

## CLOSING ADDRESS OF THE RECTOR-MAJOR TO CG28

Dear Confreres,

do you not think that God has really spoken to us and so much, so much, in these four weeks, even though we do not have the capitular document approved by all? That is the question I ask myself. Do you not think that God has spoken to us in feeling strongly the presence of Don Bosco our beloved father? Do you not believe that God spoke to us in the beautiful experience of fraternity?

Dear Confreres, I think we all agree in recognizing the beauty of our fraternity, of the joy of meeting our brother as he is. These things are not the fruit of a strategy. These things are the fruit of the Spirit, the mature expression of the Congregation and of those who now have responsibility for the governance and animation of the Provinces.

I also wondered: do you not believe that God has spoken so much to us in this climate of faith and honesty with which we have made discernment and voting? I think so. Do you not believe that the Lord spoke to us with the extraordinary protection of Mary Help of Christians? I think so. He spoke to us and a great deal in this General Chapter, even though we did not arrive at a capitular document that has all the processes within it to have final approval.

Dear confreres, I ask you not to let your hearts be taken by the disappointment of returning to the Provinces without finishing the Chapter work. Do not allow yourselves to be struck by this. I think this is not the most essential thing. We have *the reflections we have shared* in these weeks and on which we have already summarized the first draft. We have all *the magisterium of the congregation to date, especially that of GC24*, especially for the shared mission between Salesians and lay people. We have the beautiful and programmatic *message of the Holy Father* to GC28. These elements broaden our gaze with serenity and with great confidence.

The second part of my reflection, which you will see will be very brief, is intended to be a look at the future. I begin by telling you that I was very impressed by a thank you that I received last night before entering the Basilica to pray. One of those present, a capitular confrere, from a nation in Eastern Europe, tells me: "Dear Rector Major, I want to thank you for two things: one because it was possible to recover these holy Salesian Places, the other is to tell you that *we need help for our identity: don't leave us alone*". I replied to this confrere saying: "On the first statement I say thank you, but much has been the fruit of the previous General Chapter with its resolution, which for many reasons we think prophetic, to renew and strengthen *the Salesian Holy Places, the heart of our charism*. It was the Chapter that deliberated this. Then some of us were able to do something to implement this resolution".

The most beautiful thing for me is this: you have to go back to the Provinces telling all the Confreres that *here is the House of all*, these places are the places of our *Charismatic Dream*, they are the places of the birth of the Charism, they are our cradle where all the Salesians of the world were born, because this is where the Charism was born. This is where everyone can turn to because they have the right to feel at least once in their lives the emotion of being here in Valdocco. I warmly thank the Provincial of Piedmont because he has the

custody of these places. I have promised and continue to promise that we will not leave them alone to take care of this beautiful heritage. This is a patrimony of the whole Congregation.

As a second thing I said to the confrere: "I promise you that we will not leave you alone in *your journey of identity*."

1. This is the first look, the first challenge we have: to grow all, in all Provinces, in all Regions in **Charismatic Identity**, in Salesian Identity and Spirituality. We all need this, in some Provinces or Regions we need it even more. Let us be careful that having new Salesian professions is not a guarantee of a strong identity. It is not the same. Identity must be assured, more care of it must be taken. I can assure you that in recent years we have seen that sometimes small or great difficulties are so much linked to the lack of identity, as I said on the day of the initial report. I am convinced that this will be a priority in the programme of the government animation of this six-year period. To guarantee our charismatic identity in all Salesians. As I said, it is not enough to make the first profession to say "I have all the Salesian identity". It is a journey, at times it is very demanding, but it is a beautiful challenge that gives so much beauty and strength to our Congregation.
2. A second challenge for our program: **returning to Don Bosco**, as Don Pascual Chavez proposed to us in past years. We must return more and more to Don Bosco. And this means: love for the young. They asked us to be loved. And for this, as a consequence, *we are called to the presence of all the Salesians among them, among the young*. I call this the "**Salesian sacrament**" of presence. There is no need for theological disquisitions to be understood. The Salesian sacrament of presence. To make a journey with the youngsters, with the youth, to make them discover that God loves them, that God is truly love for us and also for them. To be truly *evangelizers of the young*. I think this means going back more and more to Don Bosco; today this is a task and a challenge, even if we do not start from scratch.
3. A third challenge is *to form Salesians as Don Bosco would do today*. Dear Capitular Confreres, in my opinion formation, not just any clerical formation, but **good Salesian formation** is a priority. Continuing to form formators is a priority and a guarantee. We need to take more care of the teams in our houses of formation so that they are truly Salesian and not elitist: this is a guarantee of an authentically Salesian future. *No genericism, all true Salesian spirit*. The third challenge then fully involves *the ongoing and especially the initial formation* of Salesians.
4. A fourth challenge: I dream that today saying "Salesian of Don Bosco" means consecrated "madmen", that is, Salesians who love with a true **Salesian heart, perhaps even "a little crazy" oriented towards the poorest**. My dear, if we move away from the poorest this will be the death of the Congregation. Don Bosco said so when he spoke of poverty and wealth. I would like to add: *if one day we leave the children and among them the poorest, the decline of the Congregation begins and will begin*. The Congregation, thank God, now enjoys good health, beyond our frailties! Pay attention to this *authentic capitular "deliberation"*, not in the proper sense, because it is already in our Constitutions: *a radical, preferential, personal, institutional and structural option* (in short, from all points of view, with no escape) *for the neediest, poorest and most excluded children*. It is a priority and radical option

*in the defense of children and young people who are exploited and victims of any kind of abuse, even sexual abuse, but not only: violence, lack of justice, abuse of power. This fourth point is a beautiful commitment that we must carry in our hearts. A six-year period guided by this light will give us so much life.*

5. The fifth priority. I think it is **the time for generosity within the congregation**, not only with money, but especially *with the generosity and availability of confreres*, to have new presences, because, first, they call us from everywhere, especially in the poorest places, second, also to have presences and work among the refugees, a terrible new poverty, third, to have new mission places. Dear confreres, we all belong to God and to the one Congregation, we are all Salesians of Don Bosco for the world. I think that the next six-year period will be one where this becomes even more a reality, with the availability of the confreres, with the generous response of the Provinces that have more possibilities at the service of other Provinces, sometimes with the guidance of the Rector Major and his Council, but with this look of universality. This is a moment to face with a renewed mentality that must know how to overcome frontiers: in a world where frontiers become heavier, time after time, our prophecy is also this, *showing that for us there are no frontiers. The only reality we have is God, the Gospel and the mission.*
6. One last challenge is this. We have spoken about the Salesian Family. In these years we have worked well beyond the tiredness of some of the delegates for the groups. We have seen that it seems there are no ripe times yet to take further steps. But **the Salesian Family**, together with the **reality of the mission shared with the laity**, will be the *point of arrival and the guarantee of the Salesian mission*. It cannot be just a camp to occupy someone's life, or to make a little friendship. *This is an essential charismatic element, much stronger today than in Don Bosco's time*, because there has been a great development in these 160 years. For this reason, I invite you to continue truly to believe in the Salesian Family. This is not the same everywhere in the Congregation. In some parts it is a beautiful reality, in others it is still beginning.
7. Some very brief conclusions:
  - a. Thanks to you all for **the gift of the new General Council**. It is a renewal *to be welcomed with a look of faith*. I think that one of the beautiful fruits of this Chapter, as it has always been, is the gift of a General Council. I am convinced that as a Council we take on a deep look of faith, the desire for a strong fidelity to the Lord and to Don Bosco, with a great capacity for planning. Everything else is something that we could do with our abilities, our relationships and with the gift of each one. With great serenity I say thank you for the new Council.
  - b. I have reflected in these days and I believe that as Rector Major the first commitment for the animation of the Provinces will be to **animate the Spiritual Exercises** for Regions, or for Conferences in Regions, for the Provincials and the members of Provincial Councils, to transmit the fruit of the GC28, a very special General Chapter, to take on the great challenges that we have and that we are identifying.
  - c. Thank you again for the **great communion** that exists between us.

- d. This is the great hope that we carry, and we are deeply convinced of it: we seek to enrich the Church with the gift of the Salesian Charism for the salvation of the young.

Dear Confreres, whole-heartedly, thank you!

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