

In the prayer of the Rosary contemplate with Mary the face of Christ

Dearest Sisters,

Preparing for the month of May gives me the opportunity of sharing with you a reflection on the presence of Mary in our life and in the history of the Institute. The Marian reference, precious legacy of our Founders, illumines our identity as Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. It does not regard a simple devotion, but rather a presence from which derives a clear setting for life in close connection with the education mission: “to be helpers, like her, especially among young people” (C 4). “Let us be aware of Mary’s presence in our lives and entrust ourselves entirely to her.” (C 4)

We are called to live like Mary, but above all, with her, to prolong in contemporaneity her motherly mission for many, many young people who wait for our help.

The prayer that rhythms our life as Daughters of Mary Help of Christians is based on the daily remembrance of the Virgin’s presence in the various circumstances with grateful and filial love: the celebration of her liturgical feasts, the traditional cultural devotions, the entrustment prayer, the daily Rosary valued and animated personally and in community, are the signs of a beloved and recognized presence.

It is important to interiorly revive the Marian moments, translating them into a life commitment. In fact, according to Mother Mazzarello, “true devotion consists in accomplishing our duties at the right time and place and only for the love of God” (*Cronistoria* II 134). “The most beautiful *fioretto* that can please Our Lady during her month, is to renew ourselves spiritually like the plants in Springtime by giving more attention and commitment to the daily Practices of Piety, without adding other things, beginning with the first Sign of the Cross we make in the morning, until the last one we make in the evening” (*Cronistoria* II 134).

The mission of the Institute is very clear in the articles of the *Constitutions*: to prolong in history the educative and Marian heritage of the Founders. The role of Mary in the life of Don Bosco and of Mother Mazzarello was fundamental for their spiritual and apostolic growth, although with different paths. Evident in the *Constitutions* is the orientation of the Daughter of Mary Help of Christians to live her total consecration to Christ for the young “in the joyous humility of the Magnificat!” (C 4). Only in this way can her life be “a response of salvation to the profound hopes of girls and young women” (C 1) with “Mary’s motherly care” (C 7).

Recalling Don Bosco's certainty "It is Mary who guides us" (*MB* XVIII 439), we affirm our trust in the Immaculate Virgin Help of Christians, whom he himself showed us as a shining model of self-giving to God and neighbor. With her we are called to experience the beatitude of believers and to give ourselves in apostolic action that generates life and hope for all, especially for the young women and men who are entrusted to us.

Article 44 of the *Constitutions* thus indicates the style of our Marian prayer: "Let us turn to her in simplicity and confidence, celebrating her liturgical feasts and honoring her in those forms of prayer proper to the Church and the Salesian tradition, especially with the daily praying of the Rosary in which we relive, together with her, the mysteries of our Redemption."

In this Circular, I want to pause on the importance of the prayer of the Rosary in our life of Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, on the value of this ecclesial, community prayer, the manifestation of the

popular devotion to the Mother of God, but strongly rooted in the ecclesial and Salesian tradition. For us, the daily Rosary is a ‘charismatic’ prayer, the clear expression of our call to be in the Church, with Mary and like Mary, “the sign and expression of God’s foreseeing love” for the young (cf. C 1).

Rediscover the prayer of the Rosary

In the letter written in the height of the pandemic in April of 2020, Pope Francis recalled that in the month of May, “the people of God express with special intensity their love and devotion to the Virgin Mary” and the Rosary is its most beautiful expression.

At one time, it was normal to pray it with one’s family, but this lovely custom seems to be forgotten today for many reasons. Thus, the Pope invites believers to take it up again in the real conditions of difficulty. In addition, recalling the Apostolic Letter of St. John Paul II *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, he relaunches the opportunity to support this prayer that, in the actual historical context, risks being under-valued and rarely proposed to the new generations.

Although it is a Marian prayer, the Rosary is the prayer with a Christological heart, in the simplicity of its elements, concentrates the depth of the evangelical message, and echoes Mary’s prayer, her unceasing song of the *Magnificat* for the work of the Incarnation of the Word that the Holy Spirit accomplished in her.

It is a prayer that allows us to reflect, to re-read the life of Jesus and the presence of Mary in the various mysteries; a prayer that we can say even when we are tired and that we can always offer, especially in difficult moments in history, addressing our invocation to the Lord for particular intentions, for the family, the Church, society, peace in the world.

With the prayer of the Rosary, we let ourselves be guided by Mary to the contemplation of the beauty of the face of Christ and to the deep experience of His love. With the prayer of the Rosary, each one receives from the Mother’s hands, Grace and the graces needed to face their life journey.

In his already cited Apostolic Letter, St. John Paul II presents the Rosary as a very valid means to encourage among the faithful the commitment to contemplate the Christian mystery as a true and proper ‘pedagogy of holiness’; “There is need for a Christianity that is distinguished above all by the *art of prayer*.”

In addition, we must not forget the many times, especially in the last two centuries, in which Mary has invited humanity to contemplate the mysteries of salvation and to pray, invoking her help and her intercession with God. The Church has always recognized the special efficacy of this prayer, entrusting to it, to its constant practice, the most difficult situations. In times in which Christianity itself was threatened, the power of this prayer contributed to overcome dangers and difficulties.

Persevering in prayer with Mary and like Mary

Don Bosco as well, loved the Rosary very much and wanted it to be prayed every day. He said that this prayer is as needed to live as is daily bread. This is what Mamma Margaret had taught him. Paging through the *Biographical Memoirs*, we read, “All those who knew the boy Johnny, attest to his love for prayer, and his great devotion to Mary Most Holy. He must have been very familiar with the holy Rosary because from the early times of the Oratory until the last years of his life, he wanted it to be recited every day by the young people” (BM I 90).

It is interesting to note that the first chapel built by Don Bosco at Becchi was dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary. Each year at harvest time, Don Bosco returned to his birth place together with his mother. His brother Joseph, in addition to a bedroom, made available to his brother priest another room so he could transform it into a chapel and he would not have to walk to the parish every day to celebrate the Eucharist.

Up to 1869, it was here he loved to celebrate Our Lady of the Rosary every year, solemnizing it with the presence of the musical band and choir of his boys from Valdocco. That small area was the first place of Marian devotion wanted by Don Bosco and the privileged witness of the beginnings of the

Salesian Congregation. In fact, it was here on 3 October 1852, that Michael Rua and Joseph Rocchietti received the clerical habit. It was in this Chapel also that Dominic Savio had his first encounter with Don Bosco on 2 October 1854.

Neither can we forget that it was thanks to the prayer to Mary that Don Bosco found a stable place for the young at the oratory of Valdocco.

Describing the practices of piety most common at the Oratory, the *Biographical Memoirs* affirm, "Above all, the holy Rosary was dear to Don Bosco, and for this he had described the fifteen mysteries with very brief contemplations. He had a third part of the Rosary recited at every feast, fervently exhorting his young people to continue, if they could, this pious practice every day of the week in their homes (*BM III 16*).

Don Bosco considered the prayer of the Rosary one aspect of his educative practice that he considered unrenounceable. In February of 1848, the marquis Roberto d'Azeglio, personal friend of Carlo Alberto and senator of the Kingdom, honored the oratory with a visit. Don Bosco accompanied him to every area of the house. The Marquis expressed his satisfaction but with some perplexity. He considered the praying of the Rosary as time wasted. He said, "leave aside the recitation of that antiquated list of 50 Hail Mary's attached one after the other." "Well," replied Don Bosco, "I am very fond of this practice; and I could say that my institution is founded on it. I would be willing to leave behind many other important things, but not this one." And with the courage that was really his, he added, "And also, if it were necessary, I would be willing to renounce your precious friendship, but never the recitation of the Holy Rosary." (*BM III 294*).

Even the great missionary enterprise that launched the Salesians throughout the world was marked by the prayer of the Rosary, according to what Don Bosco saw in a missionary dream, "And I saw that our Missionaries were advancing towards those hordes of savages; they instructed them and they gladly listened to their voice. They taught and they eagerly learned; they admonished, and they accepted and carried out their admonitions. I stood and observed, and I realized that the Missionaries were reciting the holy Rosary, while the savages, running from all sides, stood in the way of their passage and in good agreement responded to that prayer" (*BM X 55*).

The prayer of the Rosary accompanied Don Bosco until the end of his life. "When with headache and stricken chest and the semi-extinguished eyes no longer allowed him to work at all, it was a sad and comforting sight to see him spend the long hours sitting on his poor sofa, in a sometimes-semi-dark place, so his eyes would not suffer from the light, always calm and smiling, with his rosary in his hand" (*MB XVII 262*).

A strongly Marian spirituality was also lived in Mornese. From the *Cronistoria* and the various biographies of Mother Mazzarello and the first sisters, we know that during recreation the Sisters' discourses were almost always on spiritual topics. They spoke of the meditation, of the reading, of the sermon they had heard. The visits to the Blessed Sacrament and to Our Lady were frequent and fervent. Even while working, they prayed by reciting the Holy Rosary or singing the Litany or some Marian hymn.

From the words of Mother Mazzarello, we sometimes understood her concern for the future of the Institute and fidelity to its charismatic identity, "If what Don Bosco says is to come true, our Congregation is destined to spread throughout the world; we will also go as far as America. However, if we want the same spirit to always be kept in it and great good to always be done, it is necessary that we, the first ones of the Congregation, are not only virtuous, but the mirror in which those who will come after us have to see the true spirit of the Institute shine forth. We must live, work, speak in a way that they can and must say: "What fervor there was among our first sisters! What observance! ... What spirit of humility and of poverty. What obedience! Following our example, they will be able to continue to make the true spirit of the Institute live among themselves.

As the Sisters multiply and the Congregation grows, the spirit will necessarily have to suffer, and zeal and fervor will gradually diminish. Don Bosco said that this happened in many Congregations. But if we who are the first begin to be relaxed, if we don't love, if we don't practice humility and poverty, if

we don't observe silence, if we don't live united to the Lord, what will the others do then?" (MACCONO, *Saint Mary D. Mazzarello Co-foundress and first superior general of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*, Vol. I, 399-400).

Thus, she encouraged the Sisters to fervent and unceasing prayer, which in the midst of daily difficulties and work would help them to live in union with God. She never neglected the prayer of the Rosary with which she constantly turned her heart and thoughts to Mary Help of Christians, true Superior of the Institute. And, like Don Bosco, she often repeated, "Have great confidence in Our Lady, she will help you in everything" (L 23, 3).

Prayer of the heart

When inaugurating the Marian Jubilee in 2016, Pope Francis wrote on *Twitter*, "The Rosary is the prayer of my heart, the prayer that always accompanies my life."

I would like it if each of us could say the same, 'the Rosary is the prayer of my heart, the prayer that always accompanies my life.'

It is the prayer in which to contemplate with Mary the face of the Lord in the mysteries that mark His existence. Along the pilgrimage of faith, Mary expresses her motherhood by sharing all the stages of the life of her Son, from the silent expectation of Jesus to the atrocious suffering of Calvary, to the glory of the Resurrection and Pentecost. We know that to the traditional mysteries, developed for the first time by Saint Dominic in 1214, Saint John Paul II wanted to add the mysteries of light because as he stated, "Passing from His childhood and life in Nazareth to the public life of Jesus, contemplation brings us to those mysteries which can be called, in a special way, 'mysteries of light'. In reality, it is all the mystery of Christ who is light. He is the "light of the world" (*Jn 8: L 12*). However, this dimension particularly emerges in the years of His public life, when He proclaims the Gospel of the Kingdom. Wishing to indicate to the Christian community five significant moments, 'luminous' mysteries, of this phase of Christ's life, I believe that each of these mysteries is a *revelation* of the Kingdom which has now arrived in the very person of Jesus" (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 21).

In praying the Rosary, we can experience all the power of the *Hail Mary*, recalling what Sr. Lucy of Fatima said during the apparitions of 1917, "Through the power the Father has given the Rosary in recent times, there is no personal, family, national, or international problem that cannot be resolved with the Rosary."

We know how much importance Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello gave to this Marian prayer in the education of young people. There is no Salesian work or mission that was not born from the invocation to Mary and from the efficacy of her intercession with God. The repetition of her sweet name, with the words of the Angel Gabriel at the Annunciation, ten times for each mystery, expresses our confidence in her maternity in the Church and in the world. It is recognizing ourselves as her daughters and sons and thus is an exercise of continual entrustment to Her who is Mother and wise Teacher.

From her, we learn the secret of interior unification between being and doing, between faith and works, between prayer and work, between service to God and educative service to the young people.

I hope that reading and deepening the theme of this Circular will help us to re-motivate and renew, with creative fidelity, personally and as a community, filial love for Mary through the Rosary, and will support us in animating young people, families to this simple and concrete form of prayer and contemplation.

On 24 May, I will be in Turin, in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, and I assure you of my prayers and my remembrance for each of you, for all the educating communities, and for the peace the world urgently needs.

I greet you with affection.

Rome, 24 April 2023

Affectionately, Mother