



**SALESIAN SPIRIT**

**Fr. Pathiaraj Rayappan SDB**



# PREVENTIVE SYSTEM: LOVING-KINDNESS

**L**oving-kindness is one of the three pillars of the Preventive system. It is so central that when Don Bosco spoke of his system of education, he reduced it to loving-kindness: "The Preventive System: Charity". Don Bosco used several other terms as equivalent to and the manifestation of 'loving-kindness', helping us to understand it better: meekness, gentleness, familiarity, cordiality, affection, patience, forbearance, kindness, fatherliness.

## ***PRACTICE OF LOVING-KINDNESS***

In the way Don Bosco conceptualized the preventive system, the educators represent the pupils'

parents; hence, they should be true parents, having the parent's hearts! Such is the source from which loving kindness flows. In educational settings, loving-kindness is to be practised in several aspects.

- It is to be manifested in the way of correcting erring pupils. The preventive system rules out all corporal punishments: No striking a boy! The educators are called upon to correct the pupils when both the educator himself and the pupil have calmed down, in private, and never in front of others. As would a parent, the corrections are to be given gently, using tender words.

- It is to be revealed in being quick to forgive when

a pupil manifests that he is sorry.

- It is to be manifested in not fussing over trivial offences, not demanding things above the pupils' capacity and being patient in their light-mindedness.

- It is to be shown in enforcing the rules with gentleness. Rules are essential, and the educator must prevent disorders. However, educators should enforce them with kindness. One day in 1866, Don Bosco told Don Rua he should start an oil dealership! Don Rua replied that it was not an enterprise for a religious! Don Bosco smilingly told him, "Your dependents are creaking ... In dealing with them, use a little oil." Don Rua understood, and he did become generous and kind.

- It is to be manifested in the educator's gentle manner and gracious words. In giving orders and corrections, words are to be softened with kindness.

- It is to be expressed in the patience of the educator.

- It is to be shown in the preference given to the backward and unpopular pupils.

### **EFFECTIVENESS OF LOVING-KINDNESS**

"Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school," said Albert Einstein. Education aims to create 'good Christians and honest citizens.' If this aim is to be achieved and the pupils live good lives beyond the portals of the educational institutions, they should have pleasant memories of their student days. It can be achieved through loving-kindness.

Loving-kindness obtains discipline from the pupils more than anything else. The Government sent a fact-finding committee of three senators in 1850 to the Oratory. Having observed everything, one of the senators, Count Collegno, asked Don Bosco how he kept order and discipline among so many boys. Don Bosco said, "Reason and charity. One must be kind, patient and

**Let every Salesian be a friend to everyone, never seeking to take revenge. Be ready to forgive and never bring up whatever has already been forgiven again.**

forbearing. Here, kindness prevails over punishment; in fact, kindness reigns supreme."

To educate boys, one must find the way to their hearts, and kindness is how to get there. St. Gregory said that the heart was an impregnable castle, and none can force his way into it except by love and gentleness. Don Bosco declared toward the end of his life: "I have often come across some youngsters stubbornly opposed

to the notion of being good that they made me lose any hope for their improvement, forcing me to take severe measures with them; and only kindness won them over. We sometimes think that this type of boy is not profiting from our correction, while his heart is strongly prompting him to follow our lead."

Kindness leaves a lasting impression on the pupils' minds and hearts that in adult life, they cling to the truths and values instilled in them during their schooling. The following episode demonstrates it. In 1880, an army captain came to the Oratory and asked to see Don Bosco. Once in his presence, the captain asked Don Bosco if he recognized him and when the answer was negative, he began to say, "Don't you remember a certain V... who caused you so much trouble and worry in 1847, 1848 and 1849? Don't you recall how often you told me to keep quiet in Church and kept me close to you during catechism class lest I caused trouble? And how seldom I went to





confession..." And he wanted to make his confession, and he made it. And Don Bosco asked him as to what prompted him to make his confession.

He said, "Seeing you again reminded me of all the tricks you used to keep me on the right path: the words you whispered in my ear and your exhortations to go for confession. These things prompted me to do it." Don Bosco narrated the incident to the Salesians, concluding with these words, "My dear sons, if a soldier can still remember the religious doctrines taught to him in his youth, notwithstanding the moral



perils of military life and when given the opportunity, asks to make his confession, why should we lose heart and become depressed if we do not get immediate results from our youngsters? Let us sow the seed and then, as all farmers do, patiently wait for the harvest."

### ***DON BOSCO'S EXAMPLE***

Fr. Ascanio Savio wrote of Don Bosco as he knew him in the beginning days of the Oratory: "Don Bosco was always kind, soft-spoken and paternal in his efforts to attract boys to the practice of virtue. We never saw him treat any of them with a lack of courtesy or threaten any with punishment, not even the most thoughtless or unruly. This generous spirit was why the Oratory was swarming with boys and young men who, for the most part, received the sacraments every Sunday."

Don Bosco continued encouraging and pleading with the Salesians to practise the Preventive system. For some reason or other, the houses of the Argentine Province and especially the school of San Carlo at Almagro used a disciplinary severity that was out of tune with the Preventive system. And when Don Bosco learned of it, he wrote to the Provincial in 1885, "The preventive system should be our only system. Never any corporal punishments, a humiliating word or severe reprimand in the presence of others. Let the words be coated with gentleness, charity and patience in class. Never use a caustic word or a blow, neither light nor heavy. Let every Salesian be a friend to everyone, never seeking to take revenge. Be ready to forgive and never bring up whatever has already been forgiven again."

### ***DEMANDS OF KINDNESS***

The practice of loving-kindness requires a lot of patience from the educators. The educators must be genuinely heroic as it demands sacrifices from them. In 1877, Don Bosco narrated his dream of a lady selling candies for the Salesians. Candies were of different colours, and all candies were covered with sticky sugar icing, which looked like freshly fallen dew. The dream personage explained to Don Bosco the meaning of the sticky icing, "It signified the sweetness of the saint whom you have taken as your model. The resemblance to dew means that much effort and sacrifice are needed to maintain such gentleness and that sometimes it can be preserved only by shedding one's blood." True, the practice of loving-kindness demands a lot of sacrifices from the educators.

### ***CONCLUSION***

Practising loving kindness is a sure way to holiness. Hoping to make them 'good Christians and honest citizens', trusting in the power of loving-kindness to change 'stones into bread', being ready to put up with the difficulties to be truthful to the Preventive system, let the educators practice loving kindness and miracles will be a daily occurrence: 'wild animals to meek lambs.'