

Living communion, involving in the mission

Dearest Sisters,

Some of us, on behalf of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, took part in the solemn Consistory in St. Peter's Square on Sunday 30 September in which the Rector Major Fr. Ángel Fernández Artime was created Cardinal by Pope Francis. Those who could not be present followed the event live on TV and we all felt participants in this joyful experience which involved us, not only in the emotion of being witnesses from near or far, of a unique historical moment for the Salesian Family, but also in thanksgiving to the Lord for the Pope's trust in Fr. Ángel and in the Salesian charism, a precious gift to the Church. We assure him of our prayers for his new mission, knowing that, however, we will still find him close to us as a good shepherd with a predilection for young people, the poor, families, and in particular, consecrated life.

Live in communion

We are accompanying with great interest, and above all with prayer, the work of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops which, as Pope Francis reminded us, is not a parliament or a political assembly, but an experience of grace in which the protagonist is the Holy Spirit who has the power to compose all differences in the harmony of a single voice. In a synodal and symphonic Church, each Christian community, each person, has its own uniqueness, but always as a function of the harmonious unity of the "symphony". Returning to the text of Saint Basil to the brother Bishops, the Holy Father underlines the importance of creating bonds of communion between dissimilar parties. "Just as we therefore esteem your mutual harmony and unity as our good, so we also invite you to participate in our sufferings caused by divisions, and not to separate ourselves from you because we are distant due to location and places, but since we are united in communion according to the Spirit, to welcome each other into the harmony of one body" (*Opening Discourse of the XVI Synodal Assembly*, 4 October 2023).

I think that the most precious contribution for an effective realization of the Synod, as Daughters of Mary Help of Christians is certainly communion, which gives fruitfulness to the mission and enables us in our daily lives to discern, listen to each other, dialogue, and walk together. It is important that in every community, a circulation of life is created and maintained, an experience of true communion and not just coming together to work. Life grows and develops if each person is respected in their deepest needs for freedom and co-responsibility; if together we try to nourish it by working with optimism and pastoral charity, strengthening communion with Jesus, the authentic source of communion. "Living and working together in the name of the Lord is an essential element of our vocation" (C 49). We are together for a mysterious call of love, for a shared mission, to implement a project of integral education in the Church to which each of us contributes, giving the best of ourselves.

Learning to live together, to collaborate, is the prerequisite for building the common good, for being effective at an apostolic level, despite differences in origin, culture, age, and competence. As you know, learning to live together is one of the pillars of education for the future. Currently, the world is shaken by wars, violence, and the thirst for domination. It is therefore necessary, indeed urgent,

to educate and educate ourselves towards a coexistence in which we can experience authentic fraternity, reciprocity, indispensable requirements for building peace together.

Burning hearts, journeying feet

We are experiencing the month of October in its typically Marian and missionary connotation. The Church invites us to honor Mary in the prayer of the Rosary through which we can invoke the gift of peace upon humanity. Such a fragile reality, so at risk today, and therefore so necessary and awaited.

October is also the month dedicated to the missions. We are called not only to pray so that the evangelical message reaches the ends of the earth, but also to renew ourselves in missionary spirit as an essential dimension of Christian and Salesian life. Don Bosco attributes the success of the Salesians' mission to the prayer of the Rosary, in the first missionary dream that I recommend you reread (cf. *BM X*, pp. 53-55).

At no. 82 of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI had already stated, "May Mary be the Star of the ever-renewed evangelization that the Church, docile to the mandate of her Lord, must promote and fulfill, especially in these difficult but hopeful times!" Pope Francis, at no. 284 of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, recalls the same concept, "With the Holy Spirit, Mary is always among the people. She gathered the disciples to call on Him (Acts 1:14), and thus she made possible the missionary explosion that occurred at Pentecost. She is the Mother of the evangelizing Church and without Her, we cannot fully understand the spirit of the new evangelization."

Jesus entrusts to everyone, even today, the mandate to evangelize the world to which we belong and in which we live. The mission, in the Holy Father's message for World Mission Day 2023, arises from a transformative journey lived by the two disciples of Emmaus (cf. Luke 24:13-35). Disappointed and saddened by the painful event of the passion and crucifixion of Jesus, they need to read this experience in the light of His Word. They need to travel the entire journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus to welcome Jesus and recognize Him on the journey with them. For this reason, the Pope, in the same Message, addresses an essential invitation to us, "Let us therefore, always allow ourselves to be accompanied by the risen Lord who explains to us the meaning of the Scriptures. Let us allow Him to set our hearts on fire, enlighten us, and transform us, so that we can proclaim His mystery of salvation to the world with the power and wisdom that come from His Spirit."

The two disciples recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread, but at that moment, He disappeared from their sight. By now they had welcomed Him and recognized Him alive in their hearts. This is also an important moment for our missionary spirit. When we discover and rediscover the living presence of Jesus within us, we cannot help but proclaim Him and share the joy of His presence.

We are convinced that, to bear fruit, we must remain united to Him (cf. Jn 15:4-9). Communion with Jesus is achieved in listening to His Word, in the Eucharist, in daily prayer, in adoration, in remaining silent in the presence of the Lord, who always remains with us (cf. *Message for World Mission Day 2023*).

Mother Mazzarello and many Daughters of Mary Help of Christians also had the grace of experiencing the living presence of the Eucharistic Jesus in their hearts in a singular way, like the Servant of God Mother Rosetta Marchese (1922–1984). It is an experience that characterizes us as Salesian educators and is to be transmitted above all to young people and to the world as a charismatic gift, together with filial love for Mary Help of Christians. The Pope's words confirm this to us, "The first and main resource of the mission are those who have recognized the risen Christ in the Scriptures and in the Eucharist, and who carry His fire in their hearts and His light in their gaze. They can bear witness to the life that never dies, even in the most difficult situations and in the darkest moments" (*Message for World Mission Day 2023*).

The mission, the fruit of a transformative journey, is the vocation of every baptized person, of each and every one. The history of the Institute has been a missionary history since the beginning, written by "burning hearts and journeying feet," by Sisters who knew how to live in communion with God and with each other, involving many young people and adults in the mission through attraction.

Missionary spirit and the future

As an Institute, we feel the need to delve deeper into such an important aspect of life and mission, which finds its roots in our own charismatic identity. Since its foundation, in fact, the missionary spirit has been the expression of the apostolic passion of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello and has continued to distinguish the Institute throughout its history. In addition to the missionary passion of the Founders, the Salesian Directors who followed one another in Mornese also contributed to fueling the missionary ardor in the first sisters as a universal and constitutive dimension of those who had chosen Jesus more closely. Proof of this is the numerous Daughters of Mary Help of Christians of every generation, engaged in the evangelization and education of girls, young people, boys and girls, and women in different continental contexts.

Thanks to the generosity of people and Provinces, the Institute continues to expand its charismatic presence beyond its geographical borders. It is a sign of vitality and fruitfulness, because the charism is a gift of the Holy Spirit and His action cannot be imprisoned (cf. Mother Yvonne Reungoat, *Report CG XXIV*, 152).

At the same time, there are many requests to have the presence of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, so that they may continue to be light and salt for humanity, especially where there are ever new and urgent educational needs. A sign of missionary vitality are the educating communities open to the valorization of intergenerational, intercultural, interreligious dialogue. In them, the network of relationships nourishes sharing and fraternity in a virtuous circle in which each person enriches the environment and the social and ecclesial context with their own vocational growth (cf. Acts CG XXIV, 14).

I will briefly focus on the aspect of internationality and interculturality, dimensions to be rediscovered, valorized, and lived with more conviction and courageous openness in our communities. They are elements, or rather, choices that have characterized us since the origins of our Institute, especially in the places of the mission *ad gentes*, but not only.

I believe that the charismatic vitality that the Institute enjoys to date can be traced back to the audacity and courage of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello who immediately launched it beyond territorial and national borders. The first missionaries were certainly not culturally prepared and did not have all the requirements that we today consider necessary for this task. Yet in their simplicity and poverty of means and culture, they were animated by great courage and ardent faith in the certainty of responding to the call of the Lord.

The missionary spirit is also required of us today in making choices aimed at preserving and developing the educational charism of the Institute. I refer to the formation of international and intercultural communities, not as a limit or as a necessity due to lack of personnel, but rather as a choice for the vitality and future of the charism. The problems and challenges open us to new horizons and push us towards a more authentic and radical evangelical and Salesian life.

The current community of Mornese, with its new international face is, for example, a sign of what the Institute is promoting in many other places too. Re-signifying our presence requires forming Sisters and communities in ecclesial, intercultural, and inter-congregational openness with a strong missionary impulse in the spirit of the charism that the Founders have handed on to us.

Some ecclesial annotations

On 5 October, the Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum* was published in which Pope Francis specifies and completes what is already contained in the Encyclical *Laudato si'* on integral ecology. At the same time, he raises an alarm and an urgent call for co-responsibility in the face of the emergency of climate change before it is too late. For now, I won't dwell on the topic so as not to be too long, but I invite you to read this precious contribution, which I consider to be of prophetic value, and to which we will have the opportunity to return.

I remind you that this year as well, in preparation for the solemnity of All Saints, we will be offered a time of formation and prayer on the theme, "*In the circle of FMA Holiness*". It will be a significant opportunity to conclude the missionary month by remembering the Sisters on their way towards canonization, to feel their presence, the effectiveness of their intercession, to make their relevance known and, above all, to relive today the path of holiness in joy and in their self-giving to the young men and women on the five Continents.

We congratulate and feel in communion with Mother Yvonne Reungoat on her nomination as *Expert* in the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. This further service to the universal Church that was asked of her is a gesture that honors her and, in her, the entire Institute. Mother Yvonne has underlined several times that participating in the Synod is a very rich, unique experience; that in this experience she carries the entire Institute in her heart and lives this mission in communion with all the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. She asks us to accompany her with prayer.

While we thank her for her willingness to live this experience with a Salesian-ecclesial heart, we assure her of our prayers, affectionate closeness, and commitment to follow, little by little, the progress of the Synod's work. Ideally, we enter Paul VI Hall with her every day to "listen" to what the Holy Spirit suggests, as in a "new Pentecost", in this significant moment for the life of the Church.

May the Lord's blessing flood our existence with joy and help us to rejoice in every sign of new life that continually sprouts in us and in every reality of the Institute.

I greet you affectionately, also on behalf of the Sisters of the Council.

Rome, 24 October 2023

Affectionately, Mother

New Provincials 2023

Province "Most Holy Savior" Central America - North
Sr. Lesbia Aracely Rodas Zambrano

CAM

America

Province "St. Mary D. Mazzarello" Timor - Indonesia
Sr. Evangelina Da Costa Xavier

TIN

Asia