



## **Salesian Conference**

### **Homily**

**Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB  
Archbishop of Perth**

**Wednesday, 27 November, 2013  
Salesian Spirituality Centre, Lysterfield**

As I was thinking about what I might say to you in these few brief words today my mind kept coming back to the farewell speech which Pope Francis gave to Cardinal Bertone on October 15, when the Cardinal's tenure as Secretary of State came to an end. They were generous words as is only right on such an occasion but the thing which struck me most was the way in which the Pope drew on what he as a Jesuit religious and as a pastor working in Argentina had come to understand as the essence of the Salesian vocation.

The first thing I noticed was the Pope's remark that he saw in Cardinal Bertone more than anything else a son of Don Bosco and he went on to make the point that we are all marked by our history. In my years working in formation here in the Australian province I often encouraged the young Salesians to keep alive the story of their own journey and the memory of the enthusiasm and hope which brought them to the Congregation in the first place. There is a history behind every religious or priestly vocation, and it is a history of God's providence working, often, through very human and often mundane realities as God guides us along the path that will lead us to life. Pope Francis remarked of Cardinal Bertone that every stage of his life had been linked by his Salesian vocation which had marked him from his boyhood. I think it must be true also of us, even if some of us came rather late to the conscious realisation that this was what God was asking of us. One of the great insights we have inherited from St Francis De Sales is his conviction that God's will for us unfolds in the day-to-day realities of our lives. Perhaps then one of our great qualities as Salesians is to know how to read the workings of God in our daily lives and in all the sometimes seemingly trivial events and encounters which make up each day.

Pope Francis then went on to talk about what he saw as the characteristic Salesian approach to life: he spoke of a profound love for the Church, great generosity, and what he called that typical Salesian blend that brings together a sincere spirit of obedience and a great personal freedom for initiative and invention. I couldn't help thinking when I read this of the words from our Constitutions which have always, at least for me, summed up the Salesian life:

Our way of life bears witness, especially to the young, that God exists, that his love can fill a life completely, and that the need to love, the urge to possess and the freedom to control one's whole existence, find their fullest meaning in Christ the savior (Const 62).



It seems so obvious that it is almost an insult to say it, but our way of life as Salesians, if it is not first and foremost radically centred on Christ, quickly loses its meaning, and can easily begin to unravel. Of course, we are sent to the young and as our constitutions put it “for their welfare we give generously of our time, talents and health” but it is the “why” of this giving that matters. Here in Australia, we have our own saint, Mary McKillop, who founded an order of sisters right here in Melbourne. She is often remembered for her advice to her sisters: *never see a need without doing something about it*. As Salesians we might well paraphrase her and say, “never see a young person in need without doing something about it”. But Mary McKillop can never be understood unless we also remember another word of advice she gave to her sisters: *never forget who it is you are following*. Surely Don Bosco would say the same to us. We are sons of Don Bosco yes, but we are disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Pope concluded his words to Cardinal Bertone by saying this: *The best wish that we all express to you is that you may continue to enjoy the treasures that have marked your vocation: the presence of the Jesus in the Eucharist, the help of Our Lady, the friendship of the Pope. The three great loves of Don Bosco: these three*. The Church has changed a lot since the time of Don Bosco, but I wonder whether there might be some things that do not or at least should not change. As I think of my own vocation story, and the strange paths along which God has led me, I think I can honestly say that these three things which Pope Francis has nominated as the treasures of the Salesian vocation and which I learnt in my years at Salesian College in Chadstone have always been with me even if I have not always embraced them as fully and as enthusiastically as I might have done. In the difficult days which the Church faces, and in which our congregation shares, I think Pope Francis is doing us a great favour by reminding of these three pillars of our charism: a joyful recognition of the presence of Christ among us in the Eucharist; a simple but deeply grounded conviction of the presence of Mary in our lives as both Mother and Helper; and a call to remain willingly and deeply inserted into the heart of the Church symbolized by the figure of the Pope. It is in many ways a simple and uncomplicated spirituality and perhaps its simplicity has tempted some of us at times to abandon it for something more sophisticated. In the end, though, it is the precious gift we have been given for as our Constitutions say, “with a feeling of humble gratitude we believe that the Society of St Francis de Sales came into being not as a merely human venture but by an initiative of God” (Const 1).

The last thing I want to recall from Pope Francis’s speech is his reference to Don Bosco’s dream of the roses and the thorns. The Pope very wisely remarks that while the dream was originally about the hidden trials of the educator in fact it can refer to any ministry of responsibility on the Church. Pope Francis expresses the hope that, even during the thorns which were part of Cardinal Bertone’s time as Secretary of State, he was conscious of Mary’s presence and her help. “The Virgin Help of Christians,” he said, “certainly did not leave you without her help, and she will not deprive you of it in the future: Be assured!” I think we can take those words as addressed to us as well. In the many often daunting challenges, we face it is good to remember Don Bosco’s advice: “Be devoted to Mary Help of Christians and you will see what miracles are!” We Salesians



often have on our lips the prayer, “Mary Help of Christians, pray for us”. Let us make it really our heartfelt prayer and not a mere formula.

Pope Francis reminds us that we have a precious gift in our vocation which, he tells us, places us at the heart of the Church and enables us to share in the vastness of her mission and in the fullness of her evangelical dynamism. I hope that your time together here in the Australian Province will renew you all in your commitment and deepen your Salesian joy and hope.