



Year of Don Bosco – Year of Catechesis

"Prayer & Penance"

My dear Confreres,

Greetings from the Citadel! We have made a transit from the Month of Don Bosco to another important month, a month dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes. Lourdes is probably one of the best known apparitions of Our Lady, where she announced herself as the Immaculate Conception, a dogma which was declared by Pope Pius IX four years earlier, on December 8, 1854.

The apparition episode of Our Lady to the young Bernadette Soubirous, a 14-year-old totally illiterate girl, holds much meaning and inspiration for us. Bernadette first saw a very beautiful woman, dressed in what looked like a luminous white dress with a sash of blue around her waist and two golden roses on her feet. It was here that Our Lady requested Bernadette to dig the ground so that a spring could burst forth. Bernadette scooped out the mud with her bare hands and immediately a spring did burst forth which remains to this day.

On 24 February, Mary told Bernadette, "Penance, Penance, Penance! Pray to God on behalf of sinners!" On March 2nd Mary told Bernadette, "Tell the priests that people should come here in procession and that a chapel should be built on the site." Also on March 25th, the Blessed Virgin revealed to Bernadette, "*I am the Immaculate Conception.*" Don Bosco had a great devotion to Mary Immaculate. In 1841, Don Bosco typically began his work on the feast day of Immaculate Conception. We know how Dominic Savio chose some of his good friends to start the Sodality of Immaculate Conception in 1856.

The Virgin Mary spoke very little to Bernadette during the apparitions, but those few words conveyed deep truths. The Immaculate Conception spoke six times to Bernadette leaving the spiritual message of Lourdes to the church and the pilgrims; Bernadette was simply a witness and a faithful messenger. As we are preparing to enter into the beautiful season of Lent, I would like to reflect with you on the message of Our Lady, "...penance and prayer," which she gave during her 8th apparition.

PENANCE

Lenten penance is one of the beautiful practices that give meaning to the whole season. Penance is not some form of cosmetic application that simply changes the external appearances. It is not skipping some food, dieting or doling out a few coins. It is beyond such practises. It is more relational in nature. It should refashion our heart.

If our Lenten penance does not knock on the door of our heart, or if it does not make our hearts beat for the poor and the needy, then perhaps we will find ourselves among the Scribes and Pharisees of the Bible. The Lenten penance should convert us and turn our hearts to the relationships and obligations we have in our lives.

At times, we may take for granted the community practices of penance as mere rituals of the Lenten season and private penances as an individual affair between each one and God. But the real penance is made meaningful through our solidarity with others: "...whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

Our Lenten penance must have some kind of social manifestation or community consequences. Penance should never call explicit attention to itself or fill any of us with a sense of being holier than others. In the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14), the Pharisee was filled with pride for not being a public sinner, and for fasting twice a week and tithing his income. The tax collector, on the other hand, was deeply aware of his own sinfulness, was justified in the eyes of God. If our Lenten penance puts us on a pedestal above other people and not among them, then we would be making a tragic mistake.

PENANCE OF DON BOSCO

I would like to state Msgr. Cagliero's testimony about Don Bosco, "All my confreres, I can truthfully state from conviction that Don Bosco led such a life of penance and self-denial that it is matched only by those who have attained the highest perfection and sanctity. He kept his mortifications carefully hidden from others and concealed his fasts and penance so as to make his virtues appear as those of an ordinary pious priest. He did not want to frighten us with his penances; he instilled in us courage and hope to be able to imitate him." (BM IV, 148-149)

Don Bosco was told in his dream, "Take heed, you must have these words engraved on your coat-of-arms as your watchword, your badge. **Work and temperance** will make the Congregation flourish" (BM XII, 338). Don Bosco used to tell Msgr. Constamagna, 'we ought to print, these two magic words – Work and Temperance, in large letters on the front page of the Rules; they ought to be our programme, our marching orders, and our distinctive characteristic among other religious congregations.'

We read from our Constitution, "Temperance gives him 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 the souls require it."

For us Salesians, Don Bosco has inspired us to "substitute acts of penance, with acts of obedience" (C. 71). Don Bosco said during a retreat, "Away with vanities, ambitions, and self-indulgence. Let us not seek privileges as regards rooms, clothes and books, but accept the consequences and discomforts of poverty to which we have pledged or will pledge ourselves by vow. Let it be our ambition to save souls through sacrifice." (BM IX, 166)

Discipline is indeed very essential to the Salesian Spirit. Don Bosco reprimanded those who did not correct their faults. One day, he spoke rather severely to a boy who had been disobedient and did not care to correct himself. (BM IV, 391)

PRAYER

The Church has continually promoted prayer, fasting and almsgiving as the three basic and fundamental forms of penance. These three forms of penance are important for fostering the love of God and love of neighbour. Prayer is the most intimate expression of our love for God. Because God has begun a relationship with each one of us in a unique way, each one of us has an obligation to express the history of our relationship. Some of the best expressions of this love are Scripture reading, charismatic prayer, solitary or community prayer, rosary and other forms of prayer.

Prayer heightens our awareness of the presence of God in whom "...we live and move and have our being..." (Acts 17: 28). It focuses our spiritual quest. Our personal prayer not only makes us immediately aware of this graced relationship that God shares with us but should also spill over into everything we do. Our great challenge with adopting prayer as a Lenten penance is to *live* our prayers, not simply *say* them.

The relational effects of prayer in our life can also be found in our relationship with oneself. Prayer often brings us face-to-face with our sometimes chaotic and divided heart. Personal prayer helps us rediscover and once again enter into a relationship not only with God and others but also with oneself. The growing awareness of God's presence in our life often brings with it the awareness of just how far we have wandered away from our own heart.

DON BOSCO – UNION WITH GOD

Don Bosco was deeply united in prayer. "The pressing burdens of his responsibilities did not allow him much time for daily prayer, but when he prayed, he did it to perfection.... Several times a day he would pray for himself, for the souls entrusted to his care and, particularly, for his penitents.... His prayers revealed a heart brimming with a love and a soul endowed with wisdom" (III, 6). To young clerics Don Bosco said, "Prayer is as necessary to those who consecrate themselves to God's services as the sword to the soldier" (III, 430). Thus Don Bosco aroused in boy's heart a great love for God and spiritual things and a firm detachment from worldly affairs (III, 153).

Salesian Spirituality teaches that the imitation of Christ, does not require withdrawal or flight from the world or human society. The characteristic of Salesian spirituality is that our hearts are to be surrendered to the living presence of Christ. We have to recognize God as Creator and ourselves as 'not the creator' but a creature made in God's image and likeness, and endowed with an innate divine dignity and with the capacity for union with God.

NEWS FROM THE PROVINCE

1. Congratulations to His grace!

His grace Rt. Rev. Dr. Lawrence Pius Durairaj DD, has been appointed as the new bishop of the diocese of Dharmapuri. As he assumes leadership for the diocese we promise him our prayerful support. With his vast experience as the Auxiliary Bishop of Madras Mylapore, we are sure he will be able to carry out this responsibility of shepherding the faithful in an effective way.

2. Welcome to His Grace!

Most Rev. Joseph Antony Irudayaraj SDB, DD., the Bishop emeritus of Dharmapuri, who was the first bishop of Dharmapuri, is retiring from his office after 15 years of ardent service from 1997 to 2012. He was instrumental for the growth of the diocese in various ways. Don Bosco Arts and Science College and Technical education centre – SAGAI at Bagalur, are some of the notable success stories of his tenure. As a good pastor and sacrificing shepherd, he built up the new diocese through his pastoral zeal and attention to the poor. I would like to thank him for being a faithful shepherd of his flock. I would like to welcome him back on behalf of the province to come and stay with us.

3. Congratulations to Jubilee institutions!

Sacred Heart College, Tirupattur is celebrating its Diamond Jubilee on the 24th February 2012. In 1951, the college saw its beginning under the creative leadership of Fr. Carreno and Msgr. Louis Mathias. It was the initiative of Fr. Carreno to liberate the villages of North Arcot from want and ignorance. It has served thousands of young people in the past 60 years of its initiation. We look back with gratitude and salute all the Salesians who have built up this institution and sculpted the lives of thousands. As we congratulate the present community who are carrying the torch of education to the poor in the region, we wish and pray that this prestigious institution may continue to serve the poorest of the poor youngsters of the region.

On 18th January, **Don Bosco Agro-Tech** at **Polur** celebrated its silver jubilee. This institution has made a difference in the lives of so many youngsters over the past quarter century and opened up for them a brighter future through technical education. It was a wonderful celebration presided over by the shepherd of Vellore diocese, Most Rev. Dr. Soundararaju Perianayagam SDB, DD. During the celebration, the Salesians paid tribute to Fr. Francis Schlooz, a great missionary, who built up this institution for the cause of the poorest. All the

rectors who served in this institution were felicitated. We thank Mr. Jacques Boels and the members of the Schlooz Foundation for their support.

4. Congrats to Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC)

Sr. Philomena Mathew has been elected the new Superior General of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC), the first indigenous women`s religious congregation in North East India. She was elected on January 28, 2012, during the General Chapter at the MSMHC Generalate, at Hatigaon - Guwahati. As we congratulate Sr. Philomena, we also thank the outgoing Superior General Sr. Mary Thadavanal for her dedicated service in the office for two consecutive terms.

5. Welcome to the UPS affiliation team

Don Jarek, the Secretary General and Don Antonio Castellano, the Dean of Theology Faculty, from the Salesian Pontifical University (UPS), Rome will be visiting our Becchi Don Bosco Theologate at Kavarapettai from 4th to 6th February, to make a study and carry out an assessment in order in view of affiliating it to UPS. We welcome them and wish them that they may have a fruitful evaluation.

6. Extraordinary Visitation

Fr. Andrew Wong SDB, the Regional of East Asia Oceania (EAO), will be in our province to carry out the Extraordinary Visitation from Feb. 17 to May 21, 2013. It is a moment of grace for our province and let us that his evaluation and guidance would be a source of grace for our growth. It has become a practice in the Congregation now that the Regionals do not as a rule conduct the Extraordinary Visitation in their home provinces. We wholeheartedly welcome Fr. Wong and wish him all the best for the success of this endeavour.

7. Thanks a Million – Provincial Community Day

The Provincial Community day at Don Bosco Beatitudes, Vyasarpadi, was a memorable event. The prayerful Eucharistic celebration, the felicitations of the Jubilarians, New Priests and the Provincial was a true expression of our fraternal communion. The presence and active participation of so many Salesians showed our sense of belonging to the province and it was also a source of encouragement to everyone. I take this opportunity to thank Fr. Antonyraj, the Vice Provincial, and his team for the well-planned organisation of the whole event. I would like to thank in a special way the community at Don Bosco Beatitudes for hosting this event so well. I take this opportunity to thank all the communities in a special way for your generous contributions of Rs. 8,52,500/- towards the HIV project. It is a sign of your support and solidarity towards this new mission.

8. Inauguration of the new building for Welding Production Unit at DBRITE

On the 12th of February 2012, a new Welding Production Unit at DBRITE, Cuddalore will be inaugurated. I would like to thank the community for its hard-work and dedication towards

the growth of the institute. My sincere thanks to JDW and Ms. Silvia and Roland of Don Bosco, who have supported in putting up this structure which is necessary for the sustenance of this centre. Thanks to Fr. Sagayaraj, the Economist for seeing to its completion.

9. Salary in Unaided Schools

As the teachers in our unaided schools are receiving poor salaries, the Provincial Council has decided that we should set some reasonable standard in this matter. It was suggested that the starting gross salary of a PG assistant should not be lower than Rs. 7,000/- while for B. Ed. Rs. 6,000/- and for a D.T.Ed: Rs. 5,000/-; Office staff: Rs. 4,000/-; no worker to be paid less than Rs. 3,000/-. If the teachers and workers in your institutions are paid below these indications, kindly look into the matter in consultation with the Economist.

10. Thane Cyclone Relief contributions

I would like to thank the communities who have come forward to share their mite and show their solidarity with the affected communities. The communities such as St. Mary's Cathedral, St. Bede's, Don Bosco, Egmore, and Don Bosco, Tagore Nagar, together have contributed Rs. 2,10,000/-. I appreciate the efforts they have taken to mobilize funds in order to respond to this tragedy. I also exhort other communities to mobilize some relief measures to the affected families of Cuddalore and Gedilam regions.

11. Course for Civil Services Examination

Vazhikatti: Permission has been granted to Don Bosco Vazhikatti to launch a residential summer course of 20 days' duration for training students from our schools to face Civil Service Examinations (**IAS, IPS, IFS**, etc). Fr. Joseph Leo, the Director will contact you. Kindly take maximum number of youngsters from your institutions and send them for the course.

12. Congratulations!

Fr. Thaddeus Gregory SDB, the Director of BIIT, Don Bosco Centre, Yellagiri, has successfully defended his doctoral thesis on 'Semantic Web enabled process to software process management' at St. Joseph's College, Tiruchy. We appreciate him for his years of hard work and contribution in the field of electronic communication.

13. Welcome back to the Province

Fr. Nallayan Pancras who was part of the undivided Chennai province and has been serving for fifteen years in the Central province of Italy, will be coming back to Chennai Province. He also did his studies in communication in Italy. We welcome him wholeheartedly to our province.

14. Condolences

- **Fr. Lawrence Soosai Sdb** (Vyasarpadi) lost his mother **Mrs. Sarprasada Mary**, (aged 82) on 5th January 2012.
- **Fr. Dominic Sagayaraj Sdb** (Don Bosco, Tirupattur) lost his father **Mr. Alexander**, (aged 72) on 21st January 2012.
- **Fr. Noel Maddichetty Sdb** (Secretary, SPCSA) lost his mother **Mrs. Philomena Mary**, (aged 75) on 24th January 2012.
- **Mr. Maria John Bosco** (INM Cooperators President) lost his father **Mr. Cruz Antony**, (aged 87) on 26th January 2012.
- **Most Rev. Paul Hinder** (Diocese of Abu Dhabi) lost his brother **Fr. Konrad**, a Benedictine monk on 30th January 2012.

May God grant eternal rest to the deceased members. We express our sincere and heartfelt condolences to our dear confreres, Bishop of Abu Dhabi and President of INM Cooperators, and assure the bereaved family, friends and relatives of our prayerful support. May God be their consolation and support in this moment of sorrow.

DECISIONS FROM THE PROVINCIAL COUNCIL

1. **Gedilam:** Permission has been granted to Don Bosco, Gedilam, for initiating the process of upgrading the High School to Higher Secondary.
2. **Anbu Illam Kavarpettai:** Permission has been given to Anbu Illam Kavarpettai to apply for upgradation of the Institute to NCVT level.
3. **Kotagiri:**
 - a) Permission and financial support has been given to Don Bosco Kotagiri for converting the five cubicles into bath-attached rooms.
 - b) Permission and financial support has been given to Don Bosco Kotagiri for tarring of the road from kitchen to chapel.
4. **Polur:**
 - a) Permission, along with financial support, has been given to Don Bosco Agro-Tech, Polur, to construct a bridge at Karipoondi with the financial help of the local panchayat which has promised to bear 60% of the cost.
 - b) Permission has been given to Don Bosco Agro-Tech to give the workers who have been poorly paid for the past many years a one-time cash gift on the occasion of the silver jubilee of the institution.
5. **St Mary's:** Permission has been granted to St. Mary's Co-Cathedral to go ahead with the renovation of the façade of the church.
6. **Thattanchavady:** Permission to study the possibilities of starting a new regular school at Jeevanandhapuram for the benefit of school dropouts, as a benefactor has come forward to support the entire project.

PROVINCE PROGRAMME FOR FEBRUARY

04-06	Sat- Mon	- Meeting with Becchi Theologate Affiliation Team from UPS (Italy)
10-11	Fri- Sat	- Provincial Council – @ Citadel
12	Sun	- Inauguration of New Welding Block – DBRITE, Cuddalore.
13-15	Mon- Wed	- SPCSA @ Citadel, Chennai
20	Mon	- Installation of the New Bishop of Dharmapuri
24	Fri	- Diamond Jubilee - Sacred Heart College, Tirupattur

Conclusion

Don Bosco had a great devotion to Our Blessed Mother. He once said, “Up to now we have always walked on safe ground. We cannot go wrong; it is Mary who guides us.” Let us continue to seek the guidance of our Blessed Mother during this month.

St. Bernadette once said of the spring she discovered that “one must have faith and pray; the water will have no virtue without faith.” Let us all be inspired by these words of Bernadette and approach our Blessed Mother with faith, hope and love!

Wishing you a very happy feast of Our Lady of Lourdes!

Affectionately yours in Don Bosco,



Fr. Jayapalan Raphael SDB,
INM Provincial

