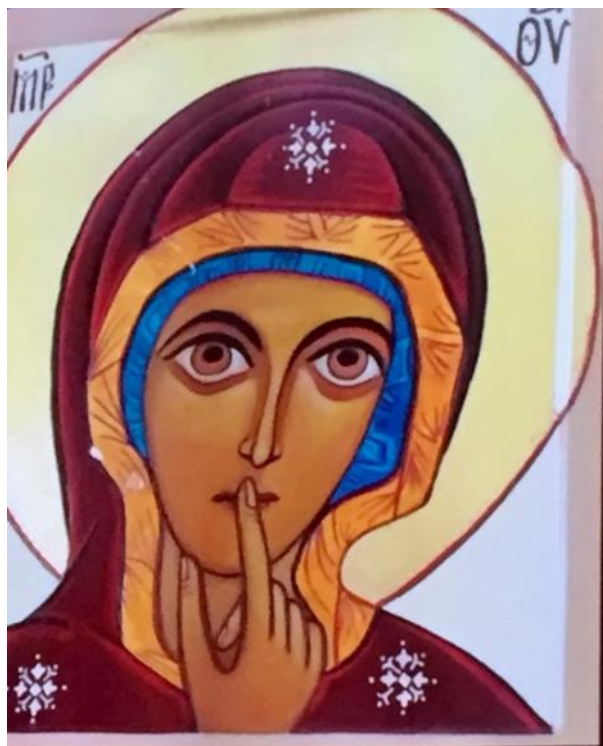


MARY INVITES US TO PRAY TO THE HOLY SPIRIT FOR THE GIFT OF CONVERSION



We are in the season of Lent, a favourable time to open our hearts to the action of God's Holy Spirit. **Everyone is called to conversion of heart and of life**, to be converted to the things of heaven and to detach ourselves from the things of the earth, because in the world we are attracted by earthly things. Our Lady asks us to become attached to God and to the things of heaven. God wants us all to go to heaven, he created us for that. All of us experience God in prayer and we know that the Lord has saved us often, sometimes physically, sometimes spiritually. This lets us see that we have a connection with heaven and with heavenly things.

Conversion is a gift, but we must collaborate. Jesus knocks on our hearts, but waits for us to open our hearts. A fundamental means is the reading, meditation and practice of Holy Scripture. In our homes and when we meet in our groups, we should keep the Holy Scripture in a visible place and read it. Before the reading we pray because without the help of the Holy Spirit, we run the risk of not understanding it.

In Lent, besides listening to the word of God, we receive the sacraments with great faith, especially the sacrament of reconciliation. Let us resume the practice of fasting and charity. All this because Our Lady wants us to become people who love God more and more, and love the things of God. In today's world this witness is missing, because often we are afraid and ashamed to be seen as Christians.

The first article of our regulations reminds us that **Don Bosco's trust in Mary Help of Christians has found in the Association a simple and practical expression for the defence of the faith among the ordinary people**. At the school of Mamma Margherita and from popular religious tradition, John Bosco developed as a child the sense of belonging to Mary. We are called at the school of Don Bosco to witness with our lives that we belong to Mary, we are hers, and with her and through her we decide for God and commit ourselves to become instruments of peace in this world where often peace is lacking.

Don Bosco's apostolic vision sees Marian devotion as an element that strengthens, consolidates and protects the Catholic faith of the Christian people. With the Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco drew up a programme of education to the faith for the people, enhancing the content of popular religiosity and orienting them towards the wisdom of the Gospel, which responds to the great questions of existence.

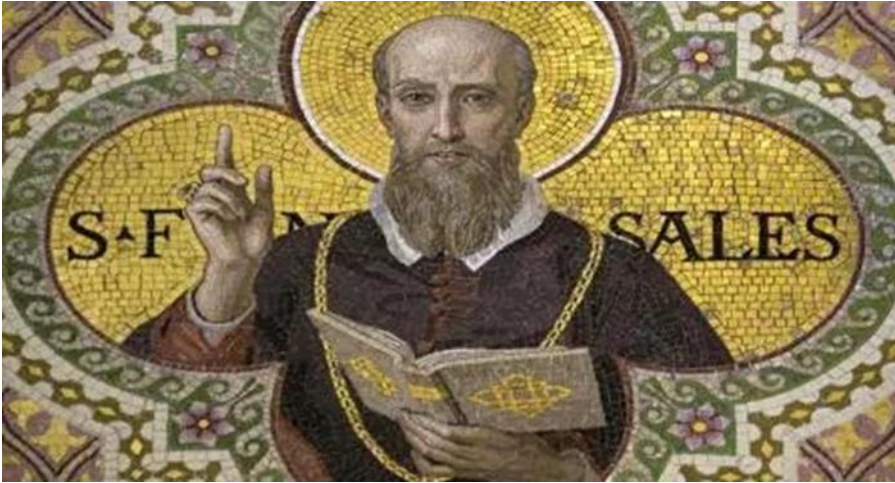
May our journey towards Easter revive in our hearts and in our groups the desire to live our membership of ADMA with joy and fidelity.

*Renato Valera, President
Fr Pierluigi Cameroni SDB, Spiritual Animator*

Formation Programme 2017-2018: Introduction to Devout Life by St. Francis of Sales

5. SALESIAN GENTLENESS

Fr Gianni Ghiglione



Humility makes us grow in perfection before God and in gentleness towards our neighbour. Francis was particularly demanding when speaking of this virtue. He himself had to make an effort to correct his proud, fiery, impulsive character to become patient, welcoming, kind and even-tempered.

There is one episode that is extremely eloquent (from *la Sainte Source*, 1614): the first monastery

was being built in the city. Work was not proceeding well since the Dominicans objected because, according to them, there was not the required distance of "forty pipes" between the two buildings (their church and the new building). There were lively protests and the Bishop hurried to calm the spirits, but he was not treated "with the respect due to his dignity". His gentleness and calm did not please Jean de Chantal, who said: "Your gentleness will only increase the insolence of these malevolent people". "No, no" answered Francis, and then he added, "Mother, do you want me to lose the inner peace I have been working on for more than eighteen years?".

Francis's commitment to the control of his temperament greatly influenced the young cleric John Bosco in his years in the seminary in Chieri. He too had a quick, proud character easily inclined to anger. This was one of the reasons why, years later, he chose the holy Bishop of Geneva, as model and patron of the newly founded Salesian congregation. "This Oratory is placed under the protection of St Francis de Sales, because those who intend to devote themselves to this way of life must imitate this Saint as a *model of charity* and good manners. These are the source of the fruits that are hoped for from the Work of the Oratories." (MB III, p.91). The biographer comments: "Don Bosco, in short, judged that the spirit of St Francis de Sales was the most suitable for popular education."

Francis is called the saint of gentleness and so indeed he was.

We need to understand well what Salesian gentleness is.

It is not sentimentalism, which suggests sentimental forms of expression. Neither is it mere bonhomie or good humour, typical of people who willingly close their eyes to reality in order to avoid problems or annoyance. It is not the myopia of people who see everything as bright and rosy and for whom anything goes. It is not the inert attitude of people who have no opinions to offer. It does not mean being a loser from the start!

Salesian gentleness (Don Bosco used the term "loving kindness") is quite different. It is more than a single virtue or attitude. We could speak of a set of virtues and attitudes. Gentleness is undoubtedly born of a profound and solid charity and requires an attentive control of one's emotions. It is expressed in a constantly serene mood and is a sign of a person rich in humanity. It requires a capacity for empathy and dialogue and creates a peaceful atmosphere, free of tension and conflict. Gentleness lessens tension and conflict, and enables one to wait until they pass. The gentle person avoids abrupt, severe or author-

itarian ways. This does not mean that it leads to compromise or that it lowers the level of need that a given situation demands. Instead the situation is met with humility, patience, courage and tenacity. The gentleness of Francis should not be confused with weakness. Rather it is strength that requires control, kindness of mind, clarity of purpose and a strong sense of the presence of God.

Let's go back to the *Introduction to the Devout Life* and pick out some points which are very demanding:

- *Do not worry. There must be no excuse for you to open the door of your heart to anger.*
- *We must seriously resist evil and repress the vices of those for whom we have responsibility, with constancy and decision but always with gentleness and serenity. Know how to combine firmness and serenity.*
- *An important and difficult point is to know how to give correction: a correction dictated by passion ... is much less effective than one that comes from reason.*
- *We need to invoke God's help when we feel agitated by anger: prayer against anger must be done with gentleness and tranquillity, not with violence.*
- *Grow in gentleness in times of calm and serenity.*
- *Gentleness should be exercised primarily towards family members and neighbours. The worst offenders here are the people who are street angels and house devils!*

One of the best ways to achieve gentleness is to practise it towards oneself, never getting angry with yourself and your imperfections.

Francis returns to the theme of corrections and says: " *The correction made by a father gently and with love has much more power to correct the child than one made with anger and fury.*" Don Bosco says the same thing in the Preventive System.

Francis suggests working more through encouragement than through reproach. He wrote in a letter: " *Whenever I used harsh and hurtful words, I later had to regret it bitterly.*"

Read this wonderful lesson of encouragement that Francis gives us: [God will help us](#). *Raise your heart, then, whenever it falls, very gently humbling yourself profoundly before God for the knowledge of your misery. Do not be in the least surprised at your fall since it is not astonishing that infirmity is infirm, weakness is weak and misery is wretched. (III, 9)*

Gentleness, calm and tranquillity, must also guide us in carrying out our various tasks. We should call this to mind at the beginning of our work. Francis described the style of life that aims high and tries to do all things carefully and well, and he says: *Be careful and diligent, in all your affairs of which you are in charge, since God who entrusted them to you desires that you take great care of them... Be not solicitous or anxious about them ... do not undertake them with restlessness, anxiety and eagerness. Do not be eager at work because every kind of eagerness disturbs reason and judgement. (III, 10).*

Conclusion: *In all your occupations trust totally in God's Providence. If you trust God, the result you will achieve will always be what is best for you.*

When young Dominic Savio asked how he could become a saint, Don Bosco said: "You will become holy by the exact fulfilment of your duties of study and prayer." This means not doing things just for the sake of doing them, not saying prayers just to be able to say that we have said them, but giving them full attention and putting your heart into them. Excellent Salesian advice!

The chapter closes with a recommendation of great beauty and simplicity:

"Be like children who cling with one hand cling to their father's hand while they collect strawberries and blackberries with the other. You should do the same: collect and serve the goods of this world with one hand while you hold on to your heavenly Father with the other, turning every so often to him, to see if your occupations and your affairs are pleasing to him. Be careful not to leave his hand and his protec-

tion, in the belief that you can collect more. If your heavenly Father leaves you, do not take even one more step or you will immediately end up on the ground."

I leave to your own careful reading some suggestions taken from letters written by Francis. Today he offers us the same advice:



- "Exercise your heart in interior and exterior gentleness and keep your heart in tranquillity amid the many occupations that face you. Take great care to avoid impatience which is the enemy of holy devotion."
- "Since the faithful heart is known through trials, take advantage of all the opportunities that are presented to you to familiarize yourself gently with ordinary people. Treat them amiably and speak to them with courtesy and cordiality. Distinctions in this life are of little importance. In reality, we are what we are in the eyes of God, and when dignity is assigned to the children of God, only their humility should be taken into consideration." Treat everyone well regardless of their social position.
- Corrections should be given only with gentleness and charity. The true Salesian spirit is a masterpiece of empathy! "Whenever you find your heart lacking in gentleness, take it very gently with your fingertips and put it back in place. Do not take it abruptly or with clenched fists. We must be willing to serve the troubled heart and to treat it with kindness; and we must link our passions and inclinations with chains of gold, that is, with the chains of love to induce them to accept God's will in all things." In these lines we hear the echo of what Francis had written to Philothea many years earlier on the subject of gentleness, a virtue which is rare and for that very reason of great value (cf. Introduction to the Devout Life III, 8-9): "Anyone who can preserve gentleness amidst suffering and infirmity and maintain peace in the disorder of many occupations is almost perfect. This constancy of humour, this gentleness and kindness of heart, is more rare than perfect chastity, but it is all the more desirable [...]. the flame of good example depends on this, as a flame depends on the oil of the lamp, because there is nothing else that edifies as much as loving kindness."

SALESIAN FAMILY SPIRITUALITY DAYS 2018



The 36th Salesian Family Spirituality Days were held in Turin for the first time from 18 to 21 January 2018. About 400 people from 22 groups of the Salesian Family from different countries of the world took part. ADMA was represented by the President Renato Valera and all the members of the Council, plus about 50 members from different regions of Italy, from Spain, Argentina and Brazil.

In particular, our Association organized a penitential celebration based on the gospel of the Samaritan woman. It included gestures and signs that recalled the teaching of St. Francis de Sales, a great master of spiritual life. Some young people from ADMA Primaria - Elisabetta, Alessandro, Giulia, and Valeria - participated in the round table discussion organized to listen to the young people.

The theme of the meeting was the message that the Rector Major himself entrusted to the whole Salesian Family in this year's Strenna, "Lord, give me this water (Jn 4:15) LET US CULTIVATE THE ART OF LISTENING AND ACCOMPANYING." The listening and accompaniment of the young will therefore be the attitudes that Salesian educators hope to discover more and more and understand better during the Spirituality Days, following the example of Don Bosco.

There were three talks. The first, by Sr. Paola Casalis, a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, was entitled "Listening to the Young". Through a visual and artistic journey starting from the contemplation of art, she



described the typical traits of listening according to the Christian and Salesian spiritual tradition. Her talk was particularly well received because of the wealth of experience it contained. Fr Juan Crespo, a Salesian, developed the theme: "Discernment and decision-making in accompaniment". Fr Michal Vojtas, also a Salesian and professor at the Salesian Pontifical University, spoke on "The Salesian Art of Encounter, Accompaniment and Discernment". He outlined the typical contribution of the Salesian charism as seen in Don Bosco's praxis and pedagogy, showing the absolute timeliness of the witness inherited by the Salesian Family. He described the various stages in the accompaniment of young people, a process that enhances their freedom and personality. He then outlined the approach that characterizes this educational attitude: "Accompaniment is not a linear, standardized path ... we cannot accompany everyone, but we can accompany some, who in turn will accompany others," he said.

Sebastiano Coticelli and Titta Boccia, of the Witnesses of the Risen Lord group, spoke on the theme, "Accompanied in order to Accompany Others". Alejandro Sanz and Pili Lance of the Spanish Salesian

Youth Ministry, spoke on "Formation for Animation". They were followed by a round table discussion attended by several young people, entitled: "How do the young people of the Salesian Family feel listened to and accompanied?" Young people from different countries and different languages, belonging to various groups of the Salesian Family, presented their various experiences, both live in the theatre in Valdocco and on video. They had one thing in common: the recognition of how accompaniment by a trusted adult educator has been of great benefit in their lives and, indeed, more than one expressed their regret at coming late to this experience.

A welcoming attitude, availability, attention and personal time, freedom ... these were the fundamental ingredients highlighted by the young people in the accompanying relationship. It is part of an integral educational project, which it does not replace. Rather, it goes along with all the other areas of Salesian experience.

In the concluding Eucharist on Sunday 21 January, the Rector Major of the Salesians, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, repeated in his homily the invitation of Pope Francis to pay attention to the liturgical prayers. Taking his cue from the Collect, he drew the attention of the Salesian Family to the qualities needed to be effective in working with the young: to be "contemplative and with eyes wide open", because only by contemplating God is it possible to bear witness; to be "pilgrims at heart", because the invitation to be an outgoing Church must find the Salesian Family in the forefront; being a "Salesian Family of the here and now", aware that the time to act is now, because there are many young people all over the world who "thirst for God" and who "are waiting for a helping hand and a welcoming heart."

He concluded the Spirituality Days with an invitation to all the members of the Salesian Family to look with hope to the future: "Today we must all be new Don Boscos and Mother Mazzarellos and the other founders of the various groups in the world. Don Bosco's dream is a dream that is becoming a reality."



Response by Renato Valera, President of ADMA

Let's walk in the footsteps of Don Bosco!

This is precisely what we did during the Spirituality Days of the Salesian Family in Valdocco, in the very places where Don Bosco became a master of listening and accompaniment.

At this favourable time when the thirst for spirituality and transcendence and the thirst for God are growing ever stronger, we are invited to use "words that go straight to the heart" and to believe that those we meet on our journey have a personal question in their heart which must lead to a project of happiness and fullness of life. We too and our association can grasp this invitation and live it in our moments of formation, prayer, meeting and service. In the words of the Rector Major, our hope is that "our mother Mary grant us the grace to be attentive mediators of the word of the Lord, which resounds, in a way that is not always immediately comprehensible, in the heart of every young person, in marriages, in families, and in all who are searching."

Listening to the young people

I thank the Lord for having the Salesian Family always with me since I was a child. Since I came in contact with ADMA ten years ago I have experienced the constant closeness of many families who take care of us young people, listen to us, give us precious advice to help us to make daily choices and mature in the Faith. This is a wonderful gift! Being accompanied by my spiritual father, Don Roberto, has always warmed my heart. Feeling his presence and knowing that I am walking with him in life makes me feel guided and protected.

It is a great gift to grow with him and with many priests and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. I feel accompanied by them in a very paternal, knowing that they pray for me and help me with great sensitivity to understand how to face what life offers me and to realize the project that God has dreamed for me. (Elisabetta)

Accompaniment has been fundamental for each of us in the decisive steps of our lives and, when we found ourselves living as a couple, we wanted to share our lives with someone.

Listening is a first requirement in anyone who accompanies the young and if this is taken care of, it will help to raise questions. We believe that being accompanied is not a search for answers, but rather a help in asking the right questions on our journey and in discovering God's plan. Sometimes little things like a simple invitation to dinner from a family friend have helped us to open up to dialogue and to get to know each other better, providing us with points of reference and models for comparison.

Those who are called to accompany must be like transparent glass, like a window through which God's light can filter. If one is not transparent, one risks stopping the light from reaching the young. We need to reach out to all young people and help them always to aim high. To do this you also need to get your hands dirty with those who are most in need. (Giulia and Alessandro)



Decalogue of Salesian accompaniment

The Salesian companion:

- Accompanies the young in their time of vocational discernment, and experiences, in turn, the beauty of being accompanied.
- Helps the young person with patience and kindness to discover, through listening to the voice of God, how to offer himself or herself and to realize the great project that awaits him.
- Fosters a spiritual climate with a humble and joyful presence and witness.
- Excludes no one but offers everyone the opportunity to be accompanied, taking the first step, with an empathic listening and enhances their personal qualities.
- Proposes a spirituality with a unitary vision, living an authentic presence on the example of Jesus.
- Gives witness of joy by loving and making God's love felt.
- Adopts a "come and see" approach with a silent and coherent testimony, which shows the presence of the Risen Lord and invites the young to undertake a journey.
- Lives the community dimension, creating a "home that welcomes" by a look, knowing how to be open to the world and the fullness of life.
- Spends time in personal encounter, developing the art of listening with the heart of Christ the Good Shepherd.
- Looks at life with confidence and hope, entrusting oneself to the Lord, walking alongside the young and awakening in them the desire to meet him.



The paper can be read at the following site:

www.admadonbosco.org

and here: www.donbosco-torino.it/

For every communication you can contact

the following email address: pcameroni@sdb.org