



Salesian Cooperators

(Province of Great Britain)

Report of the Day of Reflection—*Pilgrims of Hope*

Battersea House 16 November 2024

Over 50 cooperators from Battersea, (now South London), Chertsey, and Cowley centres came together with the Provincial council, FMA sisters and SDB's from Battersea House for this day of Reflection.

Kate welcomed everyone and introduced the Provincial council, before Dan led the opening prayer, reading and meditation.

Today's reflection on the Pilgrims of Hope was being presented by Fr Francis Preston and he introduced his talk contents as mainly referrals of Don Bosco and Pope Francis who has nominated 2025 as being a Jubilee year of Hope who has invited us all to be Pilgrims of Hope by visiting Rome during 2025.



Fr Francis then told of when Don Bosco met Don Calosso near Bechi at a parish jubilee celebration in 1829 and after a conversation with Don Bosco, he became his mentor in becoming a priest. In his memoirs Don Bosco referred to Don Calosso as his greatest benefactor.

It is the Popes wish that the year of Hope next year will enable the world to reflect on the many conflicts in our world and pray that peace will prevail. Don Bosco was a man of peace. He created peacemakers among his boys to prevent fighting and using bad language. As Salesians, we should become peacemakers to prevent any acts of violence and promote peace and enable local communities to live together in harmony.

Pope Francis promotes the need for countries to work together to enable a social harmony that children can be born into rather than being restricted. We should become Life Guardians from the womb to the tomb. As Pilgrims of Hope, Pope Francis stated that there are several groups of peoples that we should improve their situations.

Prisoners: are deprived of their dignity, freedom and respect..

Don Bosco was involved in the prisons of Turin and experienced their treatment, especially the boys in **prison. It was then that he decided to dedicate his ministry to the care of youth.**

The Sick: Signs of Hope shown be shown to the sick at home and in hospitals

Don Bosco used to visit houses in Turin for the sick and disabled and introduced his boys to accompany him. At that time tuberculosis and pneumonia was paramount in Turin and many boys dies even though Mama Margaret cared for them. This caring for the sick is part of our Salesian mission.

The Young: Despite the embodiment of Hope, today the young see their dreams practically unattainable; we should show care and support in enabling them to achieve as they are our world's future. Fr Francis reminded us that Don Bosco quoted in the first pages of his publication, "The Companion of Youth" that he loves all youth.

Migrants: need our help and support for Hope in their search of a better life for themselves and families.

Migrant boys from the surrounding countryside flocked to Valdocco and Turin to work and Don Bosco welcomed them all. Next year 2025 will be the 150th anniversary of the 1st group of Salesian missionaries leaving Valdocco for South America. We should always be open to welcoming strangers.

The Elderly: Don Bosco tells the story of when after meals at Valdocco, his fellow confrere all leave the refectory and he was normally on his own, Luke Costa came and sat with him. He told Luke as he was now getting older, he had to start letting the younger confrere getting involved, even though he was now left on his own. We need to show care and dignity in the needs of the Elderly.

We then had a 45 min break for lunch before starting the afternoon session.

Fr Francis continued on the theme of being "Pilgrims of Hope" by everyday—offering a smile, kind friendship, large shoulder, ready ear, nice words—all offering seeds of hope

There are many reasons for Hope, here's a top five...

Belief in Everlasting Life

Christian understanding of dignity of death

Certainty of Christ's judgement

Sacrement of Reconciliation/Penance

Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Hope as Stella Maris.

We then had 2 reflections to read and then discuss The first is about John and how he brought God into his life again.

REFLECTION SHEET ONE

John, Peter's father, was almost out of his mind, wandering from the square to the streets without knowing where he wanted to go. And, without realizing it, he found himself in front of the church where he had found such consolation the day before [at Peter, his son's 1st Holy Communion].

John [*speaking to himself*]: "Peter's and my wife's God is here; I'm going in, whatever happens."

His steps led him irresistibly to the altar where he had witnessed his son's happiness; mechanically he knelt down. Going back over his thoughts from the day before, he felt such regret and emotion that he dissolved into tears. He was there for a long time caught up in his meditation when he felt the priest tap him on the shoulder. Thinking that the man was distraught with some terrible cross, the good priest took him by the arm and led him to the sacristy.

Priest: "You seem to be weighed down by some terrible sorrow, so tell me your troubles. I am a minister of the God of consolation; what can I do to help you?"

All he got was a deep sigh.

Priest: "Speak, my friend, I am just a poor priest who has seen all kinds of misery, and nothing that has happened to a human being will disturb me, so open your heart to me and tell me. You are speaking to a friend."

Encouraged by these kind words, words that he had never heard from his false friends, John spoke of his impressions of the day before, his sighs, his promises, his wife's kindness and loveliness, and Peter, his first-born's obedience and tenderness.

Priest: "Well, my friend, then it is your wish to be worthy of your family and regain the friendship of the God who has been so good to your son!"

John: "Yes! This is what I want, and my soul has been in constant torment since yesterday."

Priest: "It is not torment, my friend, but grace which is lifting you up, and God who is reminding you of your sins and his infinite goodness. It is your wife's and your son's prayers that have been heard in Heaven. So, courage, my friend. Make a good confession, a firm resolve to change your life, and this will be the remedy for your torment. So good friend, do you want to confide the sorrows of your soul in me?"

John: "I want this with all my heart, because you seem to me to be a very good man, but what will my friends say?"

Priest: "Is it friends like those who will give you the happiness you do not have? Look at what your friends are worth. They are only good to get you drinking, wasting your money, staying away from a wife and a son who love you, and from the others who surely love you. Let them say what they want; show them you are a man and that you have a manly will that shows no embarrassment at doing its duty. After they have spoken about you and laughed at you, they will fall silent, then they will praise you and will finally say to themselves: 'At least he has

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my soul is separated from my body as I enter heaven, what must I do? To whom must I turn?

[DB] If Our Lady wants to accompany you, leave all that to Her. But before you leave for Paradise, I would like to give you a commission.

[M] Go ahead, I'll do all I can to obey you.

[DB] When you are in heaven and you see the Blessed Virgin, give her our humble and respectful good wishes, from me and from everyone in this House. Beg her to give us all her blessing, to take us all under her powerful protection. Beg her to make sure that none of us who are in this House at present or anyone that Providence will send us in the future will lose their soul.

[M] I'll do that willingly. Is there anything else?

[DB] Not for the present.

Michael appeared quite calm although his weakening pulse signalled his imminent death. He seemed to doze, and then he woke with a smile on his lips.

[M] Within a short time now I will deliver your message. I'll do my best to make a good job of it. Tell my companions I await them all in heaven.

Michael then took the crucifix in his hands. He kissed it reverently three times before making his final prayer:

[M] Jesus, Joseph and Mary, I place my soul in your hands.

He then opened his lips as if to smile and gently fell back in death.

After reading through the passage on reflectively on your own, try to answer the reflection questions below.

1. What struck you or grabbed your attention most as you read through Don Bosco's account of the death of the young Michael Magone?
2. In your opinion, what does this short extract from Don Bosco's *'Life'* of Michael Magone reveal to us about Don Bosco's understanding of:

[a] the reality of death and the promise of eternal life;

[b] the nature of the God's judgement at the end of life here on earth;

[c] the place of the Blessed Virgin Mary in in Don Bosco's mission and spirituality?



This is the 2nd Reflection which is an account of the death of Michael Magone, a boy in Don Bosco's oratory in Valdocco who died very young.....

REFLECTION SHEET TWO

At about two in the afternoon [Friday 21 January 1859] matters suddenly changed for the worse. [...] Michael, having asked to make his confession, prepared himself for a few minutes. Having made his confession, he calmly said to me and his mother:

[M] Who knows but this Confession might be for my real *Exercise for a Happy Death!*

[DB] What do you think? Would you like to get better or go to heaven?

[M] The Lord knows what is best for me; I only want to do what pleases him.

[DB] If the Lord gave you the choice of getting better or going to heaven, what would you choose?

[M] Who would be mad enough not to choose heaven?

[DB] So you would like to go there?

[M] For sure I would! I would like to go there with all my heart. That's what I have been asking the Lord for now for some time.

[DB] When would you like to go?

[M] Right away if that is according to the Lord's pleasure.

After a quarter of an hour, he stopped repeating the prayers that were suggested to him and, since he did not say anything, we thought he had suddenly passed away. But after a few minutes he opened his eyes said:

[M] On that slip of paper, I picked last Sunday there was a mistake! It said, *At the judgement seat of God you will be on your own.* That's not true. I shall not be alone. The Blessed Virgin will be there to help me so I have nothing to fear - I am ready to go at any time. Our Lady wants to be by my side at the judgement seat of God.

Michael then seemed to drowse off and so we did not disturb him but he soon awoke. His pulse indicated that death was fast approaching but his face was calm. He smiled, and was as fully conscious as a man in perfect health. He called me and said to me:

[M] This is it. Help me.

[DB] Take it easy. I shall not abandon you until you are safe with the Lord in heaven. [...]

[DB] And what do you want to leave as a message for your companions?

[M] Tell them to always make good confessions."

[DB] Michael, tell me what thing of your past life gives you the greatest consolation at this moment?

[M] What consoles me most at this moment is the little I have done to honour Mary. Yet, this is the greatest consolation. O Mary, O Mary, how happy are those at the hour of death who have been devoted to you! But there is one thing that puzzles me. When



The 2nd Reflection of Michael Magone's death continued.....

my soul is separated from my body as I enter heaven, what must I do? To whom must I turn?

[DB] If Our Lady wants to accompany you, leave all that to Her. But before you leave for Paradise, I would like to give you a commission.

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During the discussion there were several comments that due to Michael's semi conscience state he must have had a foresight of his eventual heavenly immediate future.

Dying well is the worth purpose of living here in earth.

That ended Fr Francis's brilliant presentation which very was appreciated by everyone, provided much reflection and food for thought in the chapel for 30 minutes





Like all Salesian events, we concluded our Day of Reconciliation having become *Pilgrims of Hope* with a concelebrated Mass in the chapel with Frs Francis and David.

Our group of Cooperators after Mass before leaving for various parts of the UK.

Photographs from Bernard O'Neill and Kate Wilkinson

Report by Bernard O'Neill