



SALESIAN SPIRIT
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Our Lady explained the dream of the pergola of roses to Don Bosco in the following words: “The roses symbolise the burning charity which must be your distinguishing trait and that of your fellow workers. The thorns stand for the obstacles, sufferings and disappointments you will experience. But you must not lose heart. Charity and mortification will enable you to overcome all difficulties and lead you to roses without thorns.” Pastoral charity is the ‘burning charity’ of which Our Lady spoke. It is our distinguishing trait.

We call pastoral charity by different names: apostolic charity, apostolic passion, burning love, ardent charity, inexhaustible charity, pastoral love, love of the good shepherd, etc. It is the internal driving force of love for youth that makes us seek souls and serve God alone. It is a burning zeal, a flaming fire, a youthful and dynamic love, a practical love, a generous & joyful love.

Pastoral Charity in Don Bosco

Pastoral charity was the driving force of Don Bosco. Let us turn to him, our model, so as to learn from him to be fired with and animated by the love for youth.

Already as a young boy, he had a real desire to do good to children. We read in the Memoirs of the Oratory: “I would see good priests working at their sacred ministry, but I could not strike up a close relationship with them. Often I would meet on the road our parish priest or his curate. I would greet them at a distance and bow to them as they passed. In their distant and courteous manner, they would return my greeting and go

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on their way. Often, I used to cry and say to myself and even to others, 'If I were a priest, I would act differently. I would approach the children, say some kind words to them, and give them good advice. How happy I would be if I could talk with my parish priest as I used to talk with Fr. Calosso? Why shouldn't it be so?'"

Even as a young boy he had this burning desire to do good to the children. He had made it his life's goal: 'If I were a priest'. Every phrase of what he intended to – I would approach the children; say some kind words to them; give them good advice; talk with them as Fr. Calosso talked with me; – exudes his burning zeal for children and even makes a sketch of how this love would be manifested. Fr. Calosso became an example to him because that worthy priest 'acted differently'!

The educational system that Don Bosco lived and practised, is founded entirely and solidly on love. He explained it quoting saint Paul: "Love is patient and kind ... Love bears all things ... hopes all things, endures all things." (1Cor 13:4,7) When there was laxity in the practise of the preventive system by the Salesians, he called them to return to it. Thus, in his letter from Rome (1884), he spoke of the oratory of early days as a reality where there was so much of love and familiarity, the basis of the preventive system to which he recalled the defaulting Salesians in his own lifetime!

Don Bosco's love for the youth was revealed in his understanding of the youngsters' needs, implementation of pedagogical methods suited to their needs, continual prayer for them, joyful giving of himself for his boys.

Jesus, the Model of Pastoral Charity

From whom did Don Bosco learn this pastoral charity? From Jesus of the Gospels. It was Christ the good shepherd who showed him his mission as well as the methodology in a dream at the age of nine: 'not by blows but by gentleness and love'. Don Bosco was aware that imitation of Jesus is religious life. He wrote in the first article of the Constitutions of 1858 that the goal was to imitate Jesus: "The purpose of this society is to gather together priests, clerics, and laymen who wish to strive after perfection by imitating Our Divine Saviour's virtues, especially through works of charity on behalf of destitute youths." And in the letter from Rome (1884) Don Bosco many made insistent references to Christ as the master and model of familiarity: "Jesus Christ became little with the little ones and shouldered our infirmities. There we have the master of familiarity ... Jesus Christ did not snap the reed already bent, nor did He extinguish the smouldering wick. That's your model!"



These are the aspects of pastoral charity that we need to imitate from Jesus, our model.

1. The Salesian should approach the young with fatherly love. Jesus was deeply aware of his sonship and of every one as his brother/sister. Each Salesian as well as youngster is a child of God by divine calling. The Salesian should feel himself the Son of God, see God working in creation and history. Experiencing the fatherhood of God, the Salesian should approach the young people as children of God with fatherly love.

2. The Salesian should have apostolic zeal: concern for their salvation. Jesus was zealous in preaching, healing and saving. The way Don Bosco imitated Jesus in his apostolic zeal is testified by Don Rua: "He took no step, he said no word, he took up no task that was not directed to the saving of the young ..." Don Bosco was anxious to save his boys' souls: "If I were as anxious to save my own soul as I am in trying to save the souls of others, I would be sure of my salvation." He was truly concerned about their salvation: "I would give up everything to win boys' hearts and thus be able to offer them as a gift to the Lord."

3. The Salesian should have a preferential love for poor youth. Jesus showed such preferential love for the little ones and the poor: "Let the little children come to me, do not hinder them." (Mk 10:16) Like Jesus, Don Bosco, feeling called to serve poor youth, showed them preferential love: "That you are young is enough to make me love you very much." He urged his sons to see Jesus in their youngsters: "Let us treat the boys as we would treat Jesus himself, if he were a boy in our boarding."

4. The Salesian should be gentle and self-sacrificing. Jesus was the good shepherd who won hearts by his gentleness and self-donation: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep." (Jn 10:11) "Learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart." (Mt 11:29) Don Bosco imitated Jesus in his gentleness and self-giving. He was kind and patient. His lived experience of gentleness with the boys developed into an original system of education, a system based above all on kindness, as he had been told in the dream at the age of nine: 'Not by blows but by love and gentleness must you win souls.' The practice of this system of education is very easy for the pupils but not so for the educators! That's our self-giving.

5. The Salesian should create a family atmosphere. Jesus desired and laboured for the brotherly communion of his disciples and of all people. "Love one another as I have loved you." (Jn 13:34) "That they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be in us." (Jn 17:21) Like Jesus, Don Bosco was a man of communion. He cultivated family spirit in the Salesian houses. He constantly told his Salesians: "Let us be charitable to one another, bearing the faults patiently and being mutually indulgent. Let us encourage each other to do good, to observe our rules and to love and respect each other like brothers. Let us pray that we may all form one heart and one soul to love and serve God." One of the recommendations given to the first Salesian missionaries on 11 November 1875 reads: "Love one another, advise one another, correct one another and do not be carried away by either envy or rancour. Let the good of one become the good of all, and let the troubles and sufferings of one be regarded as the troubles and sufferings of all, and let each one strive to banish or at least to mitigate the sorrows of others."

Conclusion

The Salesian should have an ardent love for youth. The Salesian should be moved to action by this special love for youth. Love is not to be mistaken for an emotional feeling. Love is of the will, the will to seek the good of the other. It is a decision, a determination to care for those whom one has chosen to serve, even if there is lack of positive response or even in the face of hostility. An example of such preferential love is that of parents for their children. Of course, parental love there is a play of instinct! What parents do out of parental instinct, we the Salesians, should do by choice, because God has called us and we have accepted the call!