

## **DON BOSCO: A SAINT OF THE YOUNG**

Don Bosco took no step, said no word, took up no task that was not directed to the saving of the young. Good evening dear fathers and brothers, today I am going to speak on the topic don Bosco: a saint of the young.

All over the world Don Bosco is known as a saint of young people. He became a saint living amidst and for young people. His was a life spent entirely at their disposal. However, the characteristic aspect of his sanctity, as Pope John Paul II had pointed out and which A. Caviglia, an acute interpreter of his spirituality, had observed before him, was that “the sanctity of Don Bosco was forged as an educative sanctity”, the result of his deep and abiding love for young people, which was in turn extraordinarily reciprocated by them. Witness to this is the affirmation of Fr. Lemoyne, biographer of Don Bosco, who at the beginning of the forty-five volumes of documents collected as the basis for writing the biographical memoirs of saint John Bosco, has asserted “I have written the history of our most beloved founder, father John Bosco. I do not believe that there has ever been a man who has loved more or was loved more by the young.” Don Bosco himself laid claim to this singular boast when he declared in the introduction to the companion of youth: “my dear boys, I love you with all my heart, and it is enough that you are young for me to love you very much. I can assure you that you will find many books written for you by persons far more virtuous and learned than I, but with difficulty will you be able to find anyone who loves you more than I do in Jesus Christ, and who more than I desires your true happiness.”

This predilection for the young was for him a matter of a calling, which he perceived from a very tender age: “to gather the children together in order to teach them the catechism was an ideal which burned in my heart since I was scarcely five years old. It was my most lively desire, and it seemed to me to be the only thing I was called to do on earth.” Next followed the decisive dream at the age of nine: “this is the field of your work, and his reflection as a young priest: “my delight was to make contact with the children and teach them catechism. Later came to the dramatic moment when he was confronted by the Marchioness Barolo with the choice of either remaining with his street urchins or giving them up in favor of working full time with her orphan girls. His immediate reply was: “my lady Marchioness, my life is consecrated to the good of young people... I cannot turn back from the path that Divine Providence has traced out

for me.” And in October 1862 he affirmed by saying: “the Lord has sent me to the young, hence, I must refrain from other occupations and preserve my health for them. The gift of a preferential love for the young remained alive in him right up to the last years and days of his life. Again in October 1886, when he was urged to give up hearing confession for the fatigue it caused him, he replied: “if I no longer hear the confession of the boys at least, what is there for me to do for them? I promised God that until my dying breath I would dedicate myself entirely to my poor boys.” Among his last words on his deathbed on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1888 was: “tell the boys that I await them all in paradise.”

In the Salesian bulletin of that January, the Salesian cooperators would read his last recommendations to them particularly the last most poignant one was: “I recommend to your charity all the works that the Lord has deigned to entrust to me in the course of almost fifty years but in a very particular manner I recommend to you the care of poor and abandoned youth, who were always the partition dearest to my heart on earth, and who, crown my joy in heaven.” This shows that the entire life of Don Bosco from start to finish was characterized by a complete dedication and total availability to young people, especially to the poor and abandoned, a vocation that he perceived as a wonderful gift and as an urgent call from on high, and to which he could not but wholeheartedly respond.

So my dear fathers and brothers, my wish and prayer is that let us make ourselves available and ever ready to help and love those poor and abandoned youth who were dearest to Don Bosco’s heart on earth and continue to carry out the mission entrusted to us by Don Bosco.