The Heart of Education: The Legacy of Saint John Baptist de La Salle Today

On 3 February, during the Vatican Radio (Vatican News) programme 'Dritti al cuore' (Straight to the Heart) hosted by Don Andrea Vena, several witnesses, including Brother Enrico Muller, Professor Silvia Pollato, Professor Vincenzo Rosati, and Riccardo Gamaleri, a student at "Istituto Gonzaga" in Milan, recounted the history, life and charisma of De La Salle.
The common thread running through the entire special is the ability to transform education into a mission of love and social redemption. It is an interview that presents an extremely modern image of De La Salle, not as a dusty figure from the past, but as a spiritual and educational mentor for the present.

The contributions collected do not merely describe a pedagogical method, but bear witness to a life experience that involves every level of the school community.

To fully understand the scope of this mission, it is necessary to go back to the source of that spark which, over three centuries ago, 'prompted a young canon from Reims to renounce his privileges to become a "brother" to the least among us'. **Brother Enrico Muller** guides us on this journey, opening the circle of contributions with his testimony. In his words, De La Salle's legacy emerges not as a set of rules, but as a radical choice of life: that of transforming education into an act of pure salvation, restoring to every child the awareness of their infinite value. "The education given to a child saves him", thought De La Salle, "who was firmly convinced of this", says Brother Enrico, "a man who can read, write and do arithmetic can do anything in life".

Fr. Enrico's voice is joined by that of **Prof. Silvia Pollato**, professor of information technology at the "Istituto San Giuseppe" in Milan, as well as representative for the pastoral commission, which coordinates the spiritual activities and Christian values that are at the heart of the charism of St. John

Baptist de La Salle.

Don Andrea Vena asks her how the Founder's charism is translated into the school environment. "The phrase that De La Salle addresses to educators is essential: 'consider the children in your care as children of God himself; take greater care of them than you would of the children of a King'".

Ms Silvia Pollato explains how the Lasallian method is anything but outdated. It is based on three pillars that she, like all the other teachers, lives out daily in her school: **fraternity,** i.e. the idea that one never educates alone, but as an 'educating community' (teachers, Brothers and families together). **Inclusion:** personalised attention for each pupil, especially those who struggle more, and the concept of **school as a 'home'**: a place where children feel welcomed and loved, a necessary condition for learning.

"For us, this is pastoral care. We want to inspire in educators, as in young people, a critical spirit and a different way of reading. Every institution has a community, which until 40 years ago was made up only of Brothers, but today is also open to lay people. Personally, after forty years of teaching, I try to convey to them the joy of learning and of always sharing with others".

We talk about education, but above all about attention to the least among us, with **Prof. Vincenzo Rosati**. In fact, outside the classroom, he looks beyond, bringing his experience of volunteering in different parts of the world, "where I had the opportunity to personally experience the sense of belonging to the Lasallian charism and mission lived in its entirety, together with a pressing call to fraternity". Rosati makes a fundamental distinction for our times: while the challenge once was against geographical and material poverty, today the real urgency is to combat *'existential peripheries'*. In his words, the charism of De La Salle becomes a tool to fill the voids of meaning in today's young people, wherever they may be.

Finally, the testimony of **Riccardo Gamaleri**, a 17-year-old student at the 'Istituto Gonzaga' in Milan, is perhaps the freshest and most direct, as he represents the ultimate recipient of this educational mission. He reiterates the

sense of belonging and describes the school not as a building, but as a family. He talks about how he feels listened to as a person and also, and above all, thanks to voluntary work and service with others for others, through the Lasallian Youth Movement (MGL in Italian). Riccardo explains that De La Salle's teaching comes through the daily example of his teachers, who transmit values of solidarity and respect, helping him to grow not only as a student but also as a conscious citizen.

"Even today, some three thousand Brothers around the world, together with many lay men and women (including Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus) and associates of the Institute, work with dedication in over 1,200 educational centres around the world, in a socio-educational activity that now has over three hundred years of history, and where they continue to be struck by the human and spiritual misery of children and young people", says Brother Enrico Muller.

Ultimately, what emerges from the four testimonies is that the legacy of St John Baptist de La Salle is still a work in progress. From Brother Enrico's vocation to the existential challenges posed by Prof. Rosati, from Prof. Pollato's passion for education to Riccardo's confident gaze, the common thread remains the same: **to dignify life**. A commitment that today no longer comes only from books, but from the ability to listen to those 'new inner miseries' and transform them into hope. Because, "yesterday as today, educating is not only about transmitting knowledge, but allowing every young person to feel that their life has infinite value", concludes Brother Enrico.