



Newsletter

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The greatness of all the things which thrust their roots in God

by Fr. Igino Biffi, TGS Eurogroup Salesian Delegate

As Christmas closes in, here are some reflections offered by Father Igino in his sermon during the Holy Mass in memory of Father Berti, which took place during TGS40 celebrations (28th September 2008).

We've been waiting for so long for this day to come. And finally, here we are, standing in front of the greatness of all the things which thrust their roots in God. TGS, an important part of the big Salesian puzzle, celebrates today its 40th birthday. Being here today is not only a way of thinking back on the wonderful moments we spent together, but also a way of giving thanks for all the gifts we have received. Most importantly, today we have the opportunity to ask God to let us experience this gift, an adventure which will live on only if it helps people, and young people in particular, with the same charisma that Father Bosco had.

Today Saint Paul suggests some ways, some tools which we must use to live a true Salesian experience: we have to be thankful for the past and aware of the future. What Saint Paul gives us is a concrete help to tackle the challenges that lie ahead [*Philippians, 2:1-11*].

Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in harmony and of one mind. The first

thing we need is unity: the desire of walking together in an harmonious way. This is not something to be taken for granted. This is a gift we cannot let slip away, something we must hold on to with a great deal of care. Unity makes us one, it makes us act and makes us feel part of a project which we could never carry on if we were alone. "Be united", this is what Saint Paul tells us; ...when you face disintegrating powers "Be united"; ...when dealing with young people "Be united"; ...in the Church "Be United".

In his letter to the Philippians, Saint Paul lists all we need to remain humble.

Here's what he says: *Let nothing be done through contention, neither by vain glory: but in humility, let each esteem others better than themselves... Each one not considering the things that are his own, but those that are other men's...* If we want our relations to be real friendships, and taste like real love, we must care for the others first, and then for ourselves. We should say: you come before me. The desire of appearing, of being superior, of thinking only for ourselves, of passing over other people, is like a cancer which kills all relations and condemns us to solitude. But we have not been created for this. We haven't been created to think only for ourselves, but rather to live with other people. We have been created to have friendships, because we all have, first of all, the desire of loving and being loved. We have been created to appreciate each other. And where does all this take place? In relations! If we want TGS to remain immune from this cancer, our first commitment is

Shine like lights in the world
Philippians, 2:15

*Best wishes for a merry Christmas and a happy New Year
from TGS Eurogroup*

turning it into a place where everyone can see what it feels like to love and to be loved.

This is also what makes TGS an educational experience: TGS does educate all those who care for other people's destiny, all those who take care of other people in same way they take care of themselves. It does educate all those who have a positive look on the others, all those who know what "trust" means. Only those who love truly educate.

Do not let anyone kill the love desire you have inside you. Oppose with all your strength to those who want to kill the flame which is burning inside you and which tells you that you've been created to achieve great things. Let other people come into you, let other people alarm you, disturb you, annoy you with their attention seeking attitude, with their need to be loved. Let's oppose to this century's mindset which puts the individual first, to the detriment of the group, which sees the individual's ideas and thoughts as true things, by denying the objective truths. Truth comes from the research of a community which can discern by judging with God's love. In Asiago, in August 1978, Father Berti said: *The main thing in TGS is the "group", which is committed, in its environment, to identify the most suitable forms for an educational action and to identify new powers... the "group" is the action tool of the Association.*

True friendship comes from humbleness, and if it comes from the humbleness of the human condition it can only survive in humbleness. We have to make sure that we do not follow the ideals of spite, of revenge... We do not have to listen to the voice which from the inside is screaming: *Why do I always have to be the one who gets humiliated?* Surrendering does not mean losing, but winning, winning the real enemy of love: our selfishness, our "ego".

Saint Paul, during this special year dedicated to him, has got a special suggestion for all those who claim to be Christians. He says: *Have the same feelings Jesus Christ has.* This is his invitation and it can only be interpreted in one way. Saint Paul invites us to love in the same way Jesus Christ did, with his feelings, with his heart. All this means that we are called to love in the same way God does, which is to say to love like God does. And this possibility is inside you, it's in your DNA, the desire to love until the time is through, to love at any cost. The desire of listening to love and to make love become a way to live your life: all this must be the blood flowing in your veins. Aim high; ask God to give you Jesus Christ's heart. Never be satisfied with what you get, because you can reach higher tops. And if you want to walk on the bright side of life, let Jesus Christ live inside you.

TGS experience, as an experience coming from Father Bosco's spiritual and educational intuition, wants to lead us to God. Sometimes we indulge on external, organizational

and logistic problems, we want to be professional in the way we manage the Association, and this is indeed correct, but let us not forget that the soul, the engine and the reason for being lies in the fact that TGS, as all religious experiences, has to be a road to God, a road which is close to other spiritual experiences, a road which makes young people, as Father Bosco would say, honest citizens and good Christians. In a time when Christianity is something you pay for in person, a choice which isolates you, in a time of educational emergency where people count only if they produce and if they show off, what counts is not the number of students we get, but rather the quality of our spiritual and educational offer. This is what makes TGS different; if we miss that, TGS will be like any other association and will lose the breath of soul.

When talking about humbleness, Saint Paul also tells that God came to Earth from Heaven. Once again this means putting other people at the centre of our thoughts. In TGS the real protagonists are young people, the real receivers of education and all the young people which see activities as a service and as a form of charity. And this is another subject we have to work on: the young people's desire to be the centre of attention. This requires co-responsibility, involvement and the choice to work in the backstage, to make young people be the real protagonists. The backbone of these attitudes is humbleness, the virtue which fascinated God when he looked at Mary. Being humble means to be constantly aware of our role, of our person and at the same time being able to feel happy when someone else is happy. The result of this attitude is a reciprocal esteem, a reciprocal welcoming attitude, forgiveness and the desire of involving other people in the same adventure.

How do I know if this experience is still valid? ...if, after 40 years, it is still worth continuing? The Gospel, when Jesus tells off the head priests and the elderly because they haven't changed their heart even though they have seen God's creations, teaches us that an experience, if it can change the people's hearts, deserves to go on.

Have your hearts changed since you've been in touch with TGS? Did your hearts shape on the values of love? Do you feel the desire of achieving great things in your life? Being in touch with this Salesian experience, did you feel the need of being an active citizen, and not only a spectator in the world's theatre? If the answer to all this is YES, maybe even only for one person, if TGS together with other experiences contributed to your social and Christian life, this means that our Association is doing great, that it still has got many things to teach and that today is not an end point but rather a starting point.

That's the way I see it.

TGS update

www.tgseurogroup.it

- 01.12.2008: bookings for **TGS Summer Courses 2009** are now officially open! All details on our web site. The full programme of all **Training Meetings for TGS Eurogroup Leaders 2009** is also available on the web site: prospective leaders please contact TGS Office and send your CV to this email address: info@tgseurogroup.it
- 06.12.2008: the fourth edition of the **TGS Agents' Forum** took place in Caterham (Surrey, UK); our English collaborators from various TGS centres in Kent and Surrey joined this meeting, which is now becoming a significant occasion to share our educational principles as well as the planning of our Summer courses.
- 11.01.2009: **Friendship Meeting 2009** at TGS Eurogroup headquarters, a great occasion for all TGS students and their respective families to get together with their own TGS Leaders from last Summer courses - the meeting is also open to all TGS friends and supporters!