



TJA/Cir-XXX/12/2011

17 December 2011

My dear confreres,

Cordial greetings from Don Bosco Provincial House, Bangalore!

STRENNA 2012

Let us make the young our life's mission by coming to know and imitate Don Bosco

*"I am the good shepherd:
The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep" (Jn 10:11)*

As we mark the first year of the three-year preparation for the bicentennial of the birth of Don Bosco, announced by the Rector Major, the theme of **Strenna 2012** focuses on our getting to know his story, his inspiring holy life. It is an earnest invitation to study him and come to know him in depth as an educator, pastor, founder, guide, and lawmaker – a profound knowledge that leads to love and imitation.

For us Don Bosco is the constant reference point and as such we always need to return to him so that he continues to live in our hearts - a living memory which challenges the authenticity and relevance of our present-day Salesian mission.

Availing ourselves of modern scientific methods of research and study, today we are able to better understand and assess his human and Christian greatness, his practical brilliance, his skills as an educator, his spirituality, his work. At the same time a deeper knowledge of his journey through history, in particular the history of the society in which he lived, makes us all the more aware of the immensity of God's providential intervention in his life.

The Rector Major in his commentary on the Strenna insists that the image of Don Bosco that we, his faithful sons, project must be revised and reconstructed in such a way that it takes into account the huge challenges of our peculiar cultural milieu, speaks to the contemporary world and must be capable of addressing the complex and multiple problems vexing the

young people of our times. It must therefore go beyond a mere formal allegiance to traditions.

The historical significance of Don Bosco has also to be rediscovered, beyond his “works” and beyond certain relatively original pedagogical elements, especially in his practical and affective perception of the universal, theological and social problem of “neglected” youth, and his great ability to transmit this to large crowds of co-workers, benefactors and admirers.

The Rector Major reaffirms that to be faithful to Don Bosco means knowing his history and the history of his times, making his inspiration our own, taking up his motivations and choices. To be faithful to Don Bosco and his mission is to cultivate in ourselves a strong and abiding love for young people, especially the poorest.

Consultations

Fr. Koonan Thomas, the Vice-Provincial, *Fr. Manneduppankuzhiyil George*, the Provincial Economer, and two other Provincial Councillors, *Fr. Tharayil Thomas* and *Fr. Puthenpurayil Kuriakose*, are completing their first term, *Br. Kalavanal Shaji* is completing his second term as Provincial Councillor.

The Rectors of the communities of *Kristu Jyoti College, Bangalore*, *Don Bosco College, Mannuthy*; *St. Stephen’s Church, Thope*; *Don Bosco Yuvakara Grama, Ajjanahalli*; *Don Bosco, Aluva*; *Don Bosco, Mysore*; *Maximilian Kolbe Church, Alappuzha*; and *Don Bosco College, Angadikdavu* are completing their first term while the Rectors of the communities of *Don Bosco Veedu, Manacaud*; *Don Bosco Tech, Hospet*; and *Don Bosco College, Yadagiri* are completing their second term in office. The unexpected demise of *Fr. C. K Jose* calls for a new Rector at *Vennala*.

In view of stabilizing the Salesian presences at *Bidar* and *Gulbarga*, these will soon be canonically erected and therefore they too require animators.

In this context I would like to bring to your attention that *Fr. Thomas Tharayil*, the Rector of *Kristu Jyoti College*, who is competing his first term as Rector, is disinclined to accept a second term for reasons he has communicated to me. Do keep this in mind while making know your choices.

The consultation forms are herewith enclosed. Kindly return to me these forms duly filled up on or before 20th January 2012. I am sure you will do this service with the due spirit of commitment and sense of belonging and with adequate thought and reflection.

Birthday of the Rector Major

The birthday of Rev. Fr. Pascual Chávez, our beloved Rector Major, falls on 20th December. Let us accompany him with our prayers and ask the Lord to bless him with all the necessary graces he needs to carry out faithfully the responsible task of animation and governance of our Congregation, in these difficult circumstances. *Ad multos annos* dear Fr. Rector Major.

Blessing and Inauguration of St Stephen`s Church, Thope.

On 8th December, Rt. Rev. Stanley Roman, the Bishop of Quilon, solemnly blessed and inaugurated the reconstructed Church at Thope, Kollam.

The Salesians took charge of St. Stephen`s Parish way back in 1975, though its history dates back to 1800. The all-round transformation that the Salesians brought about, through their tireless efforts, in this totally neglected coastal parish and among the local fisher-folk in the last three decades and more is quite obvious and something that one can certainly be proud of. Today, St. Stephen`s stands out as a prominent parish of the diocese with nearly 2000 Catholic families.

I place on record my sincere thanks for all those responsible for successfully completing the construction of the new church, especially Fr. Thomas Meckattuparambil, the Rector-cum-parish priest, the Salesian community of Thope, and the parishioners themselves who contributed a substantial sum of money for the purpose. A special word of thanks is due to Fr. Paulson Kannappilly, the former Rector-cum-parish priest, who initiated the construction work in 2007 and played a very pivotal role in the ongoing project till May 2011. May the new Church prove to be a blessing to all who will enter it to worship, pray and participate in the sacred rites.

New Centre for Girl Children at Risk

BOSCO Bangalore has recently procured a plot of land (30x108)-cum - building situated very close to BOSCO Mane, Chamrajpet, in order to launch an exclusive centre for the rehabilitation of vulnerable and underprivileged girl children.

We remain immensely grateful to the generous benefactor who came forward to make the long cherished dream of BOSCO a reality, that of reaching out to girl children who need special care and protection in the city of Bangalore. A word of appreciation to Fr. Payyamthadathil George, the Rector, and the Salesian community of BOSCO for the daring initiatives they have launched for the expansion of the services of BOSCO.

Blessing of the Foundation Stones

I blessed and laid the foundation stone of the new Technical School to be built at Bidar on 17th November. We are grateful to BREADS, the Development Office of the Province, for getting this major project approved with the assistance of JDW, Germany.

I also blessed and laid the foundation stone of Savio Bhavan (Centre for the rehabilitation of child labourers-cum-Salesian Residence) at Chitradurga on 29th November. I am sure that given commitment of the Rector and the other members of the community, the building work will progress steadily and will be completed on schedule.

A Reflection at Christmas

A French philosopher has said, “No man is strong unless he bears within his character antitheses strongly marked.” The truly strong man holds in a living blend strongly marked opposites. Not ordinarily do men achieve this balance of opposites. The idealists are not usually realistic, and the realists are not idealistic. Seldom are the humble self-assertive or the self-assertive humble. But life at its best is a creative synthesis of opposites in fruitful harmony. The philosopher Hegel said that truth is found neither in the thesis nor in the antithesis, but in an emergent synthesis which reconciles the two.

Jesus Himself spoke of this need for a synthesis, of the need for blending opposites when He asked His disciples to be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves (Mt. 10:16). It is pretty difficult to imagine a single person having simultaneously, the characteristics of the serpent and of the dove, but this is what Jesus expected – that His disciples combine the toughness of the serpent and the softness of the dove; that they have a tough mind and a tender heart!

Toughness of mind is characterized by incisive thinking, realistic appraisal, and decisive judgement. The tough mind is sharp and penetrating, breaking through the crust of legends and myths and sifting the true from the false. It has a strong, austere quality that makes for firmness of purpose and solidness of commitment.

Toughness of mind is one of man’s greatest needs. Rarely do we find men and women who willingly engage in hard, solid thinking. There is an almost universal quest for easy answers and half-hearted solutions. Nothing pains some people more than having to think. This results in the media shaping opinions and advertisements selling products as well as demagogues fanning the fire of fundamentalism. Few people have the toughness of mind to judge critically and to discern the true from the false, fact from fiction. Our minds are constantly being invaded by legions of half-truths, prejudices and false facts.

However the cultivation of a tough mind is not sufficient. Jesus also demands a tender, guileless heart. Tough-mindedness without tender-heartedness is cold and detached, leaving one's life in a perpetual winter devoid of the warmth of spring and the gentle heat of summer. What is more tragic than to see a person who has risen to the disciplined heights of tough-mindedness but has at the same time sunk to the passionless depths of hard-heartedness?

The hard-hearted man lacks the capacity for genuine compassion. He is unmoved by the pains and afflictions of his brothers. He is an isolated island. No outpouring of love links him with the mainland of humanity. The rich fool was condemned, not because he was not tough-minded, but rather because he was not tender-hearted. Life for him was a mirror in which he saw only himself, and not a window through which he saw other selves (Lk. 16: 19ff.)

Jesus taught that an authentic Christian life combines the toughness of the serpent and the tenderness of the dove. To have serpentine qualities devoid of dove-like qualities is to be passionless, mean, and selfish. To be dove-like without being serpent-like is to be sentimental, anemic and goalless in life. We need to combine strongly marked antitheses.

What has been said above can be applied to the nature of the God we believe in. The greatness of our God lies in the fact that He is both tough-minded and tender-hearted. The Bible always insists on stressing both attributes to God and expresses his tough-mindedness in his justice and His righteous wrath and his tenderness in His love and grace. God has indeed two outstretched arms – one is strong enough to surround us with justice and the other is gentle enough to embrace us with His grace.

Jesus Himself was an example of this creative synthesis of tough-mindedness and tender-heartedness. He saw through and challenged the cunningness of Herod, the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the pretensions of Herod. He also shed tears for his friend Lazarus, had compassion for the crowd which he felt was like sheep without a shepherd and He forgave sinners.

Looking at the Babe of Bethlehem – the God-Man Babe - often depicted with his arms outstretched I was brought to the above reflections. For indeed He is tough-minded enough to transcend the world; He is also tender-hearted enough to live in it as the Emmanuel – God with us! He does not leave us alone in our agonies and struggles. He seeks us in dark places and suffers with us and for us in our tragic prodigality.

The Messianic times are spoken of by Prophet Isaiah as a creative synthesis which will be inaugurated by the Promised of Ages. : “The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together and a little child shall lead them...(Isa. 11: 6ff). The further exhortations from the same Prophet in preparation for Christmas also indicate the synthesis that is evident in the one who is

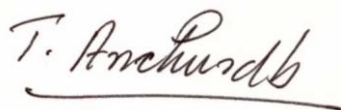
coming as our Saviour: "Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you" (Isa. 35:4). Indeed He is a tough-minded Saviour. But the prophet announces also a tender-hearted Redeemer: "He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom and gently lead the mother sheep!" (Is. 40:11).

Living in times such as ours where evil seems to have the upper hand and where corruption among the high and the mighty seems to be the order of the day, and where truth gets easily submerged in thick layers of lies, Christmas comes with the message that there is a God of power who can cut them down like the grass and leave them withering like the green herb. When our most tireless efforts fail to stop the surging sweep of injustice and oppression, we need to know that in this universe is a God whose matchless strength is a fit contrast to the sordid weakness of man.

But there are also times when we need to know that God possesses love and mercy. When we are staggered by the chilly winds of adversity and battered by the raging storms of disappointment and helplessness, we need to know that there is someone who loves us, cares for us, understands us, and will give us another chance. When days grow dark and nights grow dreary, we can be thankful that our God combines in his nature a creative synthesis of love and justice which will lead us through life's dark valleys and into sunlit pathways of hope and fulfillment ... that He is the God-Man, the Emmanuel "God-with-us men!"

Happy Christmas to you all dear confreres and may you experience the power and tenderness of the Lord throughout the New Year...and mould yourselves after His image!

Yours affectionately in Don Bosco,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "T. Anchukandam", with a horizontal line underneath.

Fr. Thomas Anchukandam, sdb
Provincial