Conclusion of the Albera Year 2021 - Opening of the Sales Year 2022

13 January 2022, Salesian Spirituality Days: Day 1, 1300-1430

Ivo Coelho, Formation Councillor

# Conclusion of the Albera Year

At the end of the Year dedicated to Fr Paolo Albera we can say that we have discovered a relatively unknown but wonderful figure from the early days of the Salesian charism.

Especially at a time when we are seeking a new appropriation of the charism, Fr Paolo Albera is of particular interest.

First, Fr Albera stands out among the early Salesians for a **remarkable interest in reading** and study. His diligent reading overflowed into his preaching, which has been described as "always very well prepared, elevated and dense".

Second, Fr Albera teaches us the possibility of being **faithful disciples of Don Bosco without losing our originality.**

Clearly, Albera is neither Rua nor Cagliero.

He was an intelligent man who was also timed, with a melancholic streak; but at the same time he was the amiable and hardworking founder, the tenacious traveller, and a man with a great capacity to win hearts.

He is a shining example of the fact that all kinds of personalities can find a home and flourish in the Salesian charism. We do not lose our originality in the following of Don Bosco.

Finally, I believe that Albera is the only one among the first Rectors Major to leave us a **spiritual diary**.

His notebooks give us a privileged glimpse into the continuous dialogue between grace and freedom in the human heart.

They are a precious window on the formative power of Don Bosco's charism, a touching testimony to the way in which our humanity endures and yet is transformed and becomes a docile instrument of the Spirit.

They are also witness to Albera’s openness to languages and cultures: he wrote his diaries in Italian, French and even in English, having begun to learn English at the age of 60, after a trip to London with Don Rua.

It is up to us now to be worthy heirs of the spiritual heritage given to the Church through Don Bosco and through those who, like Albera, allowed themselves to be shaped and formed by him.

At the conclusion of this year dedicated to our dear Fr Albera, we have many people to thank - for the studies, the books and other publications, the study of the photographic archives, the exhibition at the Casa Don Bosco Museum along with the relevant web page and the pdf document, and the Seminar held by the Salesian Historical Institute (ISS) in collaboration with the Salesian Pontifical University (UPS).

# Inauguration of the Sales Year

We conclude the Albera Year and begin the Sales Year on the 4th anniversary of the death of our Patron Saint. It is interesting to recall that the 3rd anniversary of Francis’ death was celebrated when Albera was Rector Major. It was Albera who encouraged and promoted renewed attention to the teachings of Francis de Sales.

Pope Francis has promised us an apostolic letter on the occasion of this centenary, and there are many other initiatives, including the Strenna of the Rector Major, the exhibition in the Casa Don Bosco Museum that will be inaugurated soon, videos on the life and teachings of the saint, and various publications.

Don Bosco, like St. Francis de Sales, was born in the kingdom of Savoy and therefore St. Francis de Sales was a "household" saint. Unlike Francis, who came from a noble family, Don Bosco was a simple peasant, but there is a great affinity and consonance between the two. Our founder was inspired by the goodness and pastoral zeal of St Francis, to the point of adopting as his own the motto, *Da mihi animas, cetera tolle*.

Not for nothing did Fr Rinaldi speak of goodness as a kind of 'fourth vow' for us, and a badge of our style of sanctification. The Sales Year is therefore a great call for us to clothe our whole way of being and doing with goodness, which Pope Francis would no doubt call tenderness and closeness. Against any tendency towards clericalism - which can be a virus that affects not only deacons, priests or bishops - we want to believe "in man's natural and supernatural resources, while not ignoring his weakness," we want to be zealous shepherds and educators like our great patron, with the smell of the sheep.

It does us good to remember that Margaret Mary Alacoque was a Visitation nun: the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus emerged from the Salesian tradition, from Francis' insistence on the HEART, on the love of God and the love of neighbour that is inseparable from it.

We are very happy therefore to begin this year dedicated to St. Francis de Sales, and to begin it with the Rector Major, Fr. Angel Fernandez Artime, who will now present to us the Strenna for this year: "Do everything out of love and nothing by constraint."