

Confronto 2017: Agents of Don Bosco's VISION, PASSION and MISSION

12 august: Presentation of the Theme

Hi everyone, I am very happy to welcome you all to this much anticipated gathering of representatives of the Salesian Youth Movement from Europe and the Middle East. "Confronto" is an Italian word which means "to meet and discuss". It has a special meaning for Salesian youth because it indicates the gathering of young people engaged in the Salesian Youth Movement from Europe and the Middle East.

On behalf of the Rector Major, Fr. Angel Fernandez Artime, Mother General, Sr. Yvonne Reungoat, Fr. Fabio Attard, SDB General Councillor for Youth Ministry, and the many FMA's, Salesians, Salesian Cooperators and collaborators, especially of the FMA and SDB Provinces of Piedmont, welcome home.

We come from different places and we carry different identity cards or passports, but all of us have a common origin, and we have the joy and the privilege to discover our common roots. I am sure that after this experience, Colle Don Bosco, Valdocco and Mornese will no longer be just places that you remember because you have heard about them, read about them, saw them in some film or postcard. These days are offered for each one of us to discover and strengthen our identity as Salesians. Yes, all of us are Salesians.

Each one of you represents not only yourself but the other youngsters of your school, oratory, parish, youth group, or association. So I invite you to really savor this experience. Value the opportunity to interact with other participants from other countries, take time to be silent and allow whatever you see, hear and experience speak to your heart. Write down the feelings that arise in your heart, your questions and fears, your hopes for yourself, for your group, for your country, for the world at large.

One of the most important companions that you will have during these days is the booklet which was lovingly prepared by the organizers. It will give you important indications, and it can also be a place to record the highlights of the Confronto experience.

In 2015, on the occasion of the bicentenary of Don Bosco's birth, young people of the worldwide Salesian Youth Movement gathered together for a deep experience of getting to know Don Bosco in order to be "like Don Bosco, with the young and for the young".

I believe that the theme chosen for this Confronto, "Agents of Don Bosco's Vision – Passion – Mission", is a fitting continuation of the experience of the bicentenary. The booklet gives us an explanation of the theme and the logo.

Vision is the ability to see the future with our feet firmly grounded on the past and the present.

Passion is the energy that is at the center of any project.

Mission is how we translate in concrete steps our passion in order to arrive at the vision.

We will try to create together an experience that will enable us to have a deeper understanding and commitment as “agents” like Don Bosco.

As you try to get to know Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello, the forerunners of the Salesian charism in favor of children and young people, you will discover that their lives were not focused on themselves or on their own plans.

The farm boy Johnny Bosco became Don Bosco because he understood God’s plan for him. Later on in his life, Don Bosco understood the dream he had at nine years of age here in Becchi. The majestic man in his dream, Jesus, indicated to him his lifelong mission: to transform the unruly boys that he saw in his dream, just like the goats that have been transformed into mild lambs. Jesus gave Johnny Bosco a teacher, Mother Mary, and at the end of his life, Don Bosco said that it was “Mary who did everything”.

In Mornese you will get to know how the strong-willed Main became Mother Maria Domenica Mazzarello, co-foundress of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. From an unknown hamlet, the Institute is now spread throughout the world. Maria Domenica also had a special divine intervention in her life while she was passing through an empty field. She saw a vision of a big school with young girls and a group of sisters. And then she heard the voice “I entrust them to you”.

Dear friends, we are here from different parts of Europe and the Middle East, thanks to Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello. These two persons took the risk of opening their lives and of dreaming something that was beyond the confines of their lives.

Never alone, never abandoned

We will see that for both Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello the family played an important role in their upbringing. They came from simple and working families; families that had their own share of hardships and difficulties. Compared with Maria Mazzarello, Johnny Bosco had quite a difficult life. I think you know his childhood and his life as an adolescent and a young seminarian. Both John and Maria had the blessing of wise and holy parents. Mama Margaret had a strong positive influence in John’s life; while Maria Mazzarello’s father, Joseph, was a very significant person in her life and upbringing.

The family has an important role in the life of any person. Whatever our families have given us or have not given us has an impact in our lives. That is why we recognize that in helping young people it is also necessary to accompany and help families, especially the parents.

However, maturity or growth means that we are able to be grateful to the good things that come from our families and at the same time to forgive them for their absence and whatever hurt they may have caused us. We will see how for both Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello their experiences of failure and disappointments in life did not make them bitter people, rather, they became stepping stones to understand the mission that God has entrusted to them.

Growing up without a father, facing the difficult situation with his brother Anthony, working his way through elementary, high school and the seminary, Don Bosco learned how to be a father to

his boys. The different skills that he learned to cope with life became useful in giving an education to poor and unschooled young people.

For Mother Mazzarello, her falling sick and at death's door led her to permanently abandon working in the fields. The dressmaking skill she acquired afterwards enabled her to gather a group of girls to teach them how to sew and to know God. If Maria Mazzarello did not fall sick, who knows if there would have been the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians as we know it now.

We are all children of these great people: Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello who, throughout their lives, have experienced God's Presence guiding them. Both of them have transformed a negative experience or an apparent failure into a mission that now gives life to myriads of young people in the world. From disgrace to grace.

I ask you to take a moment to thank each member of your family and to forgive whatever offenses or sufferings they may have caused you.

As you walk through the places that are silent witnesses to the life of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello, remember that there is no shortcuts to life. Life will always bring with it joys and sorrows, triumphs and failures, lights and darkness. Growth takes place in our daily efforts to make sense of each experience and, with God's help, especially through the accompaniment of significant persons, see that in our life there is a faithful presence that guides our history: GOD.

Agents of Don Bosco's vision, passion and mission

I like very much the image of roots and wings.

Family gives us roots. Ideally, family is what we consider home, a place to go to for healing, comfort and restoration. For some who cannot count on a family to be a home, there is a need for at least one person who can be considered as home. *Do you have anybody whom you can consider as such? Thank God for that person and think of the many young people you know and you do not know who are in search of such persons. Can you be a friend, a home for them?*

But it is not enough to have roots. We are also called to have wings: to become the person God has dreamed us to be, not a photocopy of someone in our family or a puppet following what others expect us to be. Wings make us fly, to go beyond our "apparent limitations", trusting that there is a guiding hand that faithfully accompanies us in our journey.

Who would have thought that the farmhand would become the Don Bosco revered as the "Father and teacher of youth"? Who would have imagined that the small group of peasant women in the unknown village of Mornese would be first members of an Institute that is present in the five continents?

Dear friends, we are at a very important and exciting time when the eyes and ears of the Church are on you, young people. Pope Francis has called on everyone to listen to you, not only to you who are moving around Church circles, but to all young people, without exception. Pope Francis reminds us all that our first vocation is JOY. I am sure that you will agree with me when I say that every young person's first dream is to be happy. The other needs and desires are what we think will make us happy.

As you go around these Salesian places, try to discover what made Don Bosco, Mother Mazzarello, the first Salesians and boys of the Oratory, and the first Sisters and girls of Mornese happy. What was the cause of their joy?

In Valdocco you will see Don Bosco's motto that captured Dominic Savio's interest: ***da mihi animas coetera tolle***. Don Bosco's passion was God. He encouraged his boys to start early in life to make God an important presence in their life.

Since Don Bosco's passion was God, Don Bosco became passionate with God's passion, which is that every person may have fullness of life, that is, happy. That is why Don Bosco was ready to lose everything in order save one soul. But what is truly amazing is that Don Bosco made holiness a very natural and joyful thing to do.

Do you experience that in the Salesian Youth Movement where you live? Do young people perceive that whether they are in a school, or an oratory, or a group, this Salesian environment's most important concern is your true happiness? This true happiness is founded only on one thing: the experience that my life has meaning because I am loved. God is the one who loves us without any conditions. We try to love like God loves, but our love will always be imperfect, and so it is important to strong experience that God loves us. This is the basis of our security.

Being loved by God would naturally transform us to become lovers like God. Love is not an idea. If it is true love, it has to be felt and experienced by the other. And so it is important for us to know in which best way we can show our love for others. What makes you totally passionate and able to get out of bed with enthusiasm every morning? Is it a short-term or a continuing enthusiasm? This could be a clue as to the direction your life has to take.

We are happy for your presence in the Salesian Youth Movement, but you will not be forever animators. Are you on a journey of discovering your life's direction, what is that "passion" for which you are willing to "give up everything". That is what passion is all about, that we are willing to give up everything so as to get that "pearl of great price". You are not alone on this journey, my dear young people. We, Salesians, FMA's, Salesian cooperators and other adults of the Salesian family are here for you. We are willing to be your companions on the journey. Do you know that journeying with you also makes us happier and more faithful to our vocation?

I know that it is not easy for you to make definitive choices because you want to maintain your freedom. You have so many possibilities and all are good and attractive, but unless we make a choice, we will be forever like a ship tossed and turned by the wind and without any horizon ahead. At some point in life, to say yes to a choice is to fully express your freedom.

Ask Mary to give you the grace to discover God's wonderful vision for your life and the courage to say YES, as she did at the Annunciation. When Mary said Yes, not everything was clear. Her yes did not exempt her from suffering; in fact, her yes led her at the foot of the cross. Mary's life is an example for us to find true joy in saying Yes to God's vision for us. I promise to say a prayer for each one of you to Mary, the teacher God gave to Don Bosco.

My dear friends, as we start on this journey, I pray that each one of us may discover the true treasure in the life of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello: God; and whoever is in love with God is also in love with people since we are God's image and likeness.

May God be the passion that moves your life and sends you on a mission to be evangelizers of your peers, not only in words but in the way you live your lives with joy, responsibility, concern for others and concrete works in favor of justice, peace and integrity of creation.

Don Bosco welcomes us all here, in his humble home where everything started. My prayer is that this may be the place and the experience where you will hear God speaking to your heart, encouraging you to make that leap that might totally unsettle your life. Say yes to the adventure. It will be the greatest of your life!

Sr. Runita G. Borja FMA

03 August 2017