

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Jan 31st 2014

Today we celebrate the feast of St. John (Don) Bosco, the founder of the Salesian Society. He was a 19th century priest known especially for his love of and ministry to children, especially poor children of the streets. Today Salesians are 34,000 strong and work in 130 countries, still ministering in a variety of ways to children and others.

On a recent trip to Shillong, India, in the Northeast States, I had the opportunity to tour a very different legacy of Don Bosco. A work of the Bosco Centre for Indigenous Cultures, it is a seven-story anthropological and historical museum full of information, pictures, life-size mannequins nestled in life-size scenes, and cultural insights into the various tribes that populate this area of India. The museum is dedicated to the belief that “if cultures are understood well, they can light up our efforts to build a peaceful, developed, and progressive society.” - from the center’s handbook. Even a brief tour of the museum gives the visitor a beginning appreciation for this wondrous area of India, the Northeast States, where Indian Jesuits in a twinning relationship with our Jesuit Province, support a thriving array of mission activities: parishes, schools, a legal center, a social science research center, an orphanage, and more.

It was not smooth sailing for Don Bosco in the beginning, however. He had a strong aversion to negative discipline; his motto was “Not with blows, but with charity and gentleness must you draw these friends to the path of virtue.” In fact, in Italy where he began his work, he was called insane for the positive methods he employed with the street ruffians that became part of his Salesian family.

In the Gospel today, Jesus compares the Kingdom of God’s growth with the person who sows seeds in good soil and trusts that God will take care of the nurturing. He also describes the mustard seed that starts tiny and develops into a huge tree with strong branches that even birds may shelter in.

We can wonder if Don Bosco did not operate with this same thought: provide a warm secure place for growth, relax, and watch God work.

Who in our lives needs our trust in her/his ability to mature, to bear fruit, to be fully included in “our” piece of the Kingdom of God? A child, a grandchild, a co-worker, a politician? What difference might it make if we were to proceed in our upcoming interactions with the charity and gentleness that we see in Don Bosco’s approach? In other words, does 2014 call us to attempt to separate the sinners from their sins? And act in a way that demonstrates this shift?

Time for a little reflection and attention to our own way of proceeding?

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