



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 125TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE DEPARTURE OF THE FIRST SALESIANS
FOR ARGENTINA**

To the Most Reverend Father Juan Edmundo Vecchi, S.D.B.

*Superior General of the Salesian Society of St John Bosco*¹. In 1875 the first Salesians left for Argentina. This was the beginning of a promising missionary season for your religious family, which in time would become more and more flourishing. Recalling this year the 125th anniversary of that event, I extend my cordial wishes to you and to your entire institute, and express my grateful appreciation to all your confrères for the apostolate carried out according to the characteristic spirit of St John Bosco. Who is not familiar with your founder's outstanding missionary soul? Many confrères, numerous Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and a great many lay people have followed in his footsteps, fulfilling their own missionary vocation in the Salesian charism. Throughout these 125 years, more than 10,000 religious have gone to mission lands. Before leaving, many of them received their Crucifix in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin. Most Reverend Father, I know that in recalling the missionary beginnings of the institute, you made a new missionary appeal to the congregation and that 124 religious and laity responded. These generous apostles will receive from you their mandate and the Crucifix that will accompany them in their apostolic ministry. They come from all the continents, another proof of how the Salesians' work has spread to every part of the world, and they are sent, in the name of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello, to carry out in all regions of the earth an intense activity of evangelization and of educating young people. At the centres opened for the new generations, the professional and training institutes, the schools and parishes, among ordinary people and street children, they are called to form and to prepare for social and religious life all those whom Providence entrusts to them, so that they in turn will become messengers and witnesses to the Gospel. And how could we not recall that many Salesians are in the front lines of evangelization and offer their service among less fortunate and needy peoples? Carry on, dear brothers and sisters, with this very useful apostolic activity, which my revered Predecessors have always encouraged and blessed. Carry on with the same missionary ardour shown by those who preceded you.² The first group of Salesians sent to Latin America in 1875 is remembered for its vibrant missionary spirit and today is still held up as an example for all in the Salesian Congregation who ask to go to mission lands. Their witness is viewed in a way as the paradigm of every apostolic project that involves the whole Salesian family, which grew out of the Turin oratory. It is the style of St John Bosco, who asked his missionaries passionately to make their own the same Gospel preached by the Saviour and his Apostles. "This Gospel", he said, "you must jealously love, profess and preach exclusively" (*Memorie Biografiche*, XI, 387). The presentation of the mandate and

the Crucifix, which is done in memory of that first missionary expedition, fits into the broad context of the Great Jubilee and is meant to instil new zeal not only in the congregation's missions, but in the spiritual life of the Salesian family itself. Today men and women religious of the great Salesian community are committed to working together by pooling their efforts. They are joined by the significant and important presence of lay people. The discernment and formation of local vocations, in fact, is a necessary, though sensitive, part of the missionary ministry of those newly sent, continuing all that Don Bosco began. The presence of 23 lay people among the new missionaries who are being sent out on this occasion highlights how much the sons and daughters of Don Bosco are doing to make the most of the laity in the Church. These are young people who heard the missionary call while they were involved in the congregation's youth ministry. They now want to dedicate a period of their lives to their brothers and sisters who live in distant lands, going as witnesses of Christ to do the Father's will (cf. Heb 10: 7).³ I deeply thank God for the missionary efforts which the members of this religious family carry out in the vast field of the Church. At the same time, I hope that this happy event, enhanced by the significant act of presenting the missionary mandate and Crucifix to the new workers in the harvest, will be for the communities and for every individual Salesian an opportunity for renewed commitment to Gospel witness and missionary activity. To this end, I invoke the motherly assistance of Mary Help of Christians and the intercession of St John Bosco and all the Salesian saints and blessed. May the divine protection always accompany your spiritual family, especially the missionaries, their parents and relatives. With these sentiments I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, Most Reverend Superior General, to your confrères, to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and to the lay people who cooperate in every area of your Salesian activity, and I gladly extend it to all who will take part in the solemn Jubilee celebrations. *From the Vatican, 9 November 2000.* © Copyright 2000 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana