

## **On the way towards an integral ecology**

Dearest Sisters,

I recently returned from Uruguay where I was able to share the spiritual exercises with the Provincials of America, animated and organized by the team of Project Missionary Spirituality (PEM). The experience of living in the first house of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Villa Colón - Montevideo, the "Mornese" of America, was a great joy and sentiment for me and for everyone. We were able to see first-hand how the seed sown by our first missionaries amidst many sacrifices, poverty, and difficulties of all kinds, developed and spread in America and throughout the world. What is most striking, and invites us to give thanks to the Lord, is the observation that the lives of our sisters handed down with generosity from one generation to the next, has borne fruits of holiness everywhere.

Even in the spiritual exercises of the Provincials of the Continents of Asia and Oceania, which took place in Thailand in Sam Phran in the month of October, we followed a path back to the origins in deepening the figure of Mother Mazzarello and the first Mornese community. In both experiences, the awareness has grown in all of us that it is possible to observe the fruitfulness of the charism everywhere, if we are docile to the voice of God who calls us to a strong testimony of holiness.

Mary Help of Christians is present among us with her maternal guidance. She supports our educational and evangelizing mission that the Lord continues to make effective with His grace. Let us not be discouraged by the complexity of the present in which the values of life and the person are often called into question. Young men and women are thirsty for the future and certainties. Today more than ever, they are open to meeting authentic and courageous witnesses who proclaim the Gospel with their lives and words.

### **Praise God for all His creatures**

In the previous Circular, I had already mentioned the Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum* with the intention of reflecting together on this precious text that Pope Francis offers us, in continuity with the Encyclical *Laudato si'*.

The document, which focuses on taking stock of the situation and indicating what to do before it is too late, is strongly action-oriented. It aims to be a stimulus towards greater concreteness in the negotiations of the next COP 28 (Conference of the Parties), which could be decisive for actions that avert the irreversibility of climate change. The meeting in Dubai, which will take place from 30 November to 12 December 2023, and in which Pope Francis will also participate from 1 to 3 December, could become a milestone for a just and equitable energy transition. In the document, with courage and the ability to synthesize, light is shed on the current situation and on the confusion generated by resistance to change, which also leads to mystifying reality (LD, nos. 5-19).

The situation is unequivocal, as appears from the reports of the *IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change)*, the group of United Nations scientists, which brings together the leading experts to evaluate the state of scientific knowledge on climate change. The global scientific community

and governments "unequivocally" agree that greenhouse gases, produced by the combustion of fossil fuels, are the main threat to people and nature. At COP 28, this must be expressed in concrete objectives to put an end to the fossil fuel era.

But the key to understanding offered by the *Laudate Deum* is to "remember that there are no lasting changes without cultural changes, without a maturation of the way of life and social beliefs, and there are no cultural changes without changes in people" (LD, no. 70).

As educating communities, we feel strongly challenged by these calls from the Pope, and we can ask ourselves if we have done everything in our power to spread correct information and to educate to a culture of respect and ecological conversion. Are we growing sensitive people, critical minds, grateful hearts for the gift of creation, of which we are part?

The challenge we face is so great that it requires the contribution of all states and of the large international organizations. True international and multilateral cooperation is indispensable, but multilateral organizations have been struggling to undertake stable and effective paths for some time and it can be seen that international politics is currently weak.

Therefore, Pope Francis hopes for a rethinking of multilateralism and sees two references. On the one hand there is the possibility that multilateral bodies can make binding decisions (for example in the energy transition). On the other hand, that decisions are participated and taken co-responsibly. "Spaces are needed of conversation, consultation, arbitration, conflict resolution, supervision and, in short, a sort of greater "democratization" in the global sphere, to express and include different situations" (LD, n. 43). We ask that power be not only of the elites, but that everything that comes from below, from the periphery, would be valorized, so as to represent everyone's interests, with the common good as its objective.

### **Our educational contribution: citizenship and ecology**

We too can be an active part in these spaces of conversation, consultation, and participation. Our organizations, associations, networks, universities can be places in which to make a conscious and firm voice heard for the complaint and the proposal. Are our networks able to make their voices heard? "Honest citizens" today means feeling like citizens of the world, guests of a planet that welcomes us and with which we are in relationship. To defend it, and to defend our brothers and sisters, it is necessary to identify and follow all possible paths.

This is why denunciation is important, but spaces for reflection and thought are also required. Above all, we need a renewed and deeply rooted theology of creation, a pedagogy of integral ecology, a social commitment that recognizes that everything is connected.

As Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, we are present on the five Continents and we have in our hands the most powerful and effective tool, that of education. Young people, we have seen it and we see it daily, are the most sensitive. With young people we can educate ourselves on a path of integral ecology, and with them we can talk to governments and the world's leaders.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum* reminds us that we are in a moment in which the most effective solutions cannot ignore major national and international political decisions and, at the same time, everyone is called to contribute to "this path of reconciliation with the world that hosts us" (LD, n. 69).

"Families' efforts to pollute less, reduce waste, and consume wisely are creating a new culture. The simple fact of changing personal, family, and community habits fuels concern for the responsibilities not fulfilled by political sectors and indignation at the disinterest of the powerful" (LD, n. 71).

How are we living our journeys of ecological conversion? Are we also among those who show to be sensitive, who make some gestures, but then do not have the courage to implement substantial changes when these inconvenience us in our daily habits?

The *third choice* made by GC XXIV inherent to integral ecology is precisely along these lines: "Let us listen to the cry of the young, the poor, and the earth, to make as networked educating communities, courageous evangelical choices from the perspective of integral ecology " (*Acts GC XXIV*, 35.3). Together with this choice, *GC XXIV* for this six-year period decided through a *Chapter Deliberation*, to ask all the FMA and the educating communities to decisively undertake "a concrete and continuous path of conversion to integral ecology, taking on board the seven objectives of *Laudato si'*, in the spirit of the Preventive System" (*Acts GC XXIV*, 36).

There is a constant both in the choice and in the *Chapter Deliberation* and it is that of assuming integral ecology as a key aspect of the educational mission.

To the question we often ask ourselves: "Is it a new trend to reflect on integral ecology?" We respond by recalling the *Chapter Deliberation* and taking it concretely as a sign of fidelity to our mission. Thus, we declare that humanity's apprehension is also ours; that we are part of the Church; that we share its concerns; and that we allow ourselves to be challenged by the cry that rises from the earth and from the lives of the young and the poor.

We are convinced that the commitment to environmental and human ecology is also an important dimension of faith, which today must be lived keeping in mind the salvation of humanity and the construction of social life. It is a mission that challenges us on a personal and community level, because it urges us to take care of each other, starting with our community, to give human relationships their due importance.

Integral ecology requires a profound interior conversion, because it calls into question the centrality of the person in their greatness and fragility and in their interconnection with creation and with humanity.

If we take this journey of conversion seriously on a vital level, it will help us to be generators of life, to grow in the ability to take care, not only of the children and young people in the mission, but of our communities as well.

Salesian spirituality has been a spirituality of relationship since its origins. Don Bosco's Preventive System was born precisely in a call to a relationship of educational care. Just think of the "dream at nine years of age" in which the Teacher invites Johnny to take care of his companions. It will be the response to this maternal appeal, together with the grace of God, that will transform wild animals into gentle lambs.

In this regard, I suggest you carefully read the magazine *Da Mihi Animas* which, during the year, with different perspectives, will explore this important topic in depth.

### **Mary illuminates and accompanies the synodal journey**

In a few days, the novena will begin in preparation for the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, so dear to the Christian people and our Institute. I thank the Salesian Family Sector which this year will help us refer to two important ecclesial texts: *For a spirituality of Synodality and A Synodal Church in mission*. We will contemplate the dynamism of Mary's love in going to meet Elizabeth, as an image of that synodal path of welcoming, listening, joy, and sharing to which the recently concluded Synod invited us.

In addition to being a rich Marian experience, the novena in preparation for this solemnity will also offer us the opportunity to read and meditate on the *summary report* that on 29 October the first session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops entrusted to the people of God.

This is not intended to be a final document, but a tool at the service of discernment which will have to continue in preparation for the second Session which will be held in October 2024. I invite you to delve deeper into the *Synthesis Report* in reflection and prayer, keeping in mind the three parts into which this document is divided. In each of them, each chapter collects *the convergences, the issues to be addressed, and the proposals* that emerged from the dialogue.

In the coming months, the Episcopal Conferences and the Hierarchical Structures of the Eastern Catholic Churches will take care to resume the synodal path by focusing on the most relevant and urgent issues.

Let us make our own the climate of listening and dialogue that characterized the Synod, because walking together as baptized people, in the diversity of charisms, vocations, and ministries is above all important today not only for our communities, but also for the world crossed by violence. Evangelical fraternity is in fact like a lamp that must not be placed under a bushel, but on the lampstand so that it sheds light throughout the house (cf. Mt 5:15). The world needs this testimony today more than ever (cf. *Summary Report – presentation*).

It is important to collaborate at all levels for a culture of encounter, an indispensable premise for peace, and committing ourselves to building peace is above all the work of education.

I invite you to pray intensely for peace in the novena in preparation for the solemnity of Mary Immaculate Most Holy and in the season of Advent. Let us implore it as the precious gift of Christmas, because Jesus is true peace. He knocks on our lives to give us peace. Let us not be afraid to open our hearts to Him and to open ourselves to Him also as a community.

With the sisters of the General Council, I wish everyone, your families, the educational communities, the young adults, the adolescents, and the children who live in our houses a holy Christmas of peace and hope.

A special thought of good wishes and prayers to the Cardinal and Rector Major Fr. Ángel Fernández Artime, to the Salesian Confreres, and to the entire Salesian Family.

We are particularly close to the educating communities who live in situations of war, violence, persecution, and poverty.

Upon all humanity, we invoke the gift of true and lasting peace.

I greet you with affection.

Rome, 24 November 2023

Affectionately, Mother