



Dear Confreres and Friends,

This month, the theme is appropriate to the liturgical season. The message of our Rector Major to the young on the feast of St. John Bosco is presented for your reading. Even though it came out in January, some may have not had the chance to read it.

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**Lent: Liturgical Spiritual Exercise of  
the Christian Community  
As Preparation for the Easter Feast  
By Arthur J. Lenti, SDB**

On Wednesday February 25, the Church enters into a spiritual exercise with prayer and fasting and almsgiving, attending with great seriousness to its calling. Thirty-seven days later on Holy Thursday evening (April 9), the season of Lent comes to an end. From Holy Thursday night until Easter Sunday afternoon, the church keeps the Paschal Triduum, the “Three Days of Easter.”

**[The Sacred Triduum]**

The original nucleus of the liturgical celebration of the Paschal Feast was the Sacred Triduum, from Thursday night to Easter Sunday. It was the celebration of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus. In this context the sacraments of Christian initiation, Baptism (with Confirmation) and Holy Eucharist, were celebrated.

**[Holy Thursday]**

By the fourth century, Holy Thursday, not part of the Sacred Triduum, was celebrated as a special

commemoration of the “Institution of the Holy Eucharist.” By the seventh century, the rite of the “Washing of Feet” (*Mandatum* or Love Commandment) was introduced at the celebration of the Eucharist on Holy Thursday, in connection with the reading of the narrative of the “supper” from the Gospel of John.

Setting of these days, Thursday night to Sunday, as the significant days of the Paschal Feast was based on the traditional interpretation of the Passion narrative in the Synoptic Gospels.



According to the Synoptics, on the night on which Jesus held a last supper with his disciples, he was betrayed and imprisoned, then brought to trial that night and next morning, and died on the cross in the afternoon of the same day—a Friday and by coincidence the eve of the great holy day of Passover. He was buried hastily that evening; and on Sunday morning (after the Jewish Passover) the tomb was found empty. This time frame gave rise to the creedal formula, “on the third day” or, “after three days” he was raised.

(The fact that this reconstruction is historically debatable did not affect the setting of these liturgical days.)

**[Passion Sunday and Holy Week]**

The Sacred Triduum being thus was thus set, Holy Week came to be defined in the liturgical calendar from the fact that the Passion narrative according to Matthew was read on the Sunday preceding the Sacred Triduum as a preparation to it. Hence this Sunday became known as “Passion Sunday,” and that whole week as “Holy Week.” Later, the commemoration of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem as narrated in the Gospels was added, and it acquired such popularity that this Sunday became known as “Palm Sunday.” In the new liturgy, however, this secondary commemoration has been retained only as an introduction to the liturgy of Passion Sunday.

**[The Season of Lent]**

Lent as a more or less extended spiritual exercise preparatory to the celebration of the Sacred Triduum and the Paschal Feast dates from the late fourth century. It varied in length in different areas of the Church at different times. As the period of preparation and initiation of individuals seeking to be baptized, Lent had at first no specified duration. Sometimes it took months or years for these individuals, called catechumens, to be initiated gradually to the Christian way of life. But at a certain point of their preparation the catechumens would be “elected” and called to spend the last few weeks before baptism in fasting, prayer and practice of charity. It is at this point that Lent became a celebration of the Christian community.

In the Western Church, Lent received its final form in the seventh century, when the 40-day structure commemorating the 40-day fast of Jesus in the desert became normative.

As a fasting exercise, Lent was reckoned from the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday back to Wednesday of the seventh week before Easter (Ash Wednesday). That's 40 days—counting the Easter Triduum, but excluding Sundays, which were not part of the liturgical fast. As a preparation for the Easter Triduum, Lent, consonant with its original purpose, begins on Ash Wednesday and ends quietly the evening of Holy Thursday (37 days).

### **[Character of Lent]**

Since Lent was and is celebrated as an extended preparation for the Easter Triduum, which from earliest days was the time of the Christian sacraments, *the primary character of Lent is sacramental.*

It was in the first place a time of Christian initiation, that is, a time of gradual initiation of catechumens into the Christian community and way of life, leading to their full induction through the sacraments of Baptism (with Confirmation) and Holy Eucharist at the Easter Vigil. For this purpose the "Order of Catechumens" was established.

In the second place it was a time for the *reconciliation and re-admission of sinners*, globally designated as the "Order of Penitents." Penitential exercises (chiefly fasting, prayer and almsgiving) were part of the reconciliation process, before re-admission.

### **[Sacrament of Reconciliation<sup>1</sup>]**

The reform of the penitential liturgy after Vatican II (since 1975) renewed the sacrament in such a way that the symbols and texts used more clearly expressed its nature and effect. The celebration of the sacrament now includes the elements of greeting, Scripture reading, confession and counsel, imposition of a penance, act of contrition, absolution, praise of God, and dismissal.

The new order of the liturgy for penance and reconciliation develops the symbolic character of the sacrament and gives emphasis to two aspects in particular. First, it makes evident that repentance and reconciliation do not involve merely an action that takes place between God and individual sinners, mediated by the priest, but constitute an event that affects the whole Church community. Secondly, a variety of forms and symbolic actions of reconciliation are available in addition to the sacrament of reconciliation itself. These are designed either to complement the sacrament or to lead us toward it.

The forty days of Lent as a preparation for Easter offer us many penitential symbols and opportunities. Such are the cross of ashes we receive on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday, the penitential rite in the Mass, penitential prayer services, exhortations to repentance, prayers for penitents, observance of Friday as the day of Christ's death. All these tokens call us to enter into the Church's Lenten exercise with true devotion.

The sacramental and penitential characters of Lent were and are very important also for the rest of the Christian community. The whole Church stood by the catechumens and the penitents in support. But they also joined them "in spirit," through renewed personal conversion and re-commitment. Hence the whole Christian community is called to participate in the sacramental and penitential exercises. The scriptures, prayers and rites of the sacramental season give clarity and purpose to the life-long struggle against evil—a struggle that draws strength from the power of the Cross of Jesus.

### **[Fasting, Prayer, Almsgiving]**

The *penitential exercises* of Lent consisted primarily in fasting, prayer and almsgiving as interpreted and spiritualized by Jesus, for example in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (Mt 6, 1-18).

The Lenten *Fast* of the Christian was patterned after Jesus' own example, as he fasted in the desert and rejected the three great temptations, thereby radically rejecting worldly purposes and choosing the Cross. *Prayer* was likewise intensified during Lent after Jesus' teaching and example. *Almsgiving* was broadened to include all works of mercy as taught and exemplified by Jesus in his ministry.

But it should be noted that these Lenten practices are conceived as exemplifying together a *gospel way of Christian life*. Fasting is a symbol of the renunciation that enables the Christian personally to enter the way of the Cross. Intensified prayer keeps the Christian united with Christ in a spirit of worship and self-offering. Then fasting and prayer jointly are to make us steadfast and effective in the service of charity, which seeks to address contemporary situations in imitation of the pastoral charity of Christ.

In his Encyclical *Deus caritas est* Pope Benedict XVI speaks at length on the subject of Christian charity. He writes at one point: "33. *The consciousness that, in Christ, God has given himself for us, even unto death, must inspire us to live no longer for ourselves but for him, and, with him, for others. Whoever loves Christ loves the Church, and desires the Church to be increasingly the image and instrument of the love that flows from Christ.*" — "36. *When we consider the immensity of others' needs, [...] we can be tempted to give in to inertia, since it would seem that in any event nothing can be accomplished. At such times, a living relationship with Christ is decisive. [...] Prayer, as a means of drawing ever-new strength from Christ, is concretely and urgently needed. People who pray are not wasting their time, even though the situation appears desperate and seems to call for action alone. Piety does not undermine the struggle against the poverty of our neighbors, however extreme. In the example of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta we have a clear illustration of the fact that time devoted to God in prayer not only does not detract from effective and loving service to our neighbor, but is in fact the inexhaustible source of that service. [...]*"

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<sup>1</sup> Cf Adjunct II below.

The Lenten spiritual exercise is thus designed to express our desire for conversion, reconciliation and wholeness—in sacramental union with Christ’s passion, death and resurrection.

**Adjunct I: To Keep a True Lent** (Robert Herrick, 1648)

Is this a fast, to keep The larder lean, And clean From fat of veals and sheep?	No; 'tis a fast, to dole Thy sheaf of wheat And meat Unto the hungry soul.
Is it to quit the dish Of flesh, yet still To fill The platter high with fish?	It is to fast from strife, From old debate And hate; To circumcise' thy life;
Is it to fast an hour Or ragged to go Or show A downcast look and sour?	To show a heart grief-rent; To starve thy sin, Not bin. And that's to keep thy Lent.

**Adjunct II: Sacrament Of Reconciliation  
(Brief Historical Survey)**

Since the bodily, visible dimension is part of being human, repentance must also be expressed in visible signs and actions that reveal both the penitent’s turning away from sin and his or her reintegration into the company of Christ’s disciples, the Church.

There is no question here of justification by works. It is excluded because every human act of repentance is always anticipated by the grace of a loving God: Grace and grace alone is what makes us capable of repentance in the first place.

Out of concern for the reconciliation of sinners, the Church at various times and in different regions developed a variety of penitential practices of differing severity.

Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving (as proposed and interpreted in the Gospel tradition) as well as other good works were regarded as sufficient for the forgiveness of daily faults.

The so-called deadly sins (especially apostasy, murder, and adultery) were, at a very early stage, subjected to public penance. This consisted essentially of the following steps: (1) confession to the bishop; (2) reception into the status of penitent with assignment of particular penitential duties; (3) exclusion from the Eucharistic celebration and from reception of Communion; (4) After the penitential duty was completed, reconciliation (that is, the reception of the sinner back into the community) was accomplished through imposition of hands by the bishop.

In the sixth century, under the influence of peripatetic Irish and Scottish monks, the practice of so-called tariff

penance was introduced: The penitent confessed his or her sins to a priest who assigned an appropriate penitential duty. After its completion (or even immediately) the penitent received absolution. The custom of private confession developed from this practice. In private confession the ecclesial aspect scarcely played any further part.

In the modern era the practice of devotional confession arose, with confession of only minor sins, especially as a preparation for Communion.

From the sixteenth century onward the celebration of the sacrament was moved from the sanctuary to the confessional.

Even before this, the juridical formula of absolution (*I absolve you*) was introduced—replacing the priest’s *prayer* of absolution, that is, the prayer that God would forgive the sinner (a form that the Eastern Orthodox Churches still retain).

The reform of the penitential liturgy after Vatican II (since 1975) renewed the sacrament in such a way that the symbols and texts used more clearly expressed its nature and effect. As noted above, the celebration of the sacrament now includes the elements of greeting, Scripture reading, confession and counsel, imposition of a penance, act of contrition, absolution, praise of God, and dismissal.

Another form was given for community celebrations of reconciliation with individual confession and absolution, in which the confession and absolution are embedded in a service of the Word that emphasizes the liturgical-ecclesial character of the sacrament.

General confession and absolution is reserved for special situations.

Absolution is always accompanied by extension of the hands and a sign of the cross in order to indicate the connection between Jesus’ death on the cross and the reconciliation of the penitent.

Again as noted above, the new order of the liturgy of penance and reconciliation develops the symbolic character of the sacrament and gives emphasis to two aspects in particular. First, it makes evident that repentance and reconciliation do not involve merely an action that takes place between God and individual sinners, mediated by the priest, but constitute an event that affects the whole Church community. Secondly, a variety of forms and symbolic actions of reconciliation are available in addition to the sacrament of reconciliation itself. These are designed either to complement the sacrament or to lead us toward it.

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### **Biblical Source I: *Matthew 6:1-18***

“(But) take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. *When you give alms*, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. *“When you pray*, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

“This is how you are to pray:

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread;  
and forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors;  
and do not subject us to the final test,  
but deliver us from the evil one.

If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions.

*“When you fast*, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.

### **Biblical Source II: Mark, Matthew and Luke (Predictions of the Passion and Connected Teachings)**

*[Note: Jesus follows each of the three predictions of his passion and death in the Synoptics with teachings intended for his disciples (and therefore for all his followers). These teachings illustrate basic points of discipleship in the light of the Cross, that is, of Jesus' own abasement and service.]*

#### **1a. First prediction of the Passion**

**Mk 8:31-33:** He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days. He spoke this openly. Then Peter took him aside

and began to rebuke him. At this he turned around and, looking at his disciples, rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.”

**Mt 16:21-23:** From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, “God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you.”

He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.

**Lk 9:21-23:** He rebuked them and directed them not to tell this to anyone. He said, “The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised.”

Then he said to all, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

#### **1b. Connected teaching: *Conditions of Discipleship***

**Mk 8:34-36:** He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them, “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it.

What profit is there for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?

**Mt 16:24-26:** Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life?

**Lk 9:23-25:** Then he said to all, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself?

#### **2a. Second prediction of the Passion**

**Mk 9:30-32:** They left from there and began a journey through Galilee, but he did not wish anyone to know about it. He was teaching his disciples and telling them, “The Son of Man is to be handed over to men and they will kill him, and three days after his death he will rise.”

But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to question him.

**Mt 17: 22-23:** As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is to be handed over to men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day.” And they were overwhelmed with grief.

**Lk 9: 43b-45:** While they were all amazed at his every deed, he said to his disciples, “Pay attention to what I am telling you. The Son of Man is to be handed over to men.”

But they did not understand this saying; its meaning was hidden from them so that they should not understand it, and they were afraid to ask him about this saying.

### **2b. Connected teaching: *True Greatness***

**Mk 9:33-37:** They came to Capernaum and, once inside the house, he began to ask them, “What were you arguing about on the way?”

But they remained silent. They had been discussing among themselves on the way who was the greatest.

Then he sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them, “If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.”

Taking a child he placed it in their midst, and putting his arms around it he said to them,

“Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the one who sent me.”

**Mt 18:1-5:** At that time the disciples approached Jesus and said, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

He called a child over, placed it in their midst, and said, “Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me.”

**Lk 9:46-48:** An argument arose among the disciples about which of them was the greatest.

Jesus realized the intention of their hearts and took a child and placed it by his side and said to them, “Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me. For the one who is least among all of you is the one who is the greatest.”

### **3a. Third prediction of the Passion**

**Mk 10:32-34:** They were on the way, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus went ahead of them. They were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. Taking the Twelve aside again, he began to tell them what was going to happen to him.

“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and hand him over to the Gentiles who will mock him, spit upon him, scourge him, and put him to death, but after three days he will rise.”

**Mt 20:17-19:** As Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve (disciples) aside by themselves, and said to them on the way,

“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.”

**Lk 18:31-34:** Then he took the Twelve aside and said to them, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem and everything written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled.

He will be handed over to the Gentiles and he will be mocked and insulted and spat upon; and after they have scourged him they will kill him, but on the third day he will rise.”

But they understood nothing of this; the word remained hidden from them and they failed to comprehend what he said.

### **3b. Connected teaching: *Service of the Cross***

**Mk 10: 35-45:** Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.”

He replied, “What do you wish (me) to do for you?”

They answered him, “Grant that in your glory we may sit one at your right and the other at your left.”

Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”

They said to him, “We can.” Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink, you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

When the ten heard this, they became indignant at James and John.

Jesus summoned them and said to them, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt.

But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

**Mt 20:20-28:** Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee approached him with her sons and did him homage, wishing to ask him for something. He said to her, “What do you wish?” She answered him, “Command that these two sons of mine sit, one at your right and the other at your left, in your kingdom.”

Jesus said in reply, "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?" They said to him, "We can."

He replied, "My cup you will indeed drink, but to sit at my right and at my left (, this) is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father."

When the ten heard this, they became indignant at the two brothers. But Jesus summoned them and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt.

But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

**Lk 22:24-27:** Then an argument broke out among them about which of them should be regarded as the greatest.

He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them and those in authority over them are addressed as 'Benefactors'; but among you it shall not be so. Rather, let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leader as the servant.

For who is greater: the one seated at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one seated at table? I am among you as the one who serves.

*[Note: Lk places this parallel passage in the context of the Last Supper. In this respect, this passage on service should be compared with Jn 13:5-15 (Washing of Feet and Connected Teaching.)]*

## **Salesian Source: Salesian Constitutions ##**

### **18. Work and temperance**

"Work and temperance will make the Congregation flourish",<sup>1</sup> whereas the seeking of an easy and comfortable life will instead bring about its death.<sup>2</sup>

The Salesian gives himself to his mission with tireless energy, taking care to do everything with simplicity and moderation. He knows that by his work he is participating in the creative action of God and cooperating with Christ in building the Kingdom.

Temperance gives him the strength to control his heart, to master himself and remain even-tempered.

He does not look for unusual penances but accepts the daily demands and renunciations of the apostolic life. He is ready to suffer cold and heat, hunger and thirst, weariness and disdain whenever God's glory and the salvation of souls require it.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>MB XII, 466; BM XII, 338.

<sup>2</sup>cf. MB XVII, 272.

<sup>3</sup>cf. C 1875, XIII, 13.

### **71. Obedience and the mystery of the cross**

"Substitute acts of penance," Don Bosco tells us, "with acts

of obedience."<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes obedience will clash with our own selfish attitudes and desires for independence, or may really test our love. This is the moment to look to Christ, who was obedient even unto death:<sup>2</sup> "Father, if this chalice cannot pass from me unless I drink it, thy will be done."<sup>3</sup>

The mystery of his death and resurrection teaches us how fruitful it is for us to obey: the grain of wheat which dies in the obscurity of the earth bears much fruit.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>MB XIII, 89, BM XIII, 68

<sup>2</sup>cf Phil 2, 8 cf. MB IV, 233, BM IV, 163

<sup>3</sup>Mt 26, 42

<sup>4</sup>cf. Jn 12, 24

### **73. Poverty and the Salesian mission**

Don Bosco lived his poverty in detachment of heart and generous service of others; his manner was marked by austerity, hard work and much initiative.

Following his example we too live detached from all earthly goods;<sup>1</sup> we participate with a spirit of enterprise in the mission of the Church and in her struggle for justice and peace, especially by educating those in need.

The witness of our poverty, lived in a common sharing of our goods, helps the young to overcome their selfish possessive instinct and opens them to the christian sense of sharing.

<sup>1</sup>cf C 1875, IV, 7

### **84. Attitudes and means for growing in chastity**

Our chastity is not a conquest made once for all time. It has its moments of peace and moments of trial.

It is a gift which because of human weakness demands a daily pledge of fidelity.

For this reason the Salesian, faithful to the Constitutions, lives a life of work and temperance, practices mortification and the custody of the senses, makes discreet and prudent use of the means of social communication, and does not neglect the natural means which contribute to physical and mental health.

Above all, he implores God's help and lives in his presence; he nourishes his love for Christ at the table of the Word and the Eucharist, and humbly purifies it in the sacrament of Reconciliation; he entrusts himself with simplicity to a spiritual director.

He turns with filial trust to Mary, the Immaculate Help of Christians, who helps him to love as Don Bosco did. R 44, 66-68

### **90. The community in continual conversion**

The Word of God calls us to continual conversion.

Aware of our weakness, we respond by vigilance and sincere repentance, brotherly correction, mutual forgiveness and the calm acceptance of our daily cross.

This commitment to conversion on the part of each member and of the whole community is brought to its fulfillment by the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Prepared by the daily examination of conscience and received frequently according to the Church's directives, this sacrament gives us the joy of the Father's pardon, rebuilds brotherly communion, and purifies our apostolic intentions. R 73

### **Christian Source: *Five Lenten Meditations***

(Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

**1. Walking under the Cross Brings Peace and Joy**  
***Rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.*** [1 Peter 4:13]

All who suffer and carry heavy burdens are called by Jesus to cast off their yoke and take up his, which is easy, and to bear his burden, which is light. His yoke and his burden are the cross. Walking under this cross is not misery and despair, but refreshment and peace for one's soul; it is the highest joy. Here we no longer walk beneath our self-made laws and burdens, but rather under the yoke of him who knows us, and who himself walks along with us under this yoke. Under his yoke, we are assured of his proximity and fellowship.

When a disciple picks up his or her own cross, it is actually Christ himself who is thereby found.

***What are the "self-made laws and burdens" that I labor under? Do I know the joy of working under Jesus' yoke?***

### **2. Beware of Boasting about Faith—Remember the Bitter Lesson of Peter**

***Peter said to him, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you."*** [Matthew 26:35]

It is good that we not boast about faith. Faith is not indicated by boasting. It is precisely because everything depends on our really having faith that every desire for boasting must fade away. Whether we believe or not will become apparent. It will become apparent daily, and declarations will be of no help at all. You all know how, in the passion story, Peter says to Jesus: "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" and Jesus' answer: "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." and the story ends, "Peter went out and wept bitterly." He had denied his Lord.

Grand declarations however sincere, however solemn, are closest to denial. May God keep all of us from that.

***Lord, when I am tempted to take pride in my faith, may I learn to bite my tongue and turn to you in silent prayer.***

### **3. Demanding to Know Why We Suffer Is "Unbelief's Greatest Question"**

***I believe. Help my unbelief!*** [Mark 9:24]

Your faith shall be tried by sorrow. God sends his children sorrow just when they need it most, when they have become far too confident on this earth. Then a great

hurt comes into our lives, a hard sacrifice, a great loss, sickness, or death. Our unbelief rears up. Why does God demand this of me? Why did God allow it? Why, yes, why? That is unbelief's greatest question. It tries to choke our belief. No one is spared this anguish. It is all so puzzling, so mysterious.

In this hour of god-forsakenness, we may and ought to say: "I believe, dear Lord; help my unbelief, yes, dear Lord, even in darkness, even in doubt, even in god-forsakenness! After all, dear Lord, you are my dear father, who makes all things work together for my good. Dear Lord Jesus Christ, you yourself cried out: 'My God, why have you forsaken me?' You wanted to be where I am! Now you are with me. Now I know that, even in my hour of need, you do not forsake me."

***Yes, Lord, I do believe. Help me to overcome my unbelief.***

**4. The Sign of Perfected Love Is The Cross of Jesus**  
***May I never boast of anything except the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*** [Galatians 6:14]

Faith alone justifies us before god. Hope directs our attention to the end. But love perfects. At the end, everything must become love. Perfection means love. But the sign of perfection in this world is called "cross." That is the way perfected love must go and always will go in this world. However, this truth shows us, first of all, that this world is ripe for demolition, overripe. It is only god's indescribable patience that is still waiting to the end. This truth shows us, secondly, that the church in this world remains a church under the cross. Woe to the church that already here wants to become a church of visible glory. It has denied its Lord on the cross. Faith, hope, and love all lead to the cross to be perfected.

***Forgive us, crucified Lord, for the times when we ignore your cross or when we are embarrassed by it. Help us to see your cross for what it is—love made perfect.***

### **5. Why, Indeed, Is There So Little Victory in Our Lives?**

***In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*** [Romans 8:37]

This is the question God addresses to us: "All that I have done for you, and you live as if nothing had happened! You submit to sin and the fear of death as if they could still enslave you! Why is there so little victory in your lives?"

Because you won't believe that Jesus is victor over death and sin, victor over your life. It is your lack of faith that leads to your defeats. But now Jesus' victory is proclaimed to you once again... It is victory over sin and death for you, too, whoever you may be.

Take hold of it in faith. Jesus will once again forgive you, and from now on sin won't have to rule over you

anymore. Jesus will rule over you, and he is stronger than every temptation. In the hour of your temptation, and in your fear of death, Jesus will conquer you, and you will acknowledge that Jesus has become victor over your sin, over your death. As often as you give up this belief you will flounder and be defeated, sin and die; as often as you lay hold of this belief, Jesus will have the victory.”

**Help us, Jesus, to overcome the defeatism—the faithlessness—that keeps us from claiming the holiness your cross has earned for us.**



## MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR TO THE YOUNG 2009

My Dear Young People,

Last summer I took part in the World Youth Day in Australia. It was great to see so many young people coming from all parts of the world, despite the distance and the expense, belonging to diocesan groups, to groups led by religious institutes or by the movements.

My thoughts immediately went to the great adventure that began with Jesus of Nazareth. From the edge of the ocean I thought of the banks of a lake in a tiny and unknown country. Those banks enclosed the whole world of a group of fishermen whose experience was limited to the waters of a lake with its sudden storms and its long and mysterious silences, and it was precisely on the banks of that lake that they met Jesus.

Fascinated by the man, they followed him, listened to him and often didn't understand him. They had doubts about him until the end, and they betrayed him. Finally, however, they all associated themselves with Peter's passionate profession of faith: «Lord to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life» (Jn 6,69). They had been caught up in his total selfless love. A love far

greater and more real than all their weakness, their every betrayal. And so that tiny seed germinated, and became a great people who cover the face of the earth: the Church.

I also had the joy of meeting the young people of the Salesian Youth Movement. In front of those thousands of enthusiastic young people there came into my mind the memory of a small group of young men who on the cold evening of 18 December 1859 had met together in Don Bosco's room to make the most important decision of their lives: to stay with Don Bosco, giving themselves totally to the Lord. And so in a simple and humble way, 150 years ago, a seed was sown. I can see the young Cagliero who a week before that decision, walking up and down the yard, uncertain, confused, thinking first one thing and then another, until he finally declared: «Monk or no monk, I'm staying with Don Bosco!». He stayed with Don Bosco, carrying that tiny seed to the furthest boundaries of Patagonia. It is a story far greater than him, far greater than those poor but generous young men. From that tiny seed there came the Salesians, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and the Salesians-Cooperators.

A story that has reached even us because that seed has become a great tree: the Salesian Family.

Yes, it's true; they were poor young men, limited in their human and cultural experience. But, in Don Bosco, they had met Jesus Christ who launched them on a mission that humanly-speaking was impossible, a mad adventure: «You will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth» (Acts 1,8). To you too, young people of the beginning of this third millennium, Jesus entrusts the mission which two thousand years ago he gave to his disciples: «I am sending you to proclaim my gospel to the ends of the earth. Go with that love and that apostolic and educative passion which led Don Bosco always to give preference to the young, the poor, the people not yet evangelized.»

Do not be afraid! The Risen Jesus will give you the power, the energy, the joy that come from the Holy Spirit. With the strength of the Spirit, the Church carries out her mission, making Jesus present today; the same Spirit who raised up and formed Don Bosco, has made that seed a fine large tree. To continue this mission I address to you dear young people, the pressing invitation to collaborate with your youthful enthusiasm and drive in making the Salesian Family into a great Movement, as vast as the world, for the salvation of the young.

You are not just the ones to whom the Salesian mission is directed, but, with the freshness of your youth, you are the beating heart of this great Movement. So you may ask: «But what do we have to do, how can we respond to the mission which Jesus entrusts to us, and in practical terms how do we set about evangelizing and educating our companions?».

I'm sure that if you know how to find a place for prayer, and you listen attentively with docility to the Holy Spirit, it will become more and more clear what to do in a

practical way in this work of your own evangelization and education and that of your companions which is so important.

But here in very simple terms I want to give you some suggestions to reflect on in the generosity of your hearts.

Above all I invite you to cultivate as a fundamental attitude: the will to walk together towards a shared goal, with a deep spirit of communion, with the convinced desire for synergy, with a mature ability to plan together. We have received the great gift of Salesian Youth Spirituality which constitutes the source of our communion and the energy for our mission which we need to understand more deeply and share more and more.

Our common mission, our shared goal is the world of youth. For this reason, dear friends, we need to be part of the youth scene. Jesus is sending you together with the whole Salesian Movement to the world of today's young people, with its lights and shades, with its anxieties and hopes, with its moments of joy but also its suffering, with its irrepressible life, but also with its deserts where only the bitter herbs of loneliness grow. I am thinking of the world of the school, of the university, of work; I am thinking about the places for free time and entertainment; I am thinking, in particular, about the desperate places of youth deprivation. It's a question of being actively present in all these places fostering a better quality of life, better and deeper interpersonal communication and sharing to overcome so much individualism and so much loneliness in which many young people are living, bearing witness to the positive values that give meaning and flavor to life, and above all, making the person of Jesus Christ the source of the fullness of humanity, of life and of joy present among the young.

Here is another suggestion: make the voice of the young heard, in particular that of the many who don't have a voice and no one listens to; make their needs and their expectations known, defend their rights and support them in their demands. Above all make this voice of the young heard among your own companions, who often don't know about these situations of marginalization and hardship; make it heard by the groups of the Salesian Family. Like Dominic Savio who took Don Bosco to the person sick with the plague and left on his own, you too ought to take the Salesian Family by the hand so that it takes care of today's sick people. If you don't go there among your peers, perhaps no one else will in your place.

But also together, as a Movement, you ought to be the voice of the young speaking to society and also to the Church: with a spirit of creativity promote initiatives that make their plight known, their problems, hardships, their expectations and hopes. The many good things too that are already taking place in the world of youth need to be made known, the many positive initiatives for which often no space is found in the media; in this way foster a posi-

tive view of the world of the young among adults, infecting them with your enthusiasm and drive.

We are being called to go together to the heart of life, accepting the challenges arising from its cultural and social complexity. The family, school, social communication, culture, and politics - all require new forms of solidarity. The response is to be found in living as active citizens for the common good, which, for the Salesian Family means promoting a shared commitment with regard to the great challenges: of life, of poverty in all its forms, of evangelization, of peace, of human rights. For you, young people, civilian, social and missionary voluntary service constitutes a possible vocation of significance and of great commitment which the Movement ought to promote.

Another area to be considered as a Movement is missionary commitment. In these last few years in the missionary expeditions there have always been some young people who are devoting some years of their lives to spreading the Gospel; but also in your own countries you can set up net-works of collaboration and support which sustain the missionary work of the Salesian Family and of the Church.

Be ready and willing to opt for demanding and generous forms of service even to the extent of accepting the gift of God who calls you to a vocation of special consecration.

Strengthen your own Salesian Youth Movement promoting contacts and knowledge about each other between the various groups in the same Salesian center or in the same local area, encouraging the sharing of ideas and resources, collaboration in joint projects in the service of the great causes of life and of solidarity. Open up the SYM to other Movements in the local Church, collaborate with institutions and organizations in civil society, especially those which are working among the young and in the field of youth in straightened circumstances. Make the Salesian presence, as a Movement, visible in the Church and in society by taking part in joint projects, offering your resources and capabilities in support of initiatives on behalf of the young, encouraging forms of collaboration that are multifaceted, flexible, directed towards the same goal, and can be repeated...

And now the final suggestion which I think it is important that I make. The Salesian Movement was born from the apostolic heart of Don Bosco, enflamed with charity for the salvation of the young. For this reason we will build the Salesian Movement if we are present among the young with hearts centered on Christ. We are being called to model our heart, poor and sometimes even sinful on that of Jesus, in whom God revealed Himself to the world as the One who gives life, so that man might find happiness and have life to the full (cf. Jn 10,10). What is needed is a faith that constantly grows stronger, nourished by the Word of God and by the Eucharist, which is often im-

mersed in the ocean of God's mercy and discovers more and more how beautiful it is to allow oneself to be helped by a spiritual guide.

Following paths of spiritual growth and development and of pastoral formation we will be able to carry out our shared mission which is the Christian education and guidance in life of the young person.

Here is the question put by the Pope to the young people at the last World Youth Day in Sidney; he said: « Dear young people, let me now ask you a question. What will you leave to the next generation? Are you building your lives on firm foundations, building something that will endure? Are you living your lives in a way that opens up space for the Spirit in the midst of a world that wants to forget God, or even rejects him in the name of a falsely-conceived freedom? How are you using the gifts you have been given, the "power" which the Holy Spirit is even now prepared to release within you? What legacy will you leave to young people yet to come? What difference will you make? (Homily at the final Mass at Randwick Racecourse on 20 July 2008).

Let us walk together with hope: «You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses to the ends of the earth » (Acts 1,8). My dear young people, these words of Jesus are addressed to each one of you. Never ever forget it! The Risen Jesus opens up for each one of you these wide horizons, points out to you too the ends of the earth. But these begin here and now in your own countries, in your own cities where Providence has placed you. We are part of a great Family born in the heart of Don Bosco and increased with the gift of Mary Mazzarello and of all the Saints who have given it life, in a special way the young saints, Dominic Savio, Laura Vicuña, Zephyrinus Namuncurá, the five young martyrs from the Poznań oratory, and so many others. Today the Lord is calling us to continue this beautiful adventure for the benefit and the salvation of the young.

Mary, who was the Mother and Teacher of Don Bosco, cannot leave us alone on this journey. She is for us too the Mother and Teacher who opens our hearts to Christ and to the young, so that at the service of the poorest young people we can build a Movement of salvation and the fullness of life.

Turin, 31 January 2009

On the Solemnity of Saint John Bosco

Fr. Pascual Chávez Villanueva, SDB  
Rector Major



## A Glimpse at the First Semester Courses in the program

### Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology Autumn Session — September-December 2009

#### HS 2881- Don Bosco Founder

##### Instructor Arthur Lenti, SDB

Don Bosco Founder: History and Spirit surveys the life and times of St. John Bosco (1815-1888), in the context of 19th-century social political and religious history. Topics: John Bosco's education, his spiritual and theological formation during the post-Napoleonic Restoration; his vocational choices and work on behalf of young people at risk his subsequent apostolic commitment in the field of education; the founding of religious communities (specifically the Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians) at the time of the liberal revolution and the unification of Italy. The course ends with the approval of the constitutions of the Salesian Society in 1874.

#### SP 2505 - Spirituality of Francis de Sales

##### Instructor Joe Boenzi, SDB

Beginning with a general survey of the life and work of Saint Francis de Sales (missionary, bishop, founder and doctor of the Church), students analyze the major themes of his spiritual teaching: (1) devotion and gentleness: two sides of Christian humanism; (2) meeting God in daily life; (3) means for progressing in the love of God. The special role of Saint Jane Frances de Chantal is highlighted in synthesizing the impact of Salesian thought on the spirituality and pastoral life of the Church.

#### STSP3080 – Interactive Evangelization

##### Instructor: John Roche, SDB

The "new evangelization" first proposed by Paul VI and strongly endorsed by John Paul II reaches far beyond older definitions of mission outreach. In this moment, wrestling with the "dictatorship of relativism" and other realities addressed by Benedict XVI, religious educators have a duty to understand the times and respond accordingly with every resource. Such a response demands of the educator and minister the high levels of integration and an ever-deepening of faith. Examining the cumulative impacts of globalization and secularization and by referencing prophetic voices addressing these evolving realities, the students will become conversant with various models of theology and spirituality which aptly demonstrate and reinforce the conviction that the Gospels are up to the challenges and tasks presented in this milieu. Among many of these prophetic voices has risen a discernible strain advocating the power of the shared journey of faith and a spirituality of accompaniment.

Don Bosco Hall, Berkeley, California, USA