babel (*Gen 11:1-9*), which describes what happens when we try to reach heaven — our destination — ignoring our bond with humanity, with creation and with the Creator. It is a figure of speech. This happens every time that someone wants to climb up and

up, without taking others into consideration. Just myself. ... Pentecost is diametrically opposite to Babel (*Acts 2:1-3*), as we heard at the beginning of the audience. The Holy Spirit, descending from above like wind and fire, sweeps over the community closed up in the Cenacle, infuses it with the power of God, and inspires it to go out and announce the Lord Jesus to everyone.

The Spirit creates unity in diversity; he creates harmony. In the account of the Tower of Babel, there was no harmony; only pressing forward in order to earn. There, people were simply instruments, mere “manpower”, but here, in Pentecost, each one of us is an instrument, but a community instrument that participates fully in building up the community.

With Pentecost, God makes himself present and inspires the faith of the community united in diversity and in solidarity. Diversity and solidarity united in harmony, this is the way. A diversity in solidarity possesses “antibodies” that ensure that the singularity of each person — which is a gift, unique and unrepeatable — does not become sick with individualism, with selfishness. Diversity in solidarity also possesses antibodies that heal social structures and processes that have degenerated into systems of injustice, systems of oppression (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 192). Therefore, solidarity today is the road to take towards a post-pandemic world, towards the healing of our interpersonal and social ills. There is no other way. Either we go forward on the path of solidarity, or things will worsen. I want to repeat this: one does not emerge from a crisis the same as before. The pandemic is a crisis. We emerge from a crisis either better or worse than before. It is up to us to choose. And solidarity is, indeed, a way of coming out of the crisis better, not with superficial changes, with a fresh coat of paint so



everything looks fine. No. Better!

In the midst of crises, a solidarity guided by faith enables us to translate the love of God in our globalized culture, not by building towers or walls — and how many walls are being built today! — that divide, but then collapse, but by interweaving communities and sustaining processes of growth that are truly human and solid. And to do this, solidarity helps. I would like to ask a question: do I think of the needs of others? Everyone, answer in your heart.

*(Excerpts from the Address of Pope Francis,
General Audience, September 2, 2020)*

MISSIONS:

OUR COMMON RESPONSIBILITY

Bp. Luc Van Looy SDB

President emeritus of Caritas Europa

Church is mission. Every Catholic community shares the responsibility for proclaiming the Gospel not only in our own area. This flows from the right of every human being to have the possibility to know Christ and follow him as a response to his great love. But our primary responsibility is to make the love of God known and to establish the Church in all contexts (*Ad Gentes*, 6). This responsibility concerns also the care for the development of peoples and cultures. The Creator has given every person the desire for an optimal growth. Pope John Paul II lists among many aspects also the concern for “the material and financial needs of the mission: not only to set up the Church with minimal structures, but also to support works of charity, education and human promotion. ... The missions ask not only for a contribution but for a sharing in the work of preaching and charity toward the poor” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 81).

The criterion for any missionary work is that which Jesus gave to the disciples: “You received without paying, give without pay.” (*Mt* 10, 5-10). However, it is clear that the money given by Christians in the first place, as a witness of their faith and generosity, is needed. This money ought to be spent for the foundation of the local Church and for the development of the people. In particular, money is needed for formation activities of priests, deacons and religious, for catechists, lay people and youth leaders. But money is also an ambiguous tool, tempting those in positions of authority to use it for their own development or to provide the missions with technological tools only for their use. Money can corrupt people. Instead, a missionary goes to proclaim God’s love through the Gospel. First of all “he has to be a person of prayer” (*Ad Gentes*, 25), giving himself or herself to the people in imitation of St. Paul: “I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content with whatever I have” (*Phil* 4, 11).

A missionary integrates in the culture, in the social condition of the people. Through the learning of the language he grows in depth into the customs and the mentality of the people. He shares his whole life with the people, he knows that "life itself – as well as material goods – does not belong to us but is given to us for our use" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 81).

We know that the missions are in need of financial assistance from NGOs and organisations worldwide. Also, in the context of the Church there are Mission Offices which specialise in the collection of funds for missionary work. Projects need to ensure that the first aim is to bring the gospel message to the people and that any development project is a direct contribution to the welfare of the people. For us Salesians this will be first and foremost in the form of education, at all levels of the population. Projects can profit from networking of Christians of different countries or between urban and rural communities. Voluntary initiatives and projects run by missions-oriented groups, also at the home country of the missionary, contribute to the sense of belonging to the universal Church as well as to the understanding of local situations of poverty and cultural differences. Groups of professionals and youth can dedicate their vacation time to the missions. In this way a shared responsibility will grow, and fundamental aspects of the life of the Church and of the faith will be experienced. Young catechists can share their faith with the people in the missions, often learning from them a new dimension of the faith. They will learn that missions mean giving of ourselves, of our goods and talents "as an offering made to God, in the eucharistic celebration and for all the missions of the world" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 81).

The celebration of the Eucharist, source and origin of the faith, "through which our redemption is realised" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 2), is the centre of all mission activity. The offerings we bring to the altar during the offertory procession are an answer to the call of the Gospel to build up the Church and to take care of the most needy. It creates the opportunity to communicate to the community its concrete contribution to the poor as well as its material reality and resources. In this way the gift of the body and blood of Christ becomes a real and tangible token of Gods' love to the people. Indeed, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (*Acts* 20, 35).

THE HOLY CHILDHOOD ASSOCIATION

In the mid-nineteenth century a French bishop, **Msgr. Charles de Forbin-Janson**, was shocked by news coming from China about children who died without having been baptised. Reminded that he could not leave personally as a missionary, he sought advice from **Pauline Jaricot**, founder of the Pontifical Work of Propagation of the Faith. The exchange of ideas between the two was enlightening and **Msgr. de Forbin-Janson** had the idea of involving the children of France so that they could help their Chinese peers through prayer and material collaboration. “One Hail Mary a day, a penny a month” was the commitment made from the very first moment by each child.

At that time, we were in 1843, and still today, making children protagonists of the life of the Church was a revolutionary idea. In a short time, many countries joined the initiative and the Work, from France, spread to Belgium, Spain, Italy and many other countries. On 3 May 1922 Pope Pius XI, aware of the great contribution that the Work had made to the missions in about eighty years, made it his own, recognising it as Pontifical. Today the *Pontifical Work of the Holy Childhood* has taken root in more than 150 countries.

Their motto is “**Children helping Children**”. Children in communities, orphanages, homes for the disabled, refugees, and those living on the streets are assisted by the generosity of children who wish to make the love of Jesus know everywhere. Educators, parents, catechists, young people help and guide the children in their missionary work. Children are friends of Jesus and they make friends for Jesus!

UNIVERSAL AND GRATUITOUS LOVE:

LECTIO DIVINA ON LK 6,27-36

Fr Martin Lasarte SDB

Let us reflect on the Word of God which invites us to have a great, merciful and universal heart like that of our heavenly Father.

²⁷ But I say to you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from him who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰ Give to every one who begs from you; and of him who takes away your goods do not ask them again. ³¹ And as you wish that men would do to you, do so to them. ³² If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵ But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. ³⁶ Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.



INTRODUCTION

This discourse of Jesus, present in Luke, corresponds to the “Sermon on the Mount” of Mt 5-7. We could call it “Sermon of the Kingdom” or “Sermon on the Plain”. There are similarities and differences proper to the theological sensitivity of every evangelist. The underlying theme is common: the behaviour of the disciples or the multitude following Jesus; the beginning with the beatitudes; the eschatological tension; the centrality of the theme on love of neighbour; the conclusion with the parable of the two houses; the discourse takes place in Galilee near a “mountain” and is done at the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry.

It seems that Luke preserves with greater purity the sequence of sayings from the common source that the two evangelists drew from. In Luke the recipients are not all those who come to listen to Jesus, but especially the disciples, whom he prepares to send on a mission to Galilee. Luke, addressing a pagan-Christian audience, omitted certain aspects more relevant to the Judeo-Christian community of Matthew (the theme of Jewish justice). Luke’s structure is more elusive than that of Matthew. J. Fitzmyer proposes the following division: (1) Beginning of the Beatitudes 20-26, (2) Love of neighbour, particularly to the enemies 27-36, (3) Judgement of others 37-42, (4) Doing good (43-45), (5) Concreteness of action 46-49.

This speech aims to define the behaviour of his future missionary-disciples. The use of the pronoun of the second person plural appears 13 times, indicating a strong incisiveness exhorted in the hearts of the apostles. At the same time, the passage is related to the mission of Jesus, to his discourse in the synagogue in Nazareth: the proclamation of the Good News to the poor, to prisoners, to the blind, to the oppressed.

The heart of the discourse is **love of neighbour** that must guide Christ’s disciples. The motivation is found only in the love

and mercy of God the Father. It is a love of universal breath, which also embraces enemies (27-36); to be lived in one's own Christian community, through forgiveness, avoiding judgement and criticism; such love demands action in a concrete and effective way.

"Love your enemies":

These revolutionary verses on the love of enemies open the door wide to a universal love, which embraces the enemies as well.

Who are the enemies? Here in the text they are those who hate, curse, treat badly, strike, take unfairly from the disciples. The field of recipients extends from Judaism to the pagan world; from the private and family sphere to the public sphere; from within the Church to outside the Church. In the context of the communities of Luke, those who oppose the Good New, rejecting the Christian name, are important.

It is a love marked by **universality** (*give to anyone*), by **gratuity** (*do good without hoping for anything*), it is **proactive** (*do good, give, help, lend*), patiently opposes **evil with good** (*offer your cheek, do not ask for your things back*) for a **theological motivation** (*because the Father is merciful*), with an **eschatological tension** (*your reward will be great*).

The verb **"to love"** (*agápaō*) appears 6 times indicating an active, disinterested and extraordinary benevolence, which is expressed at least in four other commands of verbs indicating activity in favour of enemies, in the sense of doing something concrete for them.

- "Do good" (*kalōs poieîte*) and its synonym "to help" (*agathopoieîte*). In Greek and Jewish literature, one finds the advice to do good to others even to enemies, instead here it is a command.
- "Bless" (*eulogeîte*). Unlike in the Old Testament and

Qumran, here it invites to bless the enemies. Also in Rom 12:14 the disciple is called to bless (1Cor 4:12; 1Pt 2:23).

- "Pray" (*proseúchesthe*) for persecutors (cfr. Mt 5:44).
- "Lend" (*danízete*), expresses a concrete operational love that goes to meet the economic needs, even of enemies.

Overcome evil with good. There are two other verbs that express what to do in the face of enemy's aggression: With gentleness and patience "offer the other cheek" and let them take the cloak and the tunic, without putting up resistance.

The **golden rule**, widely cited in different cultures, also appears here. For example in Tob 4:15 it says: "What you hate, do not do to any one". The gospel demand, in Luke, does not consist only of not doing evil, but in the positive sense of doing good.

As a **conclusion**, summing up everything, Jesus invites the disciples to have the same attitude as God "Be merciful" (*gínesthe oiktrímones*). "Be merciful" is a reformulation of Mt 5:48: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect". The formula of Luke is expressed in terms of mercy. There is a clear reference to Lk 19:2 "Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy". Luke proposes the imitation of God, the "Merciful God" of the Old Testament, as a way of expressing the perfection of love and of holiness.

The **source of love**. The requirements of this passage, as of the whole discourse, do not pretend to be an exhaustive list, but they are just examples of the new need and radicality of the Kingdom. It is ethics that has its foundation in the divine love, in its merciful heart.

MEDITATION

To love as God, to love in God: these are the characteristics of Christian sonship (cf. *Rom* 8:14-15; *Gal* 4:5-6). Love in the Gospel, is not to be confused with a vague philosophical philanthropy: It is an expression of our nature as children of God, finds its motivation, indeed the energy of this radical love in the person of God, with whom it is united. At Pentecost this reality was brought to its fullness through the person of the Holy Spirit, so that love of neighbour and enemies is not only a heroic human love, but the docility to let God's love be present in history through us.

Universal love: Verse 30 excludes any kind of consideration for giving. It speaks of "anyone" (*panti*). Christian love has no boundaries. In this sense in the text of the Good Samaritan to the question "who is my neighbour?" Jesus answers identifying the neighbour with the term "a man" (*ánthrōpos*) (*Lk* 10:30), a universal expression that includes everyone: pagans and Jews, people of Israel and foreigners.

Gratuitous, disinterested love: In verses 32-34 the word (*charis*) is used three times as a reward, as an expression of gratuitousness, to do good without any hidden interest. It is a call to renounce one's own interest. How many times in acts of apparent great philanthropy and solidarity many personal or group interests are hidden: an apparent solidarity conditioned by ideological and political propaganda, marketing, the conditioning of the most vulnerable, self-affirmation, the creation of mechanisms of dependence, etc.; a voluntary work centered only on my own self-realisation, on my own curriculum, on a certain type of remuneration and gratitude. All expressions of solidarity and love should never lack of the "grace" of gratuitousness.

Concrete and supportive love. The parables that give continuity to our text (*Lk* 6:46-49) insist on the concreteness of love: that

of the tree that bears good fruit, of the house built on the rock, as an image of the one who puts the Lord's words into practice. Christian love is neither platonic nor made only of words. In fact, Luke and the Pauline letters will clearly show us solidarity with the poor (*Acts* 6:1), the communion of goods (*Acts* 2:43-44), the collections for the needy of the mother church in Jerusalem (*2Cor* 8-9) as constitutive realities of Christian identity.

ACTION

Consider what the Scripture text is inviting you to do for today.

You may want to consider how the passage is asking you to act differently.

- Am I capable of loving without any hidden interest?
- How can I express concretely my love for others?

Take time to simply remain in the presence of God and dialogue with the Lord.

IN DON BOSCO'S ORATORY: SOLIDARITY OF THE POOR WITH THE POOREST

Marco Fulgaro

Don Bosco has always educated his boys in solidarity and the importance of giving concrete answers to the needs of others. His work has never been mere philanthropy because it was nourished by a strong love for Jesus, whose face was reflected in every young person, especially in the poorest. Even though he found himself many times facing financial hardship, Don Bosco entrusted himself to Providence, not with a passive attitude of those who hope without doing anything, but, on the contrary, always doing something, also willing to make sacrifices to help others..

There are many episodes of the young people of the oratory who, moved by the example of the saint, have made gestures of solidarity towards the most in need by committing themselves to be on the front line.

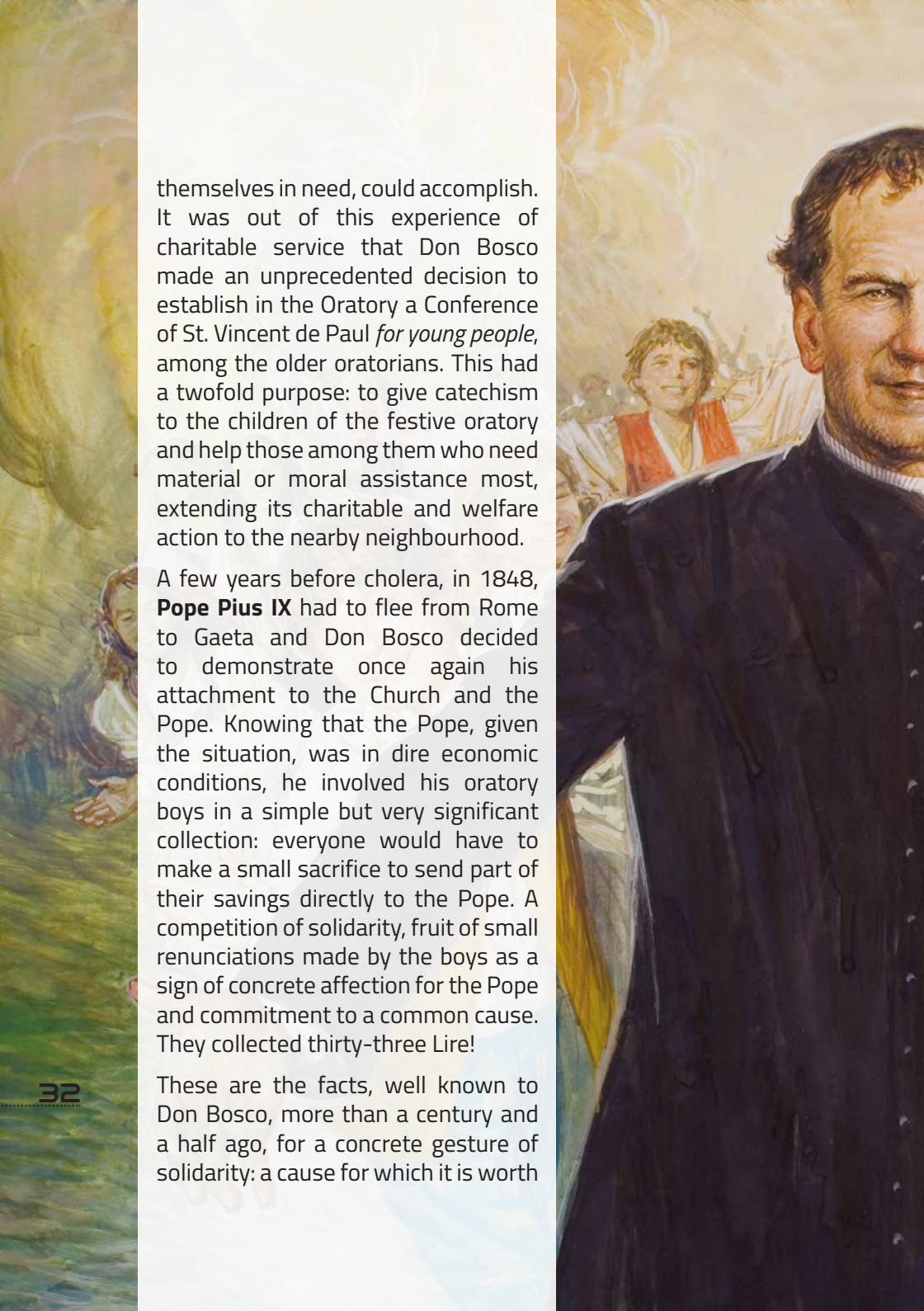
In another pandemic context, that of **cholera** in Turin in 1854, Don Bosco asked the boys of the Sodality St. Aloysius something special: to offer themselves voluntarily to help the sick, who needed assistance and to be taken to hospitals. Once again, Don Bosco shows how the poor can help the poorest of them: the gift and free sharing lead to getting rich and not losing something. The first thing that Don Bosco presents to his boys is the "toolbox", a spiritual help that cannot be ignored for a free commitment to the integral salvation of the person: he recommends to them sobriety, temperance, tranquillity, courage, confidence in Mary, confession and Communion, "If you do what I tell you, you will be saved. If you put yourselves

FAMILY

in God's grace and commit no mortal sin, I assure you that none of you will be touched". Before leaving to meet the needs of others, one has to work on oneself and the boys of Don Bosco began to behave in a truly exemplary way, fully understanding the meaning of what they were experiencing. Electrified by Don Bosco who had promised them that they would be saved if they avoided sin, they set off to cure the sick and dying in hospitals and families. The courage of those boys of 15 or 16 years, all poor, was the subject of comments full of admiration among the population. So their gestures of solidarity and heroism multiplied: they ran to Mamma Margherita if the sick needed sheets, clothes or blankets, they gave up their lunch or ate together with the sick if necessary, they collected the dying in the streets, all with a bottle of vinegar to wash their hands, like a precursor of our hand sanitising gels to which we are now accustomed.

It was during the epidemic that Don Bosco joined forces with the local Conference of St. Vincent de Paul in caring for the victims of cholera. This was a magnificent demonstration of Christian charity and a revelation of what poor young people, who are





themselves in need, could accomplish. It was out of this experience of charitable service that Don Bosco made an unprecedented decision to establish in the Oratory a Conference of St. Vincent de Paul *for young people*, among the older oratorians. This had a twofold purpose: to give catechism to the children of the festive oratory and help those among them who need material or moral assistance most, extending its charitable and welfare action to the nearby neighbourhood.

A few years before cholera, in 1848, **Pope Pius IX** had to flee from Rome to Gaeta and Don Bosco decided to demonstrate once again his attachment to the Church and the Pope. Knowing that the Pope, given the situation, was in dire economic conditions, he involved his oratory boys in a simple but very significant collection: everyone would have to make a small sacrifice to send part of their savings directly to the Pope. A competition of solidarity, fruit of small renunciations made by the boys as a sign of concrete affection for the Pope and commitment to a common cause. They collected thirty-three Lire!

These are the facts, well known to Don Bosco, more than a century and a half ago, for a concrete gesture of solidarity: a cause for which it is worth



committing oneself, personal and group involvement, the willingness to give up something, the building up of a network of benefactors, even small ones (in this case, the young people of the oratory), the fruit of this gesture (a collection of money, goods or time made available...) and the reading of the act of charity that is set in motion from a Christian perspective.

Pope Pius IX himself, years later, said to Don Bosco: *"When I think of those young people, I still remain touched by those thirty-three lire sent to Gaeta. Poor young people, they deprived themselves of the money destined for the piece of bread and spread: a great sacrifice for them!"*

What will 33 lire be when faced with the great problems of the world, such as hunger, poverty and wars? The answer can be found in the Gospel, where simple people teach us with their gestures the importance of doing each his part: the widow who offers two coins, which are all she had (*Mk 12,41-44*) or the boy who delivers into the hands of Jesus five loaves of barley and two fish (*Jn 6,5-13*), without his small contribution there would not have been a miracle.!

With your small contribution many miracles can still happen!

MISSIONARY SOLIDARITY DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Fr George Menampampil SDB
Coordinator of DB Worldwide Solidarity Against COVID-19

After the outbreak of COVID-19 virus pandemic, the Missions Sector at the Salesian Headquarters in Rome, with the support of Don Bosco Network, held an on-line conference on March 25, 2020. Persons representing Salesian Mission Offices, NGO's, and other Salesians structures in all continents, agreed to network and coordinate their initiatives to save human lives. They decided to conduct awareness campaigns, identify the weakest groups in the communities they serve, do a mapping of their needs and resources, and to assess the external assistance they might eventually need. Thus, the ***Don Bosco Solidarity Against COVID 19*** was born.

Thanks to the partnerships Salesians had developed earlier with government agencies, private corporations, clubs and community-based organisations, and thanks to the collaboration of numerous individuals, it was possible to respond immediately to the emergent needs of the most vulnerable people near our institutions. This campaign quickly evolved into an initiative of the Salesian Family. There soon developed a very large army partners by their side. Together they supported the front-liners, filling in gaps with resources from their own partners and donors.

Our focus was on those in greatest need – the forgotten, the marginalised, the stigmatised, the unwanted, for whatever reason. In some countries the lockdown saved many lives from death by the virus; but, it also risked killing even more people through hunger. Our little resources provided the essentials for survival – masks, food, sanitizers and detergents.

This worldwide solidarity unleashed countless initiatives, too many to mention all here. We learned from each other; we were inspired by the deeds of our family in other parts of the world; we felt the pain of those even far away, empathised with them and looked for ways to support them. Salesian Mission Offices and NGO's from New Rochelle to Korea raised funds. Past Pupils and Salesian Co-operators of Hong Kong sent help to Italy and Spain. All Provinces and institutions looked for local donors and partners. They initiated income-generating activities – even kitchen gardens.

In Angola, Salesians and the Salesian Sisters took street boys and street girls into temporary shelters to protect them from contamination. Salesians in Lima took Venezuelan refugees into the courtyard of the Provincial House. In the Philippines, the Salesians accommodated doctors and nurses. Institutions in Kerala, Shillong and elsewhere were used as quarantine centres. From Peru to Kohima we cared for ethnic minorities.

In South Africa, Salesian Cooperators and Salesian Sisters distributed food to undocumented immigrants. Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians in Lesotho, Eswatini and India led their local communities in unique ways. In Thailand, nine groups of the Salesian Family, including the Sisters of the Queenship of Mary, the Daughters of the Queenship of Mary and the ADMA collaborated under one common logo and banner. The Visitation Sisters of Don Bosco in Shillong and in South Sudan launched numerous initiatives in their villages. The Sisters of Maria Auxiliatrix at Chennai went out to help their neighbours. Caritas sisters in Port Moresby helped raise funds. Past pupils from Argentina to the Philippines helped in the distribution of food.

Institutions around the world, including refugee students in Uganda and trainees in covid-unaffected Samoa, produced and distributed masks by the million. Salesian Polytechnics in Costa Rica and Ecuador used 3D printing to produce safety

equipment of the highest quality for doctors. In Ecuador and in Bombay coupons were given out with which to buy groceries. In Korea, cooked food was delivered to the home-bound helpless elderly. Bosconet India launched a campaign to feed millions of stranded migrant labour, besides helping them reach home. In Mumbai and elsewhere we took care of commercial sex workers and eunuchs, among the most stigmatised, marginalised and ignored even by aid-givers. In Indonesia Salesian aspirants and prenovices worked with a local NGO to reach out to remote villages.

In Vietnam, each Salesian community mobilised local benefactors to help the needy. From the Solomon Islands to Congo Brazzaville we held awareness campaigns. Refugees in Palabek, Kakuma and Juba received Salesian support.

Institutions from the USA to Portugal, the Czech Republic to Japan, provided support through phones and the social media. We helped youngsters fearful for their future and parents under the stress of managing their work and their kids at home. We provided spiritual solace through online Eucharist, adoration, retreats, prayers and good-night talks.

All this coordinated work enables us also to advocate for the needy also at the UN.

The ***Don Bosco Solidarity Against COVID 19*** taught us that one needs love, commitment, dedication and concern for human life to step out of the house, roam the streets, even at the risk of contracting the illness ourselves, to search out and extend a helping-hand to the most abandoned, the forgotten, the ones that are not even capable of asking for help.

It takes patience to satisfy the bureaucratic requirements to obtain permissions. It takes self-discipline to maintain accounts and documentation, to write reports, collect stories, take photos and to send them to those that

FATHER

need them. It takes humility to collaborate with others as equal partners. It takes imagination and creativity to innovate solutions to situations we never faced before. It takes optimism to believe that even this pandemic will pass. It takes spirituality to keep going despite all obstacles. It takes faith to be convinced that at the end of it all, God, not evil, will have the last word; that Life will triumph over death. It takes vision to prepare for our life after COVID-19. We learned that our many small initiatives, if well planned and coordinated, can defeat almost any challenge that could come our way. Above all, we realised that, in order to do that, we need to recognise that there is just **ONE**, who is the **FATHER** of us all and we are all but his **ONE FAMILY**.



Don Bosco Solidarity Against COVID-19 in India



HEROES DURING COVID 19

Abraham Lottering is a 39-year-old man who suffered a lot of parental abuse as a young child. He was involved in serious violence as a teenager and was homeless for a period during his early adult life. He migrated to Cape Town and there came to know Don Bosco through the *Waves of Change Programme at the Salesian Institute*, which prepares youth from at-risk backgrounds for employment. Abraham found a new meaning in life by helping other youth at risk. When the programme had no more funds to pay him, Abraham offered to continue to serve as a volunteer. From a hardcore gangster he was gradually transformed into a committed volunteer.

In 2020 South Africa was hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic; a very strict lockdown was imposed. Abraham volunteered to do what no one else was willing to - deliver food parcels to those in need. He got a colleague to go along with him to some of the most dangerous communities in Cape Town. Nothing could stop him. He kept visiting these communities repeatedly, sometimes putting his own life at risk. He is the first to arrive and the last to leave the premises. He well deserves his nickname which he bears with pride, **"Mr. Focus"**!




■ Abraham Lottering

Dr. Terence Mukhia is the associate professor and Dean at Salesian College, Sonada, India. During the COVID lockdown, he organised relief supplies for migrant workers from Nepal stranded in the town. He roped in the members of the Minority Christian Group of which he is a leader. "My conscience was not at peace. I felt I had to do something rather than just sit comfortably at home. The turning point was when, two Catholic boys who had just completed their quarantine, came to my house asking for relief," recalls Dr Mukhia. "They explained how they were despised and neglected by their own neighbours and the difficulties they faced."

"With the help of my Church group members, my family and local people, we organised a distribution of food packets. Initially, we feared contracting Covid-19 as the pandemic had just arrived at Sonada and some families had already been



 *Dr. Terence Mukhia*

quarantined. I personally thought that I was putting my entire family at risk. Moreover, I suffer from gout in my left foot and am in constant pain. I had to walk for the shopping and the supervision of distributions. Soon, resources (cash, in-kind, and services) started pouring in, from pastors, priests, laity, family members and friends. It was a very touching experience as well as an eye-opener." "This experience made me aware of my weaknesses and transformed my life. God helped me to grow in love and faith-in-action."

Angélica M. Fesariton, is the Youth Ministry Coordinator of San Ildefonso Salesian Parish, Makati City, the Philippines. She shares her experience: "We had to cancel all our activities, planned with so much love and enthusiasm. It was painful, but soon we were compelled to look beyond our own loss. We realised that the families of our youth lacked even basic necessities. We are a parish youth ministry. Most of us are students; only a few have permanent jobs. Nevertheless, we decided to start our "*Happiness Fund Drive*". *We sought donations from generous and supportive people, and we could bring a food pack to the families in need.*"

Angelica continues: "*As we walked the streets, our hearts were shattered by the pathetic reality of the homeless. We realised how difficult their lives were. We talked about it with our youth leaders. We collected a small amount once again - sufficient to provide sandwiches for the homeless. We strolled along the highways and around railway stations and gave away our simple gifts. The love that we showed was probably more important than the simple sandwiches we shared!*"



■ Angelica M. Fesariton

FATHER

Anna Sansoni and Andrea Lapi are Salesian Cooperators at "*La Magione*" Oratory in Siena. They work at the Hospital of Siena, Anna as a specialist in infectious diseases and Andrea as an internist. Anna says that she had observed COVID-19 from afar, at the time only in China. She prepared herself to face the shock when it would hit Italy. "The Ash Wednesday liturgy was a few hours before my separation from my family and the Oratory. I needed to stay away from my loved ones for their protection. It was a real 'Lent-within-Lent'. The sick always arrived in the middle of the night, in the dark, when our energies were almost gone. They exhausted the little that remained. Like Veronica wiping the bloodied face of Jesus, we would console the families – a truly painful Way of the Cross." After a month of work, Andrea joined his wife Anna. This marked the beginning of a period of working as a couple but with a rhythm that is calm, stable, sweet and safe, strengthened by the Eucharist, the meditation of the Word, the 'Good Morning' talk read from the Gospel, and the Novena to Mary Help of Christians. On Holy Saturday, with the help of the hospital chaplains, they brought the Eucharist to the sick. "I hope we shall together seek the profound meaning of what we are

■ Anna Sansoni e Andrea Lapi




living and that, with the Lord as travel companion, our eyes will be opened. Filled with Salesian joy, may we return to Jerusalem with Jesus in our hearts”.

Paúl Cuadrado, just 18 years old, became the guardian angel of the community of San Giovanni Bosco, in Guayaquil, Ecuador, where he was doing his year of volunteer work. The Salesian community was quarantined, each in their own room as many Salesians, including several elderly people, were infected. Paúl was the only one allowed to go out. He alone did everything for the community: shopping, cooking, cleaning the house, washing clothes, distributing medicines and much more. After about twenty days, Paúl had to go out into the city because there was a shortage of medicines. He faced total chaos, with people crying and screaming on the streets at the loss of loved ones. Unfortunately, two Salesians also died in the community: Father Jorge Bustamante and Néstor Tapia. The 24th of May, feast of Mary Help of Christians, was the first moment for the community to come together in the refectory, albeit with safe distancing. “The Salesians told me that they were alive thanks to me and I replied, ‘it was God who took me there to keep you well’”.



Father Rubinsky Sánchez is a Salesian in Ecuador, director of the community of Machalla. Like many others, he initially continued to live the “new normal”. He was far, but only physically, from the children and the faithful, locked up at home to avoid the risk of contagion. Many parishioners were dependent on daily commerce at the market. From one day to the next they found themselves without work, without money and without food, going so far as to face death, if not from the virus, from hunger. Unexpectedly, a benefactor called offering 500 food kits.

Fr. Rubinsky had already experienced the effects of the 2016 earthquake in Manta. He now went out to the people in the streets, though with precautions, to distribute food and have a chat, slowly involving a group of volunteers and reaching hundreds of families. The joy of the people was immense, not only for the food but also for the words of hope. Solidarity gradually expanded: 27,000 litres of milk and other donations allowed many people to move forward. “The main challenge today”, says Fr. Rubinsky, “is to stay with the people and continue to be light through the animating presence of the Salesian community.”

 *Father Rubinsky Sánchez*



Prabhu Sharan, Swati, Thirumalesh and Venkatesh are leaders of the human rights club in Boddupalli village, in Hyderabad Province of India. The members of these clubs are all children, trained and supported by Salesians. They received relief kits consisting of masks, sanitizers, toiletries and food. These three children knew that their families had sufficient provisions for the next fortnight, though they didn't know what would happen after those two weeks. They remembered a few other children who did not have food even for the next day. They travelled to Kollapadukal and gave all their provisions to Mahesh, Akhilesh, Arun and Swatik. They did not know when the lockdown would be lifted. Their own families would need the food if it were not lifted, but that did not stop them. Infront of our office of PARA (People's Action For Rural Awakening) are two statues: one of Ambedkar, Indian politician of the 20th century, and another of Don Bosco.

Below the statue of Don Bosco is a plaque with the words, "*Friend of youth, teach us*". The plaque below the statue of Ambedkar reads: "***Architect of our constitution, lead us***". These children have shown a simple and effective way to be good people and upright citizens!



MARTYRS OF COVID 19



Fr José Aymanathil, of Calcutta Province, India, was the first COVID-19 victim in Salesian India. He was a pioneer educationist who brought free education to Kolkata's slum children. He already had for thirty years a series of programmes to reach out to the people living in the slums and footpaths in ways that were relevant and meaningful, such as free tuition for students, literacy programme, sponsorships for students, nutrition programme for malnourished babies, dry rations for the elderly and even medicines for tuberculosis.

When Covid hit, he organised an uninterrupted feeding programme from the first day of lockdown (25 March 2020) until his death. His collaborator Fr Mathew George recalls, "The feeding programme for over 1500 slum and footpath

dwellers had reached its 115th day when the cruel tentacles of Covid snatched him away. He was a multifaceted personality who combined intellectual acumen with spiritual depth. He possessed a heart overflowing with compassion for the poorest and suffering section of society."

Father Grzegorz Jaskot was in the community of UPS (Pontifical Salesian University) in Rome. When Covid spread in the community, he had to help the ill. Fear wouldn't hold him back. He brought them food and, medicine, visiting them every day with news of the outside world and cheerful words of encouragement ... a month of intense and tiring work but full of joy. Fr. Jaskot, despite all his precautions, tested positive for Covid because of his contact with the sick. When his condition worsened, he was taken to the hospital. The whole community of UPS started a novena for his health, but after a few days of suffering, Fr Jaskot went to Heaven. His death is not a tragedy but a glorious event: his sacrifice was not a one-time event; it was an attitude and a habit, deeply ingrained in him over decades.



WITNESS OF HOLINESS AND SOLIDARITY: MATHILDE SALEM

Marco Fulgaro

Mathilde Salem is an example of a life dedicated to others in the conviction of belonging to a great human family where all are brothers and sisters as children of God.

Born in Aleppo, Syria, in 1904, Mathilde was a beautiful girl from a wealthy family, married since 1922 to Georges Elia Salem, a businessman with a strong personality. Mathilde was always close to her husband, who, in addition to having a hectic life, suffered from diabetes. She looked after him, accompanying him on his business trips and participating in commercial negotiations. They could not have children, but Mathilde still found a way to be a mother by taking care of the “Georges Salem Foundation”, which responded to her husband’s dream of founding a Christian charity in the city of Aleppo.

Thus, a vocational training centre, a church, houses for workers, a hospital were founded and the work, carried out with the help of Msgr. Isidore Fattal, grew ever larger. Mathilde encouraged this idea and took over at the premature death of her husband. The maturity of spirit, dignity, and courage of this young widow of 40 years stirred up the admiration of all. This became Mathilde’s mission: she decided to give her life for this project.

After speaking with the Rector Major, Fr Peter Ricaldone, she entrusted to the Salesians a college in Aleppo that the Foundation had bought. She moved to a small house near the Salesian school giving a great testimony not only of active charity but also of intense and fervent prayer. As his nephew Roland de Sahb wrote, “If I try to trace Mathilde Salem’s spiritual itinerary, I find it marked by her encounter with the poor man of Assisi, Saint Francis de Sales and Don Bosco. From the former he embraced the spirit of poverty and the total and



unreserved gift to God; from the latter the love of neighbour and the understanding of the weakness of others; from Don Bosco the concrete love for the young workers”.

Mathilde felt she was the mother of the many young children of workers who received a Christian education in the school, receiving the affection and esteem of all, even of Muslims who called her “God’s chosen one”. After two years of suffering from cancer, she died in 1961, loved and recognised as a woman of communion and peace. Because of the reputation of holiness that still surrounds her in Syria, in 1995 she was declared a *Servant of God* with the opening of the diocesan inquiry for her beatification.

*God, Father of mercy,
You willed to give us in Mathilde Salem,
an admirable example of charity to others,
especially towards the young and the poor,
and of love for the Church.
With fervent prayer and diligent initiatives for doing good
your Servant worked for the unity of Christians,
the sanctification of the clergy
and the development of the Georges Salem Foundation.
We beg you to glorify your Servant,
so that her example will be for your faithful
incentive to do good,
and bear witness to your divine plan of salvation
and of your love.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen*



GUMBO DON BOSCO HEALTH CENTRE

St. Vincent De Paul parish, Gumbo, South Sudan, was entrusted to the Salesians in 2006 and by 2008 we began to reside at Gumbo, located at the centre of 20 villages along the left bank of river Nile. There are no proper hospitals or dispensaries in any of these villages; the nearest one is the hospital of Juba. After the establishment of the Salesian parish we felt that we ought to give greater attention to the health care of people than we normally do in our presences elsewhere. Don Bosco Health Centre was established in 2012. At the request of the Salesians of Don Bosco, the Caritas Sisters of Jesus accepted to be part of this mission and help in the health sector.

The **Caritas Sisters of Jesus** (CSJ) was founded by Salesians Fr Antonio Cavoli and Fr Vincent Cimatti in Japan in 1937. In 1986 they were accepted as a member of the Salesian Family. Their mission is to bear witness to the merciful charity of Jesus towards all, especially the poor and suffering, through various works of evangelisation.

The health centre started with three small rooms, attending to about 30 people daily. Today an average of 100 to 200 outpatients from Gumbo and surrounding area use its services daily. The health centre has also an HIV/AIDS rehabilitation facility as well as a programme of nutrition and child-care. The Mobile Clinic reaches out to the villages to prevent diarrhoea, dysentery and other water borne diseases that devastate the health of thousands in South Sudan. Most of these diseases are consequences of poverty and the lack of clean water, hygiene and sanitation. The Covid-19 pandemic has made the fragile health situation in the country even worse; particularly, there is a dearth of health care professionals.



There is little understanding among the population about the virus and the seriousness of the pandemic; many families do not have access to media that provide the right information; finally, people cannot practise social distancing because of their living and working conditions.

The **Salesian Mission Day Project for 2021** is to help **Don Bosco Health Centre at Gumbo** build a new medicine store and provide essential medical supplies and laboratory equipment to keep on treating the sick who come from very poor areas of the country.



WITH A SMALL CONTRIBUTION, EVERYBODY CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

<i>Burned bricks</i>	<i>1 \$ (10 bricks)</i>
<i>Cement blocks</i>	<i>2 \$ (3 pieces)</i>
<i>Cement bag (50 kg)</i>	<i>13 \$</i>
<i>Sand (18 m³)</i>	<i>300\$</i>
<i>Window</i>	<i>175\$</i>
<i>Door</i>	<i>350\$</i>
<i>Cement pillar</i>	<i>3500\$</i>
<i>Corrugated iron sheet</i>	<i>35\$</i>

BOSCOAID - PDO

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PRAYER SMD 2021

*O God, Father of all,
the mission of your Son,
to all peoples of the world,
creates in us a real passion.*

*How can we not speak of the grace
your Spirit bestows on us?
How can we keep the joy of your friendship
only for ourselves?*

*May our prayers, sacrifices,
and solidarity for people most in need
enlightened and inspired
by our faith in Jesus your Son,
proclaim to all peoples of the whole world
that we form one family,
and that you care for each one of us.*

*Bless everyone with your holy Name
that your light may shine
over the whole world.*

Amen





AFRICA

*The sweetest streams
of solidarity are those
that flow sideways.*



EUROPE

*We are close to
the people and bring
God into the digital world.*



INDIA

*The heart of the lonely,
jobless, stranded migrant
longs to reunite with
his families thousands
of kilometers away.*



AMERICA

*The love of the Father
is unconditional and
inclusive of all, especially
those at the peripheries.*



ASIA

*The Salesian Family
comes together to serve
the human family.*



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