

## **January 31, 2010 – Salesian GHQ – A Letter from the Rector Major opens the centennial year of the death of Blessed Michael Rua**



**(ANS – Rome)** – As already announced, the centennial year of the death of Blessed Michael Rua, Rector Major, first successor of Don Bosco, opens on January 31.

To mark the opening, the present Rector Major, Fr. Pascual Chavez, has sent a letter to all the Salesians. The date chosen – 31 January – for the opening of this centennial recalls “January 31, 1888, the day on which, with the death of Don Bosco, Fr. Rua became de facto his first successor.”

To know and to make known Blessed Michael Rua is the first task Fr. Chavez gives his Salesians, mentioning some aids. Among these is his letter of June 24, 2009, “Successor of Don Bosco: son, disciple, apostle. The human and spiritual profile of Blessed Michael Rua” (AGC 404).

He then mentions some special dates in the course of 2010 closely linked with the life of Don Bosco’s first successor of: April 6, the date of Fr. Rua’s death in 1910; July 29, the date of his ordination as a priest (1860); and October 29, the liturgical memorial of Blessed Michael Rua. For each date the Rector Major also suggests some things to do that can help the communities and the individual Salesian celebrate these occasions better.

The third point he makes regarding the centennial is the international congress, “Fr. Rua in History,” to be held in Rome between October 29 and 31.

Finally, in every province, vice province, and delegation, the centennial could be brought to an end with a congress on Fr. Rua for the confreres and the Salesian Family. Those taking part in the international congress could be responsible for leading these.

The full text of the Rector Major’s letter for the centennial follows.

### **The Beginning of the Centennial of the Death of Blessed Michael Rua**

Prot. 10/0098  
Rome, January 31, 2010  
Solemnity of Saint John Bosco

#### **To the Salesian Confreres of the Congregation**

My Dear Confreres,

I am writing on the liturgical solemnity of our dear Father, recalling January 31, 1888, the day on which, with the death of Don Bosco, Father Rua became de facto his first successor.

On this occasion we are beginning the celebration of the centennial of the death of Father Rua which, as we know, took place on April 6, 1910. In order to encourage greater involvement on everyone's part, I want to tell you now about some initiatives that will accompany the centennial, referring back to the letter with which I launched the celebration, which I sent to you on June 24, 2009, and in which I mentioned the spiritual and pastoral journey for this year.

Our heart is full of gratitude to God for the gift He made to our Congregation and to the Salesian Family in the person of Father Rua. Faithfully following in Don Bosco's footsteps, he became a Blessed; deeply involved in the beginnings of the Salesian charism, he ensured its continuation; generously taking up the guidance of the Congregation, he promoted its development.

### **1. Knowledge of Father Rua**

It is our task during this year to know Father Rua and to make him known, and through him, know how to read and understand one part of the history of our Congregation. Discovering our roots, we will become more aware of our identity and therefore more capable of looking toward the future.

To help your study you could make use of my letter, which was in number 405 of the *Acts of the General Council* entitled "Successor of Don Bosco: son, disciple, apostle: The human and spiritual profile of Blessed Michael Rua." In addition, the "Life of Father Michael Rua" written by Father Francis Desramaut has been published and also now translated into various languages. At the end of October last year the Congress of the Salesian Historical Association on Father Rua took place in Turin, the Acts of which will soon be available. A traveling exhibition in various languages on Father Rua is also going the rounds; a video will also be produced on "Project Europe according to Father Rua."

As you can see, there is no shortage of helps to get to know Father Rua. A knowledge of history helps us to understand the context in which he lived and the complexity of the circumstances; it throws light on the choices he made, reveals his lively intelligence, his greatness of heart, his farsighted courage. A better knowledge of Father Rua will evoke in us a love for him, and the love will urge us to imitate him. In this way we shall the more easily propose to ourselves that we, like him, be "another Don Bosco."

### **2. Significant dates in the centennial year**

In addition to January 31, the date of the opening of the centennial of the death of Father Rua and the beginning of his period of service as Rector Major of the Congregation and successor of Don Bosco, there are other dates which can be of advantage to us in the course of the year.

In the first part of the year an opportunity could be found, at local and province level to present the *strenna*, which this year invites us to imitate Father Rua in bringing the gospel to the young.

On April 6 we can commemorate the date of Father Rua's death, which took place in Turin in 1910, recalling the way the confreres responded and the addresses given at his funeral.

On July 29 we can commemorate his ordination to the priesthood, which took place in the chapel of Saint Anne at Caselle Torinese in 1860, exactly 150 years ago.

On October 29, the liturgical memorial of Blessed Michael Rua, we will recall his beatification on that day in 1972, we will be able to re-read the homily which Paul VI gave on that occasion.

### **3. International Congress**

At the end of October 2010, from Friday the 29th until Sunday the 31st, there will be an international congress at the Salesianum (at the Generalate), which I asked for on the topic "Father Rua in History." It

is a congregational event, in which scholars from all over the world will be involved, Salesians and others. In the light of the research undertaken and of the results of this congress, it will be possible to write another life of Father Rua.

For this occasion I am inviting all the provinces, vice provinces, and delegations to send to Rome two confreres to take part in the congress. It will then be their task on their return to animate the confreres, presenting person of Father Rua. It would be appropriate, for example, to choose to send the provincial delegate for formation and a teacher of Salesian studies.

It would be easier for those confreres to take part in this congress if they could understand Italian. The conferences at the congress, in fact, even though there will be simultaneous translation, will be given and distributed written in Italian.

#### **4. Provincial Congresses**

The centennial will conclude in November with the celebration of a congress on Father Rua in every province, vice province, and delegation for the confreres and the Salesian Family. Those taking part in the international congress could be responsible for leading these.

To prepare the program of the provincial congress, use could be made of the conferences at the congress in Rome in 2010 and the Acts of the Turin Congress in 2009, and perhaps also the history of the province or the region connected with Father Rua. The provincial congress will be one way of keeping alive the person of Father Rua and showing the confreres the relevance of Father Rua for today.

I thank you for the attention you will give to these suggestions and proposals. Each one of you will certainly not be lacking in imagination and creativity in order to identify in your personal lives, in the community, and in the province the ways and means to know, love, and imitate Father Rua better. May he accompany us throughout this year and help us to live our vocation faithfully.

Yours in the Lord,  
Fr. Pascual Chavez V., SDB  
Rector Major