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Salesian Province of St. Joseph, Hyderabad



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Christmas -The 'Personal' communication of God

Media and Technology are 'gifts of God'. The world has welcomed the advent of information age positively and believed that it would enhance human life considerably. The Church too accepted the new means of communication as participating in the creative power of God. The Church affirms that "among the wonderful technical inventions" which foster communication among human beings, Christians find means that have been devised under God's Providence for the encouragement of social relations during their pilgrimage on earth. These means, in fact, serve to build new relationships and to fashion a new language which permits men and women to know themselves better and to understand one another more easily. By this, human beings are led to a mutual understanding and shared ambition. And this, in turn, inclines them to justice and peace, to goodwill and active charity, to mutual help, to love and, in the end, to communion. The tools of communication, then, provide some of the most effective means for the cultivation of that charity among human beings which is at once the cause and the expression of fellowship." (Communio et Progressio, 12)

Already in the 19th century our father and founder Don Bosco had an intuitive grasp of the importance of the social communications. GC21 stated, " Don Bosco considered the press, the publication of good books and magazines, stage plays for youth, music and song not only as means for the service of educational and pastoral work but also as 'original apostolic endeavours' directed of their very nature to the mission Divine Providence gave him for youth." Don Bosco made use of the means of social communications, especially the press to defend the Church, to educate the young and to provide moral and religious instruction. He was a prolific writer who published about 170 major works. In his letter of March 19, 1885 on the Apostolate of the Press, he encouraged his sons to cultivate a culture of writing and reading. Over the years, mass media and social communications have grown leaps and bounds, bringing with them great new avenues with even greater challenges.

Today we live in an information age that has seen great advancement in communication technologies. We do not just 'use' technology and modern tools of communication, but we are 'overwhelmed' by them. This internet-driven and networked world has engulfed every fabric of human life. A closer look at human life today is proving that we are becoming more and more incapable of communication and relationships. There is a decline of communication in the digital age. Communication technology is meant to be a tool at the service of humanity. But it has taken control of our lives. James Bridle, in his book, *New Dark Age: Technology and the End of the Future*, depicts this crisis in communication. The darkness that he speaks of is our 'inability to see clearly what is in front of us, and to act meaningfully, with agency and justice.' The unfettered access to information and ease of connectivity has led us into the deep sea and we are trying to navigate without a compass. James Bridle affirms that Internet has become the 'hyper object' (a thing that surrounds us, envelops us and entangles us, but that is literally too big to see in its entirety) a term used by Timothy Morton. Many of us and especially the young are lost in this labyrinth.

Self engrossed culture of the cell phone, Email, Whatsapp, Twitter, Facebook, chat rooms and social networking sites enable people to keep in touch, but psychologists are concerned that the lack of real human contact has an adverse effect on people's emotional and social well-being. It is fostering social isolation. Aric Sigman, an American psychologist and biologist reiterates that the lack of real face-to-face contact fostered by online communication could alter gene functioning, interfere with the immune system, adversely affect arteries and impair mental performance. By contrast, personal interaction has a positive effect on our well-being. No amount of sophistication and technology can replace the human touch and the presence of one person to another in a profound way.

God has communicated with us human beings in a variety of ways. In the Bible we read that He communicated through dreams, spoken word, visions, angels, prophets, etc. As a culmination of this communication and to make it 'perfect', God chose to be personally and physically present to us through Jesus Christ. God is love and it ceases to be love in the absence of the other. The essential nature of this love is to share it. Communication begins within God as Trinity: among the three divine persons who remain in personal permanent communion and permanent communication. Cardinal Martini wrote that "the life of God is a continuous and inexhaustible process of communication between the three Divine persons."

The love of the Father becomes flesh in the incarnation of the Son. The Father, who is love, sends the Word, a Word who communicates his love and his very self. By divine revelation, through the

Word, God does not simply communicate ideas, a message or an instruction, like an order. In *Dei Verbum* we read that “by divine Revelation God wished to manifest [...] himself.” (DV 6) As stated in the pastoral instruction *Communio et Progressio*, “communication is more than the expression of ideas and the indication of emotion. At its most profound level it is the giving of self in love.” (CP 11)

The communication in Christ was not simply to give an oral message. His whole being was the message. The Word has been made flesh in Christ. It is not only audible but visible. In the first letter of John we read: “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands concerns the Word of life for the life was made visible; we have seen it and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was made visible to us - what we have seen and heard we proclaim now to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; for our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ” (1 John 1,1-3). The message became visible and dwelt among us and we have seen His glory (cf. John 1,14). Jesus thus revealed himself through words and deeds such that he could invite others to see the message in His life and actions. Christmas is the gift of the personal communication of the Father through Jesus. Let us search ways to engage in real encounters with people. There is no substitute for being present to the other through flesh and blood as the Lord has chosen the manger to begin this encounter.

Leaders' Meet

At the very outset I would like to thank all the leaders and also the administrators who were present for the first day of the leaders' meet held on November 19 and 20, 2019. I thank our Economer Fr Androth for making this combined meeting possible and for arranging a resource Person Mr Leo Fernandez to help us reflect on the theme TRANSPARENCY IN ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT. We have proposed this theme for the combined meeting of leaders and administrators for the following reasons:

1. Our Gospel way of life demands transparency in administrative and financial management.
2. Transparency in administration is vital for the fruitful execution of our mission, at whose disposal ought to be kept all our resources, both spiritual and material.
3. We cannot afford to bypass the legal compliances required of us and demanded by Civil Law.

After a lengthy deliberation on the issues and challenges of the Province in terms of our spiritual life, community life, apostolic life and code of conduct of confreres and corresponding measures to be taken, it has been agreed by the floor, that this draft could be reworked by Provincial

Council and then disseminated to individual communities for their feedback and comments, which can thereby be integrated into the final draft. During the leaders' meet we had enriching and constructive discussions. The following are some of the deliberations that have emerged:

In the light of the presentation by Mr. Anbalagan from BOSCONET on Job Placement Web Portal (donboscojobs.org) and Mobile App (on November 20, 2019) the floor felt the need to establish and strengthen the Province career guidance and job placement centers. We have deliberated to offer training in communicative English and soft skills and prepare our graduates and young people to find jobs. This would be a new frontier for us as the unemployment rate in our states is very high. Hence, we will be commencing this service for the young at DB Ongole in Andhra Pradesh and at DB Gagillapuram in Telangana. All the communities of the Province are exhorted to encourage and motivate the needy youngsters, including the migrants to avail themselves of this opportunity.

This year the Provincial Community Day will be held on January 27, 2019 at Don Bosco Guntupalli. I thank the community of Guntupalli for their readiness to host this event of our coming together as brothers and as one family. Kindly make a note of this change in date. I thank you for your cooperation and understanding.

Publications

During the Leader's meet and the Jubilee celebrations of the confreres, we have released a few publications of the Province. We have released the autobiography of Fr John Lens and his obituary - *From Belgium to India and from India to Heaven... Always at Home!* Mickey - a movie dubbed into Telugu from original Malayalam too has been released on this occasion. Copies of Statutes and Regulations of the Salesian Cooperators printed in Telugu were distributed to our communities. I congratulate Fr Yerramaneni Bali, Fr Lingampalli Ashok, Fr Gangarapu Anil, Fr Garlapati Kishore respectively for their efforts in publishing these materials.

Youth Retreats

In accordance with the province priorities for this year, kindly organize a youth retreat at the local level. I request the local youth animators to take the lead along with the Rector and the community in helping our young people towards their moral and spiritual renewal.

Province Youth Fest

There will be a Youth Fest organized on January 4 and 5, 2020 at BIRDY, Hyderabad. Kindly contact Fr Donthireddy Raja, the Youth Director of the Province for further details. I encourage every community to send at least 10 young people to participate in this event.

Periodic Assessment - II

The Local Community shares the responsibility for the development of each confrere (Regulations 81). A form of this responsibility is explicitly exercised by periodic moments of personal assessment, by which the Council of the community helps the confrere in temporary profession to assess the situation of his personal formation; guides him and gives him practical encouragement. Hence I request the Rector and his council to faithfully fulfill this responsibility towards our young confreres and send the assessment forms duly filled by December 31, 2019 to the Provincial Office.

All Don Bosco inter-school Quiz Contest - 2019

I extend my heartfelt appreciation and congratulations to the organizers Fr Gopu Peter and Fr Banda Suresh and the participants of All Don Bosco inter-school Quiz Contest - 2019, held at Don Bosco Guntupalli on December 7, 2019. There was representation from eight schools from across the Province: 1. Don Bosco Muniguda 2. Don Bosco Ravulapalem 3. Don Bosco Mangalagiri (with 2 teams) 4. Don Bosco Guntupalli 5. Don Bosco Mariapuram 6. Don Bosco Nalgonda 7. Don Bosco Bandlaguda and 8. Don Bosco Mothinagar. I congratulate the Principals and teachers too for their initiative and interest in preparing their respective school teams for the contest. My special compliments go to Don Bosco School Bandlaguda principal, Fr Godugunuru Chinnappa and the staff for securing the first place in this contest.

Salesian Sanctity in December

December 5 - Blessed Philip Rinaldi, founder of the Secular Institute of the Volunteers of Don Bosco. Philip Rinaldi was born at Lu Monferrato, Italy, on 28 May 1856. From his boyhood he had known Don Bosco but it was only at the age of 21 that he accepted the Saint's invitation to become a Salesian. After his ordination to the priesthood in 1882 he was entrusted with the formation of adult aspirants to the priesthood. From 1889 he worked for twelve years in Spain and Portugal until in 1901 he was called by Don Rua to be Vicar General and Economer. Intense work did not prevent him from further qualification in the priestly ministry as an eminent spiritual guide. He developed the Salesian Family in all its aspects, and enriched it with the institute, something new for its time, now known as the *Don Bosco Volunteers*.

He was elected Rector Major in 1922 and dedicated himself especially to the formation of the confreres and to development of devotion to Don Bosco, insisting always on the interior life, union with God, the mission, and unlimited trust in Mary Help of Christians. As an authentic interpreter of the Founder, he was able to read the "signs of the times" with prophetic intuition and adapt to them, sometimes in a courageous and daring manner. He died at Turin on 5 December 1931, and was beatified by Saint John Paul II on 29 April 1990, during the XXIII General Chapter of the Salesians of Don Bosco.

Upcoming Events

December 09	Young Priests' Meet
December 10	Young Priests and Local Youth Animators' Meet
December 14	Provincial Council
December 21	Province Priestly Ordinations at Don Bosco Shrine
December 25	Christmas
January 4-5	Province Youth Fest
January 10-11	Brothers' Meet
January 11	Jubilee of Sacred Heart Novitiate, Manoharabad
January 13-18	Retreat III
January 25-26	Salesian Social Forum
January 31	Feast of St. John Bosco

Condolences

We offer our sincere condolences:

- To Fr Provincial and the Salesian confreres of the Province of Shillong at the death of Fr Vadakumpadan Paul at Sacred Heart Theological College, Shillong on November 18, 2019. May God grant him rest in His eternal abode.
- To Br Vincent Castilino and to his family members at the sudden demise of Mr. John Castilino, the father of Bro Vincent. He passed away at 2am on November 29, 2019. Let us recommend his soul to God's boundless mercy.
- To our Salesian confreres and to the faithful at large at the passing away of Bishop Joseph Antony Irudayaraj D.D. SDB, former bishop of Dharmapuri Diocese at 10.15am at Don Bosco Perambur on November 29, 2019. May God grant eternal reward to him, who labored as the shepherd and pastor of His flock.
- To Fr K.M. Sebastian and to his family members at the death of Annie the eldest sister of Fr. K.M. Sebastian. She passed way at 2pm on November 29, 2019. May God grant eternal rest to her soul.

Conclusion

ADVENT HAS BEGUN: “Be vigilant at all times and pray.” Luke 21:36a (Year C)

Advent begins with a call to vigilance as reflected in the passage above. There are numerous Scripture passages that call us to vigilance and anticipation of the Lord’s coming. Being vigilant means that we are prepared. We are not caught off guard. Imagine if Christmas morning came and you woke up suddenly realizing that you forgot to prepare! Imagine if you had no gifts, no food purchased and no plans made. Of course we wouldn’t allow that to happen, but we do sometimes allow it to happen spiritually speaking. We often are not prepared to celebrate the birth of Christ within our hearts.

The Advent also offers the focus of the Second Coming of Christ. Jesus will return again, in all splendor and glory, to judge the living and the dead. We profess that fact every Sunday in our Creed. So, even though Advent is a time for the preparation of the celebration of the first coming of Jesus in the flesh, it is also a time to acknowledge that His first coming is ultimately fulfilled in His final glorious coming.

As Advent has just begun let us reflect upon how ready we are for Jesus’ coming. Are we preparing for it with the same fervor that we prepare for Christmas through shopping, planning, decorating, etc? Are we looking forward to that day when He will return? Are we preparing for the spiritual celebration of His birth? Are we awake and attentive to the numerous ways that God speaks to us on a daily basis?

If we find that we are not as prepared for His return in glory as we would like to be, let us make this Advent a time when we get our hearts ready, commit to prayer, spiritual exercises, reflection and attentiveness to His gentle voice, so that we can welcome Him into our hearts on Christmas Day.

Wish you an enriching Advent and a Blessed Christmas.

Yours affectionately in Don Bosco,



Fr Thathireddy Vijaya Bhaskar SDB
Provincial