



SALESIAN SPIRIT
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LOVE FOR THE CHURCH

Another characteristic feature of the Salesian Spirit is the love for the Church: the Salesians love the Church. Our love for the Church has origin in our awareness that we are in the heart of the Church. The salesians see the Church as their family to which they belong, as a living part of the entire people of God (mystical body of Christ), as a communion of all who work for the kingdom, and as a sacrament of salvation for humanity. The salesians feel themselves a living part of the Church: the Holy Spirit raised us up in the Church for its nourishment. The Church on its part has recognized our salesian charism as God's timely response to the needs of the Church and society.

Our love for the Church is expressed in our work on behalf of and for the Church, and in educating young Christians to an authentic understanding of the Church.

Fidelity to the Pope

The Salesians manifest their love for the Church by their fidelity to the Pope and to his teaching. Don Bosco had this as one of the fundamental aims of the congregation: To sustain and defend the authority of the Supreme head of the Church among the poorer classes in society and especially among people in danger. The salesians are convinced that the Pope and the Bishops have received from Christ the mandate to lead his Church. (LG 18) So, we submit to the teachings of the Pope because we are convinced that in it we have a sure and certain reference point in the search for truth: we cannot be devoted to Christ without being devoted at the same time to His Vicar.

Here is an episode that narrates Don Bosco's fidelity to the Pope and the legacy that he has left behind for the salesians to be always on the side of the Pope. In November 1881 Bishop Peter Ferre of Casale hosted a lunch for Don Bosco, some salesians and some clergy. The table conversation turned towards Rosminian philosophy of which the Bishop was a supporter and a salesian table fellow Fr. Bertello was an opponent! There was an animated argument. In this context, the Bishop remarked that in regard to philosophy one Pope may incline in one way and another in another way and so, to avoid having to change philosophical systems with every Pope, one should follow what one judges best. And he declared that he sided with Rosmini.

Don Bosco who was following everything stated calmly, "As a religious superior I would like to leave my confreres a legacy they can follow as a guideline, regardless of the circumstances they may find themselves in. I notice that when it comes to philosophy or theology some philosophers and theologians hold a theory which they judge best while others claim that the very opposite is better. Both theories have learned supporters but one of them has also the affirmation of the Pope. As a prudent superior what am I to say to my religious? What path should I counsel them to take? Without hesitation I say: My sons, follow the theory favoured by the Pope even as a private philosopher, theologian, and scholar. In addition

to showing my respect for the Pope, I also feel I would be on safer ground; I would either not err or I would err with honour.”

Don Bosco's devotion to the Pope is demonstrated emphatically in his taking up the construction of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart although it cost him his life. Pope Pius IX had planned to construct a Church in honour of the Sacred Heart in Rome. But he died before he started it. His successor Pope Leo XIII took it up and the work was begun in full swing but soon came to a grinding halt due to the lack of funds. The Pope was grieved. Cardinal Cajetan Alimonda suggested to the Pope that the project be handed over to Don Bosco. The Pope was little apprehensive whether Don Bosco would accept it. To allay his fears, the Cardinal replied, “Your Holiness, I know Don Bosco and his total boundless devotion to the Pope. Let Your Holiness suggest it, and I am convinced he will accept it.” The Cardinal spoke to Don Bosco on two occasions to take it up without mentioning that it was the Pope's wish. Don Bosco did not commit himself. In an audience, the Pope let him know that it was his wish and immediately Don Bosco replied, “For me the wish of the Pope is a command. I accept the trust Your Holiness has graciously given me.” And Don Bosco began working at it although it caused him great pain, even brought him closer to death. That his devotion to the Pope was proverbial is demonstrated in this. And it was very obvious to those who knew him well such as Cardinal Alimonda.

The salesians manifest their love for the Church by working for the local church in communion with the Bishops and the clergy. Salesians are aware that their mission forms part of the pastoral plan of the diocese where they work and accordingly carry out their ministry.

Don Bosco was obedient to the Bishops and did all his best to protect their good name as is evidenced in the following incidents. We are aware of the troubles that Don Bosco had with Archbishop Gastaldi, of Turin. One day in 1875 some people came to Don Bosco and showed him a slanderous biography of the Archbishop and wanted that it be printed in the press of the Oratory. Don Bosco tactfully got the manuscripts on the pretext of wishing to go through it. It was a thousand pages long. Don Bosco took it and burnt it! So it was never printed! But Don Bosco had to pay for it for many years. Again Don Bosco came to know that a journalist had accepted payment to write a series of slanderous articles against the Archbishop, which were intended to be published in a disreputed local newspaper. Don Bosco obtained those articles and prevented their scheduled publication at great cost: gave money to the journalist and educated his son in the oratory free of charge! These incidents show the

iron will of Don Bosco to hold the religious authorities in honour and his great efforts to protect their good name.

Our love for the Church is expressed in promoting vocations. We have a very good example to follow in Don Bosco who promoted vocations at personal sacrifice. There was a gathering of the priest past pupils of the Oratory at Valdocco on July 30, 1885. Don Bosco spoke to them telling them to promote vocations: “No priest should stop trying to find, to encourage even at the cost of sacrifices to themselves, the spirit of vocation in others so as to leave them when they are gone as their heirs and their successors in the work of saving souls. The scarcity of priests is sorely felt in many localities to the tragic detriment of souls. We have done whatever our weak strength permitted us to do in the past, to cope with the situation.... They will appeal to you and ask for your help so that they may become priests. Such things do happen every day. Receive them kindly, encourage them, and advise them to apply wherever you think best. If you know of places in your vicinity suitable for them, if they are able to pay the fees, good. But if you do not know where to send them, if they do not have enough money, send them to Don Bosco, who will somehow do what he can for them.” We see the willingness of Don Bosco to do anything to promote vocations to the ecclesiastical state!





Communion with the religious and laity

The salesians manifest their love for the Church by working in communion and collaboration with the religious and laity. Our solidarity with the religious stems from our conviction that just like us they too are raised up by the Holy Spirit in response to a particular need and for the enrichment of the Church. And hence, we need to work with them in unity and charity, rejecting any jealousy or competition or superiority. Don Bosco told the first missionaries, "Love, reverence and respect other religious orders and always speak well of them."

We need to work more closely with the laity. By their baptismal vocation their field of evangelization is the secular world. We need to form and accompany them in their field of evangelization ... on an equal footing, avoiding superiority complex. This should be manifested in the way we work with all the lay people in our institutions, especially in the way we animate the Educative and Pastoral Community (EPC).

Educating the young to love the Church

The salesians manifest their love for the Church by educating young people to an authentic understanding of

the Church. We educate them to see in the Church the Body of Christ, as 'People of God', as a communion of all the forces working for salvation and as their centre of unity and animation.

Don Bosco compiled books on history of the Catholic Church in order to refute the slanderous statements of heretics and to correct the methods and errors of some catholic authors. He highlighted the influence that Popes exerted on the Church, their influence on the world events of importance and acknowledged their supreme jurisdiction. His publication was to imbue among confreres and pupils, love for the Church.

Educating young people to love the Church was one of the aims of the Salesians as is well acknowledged by Don Bosco in the following episode. Between 1878 and 1879 three anonymous pamphlets were published in different places criticising the Archbishop Gastaldi of Turin. They also contained references to Don Bosco being hounded by the Archbishop. The Archbishop believed that Don Bosco and Fr. Bonetti were behind these publications. Investigations and intimidations began. And the matter was taken to Rome, Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars and was to be tried before the full court of the most eminent cardinals. The court suspended Bishop's judgement on the merits of Fr. Bonetti's plea, and brought both the parties to the negotiation table. Displeased with the turn of events, the Archbishop asked Fr. Bonetti to appear before the diocesan ecclesiastical court.

Don Bosco wrote thus to the Pope, "... Therefore, Most Holy Father, I earnestly and humbly seek your wise counsel and your strongest support. Speak and we shall listen. We shall abide by both your express orders and your wishes. Not only shall we follow you as our universal teacher, but also as our personal teacher. Not only among ourselves as Salesians shall we revere your august person, but we shall do all in our power to inspire, foster and increase these sentiments in the eighty thousand and more boys whom Divine Providence has gathered in our houses in Europe and South America. In a word, we shall be totally dedicated in all things to the Apostolic See wherever the Lord may send us at any time." In these words of Don Bosco, we see the focus that the Salesians should have - educate and instil in the young love and obedience to the Pope.

Let us love the Church, our mother. Let us be faithful to her teachings and be obedient to its pastors. Let us accompany the youngsters entrusted to our care to love the Church.