

MARY INVITES US TO REJOICE BECAUSE GOD IS MERCIFUL

Joy is one of the distinguishing features of Pope Francis's pontificate. All his principal documents recall the joy of the Gospel, of love and of holiness. **Mary, the Woman of the Magnificat**, reminds us that the reason for our joy is found in the merciful love of God the Father for each one of us. This is a message full of loving compassion towards anyone who turns to God in search of a look, a gesture and a simple relationship that can give the only salvation that can really save mankind. She invites us **to believe in merciful love**. Mary is the maternal face of God, a face full of compassion and tenderness that contemporary man is greatly in need of. Through her apparitions and her messages, Mary reminds us of the truth of God's love and our commitment to live as people of God, loved and redeemed.

As members of ADMA we are called to make visible the popular dimension of faith, faith above all in the love of God, and to witness in particular the care, defence and promotion of the family.

As the Regulations remind us: "Don Bosco founded ADMA as the second Group of his Work to involve the ordinary people in the spirituality and mission of the Salesian Congregation" (Article 2). As the second group founded directly by him, ADMA therefore has a special bond with the Salesians of Don Bosco, participating in the youth and popular mission proper to the Salesian charism.

This popular dimension is an essential element of the Salesian charism as stated in art. 16 of the Charismatic Identity Card of the Salesian Family: "Illuminated from above, Don Bosco became interested also in

adults, with preference for the humblest and poorest, for the working classes, the urban underclass, immigrants, the marginalized, in a word, for all those who were more in need of material and spiritual help. Faithful to the direction given by Don Bosco, the Groups of the Salesian Family share this preferential choice. The Association of Mary Help of Christians includes in its new Rule the Salesian apostolate aimed in particular at the ordinary people. Particular attention is given to the family, the primary place of humanization destined to prepare young people for the love and acceptance of life, the first school of solidarity between people. All are committed to guaranteeing the dignity and strength of the family so that it may become increasingly a small domestic church."

As we move towards the 150th anniversary of the foundation of ADMA, we strive to deepen our sense of identity and mission.



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

10. THE HEART OF FRANCIS DE SALES

Fr Gianni Ghiglione

We have reached the end of our monthly contributions and I have decided to dedicate this last article to the author of the Devout Life: Francis de Sales. In the space at my disposal, I would like to offer a description of Francis's heart, drawing on the material from his **Letters** which have been the subject of my reading and study for many years. I start with this wonderful and candid confession made towards the end of his life, one of the rare



times when Francis talks about himself: *"I think that in the whole world there are no souls who love more cordially, more tenderly and more lovingly than I do, because God willed to give me that kind of heart. And yet I love independent, vigorous souls, because too much tenderness upsets the heart, makes it restless and distracts it from the loving meditation of God. What is not of God is nothing for us!"*

a. A heart that combines the tenderness of a father and that of a mother

This was the first time that Francis, far from Annecy, wrote a community letter to his daughters. It is both lively and affectionate: *"Would it ever be possible for me to forget for a moment my dear daughters? [...] The holy love we nourish for each other is written in our hearts in such large letters, that we can almost read each other's thoughts from a distance, as from here (Chambery) to Annecy."* (L 786, 170).

"I have a father's heart, but there is also in it something of a mother's heart. I love progress in solid virtue; and this progress must be achieved by overcoming difficulties, so that you may be formed at the school of the Cross, the only school where our souls can be perfected; and yet I cannot help feeling motherly tenderness, which makes me desire pleasant things for my children." (L 2017, 812).

And this can be seen also in small things.

When his "first daughter" Giacomina Favre was ill, Francis sent her *"his own big glass so she could drink more easily."* (L 735, 117).

He showed gestures of motherly kindness, such as when advising Sr Brécard to work in moderation: *"I hear you work until you are exhausted, that you spend several nights in a row without going to bed, that you eat very little, that you reserve for yourself the most tiring services in the infirmary and immediately afterwards, return to the choir for the office ... I do not want you to be so good! Do as this poor Father tells you: take sufficient food and rest, kindly leave some work to others and do not aspire to deserve all the crowns yourself."*

b. A heart capable of profound friendship

Writing to a lady whose identity is unknown to us, he speaks of his thirst for friendship: *"I have to tell you these few words in confidence: there is no man in the world who has a heart that is more tender and more thirsty for friendship than mine or that feels more pain at being separated."* (L 2008, 799).

We know that this characteristic stayed with him throughout his life. He writes, *"part of the gift of the friendships aroused in us from heaven is to be imperishable, as the source from which they emanate is inexhaustible. Presence does not enrich them, and absence does not impoverish them, nor does it make them die, because they are founded in God."* (L 1716, 371). We mention now some people to whom the Saint was particularly attached:

The Duke of Bellegarde, who left a frivolous and empty life and decided to lead a good life under the guidance of Francis, who became like a father to him: *"You honour me too much by calling me father. This name has penetrated deeply into my heart and my affections have adapted to the laws of love that it represents: the greatest, the liveliest and strongest of all loves"* (L 907, 352). This was the start of a wonderful father-son relationship that was very dear to the saint: *"Be a true son of mine with all your heart, sir, because I with all mine, am not only your most humble and obedient servant, but also your infinitely affectionate father."* (L 1004, 483).

Another great friend was Antonio des Hayes. This was a sincere and total friendship: *"I use the language of my heart and not that of this present time. And according to my way of feeling, when I said that I am all yours, I said everything, and when I did not say this, I said too little"* (L 700, 69). Friendship became prayer at the beginning of the New Year, 1612: *"The goodness of the Lord in healing you was good for you and for me. May he now please to preserve your health for a long time and grant us a constant and long consolation in this holy and sweet friendship that has developed between us."*

Another 'special' friendship was that with Mr. Benigno Milletot: *"Even if our friends die, my friendship does not die. Indeed, the friendship that is capable of ending was never true friendship!"*

To his "first daughter", Giacomina Favre, he wrote this touching invitation: *"You must call me, if any change takes place, it is only that you may be reborn more alive and vigorous than ever [...]. I have always considered this principle fundamental for the knowledge of true friendship."*

"I am your Father without any ceremony, because I am a father to you with all my heart and I love you, I believe, more than natural fathers love their daughters" (L 1138, 677) and again: *"I am happy that you call me Father, because I have an extraordinarily paternal heart for you"*.

c. A humble and trusting heart

On 8 December 1621, the anniversary of his consecration as Bishop, Francis opened his heart to a Visitation Sister: *"If I took into account only my conscience, this would be a day of great confusion for me and worthy of your tears rather than of your congratulations. But God is good: he sees the weight of my burden and the weakness of my strength."* (L 1870, 607).

The Cardinal of Paris wanted to have Francis as his coadjutor and successor. Here is how Francis reacted: *"I told the Cardinal clearly, from the very beginning, that I would not leave my present wife (the diocese of Annecy) if not for a better one. I go forward serenely, though with great difficulty, enduring my burdens with which I have grown old; but this is a completely new one for me, what should I do? Only the glory of God, manifested by my superior, the Pope, can take me away from my determination."*

On a few occasions, Francis was made the subject of hurtful gossip, slander and ignoble acts, Commenting on one of these episodes, he wrote to a friend: *"The little contempt I was subjected to is nothing or almost nothing"* and he added that his brother, who was to become a Bishop in his place, *"would make up for many of the faults I have committed while in charge. [...] I lacked everything except affection; but this brother is zealous in spirit and, as I understand it, well able to remedy my misdeeds."* (L 1877, 617).

A religious sister wrote expressing her envy at the beauty and richness of his preaching. Francis made fun of himself: *"We are like an organ: in reality, those who pump the air do all the work but do not receive praise. So pray often for me, my daughter, and you will be preaching with me. If you wish to preach with me, do so always, I beg you, praying to God to suggest words to me according to his heart and accord-*

ing to your wishes. How often it happens that we say something good thing because some good soul has requested it from God."

"God to whom I belong disposes of me according to his will: it does not matter where I will end my mortal days, as long as I can finish them in his grace. My own feeling is that I would prefer to remain here, which would be immensely pleasant when the present project is complete. I renounce my feelings which are of flesh and blood, and I intend to serve God and his Church in spirit and truth in all circumstances."

d. A heart that becomes all things to all people

On the anniversary of his ordination he made this resolution: *"Today is the anniversary of the day when I was consecrated to God for the service of souls, which I am accustomed to solemnize every year with all the love that is possible for me, sacrificing myself again to God."*

It is moving to read confessions like these: *"I have sacrificed my life and my soul to God and to his Church: what does it matter if I am inconvenienced when it comes to obtaining some advantage for the good of souls?" "A lot of souls turn to me to know how to serve God. Help me a lot with your prayers, because I feel the ardour stronger than ever".*

It was this attitude of absolute dedication that captured the heart of the young John Bosco and later Don Bosco!

e. A heart in love with Mary

It is enough to scroll through the analytical index of the principal works of the Saint to realize the place that the Virgin Mary occupies in the writings and preaching of Francis. His friend Mons. J.P. Camus wrote: *"His devotion to the Mother of beautiful love, of knowledge, of chaste love and of holy hope was truly great. From a tender age he dedicated himself to honouring her. He enrolled in Church Confraternities under her protection. Living continually under so favourable a sign of the Virgin Mary, it is no wonder that he had an immense love for purity and offered himself to God in his virginity and chastity, under the help and protection of the Queen of the Virgins."*

He dedicated the Institute of his daughters to the Mother of God and in particular to the mystery of the **Visitation**. In 2010, on the fourth centenary of their foundation, the Visitation Sisters in Paris wrote: *"Contemplation and praise of the Lord, united to the service of neighbour; the spirit of thanksgiving and humility of the **Magnificat**; real poverty that trusts with infinite confidence in the goodness of the Father; availability to the Spirit; missionary ardour to reveal the presence of Christ; mystery of the communion of persons, rooted in the Mystery of the Trinity; a look that extends to the whole of humanity; kindness and simplicity in human relationships; community of life in diversity and complementarity; joy in the Lord; Mary who faithfully preserves all these things in her heart ... For four centuries the Order has never ceased to draw from this scene of the Gospel all that is best in its spirituality."*

I offer you, friends, the advice that Francis wrote to a Visitation Sister: *"My daughter, never lose sight of the Holy Virgin, your holy Lady; keep her always present with the affection that expands your heart and with the holy memory that occupies your soul."*

The paper can be read at the following site:

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FAMILY CHRONICLE

JAPAN - VATICAN - SALESIAN FR YAMANOUCHI APPOINTED BISHOP OF SAITAMA

On Saturday 2 June, Fr Mario Michiaki Yamanouchi, SDB, Salesian Provincial in Japan, was appointed new bishop of the diocese of Saitama in Japan. For several years he was **Spiritual Animator of ADMA in Japan** and dedicated himself with passion to the spread of the Association. We remember him with affection and assure him of our prayer for his new mission.



HIALEAH (UNITED STATES) - FEAST OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS



About 400 people took part in the solemn mass in honour of Mary Help of Christians, at which Fr Juan Toledo presided. One family carried the banner, while another crowned the statue of the Virgin. 14 members made their commitment as members of ADMA, while 25 children received a medal and the blessing of Don Bosco. There was a collection in solidarity with the sisters in New Jersey who had their chapel burned. In truth, as Don Bosco used to say: She did everything! (Maricarmen Acosta).

On Sunday 10 June the ADMA Senior of Torino-Valdocco went on pilgrimage to Sacro Monte di Varallo "The new Jerusalem".



TORINO VALDOCCO - CONCLUSION of the 150th ANNIVERSARY OF CONSECRATION OF THE BASILICA OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

Fr Guido Errico, Rector of the community of Mary Help of Christians in Valdocco, retraced the fundamental steps of Don Bosco's Marian devotion: "St. John Bosco in two 'good nights' to the young men of the Oratory (in 1862 and 1865) declares his enthusiasm and his happiness for some miraculous events that happened in Spoleto, linked to an image of Mary. He particularly liked the title used by the then Archbishop of Spoleto Monsignor Arnaldi, who named the image "Auxilium Christianorum".



Don Bosco said to one of the first Salesians, Giovanni Cagliero: "Until now we have celebrated the feast of the Immaculate Conception with pomp and solemnity and it was on that day the work of the Festive Oratories began. But Our Lady wants us to honour her under the title of Mary Help of Christians: the times are so sad that we need the Blessed Virgin. May she help us to preserve the Christian faith."

At 10.00 on Saturday 9 June 2018, Archbishop Renato BOCCARDO of Spoleto - Norcia, presided over the solemn celebration of the 150th anniversary of the consecration of the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin. There was a significant presence of the Primary ADMA which included the President Mr. Renato Valera, and a representation of members from Madrid.

SPAIN - CASTRELO CAMBADOS: HOMAGE OF GALICIA TO MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

Castrelo-Cambados was fortunate this year to be the venue for the annual Homage of the Salesian Family to Mary Help of Christians in Galicia on the 150th anniversary of the consecration of the Basilica of Turin and 25 years after the legal foundation of the local Association. As the various groups arrived, they were welcomed by the bagpipes of the folk group "Con de Xido" and a showing of a powerpoint that recalled the history of the Homages.

The meeting was prepared in detail, thanks to the commitment of the President of ADMA, Rosa Padin. It involved the Association, the Salesian community, teachers, the Salesian Family, various institutions, and friends. At 12.30 the Eucharist was celebrated, with the Vice-Provincial Fr Samuel Segura presiding. Significant offers and contributions were made by the various ADMA groups to the *Juan Soñador Foundation*. Then a procession followed on a carpet of petals. After lunch shared by more than 300 people, we enjoyed the music of the Cultural Association "Amigos do Acordeó Rias Baixas" and Galician bagpipes and dances by "Con de Xido".

The day ended with the statue of Mary being brought back to church. The *Salve Regina* was sung, and another hymn, and the blessing of Our Lady was given.



BILBAO (SPAIN) - PILGRIMAGE FOR CONCLUSION OF YEAR 2017-2018

On 2 June about 400 members of ADMA from the Bilbao area took part in a pilgrimage to the Salesian College at Cruces to mark the close of the activities of the association for the year 2017-2018.

The Rector Fr Iñaki Fernández Lerena presided over the Eucharist, during which he recalled the dream of the Two Pillars. The day coincided with the liturgical solemnity of Corpus Christi.



At the time of presentation of the gifts, we also offered all our desires and intentions to contribute to the spread of devotion to Mary Help of Christians, and to deepen our Christian and Salesian formation. The day ended with a family lunch and the sharing of the gifts presented during the Eucharist. (Arcadio Cuadrado)

SPAIN - AVILÉS: HOMAGE OF ASTURIAS-CASTILE AND LEÓN TO MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

With great enthusiasm, the Salesian groups of Avilés took on the task of preparing the Homage to Mary Help of Christians for this year 2018. This Homage to Mary Help of Christians is from the whole Salesian Family from Asturias-Castile and León, although ADMA is responsible for the preparation and celebration. Participants included Salesian Cooperators, the Salesian Community, members of ADMA, former Salesian students and other friends. Although the day started with dense fog, the Virgin Help of Christians gave them a clear and pleasant day. The sound of the bagpipes brought joy to people's hearts as they exchanged greetings.

After an audio-visual presentation of the history of the Homage in the Province, a solemn and well-attended celebration of the Eucha-



rist took place in nearby parish church of Virgen de las Mareas. During the Mass, donations were made to it the *Juan-Soñador* Foundation. The Provincial Delegate for the Past Pupils, Fr Antonio González Robles, presided. The director of the school and several local animators of ADMA concelebrated. About 350 people took part. The religious act culminated with a procession with the image of Mary Help of Christians to the Salesian College. In the afternoon, after some typical musical performances of the area, the Homage concluded with the singing of *Salve Regina* and the Blessing of Mary Help of Christians.

Thanks to all the people who contributed with their grain of sand to offer a very worthy Homage, which filled the hearts with love for *Mary Help of Christians*!

SPAIN - CLOSE OF THE YEAR WITH A LOOK AT THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY

Saturday, June 16, 2018 the **National Coordination Committee of ADMA in Spain** met in Madrid-Atocha to review the past year and look at the scheduled events. The meeting was attended by Fr Pierluigi Cameroni, world spiritual animator of ADMA and Mr Renato Valera, the new president of Primary ADMA. Also present were the National Animator Fr Joan Faner and the three delegates of the Salesian Family: Fr Alejandro Guevara, Fr José Antonio Hernández SDB and Sr. Isabel Pérez FMA.

Renato Valera shared his personal and family experience of ADMA, remarking that everything that happens is grace. Fr Pierluigi Cameroni underlined the fundamental aspect of the ADMA charism in its popular dimension and strongly emphasized the value of communion.

The main events of the Association at world level for the next year were presented: the 150th anniversary of the foundation of ADMA (18 April 1869) and the 8th International Congress of Mary Help of Christians to be held in Buenos Aires (Argentina) from 7 to 10 November 2019.

In Spain, the **Spirituality Days of the ADMA Family** will be held from 3 to 7 August 2018 in Sierra de Cazorla (Jaén). So far 33 people have registered. We are confident that beautiful results will come from this initiative.

