**Salesian Missions – MCP 2020 Homily**

I want to thank your pastor and bishop for allowing the Salesians of Don Bosco to preach on behalf of missionaries today.

The Salesians of Don Bosco are the second largest order of men in the Catholic Church, serving in over 130 countries. Our primary ministry is the assistance of poor and abandoned youth, striving to make them good Christians and upright citizens.

Salesians are educators. We are committed to forming the hearts and minds of the young and assisting them to develop all of their talents and skills. While doing this, we accompany the young on their journey of faith, guiding them to a deeper relationship with God and helping them to integrate a spiritual life into their daily occupations.

We accomplish this goal in a variety of settings including schools, both academic and technical; youth centers; skills training programs, preparing the young for the world of work; shelters for homeless or at risk youths; community centers; camps; radio stations in developing countries; catechetical centers; music and art programs; parishes with a special focus on engaging the young. Additionally, we serve migrant and refugee communities, as well as young people with disabilities.

Each country and culture has a distinct set of circumstances that must be respected when you work with the young. In each place, the Salesians work to understand the environment they are in so that they can respond appropriately and with sensitivity. Countries that have a majority Muslim or other faith groups present special challenges for missionaries. In some instances, conversion to Christianity puts a person’s life in danger.

In Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, the Salesian community responds to many of the societal problems there. Gang violence, drug dealing, violence against women and intense poverty are common. Preaching the Gospel in such an environment is difficult, but the Salesians work to do this as they address these issues in collaboration with many other religious groups and agencies. Their efforts focus on creating an enabling environment for the young to thrive and avoid becoming involved in these negative activities. The Salesians also work on the rehabilitation of those who have been involved with these activities, or have been victims of them. Through chaplaincies at a youth prison and a center for HIV infected young adults, street outreach and neighborhood presence, some lives have been transformed. In some of the most impoverished neighborhoods, Salesians and volunteers have earned the confidence of local residents. In the late afternoon, volunteers gather the young from their homes, bring them to a local park, organize games, teach catechism and give the children a snack. Slowly, the environment of these poorer neighborhoods is becoming more hopeful and peaceful as the families see their children being cared for.

Child soldiers are frequently severely traumatized by their involvement in the guerilla form of warfare they participated in. The decision to turn away from that way of life is complicated and needs lots of support to have the youths change. In Colombia and Sudan, Salesians have worked with other agencies to help provide services to effect healing in the lives of these youths. Additionally, the families of those affected by the violence perpetrated by the youths are assisted in healing. The Gospel message of reconciliation is needed for a society to begin anew.

Those who are wounded in body and spirit need the presence of Christ as well. *Don Bosco Sobre Ruedas* in Mexico and the *Nonthaburi Skills Development Center for the Blind* in Bangkok, Thailand are just two examples of such healing ministries the Salesians engage in.

*Don Bosco Sobre Ruedas* works to promote, protect and guarantee quality of life for people who have physical disabilities, often as the result of accidents. They especially seek out children and adolescents living in extreme poverty and work with them to acquire the skills they need to live independent lives, maintain their health and be socially integrated into society. Often, these youngsters want to overcome the physical challenges but don’t know where to start. The Salesians have provided them with the opportunity to develop their skills and potential.

For nearly forty years, the *Nonthaburi Skills Development Center for the Blind* has given the blind an opportunity to gain an education and learn valuable job skills. Additionally, to the surprise of many, students participate in activities such as judo, baseball, bicycle riding and competitive running, all of which foster physical development and self-confidence.

In India, the Salesians have addressed the issue of child labor and exploitation in the brick factories in Pasahaur. One can find children, many less than 10 years old, working in the brick furnaces. Often the children come from the families of poor immigrants coming from the neighboring provinces.

The Salesian house of *Pasahaur Don Bosco* has built a village to help these children. In addition to providing shelter, clean water and a safe environment, the Salesians have begun classes to assist women and child laborers to help them avoid exploitation and leave this dangerous work.

Responding to these needs is part of the missionary call of the Church. We are pleased that more and more lay people throughout the world are joining the Salesians in answering the call to be a missionary disciple by volunteering to serve in a distant land. For over thirty years the Salesians in the United States have sent Lay Missioners to serve in countries throughout the world. The Missioners work in a Salesian ministry, often in challenging circumstances, generously giving of themselves on behalf of the young. The talents and capabilities of the volunteer are matched with a mission site that is willing to receive Lay Missioners.

Salesian Missions, located in New Rochelle, New York, fundraises to help the local missionaries as they strive to bring the Gospel to the people. The generosity of many people like you allows the missionary work of the Church to continue and grow. We hope you can contribute to this important ministry of strengthening the Body of Christ among all peoples.