

"Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world"

2nd Sunday Ordinary Time (Year A)

Homily for the closure of the Salesian Family Spirituality Days

Is 49:4.5-6; 1 Cor 1:1-3; Jn 1:29-34

My dear brothers and sisters,

We are concluding this series of Salesian Family Spirituality Days by giving praise and thanks to the Lord who has brought us together, let us hear his voice and is sending us back home, to our communities and works with the mission of pointing out, as did John the Baptist, for young people the Christ who is amongst us. Jesus is the only one who can fill their lives with joy, meaning, commitment, because he is "*the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world*".

Over these days we have reflected on the fundamental element of human life, and more so Christian life, meaning our vocation to holiness through love. This is also the basis for the Salesian vocation and mission: the spirituality, with love at its core, that Don Bosco spelt out as pastoral and educative charity, since its purpose it to lead young people to the fullness of life in Christ. This is a kind of life with a theological characteristic, or better, it is God's life in us through faith, hope and charity, ultimately reproducing in us the image of His Son, as Don Bosco knew how to do at Valdocco.

But we have also seen that the holiness which is our common vocation needs to be lived within the Salesian Family, according to the diversity of our state of life. The beautiful mosaic of Salesian holiness is the most splendid proof that Don Bosco was a great mystic of action, a wise spiritual guide, and his was a school of holiness for himself, his mother, his closest co-workers, his first successors, his boys, Mother Mazzarello, and following them many others have made Salesian spirituality a sure path to holiness.

The word of God that we have listened to insists that life is a vocation and that everyone has a mission to carry out: the *Servant of Yahweh* has the vocation of being the servant of God and his mission is to be a "light for the peoples" and to bring salvation to all. *Paul* felt called to be an "apostle of Christ", with the specific mission of proclaiming Christ crucified. *John the Baptist* was born to be the precursor of Christ and from his mother's womb received the splendid mission of preparing for his coming, recognising him in the midst of the people and pointing him out to his disciples as "the Lamb of God", filled with the Holy Spirit, the Son of God recognised by the Father, and of witnessing to him by word, life and death.

We too dear brothers and sisters have a vocation as members of the Salesian Family: to be servants of God, apostles of Christ, his precursors with the beautiful mission of presenting him, identifying him, to the world. The Salesian mission is none other than that of being believers who make the yearning of the Holy Spirit felt wherever there are seeds of life, of good, of truth, of beauty; believers who discover God's traces and provident love in creation, in history; who let young people see the presence of Christ in the Church, the poor, the needy and the marginalised, and point him out as the One who is seeking their hearts, and can satisfy their deepest desires, will not disappoint their expectations, and encourages them to become his missionary disciples, as Pope Francis asks us to be.

Without John's testimony Jesus would have passed through the crowd unrecognised. What happened then also happens today, where God's traces in the world seem to have been lost, where we experience the "silence of God" and there is the illusion of being able to live without his presence by our side, his loving presence, his effort to save us. The Baptist had the grace of living while waiting for the Christ, and being ready to receive him with alert mind and vigilant heart, and then recognising him when he came, amidst the crowd that had come to find him. Because he preached conversion, the Baptist had the courage to be the first to identify Jesus as the conqueror of sin and was brave enough not let what he knew go by in silence. So, recognised by the Baptist, Jesus could begin to manifest himself amongst men.

Nevertheless the Gospel does not only want to remind us of John's merit in awaiting and identifying Jesus as the Lamb of God, but also wants to draw our attention to the need for Christian witness so that Jesus can be recognised and followed in our generation, also in need of redemption. It would have served for little if God had become incarnate as Mary's son if Jesus had not been recognised as the Son of God. We should not forget what is written in the Prologue of John's Gospel: "he came amongst his own, and his own did not accept him". This happens when we think we have no need of Christ and want to substitute him with progress in science, technology, economy and especially "the culture of wellbeing, which, as Pope Francis said so frankly, leads us to thinking of ourselves, make us insensitive to the cry of others, and makes us live in a bubble, beautiful but counting for nothing, an illusion of what is futile, temporary, leading to indifference to others, and indeed leads to the globalisation of indifference".¹

Well then, had Jesus not counted on John the Baptist's availability, he would not have been presented as the Lamb, the man filled with the Spirit, the Son of God. By affirming Jesus' mission, John accepted that he must

¹ Pope Francis' message during his trip to Lampedusa,

decrease: by pointing to Jesus as the Lamb who takes away sin, he sent all those who had come to see him in His direction.

Today as yesterday, or rather today more than yesterday, Jesus needs people to make him known. There is a need for people who make God's presence in the world known.

Here is our Salesian mission, dear brothers and sisters: being people who render testimony to Jesus for young people, especially the poorest from a social and economic point of view, also emotionally needy, at risk because they could lose a sense of life's meaning, lose hope and their future. We should not forget that the effort to chase God out of our lives will never turn the earth into paradise. Indeed it makes our work more difficult, our life more fragile, the lives of young people more difficult and our entire earth less of a paradise.

This pedagogical choice of God's is an interesting one - to be preceded by precursors. It is a choice that bears abundant fruit when the people chosen carry out their role fully, identify with God's will. This is what Don Bosco did in history as a believer "as if he could see the Invisible" and channelled all his energies towards a single cause: the salvation of the young, and to realise this mission he set up every kind of initiative and work, amongst them the founding of the Salesian Family, with no other purpose than: "Da mihi animas".

I am certain that vocations for all our Institutes will multiply, will be strong and bear more fruit if the young – boys and girls – who frequent our works or whom we look after in our many activities find in us a John the Baptist who points out the Lord to them, who lets them know his profound identity and guides them to follow him.

What a beautiful mission the Lord has entrusted us with! Let us carry it out joyfully, convincingly and generously. Christ is everyone's right. Let us point to his presence amongst us and lead young people to encounter him personally.

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