

Happy Feast of
MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS



Blessed is she who believed!
(cf. Lk 1:45)

24 May 2021

CIRCULAR – SOUTH ASIA REGION

BM/2021/SA/Circular 004

DO WE TRUST ENOUGH TO THROW OURSELVES?

Dear Confreres and members of the Salesian Family and Collaborators,

We are living on the strength of our faith in God in these times of the Pandemic. There is much pain and suffering that each of us go through. Death has become a familiar figure – closer to our thoughts and our experience! As a Salesian family, we have been grieved by the death of our brothers and sisters. When death stares at us during the pandemic, the motto of St. Dominic Savio whose feast we celebrated on 6th May becomes more powerful than ever.

“Death rather than sin”!

Death is frightening to us adults. How much more would it be to a teenager? Yet, Dominic Savio was able to choose death over sin, indicating his Spirit inspired wisdom to recognize sin as the greater of the two dangers. This reveals the trust he had in God into whose hands the sinless souls entrust themselves in the face of all types of deprivations, even that of life itself in death.

Yesterday we celebrated the birthday of the Church. The gift of the Spirit of God that came down on the apostles, and all who were gathered with them on Pentecost, made a new beginning after the gloom of the crucifixion, the joy of the resurrection appearances, and the uncertainty of a new departure at ascension. The timid plucked up courage to preach from roof tops!

Today, we are celebrating the Solemnity of Our Lady, Mary Help of Christians. She too faced uncertainties when the angel Gabriel announced God’s plan to her. How can this be? She asked. Even in that perplexity, her answer was Yes. For that response, all generations have called her blessed (cf. Lk 1:45).

In all these examples, we see the capacity of the protagonists to trust. They could trust in the face of uncertainties. Do we?

Most of us are familiar with the story of the mountaineer who, in his effort to conquer the peak continued climbing alone even though darkness had set in. As he was about to reach the peak, he slipped and fell, but the safety ropes left him hanging from the cliff with nothing but the rope to hold on and he had no energy to pull himself up without any footrest. As he hung thus from the cliff, he prayed to God. God answered saying, “let go of the safety of the rope and throw yourself into the

safety of my arms.” The mountaineer could not bring himself to do that. The sad story ends with his friends coming in search of him the next day and finding him frozen to death only five feet from the ground! He could not muster the trust needed to let go and throw himself into safety in God.

Flying trapeze in the circus is probably one of the most exhilarating things to watch and even more thrilling to try. But how many of us would be willing to let go of safety and fling ourselves into the hands of those persons, who, we trust will be there to hold us? Learning to fly implies learning to let go. Without the courage to let go, we cannot fly!

If we analyse, what is it that allows us to let go? It is trust. Trust, that there is something better. Trust, that there is someone in whom I can believe.

Disciples are people who let go and entrust themselves to a master. In the narration about the apostles, we often read “they left everything and followed him” (Lk 5:11, 28). Their trust is so strong that Peter would say, “Lord to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life” (Jn 6:68).

There are many acronyms for the word “TRUST”. One that draws our attention is “Totally Relying Upon Spiritual Truths.” For us believers, the spiritual truth is a person – Jesus, who said, “I am the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6). Jesus taught us to trust in the Father even when one sweats blood for grief and fear of impending death: “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done (Lk 22:42). Jesus gave us the example of trusting the Father in the face of betrayal, denial, condemnation, abandonment, mockery, scourging, crowning, crucifixion, death and burial. The resurrection on the third day showed that God our Heavenly Father is an everlasting rock who will never abandon those who trust in him.

In imitation of Jesus Christ, it is trust in this Heavenly Father that keeps us Salesians and members of the Salesian family from giving in to discouragement. The SDB Constitutions articulate it: “The Salesian does not give way to discouragement in face of difficulties, because he has complete trust in the father. ‘Let nothing upset you’, Don Bosco used to say” (SDB Const. 17 §1).

The capacity to let go of everything that the apostles had is demanded of every religious who is called to let go of oneself in obedience, poverty and chastity to imitate and follow Jesus Christ more closely (cf. SDB Const. 24).

Simon Peter as described in the passage about the great catch of fish indicates to us an intense and graphic image of letting go of oneself – he threw himself. In the passage the equivalent of the Greek verb “throw” appears twice: once to throw the net and second to indicate Peter throwing himself at the feet of Jesus. Let us read the beautiful passage once again.

“Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.’ Simon answered, ‘Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.’ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So, they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!’ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of

Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.’ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him” (Lk 5:1-11).

Peter trusted Jesus and said “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” It is trust in the Master that makes Peter do the unimaginable after a whole night of fishing without a catch. But the greatness of Peter lay in being ready to throw not only the net but also himself (fell down at Jesus’ knees). Throwing yourself on your knees, prostrating yourself, bowing before someone, are expressions of worship and submission. Remember the devil asking Jesus to bow down before him? – third temptation (Mt 4:8-9): “Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

Peter the head of the apostles was one who threw himself at the feet of the Lord (on his knees) not only on this occasion. He did it again when he threw himself out of the boat to walk on water when he recognized the Lord on the lake (cf. Mt 14:28). After the resurrection, he did it again and threw himself into the water to reach Jesus ahead of the others in the boat (cf. Jn 21:7).

As consecrated persons, we all throw a lot of things aside. *Cetera tolle!* But do we find it easy to throw ourselves? Our throwing things aside is only in view of the following of Christ – *da mihi animas*. The SDB Constitutions stress this when it says, “Through our religious profession *we offer ourselves* to God in order *to follow CHRIST* and work with him in building up the Kingdom” (SDB Const. 3 §2. Italics added). Disciples are called not only to throw things, attachments and tools but to throw everything and follow him.

It is interesting to note that the verb that goes most with discipleship is *follow*. **TRUST (Totally Relying Upon Spiritual Truth)** in the person of Jesus makes us his followers. Christianity is all about following the person of Jesus. Doctrines are a codification of how best to follow Jesus.

The trust with which Jesus called them to be fishers of men is reciprocated by the disciples in leaving everything and following Jesus. However, God’s love can never be repaid equally and so the Lord once again puts trust in the disciples and commands the disciples to “*go*.” “*Following*” is thus only a first step. Being with the Lord is to be sent out to the four corners of the world to preach the same good news who is Jesus Christ. This is why “Like Don Bosco, we are all called to be educators to the faith at every opportunity. Our highest knowledge therefore is to know Jesus Christ, and our greatest delight is to reveal to all people the unfathomable riches of his mystery” (SDB Const. 34, §2).

When we trust, our fruitfulness is great. The apostles had a great catch to fill not only their boat but also that of their friends. Jeremiah had rightly spoke of the fruitfulness of those who are ready to throw themselves with complete trust: “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit” (Jeremiah 17:7-8).

Recognizing the great value of trust which enables disciples to leave everything and follow, and the master to call disciples to follow and to be sent forth, Don Bosco made *mutual trust* the foundation of the family spirit that should reign in every Salesian house. He also saw this as the quality that will attract vocations to the Salesian life. “In an atmosphere of *mutual trust* and daily forgiveness, the

need and joy of sharing everything is experienced, and relationships are governed not so much by recourse to rules as by faith and the promptings of the heart. This is a witness that enkindles in the young the desire to get to know and to follow the Salesian vocation” (SDB Const. 16 §2-3. Italics added).

Dominic Savio whose feast we celebrated on 6 May, was able to trust in the Lord and make that leap of faith which calls for throwing oneself when he took as his motto: “death rather than sin”. Death is the ultimate throwing of oneself, and the Lord keeps telling us that there is no greater love than to give up one’s life out of love (cf. Jn 15:13). When the Blessed Mother as a young girl said “yes” to the will of God, she too could have faced the danger of being stoned to death, but she trusted.

As we live through the pain and uncertainties of the covid-19 pandemic, let us learn to trust the Lord and each other to be disciples of the Lord who, on the cross, trusted his life into the hands of the Father: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Lk 23:46). In imitation of Our Blessed Mother who trusted the words of the angel, and in imitation of Don Bosco who trusted the words of her Son who advised him in the dream at the age of nine: “she will teach you,” let us also let down our nets and throw ourselves fully into discipleship.

Happy Feast of Mary Help of Christians!



Fr. Biju Michael
General Councillor for South Asia Region
24 May 2021



New Provincials

Fr. Davis Maniparamben and Fr. Jose Koyickal who were nominated by our Rector Major as the Provincials of Delhi (INN) and Bangalore (INK) respectively were installed on 8th February and 11th February 2021. The SPCSA welcomes them, and we wish them both fruitful and fulfilling ministry of animation and governance in the provinces.

Consultations for new Superior of the Vice Province of Sri Lanka

Fr. Joseph Almeida, the Superior of the Vice Province of St. Joseph, Sri Lanka is completing his service as Superior in August 2021. The Rector Major announced the consultation for the nomination of a new Superior of the Vice Province (LKC) by his letter dated 6 February 2021 (Prot. 21/0037). Due to restrictions on travel caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Regional could not travel to Sri Lanka as planned (18-30 April), and initiated the consultations through online meetings held on 23-24 April & 1 May 2021. The nomination of the new superior of the Vice Province by the Rector Major is expected during the summer session of the General Council (June-July 2021).

Extra-ordinary Visitations

The Extraordinary Visitation of the Kolkata Province began during this first semester of the year 2021. The Region began the Extraordinary Visitation on 4 March and it was scheduled to end on 22 May. However, due to the time lost with lockdown interruptions, it has been extended to 5 May. In

the next semester (August-November) two extraordinary visitations are scheduled in the South Asia Region. Fr. Vaclav Klement will make the extraordinary visitation of Guwahati Province (ING) and Fr. Biju Michael will make the extraordinary visitation of the Tiruchy Province (INT).

Visit of the Rector Major to the Region

We hope that the scheduled visit of the Rector Major to our Region (11-15 November 2021) to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of the Province of Delhi (INN) and the Golden Jubilee of Don Bosco Okhla will be possible. The jubilee celebration is scheduled for 13 November. Let us continue to pray that the pandemic may pass, and we can celebrate this occasion.

In 2022, in addition to the visit of the Rector Major in October to Mumbai, Guwahati and Shillong, as announced earlier, the Rector Major has kindly consented to preach the Retreat for the Provincials and their Councils on 8-13 September 2022.

SPCSA Assembly and Council Meetings

The SPCSA Assembly (27-28 February) and Council (25-26 February & 1 March) were held in person, at Bangalore. At the Assembly, the SPCSA Networks that are officially recognized by the SPCSA as per statutes, presented their yearly reports and plans for the next year. The budgets and accounts were also presented to the Council.

As usual the details of the decisions taken in the meetings are published in the SPCSA Bulletin. Some of the decisions taken are shared below.

New Personnel at SPCSA

- SPCSA Secretary – Fr. Jose Mathew Koorappallil
- Salesian Family Delegate for South Asia – Fr. Joseph Manippadath
- Provincial In-charge & President of DB Tech – Fr. Davis Maniparamben
- Provincial In-charge of Formation – Fr. Jose Koyickal
- Vice President of DB Tech – Fr. Jose Mathew
- AIDBES President – Fr. Jose Koyickal
- Trademark President – Fr. Davis Maniparamben
- Joint Secretary 1 – YaR – Fr. Leo Joseph
- Schools Coordinator - Fr. Babu Mannisery (extended for a year)
- SPA representation in SAFC – Fr. Ajoy
- Standing Committee – Fr. Thathi Reddy, Fr. Felix Fernandez, Fr. KM Jose, and Fr. Januarius,
- DBRC Staff: Fr. Joe Mannath, Fr. VM Thomas, Fr. Philip John Paul + visiting professors who regularly are animating.
- DB Tech: Fr. Noble George
- Poverty Alleviation programme will be coordinated by the SPCSA Secretary.

We are grateful to our confreres who have contributed much during their term of service at the SPCSA: Fr. Albert Johnson and Fr. Thomas Aquinas. We wish God's blessings on them and the services they are being entrusted with in their Provinces.

Legacy

In the year in which we have been tried by the pandemic, the legacy funds from Australia and the United Kingdom have proved to be great relief to the Provinces. All the funds have been allotted by SPCSA to the Provinces and to YaR, Bosconet, and to AIDBES. Bosconet is tasked with preparing the final report on the utilization of the same. We continue to pray for our benefactors.

Evaluation of our structures

As announced earlier, the provincial level commissions set up to study DBTech and Bosconet presented their reports to the SPCSA Council. After feedback from the Council, the respective commissions are preparing a final statement. The findings and proposals from the commission that studied possible re-structuring of the Region will share the proposals with Provincial Councils to seek further feedback.

Ministry Among the Migrants

The YaR Forum has carried on animating the region on a coordinated effort to work for migrant youth. The SPCSA which had authorized the regional level programme has allotted resources from the legacy funds to this very important ministry to be carried out from all the Provinces. This will be one of our very concrete ways of showing our commitment to “ABSOLUTE PRIORITY for the young, the poorest and most abandoned and defenceless.” Recently, on 1st May, feast of St. Joseph the worker, YaR Forum has launched a Tollfree All India HELPLINE number for migrants. The services are available in multiple languages and the number is 9642 372 372.

Football Academies

At the SPCSA Council, a novel idea of starting Football Academies in the context of doing youth ministry through sports was proposed by INK Province who have had three years of experience in establishing and successfully running a fully accredited Football Academy. SPCSA has adopted the idea and placed the regional venture under the guidance of AIDBES, under Don Bosco Youth Animation of the SPCSA. Already new Academies are being formed in the Region.

Six-year Plan (2020-2026)

The six-year plan of the Rector Major and the General Council has been published in the Acts of the General Council, no.434 of December 2020. Our Regional action plan was formulated in consultation with all the Provincials and based on the reports from various meetings in the Region. It was then discussed and approved by the Rector Major with the General Council. At the last SPCSA Assembly, all the networks presented their plans to achieve the six-year plan. The references to Congregational and Church documents, given within brackets give the larger context of the theory underlying our choices. Everyone who has ideas and commitment to achieve the indications given by GC 28, are invited to do their best.

As you will notice, the programme to alleviate poverty from the families of 500,000 young people is one among the many points in the action plan to achieve the goal of evaluating and ensuring that we truly serve the young who are resource poor.

The published plan is a minimum programme, and it does not prevent anyone from doing much more. In fact, all of us must aim much higher. Let committed achievements on behalf of the poor do the talking.

Gratitude to our family members who have left for their eternal reward

In painful ways, together with all people of the world who are experiencing the covid-19 pandemic, we have experienced the untimely death of our dear brothers and sisters of the Salesian Family whom we have known closely. We entrust them to the Lord. We thank each of them for carrying the love of God to many young people. In a very special way we remember Fr. Thomas Panakezham, who passed away during this covid time (not due to covid), and left us little possibility to gather together, as we would have liked to do, to recall his immense contribution to the Congregation and the Salesian

family. Here below is the letter of the Rector Major, written on the occasion of the funeral of Fr. Panakezham. It recalls for us the great legacy left by Fr. Panakezham.

“I offer my sincere condolences to the Salesians of Asia-Oceania-Australia on the death of Rev. Fr. Thomas Panakezham sdb, who was the General Councillor for this vast region for 18 years (1978-1996). After his long and effective term in the General Council, he had returned to India and was part of the Bangalore Province and he passed away on 24 April 2021 at Bangalore.

On this occasion of Rev. Fr. Thomas Panakezham entering the eternal Salesian garden, on behalf of the Congregation, I would like to recall with gratitude his extraordinary contribution to the life of our Congregation.

Fr Thomas Panakezham rightly remains in our memories as a Salesian legend. He joyfully lived his consecrated Salesian life for 71 years and served as a Salesian Priest for 61 years. He was the first Indian Salesian Provincial (Chennai – Madras 1971-1976) and was elected to the General Council by three General Chapters (GC XXI, XXII, XXIII). As a Regional, he served the congregation in the vast regions of what is today two regions in the congregation: South Asia and East Asia Oceania. During his tenure as Regional he facilitated the birth of eight provinces: three in the current EAO region (FIS, KOR, VIE) and five in India (INB, IND, INH, INN, INK). As Regional, he also provided leadership to the first Salesian missionary efforts in East Africa (Kenya, Sudan and Tanzania) as part of Project Africa initiated by the then Rector Major Egidio Vigano. He supported the missions in Cambodia and Indonesia, in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands and in Nepal and Yemen.

He is known to all as a great devotee of the Blessed Mother and a true son of Don Bosco who carried Don Bosco to Asia and Asia to Don Bosco.

May the memory of Fr. Thomas Panakezham, continue to inspire and encourage all Salesians to work tirelessly in the Salesian mission addressed to the poorest young people. May the sense of congregation and missionary spirit that he cultivated and encouraged enable all of us to be missionaries of the young with large hearts for every young person in the world.

I pray that the good Lord Jesus welcome our confrere to the eternal rewards prepared for all his faithful servants.

Fr. Angel Fernandez Arttime, SDB
Rector Major

Conclusion

We are also grateful to our Rector Major who expressed his fatherly concern for us in the Region with a letter to the confreres in India who are in an extreme way affected by the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Pandemic is now becoming more intensive also in Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh. Let us all take the precautions we can take, be of help to each other, and above all, trust in the Lord.

“It is she [Mary Help of Christians] who has done all things”

- Don Bosco