Dear young people,

“The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them: ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing’” (Lk 4:20-21).

With these words, the Gospel presents the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. It started in the synagogue that saw him grow up; he was in the midst of neighbours and people he knew, and perhaps even some of his childhood “catechists” who had taught him the Law. It was an important moment in the life of the Master: the child who was educated and grew up in that community, stood up and took the floor to proclaim and put into action God’s dream. A word previously proclaimed only as a future promise, but now, on the lips of Jesus alone, could be spoken in the present tense, as it became a reality: “Today it has been fulfilled”.

Jesus reveals the now of God, who comes to meet us and call us to take part in his now of “proclaiming good news to the poor... bringing liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, setting at liberty those who are oppressed, announcing the year of the Lord’s favour” (Lk 4:18-19). This is the now of God. It becomes present with Jesus: it has a face, it is flesh. It is a merciful love that does not wait for ideal or perfect situations to show itself, nor does it accept excuses for its appearance. It is God’s time, that makes every situation and place both right and proper. In Jesus, the promised future begins and becomes life.

When? Now. Yet not everyone who was listening felt invited or called. Not all the residents of Nazareth were prepared to believe in someone they knew and had seen grow up, and who was now inviting them to realize a long-awaited dream. Not only that, but “they said, ‘Is not this Joseph’s son?’” (Lk 4:22). The same thing can also happen with us. We do not always believe that God can be that concrete and commonplace, that close and real, and much less that he can become so present and work through somebody like a neighbour, a friend, a relative. We do not always believe that the Lord can invite us to work and soil our hands with him in his Kingdom in that simple and blunt a way. It is hard to accept that “God’s love can become concrete and can almost be experienced in history with all its painful and glorious vicissitudes” (BENEDICT XVI, General Audience, 28 September 2005).

Often we too behave like the neighbours in Nazareth: we prefer a distant God: nice, good, generous but far-off, a God who does not inconvenience us. Because a close and everyday God, a friend and brother, demands that we be concerned with our surroundings, everyday affairs and above all fraternity. God chose not to reveal himself as an angel or in some spectacular way, but to give us a face
that is fraternal and friendly, concrete and familiar. God is real because love is real; God is concrete because love is concrete. Indeed, this “concrete manifestation of love is one of the essential elements in the life of Christians” (BENEDICT XVI, Homily, 1 March 2006).

We can also run the same risks as the neighbors at Nazareth, when within our communities the Gospel seeks to be lived concretely. We begin to say: But these young people, aren't they the children of Mary, Joseph, aren't they the brothers and sisters of so and so? Are these not the youngsters we saw grow up? That one over there, wasn't he the one who kept breaking windows with his ball? What was born as prophecy and proclamation of the kingdom of God gets domesticated and impoverished. Attempts to domesticate the word of God occur daily.

You too, dear young people, can experience this whenever you think that your mission, your vocation, even your life itself, is a promise far off in the future, having nothing to do with the present. As if being young were a kind of waiting room, where we sit around until we are called. And in the “meantime”, we adults or you yourselves invent a hygienically sealed future, without consequences, where everything is safe, secure and “well insured”. A “make-believe” happiness. So we “tranquillize” you, we numb you into keeping quiet, not asking or questioning; and in that “meantime” your dreams lose their buoyancy, they begin to become flat and dreary, petty and plaintive (cf. Palm Sunday Homily, 25 March 2018). Only because we think, or you think, that your now has not yet come, that you are too young to be involved in dreaming about and working for the future.

One of the fruits of the last Synod was the enrichment that came from being able to meet and above all to listen to one another. The enrichment of intergenerational dialogue, the enrichment of exchange and the value of realizing that we need one another, that we have to work to create channels and spaces that encourage dreaming of and working for tomorrow, starting today. And this, not in isolation, but rather side by side, creating a common space. A space that is not simply taken for granted, or won in a lottery, but a space for which you must fight.

You, dear young people, are not the future but the now of God. He invites you and calls you in your communities and cities to go out and find your grandparents, your elders; to stand up and with them to speak out and realize the dream that the Lord has dreamed for you.

Not tomorrow but now, for wherever your treasure is, there will your heart also be (cf. Mt 6:21). Whatever you fall in love with, it will win over not only your imagination, it will affect everything. It will be what makes you get up in the morning, what keeps you going at times of fatigue, what will break open your hearts and fill you with wonder, joy and gratitude. Realize that you have a mission and fall in love; that will decide everything (cf. PEDRO ARRUPE, S.J., Nada es más práctico). We may possess everything, but if we lack the passion of love, we will have nothing. Let us allow the Lord to make us fall in love!

For Jesus, there is no “meantime”, but only a merciful love that wants to enter into and win over our hearts. He wants to be our treasure, because he is not a “meantime”, an interval in life or a passing fad; he is generous love that invites us to entrust ourselves.

He is concrete, close, real love. He is festive joy, born of opting for and taking part in the miraculous draught of hope and charity, solidarity and fraternity, despite the paralyzed and paralyzing gaze born of fear and exclusion, speculation and manipulation.

Brothers and sisters, the Lord and his mission are not a “meantime” in our life, something temporary; they are our life!

In a special way throughout these days, Mary's fiat has been whispering like a kind of music in the background. She not only believed in God and in his promises as something possible, she believed God himself and dared to say “yes” to taking part in this now of the Lord. She felt she had a mission; she fell in love and that decided everything.

As in the synagogue of Nazareth, the Lord stands up again among us his friends and acquaintances; he takes the book and says to us “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk 4:21).

Do you want to live out your love in a practical way? May your “yes” continue to be the gateway for the Holy Spirit to give us a new Pentecost for the world and for the Church.
To all the Salesian Family,

A very happy and joy-filled feast of Don Bosco, our Father and Founder! You will be remembered in my prayers this day. May God, through the intercession of Don Bosco, give us the passion and boldness to bring the good news of God’s unconditional love and compassion to the young, especially those most in need! May we be signs and bearers of that love and to do it always with the joy of the Gospel!

With great Salesian affection and warmth,
World Youth Day
Salesian Youth Movement in Panama!

By Andres Neria
Delegate for Social Communications

Salesian Youth Movement USA West with locals from Panama after the conclusion of World Youth Day Panama!

On our way to the Vigil and Closing Mass

Always room for a Fr. Rob Galea concert!

SYM USA West Flag in Panama!
SYM USA West members from Watsonville after getting back from the Vigil and Closing Mass.

A day after WYD ended some of our pilgrims took a ride down the Panama canal.

SYM USA West and a delegation from Trinidad and Tobago before heading out on their Pilgrim walk to the Vigil and Closing Mass.
Thank you to all those that made this possible for all of us and for your prayers!

See you in 2022!!
Youth from St. Luke’s and Mary Help of Christians may not have had the resources to get to World Youth Day Panama, but we celebrated in spirit with all the pilgrims. Four north Stockton parishes hosted a WYD – Stateside event Jan. 26 & 27 at St. Mary’s High School, Stockton. On Saturday over 200 youth and young adults came together for music, a talk on being ‘missionary disciples,’ a panel on vocations, pizza dinner, outdoor candlelight Stations of the Cross, Adoration and Confession. Many stayed over, slept on the gym floor and woke up to breakfast burritos, a Salesian Good Morning, and games until it was time to pack up and make the one and a half hour pilgrimage walk to the Cathedral of the Annunciation for mass with Bishop Cotta and cathedral parishioners. Getting together with other youth groups, fun photo ops, the challenges put forth by the vocations panel, Adoration, the pilgrimage walk, and Bishop Cotta’s homily were all highlights. No doubt some of these WYD Stateside pilgrims will set their sights on WYD 2022 in PORTUGAL!
St. Bridget Chinese Catholic Church

Feast of St. John Bosco Celebration - Salesian Cooperators Renewal of Promise

By Joseph Ng
Salesian Cooperator

St. Bridget Chinese Catholic Church celebrated the Feast of St. John Bosco on Sunday, 1/27/2019. The US Western Region Provincial Fr. Ted Montemayor celebrated Mass with Fr. Lam. In the Mass, Fr. Ted and the US Western Region Cooperator Provincial Coordinator Elizabeth Gamarrae presided the Renewal of Promise by eight Salesian Cooperators. 18 cooperator candidates in their second-year formation received special blessing from Fr. Ted. The cooperators assembled a St. John Bosco exhibition and information booth.
“An Oratory without music is like a body without a soul”
- Don Bosco

Many times, we forget what it’s like to be a kid, but when we return to an oratory to pick up our kids then we remember that fun, thrilling, warm feeling inside. This Saturday January 26, 2019 St. Dominic Savio Oratory had an amazing time planning a carnival for children to commemorate St. Don Bosco. The animators, salesian postulants, and salesian candidates were able to create an amazing environment for the children to play games such as; bowling, Connect Four, Jenga, and much more. During their adventure time playing, they had a chance to enjoy a sugary treat with Sr. Thuy Huong and Fr. Andrew, make some cotton candy, and if their competition face was on they could challenge their friends on the donut on a string eating contest. But they had an amazing surprise during their time playing, Don Bosco had a skit ready for them during the time when Don Bosco first had the thought of creating a home for boys.
Caring
Beyond Your Own Home

By Sheila Kun RN, BA, BSN, MS, FCCP
Salesian Cooperator

This week I am proud to introduce you all to the wonderful work from St. Joseph Salesian Youth Renewal Retreat Center. Below is the summary written by our champion Johnny Martinez. Enjoy this amazing program and send in your support. I am sure Johnny welcomes any tangible support in terms of your participation and donation.

Our mission started when we got together with staff to pray and discern ways in which our retreat center can answer the call of Evangelii Gaudium and most importantly, walk in the footsteps of our Lord in being on mission to gather those most marginalized into God’s loving embrace. The idea of eventually having a retreat program came up but we knew we had to start by getting to know the people we were hoping to serve. We began by taking meals and sharing Scripture with those experiencing homelessness just East of Downtown and working our way back ending in Boyle Heights. We did this for a period of about four months and were able to build strong and loving friendships with the people of that community. It was because these friendships were established that Doug, our friend experiencing homelessness in Boyle Heights, had the courage to say: “It would be nice to have a Bible Study all together”. The Holy Spirit moved in us and made it happen, what began as merely going out to “feed the needy” manifested into a vibrant and spirit filled Bible Study we currently hold every other Thursday with Doug’s community in Boyle Heights. As Evangelii Gaudium teaches us, “God’s word is unpredictable in its power. The Church has to accept this unruly freedom of the word, which accomplishes what it wills in ways that surpass our calculations and ways of thinking.” We have seen this come true first hand and are amazed at what happens when one takes the first step and God manifests his Divine Will, the Bible Study has been a place of healing, sharing, and building community.

One of our many wonderful testimonies is the story of Daniel, also a community member of Boyle Heights experiencing homelessness, who walked in to the first meeting tired, depressed, and struggling with substance abuse. Since that first meeting Daniel has become a regular member of our Bible Study who participates and listens with fervor, since that day he has been able to stay drug free, has found a job and is now living in a home. He and I regularly call each other and talk on the phone when we are not able to see each other, he frequently mentions that after that first experience of community building in the Bible Study he has changed and found hope. What he feels is most beneficial about the Bible Study is finding people that genuinely care for him and his person regardless of what he has done in the past and that he now has a community to share his life and struggles with. Daniel has been a great example of the power that the Word of God has and has encouraged us to keep our humble mission of planting the seed and letting God do His work.

Currently, we are praying for a space or to partner with someone that can offer permanent housing so that we can take the next step and start providing retreats contextualized to the homeless experience and will have a home to offer them after they leave the retreat. On top of our Bible Study we are housing and participating with Ignatian Spirituality Project, an Ignatian Retreat program that provides retreats to those in active recovery and have experienced homelessness. We also hold regular shifts at St. Francis Shelter in Downtown Los Angeles where we serve meals and serve the meals “waiter style”, also in hopes of gaining an understanding of what being without a home feels like.

We know nothing good comes without praying, so we ask for your prayers for our Homeless Mission and those we serve. If you would like to be involved you can reach out at (626) 280-8622 or jmartinez@sjscenter.org

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Johnny and I had discussed that a donation of $10 would cover the cost of a hot dinner and Bible study material. I invite you to sponsor our homeless brothers and sisters to enjoy a great dinner and experience the spiritual food prepared by our champions.
In every young person a point of goodness is accessible and it is the primary duty of the educator to discover that sensitive cord of the heart so as to draw out the best in the young person.

- Don Bosco