

Go and proclaim the joy of the risen Christ

Dearest Sisters,

In this particular time of grace for the Ecclesial Community, we accompany with prayer and the daily commitment to personal and communal conversion, the work of the Second Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops *For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission*, which will end on the 27th of this month.

Pope Francis, in the opening message of the Synod on 2 October, stressed that the Assembly, led by the Holy Spirit, is called to make its contribution so that the Church is truly synodal and missionary, to come out of herself and inhabit the geographical and existential peripheries, taking care to establish links with all humanity in Christ our Brother and Lord.

The gaze of the Holy Father is on this great Assembly, engaged in a journey that is beautiful but hard; a journey to be made *together* as people of God, sign and instrument of salvation for the entire human family.

As Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, we are aware that we are called to walk a path of missionary communion, both as Church and as educating communities, certain that the Holy Spirit works in each person. Together with all the faithful in Christ, we are entrusted with the task of living every relationship with responsibility and creativity, so that it is constantly a manifestation of the gratuitousness and mercy of God.

Pope Francis, in his speech on 2 October, stressed that "a self-proclaimed Christian who does not enter into the gratuitousness and mercy of God is simply an atheist disguised as a Christian. The mercy of God makes us responsible" and entrusts to us the mission of being for the world, joyfully and faithfully, sacrament of that light which is reflected by the light of Christ, our Sun.

Joyful signs and bearers of salvation

In a world torn by divisions and conflicts, the Gospel of Christ is the gentle and strong voice that calls people to meet, to recognize each other as brothers and sisters and to rejoice in the harmony between differences. God "who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth" (*1 Tim 2:4*). Therefore, we are invited to proclaim the Good News to all, walking together to realize a true missionary synodality at the service of the Gospel, with special attention to children and young people, to the poorest.

It is the experience that 9 Daughters of Mary Help of Christians of the 147th missionary expedition, the 27 Salesians of the 155th missionary expedition, and some lay people of the *Community of Don Bosco* are preparing to live. In Turin, in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, during the Eucharistic celebration presided by the Vicar of the Rector Major, Fr. Stefano Martoglio, they received the missionary Crucifix.

In his homily addressing the missionaries he said, "This celebration is the celebration of faith. It is the recognition of God's action in the Holy Spirit, in the heart of the Salesian family and the Church. Your presence is a very clear sign of your responsibility and generosity, and it is a great sign of hope. We take this celebration with us, because this sign of hope, of light, is our joy."

These sisters and brothers sent in the name of Jesus, are well aware that the current historical-social context has changed and puts us before new scenarios. When we talk about mission, we must keep in mind globalization, migration flows, the digital revolution, secularism, and the different theological evaluations of other cultures and religious traditions. We are faced with the paradox of being, today, citizens of peoples coming from lands to be evangelized, while not a few Christians convert to other religions. Technological development has made the Church known, at least partially, throughout the world, while Christ is becoming a sort of unknown to many baptized people.

The mission has gone from an inculturation, which was perceived as invasive and extrinsic, to a mission that seeks in all ways to fully value the various cultural traditions. We have gone from a theology that is born in the West and from Rome, that addresses to the people, to a theology of local Churches and of 'peripheries' that returns to the 'center', and stimulates, enriches, and increases the universal Church. There are still lands to be evangelized and nations that ignore the Gospel, therefore the term *ad gentes* retains all its value.

Every missionary sending in the Church, also through the Salesian Family, is always an event of grace in which is celebrated gratitude to God for what He has done in Valdocco and Mornese, through the courageous daring of our holy founders and the first communities, and in which faith is renewed in His Word, who still calls sisters and brothers to set out and cast nets.

The departure from the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians for various missions in the world reminds us that Mary is the Teacher of Evangelization. She helps us to be faithful disciples who sow the seed of the Gospel in the heart and soul of those who are present and those who will be entrusted to us, especially in the poorest young people, with the same passion as Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello.

We pray for the missionaries, called to be women and men capable of giving themselves totally, even with their frailties and weaknesses, to proclaim the beauty of having met the Lord and having oriented their life in the search for Him, the only one and supreme good. Wherever they go, they will proclaim Jesus, not their own culture, not their geographical, political or continental affiliation. They must learn, with patience and mercy, the art of listening and mature in the ability to be close to their brothers and sisters, taking care of them.

We accompany with prayer, in particular, the new missionaries Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, who are living the process of discernment and their preparation for the future destination: with missionary formation at the *Pontifical University of Rome*; following some courses in Salesian Spirituality in the community of *Mother Ersilia Canta of Mary Mother of the Church* Preprovince (RMC) and with specific formation for the mission *ad gentes*, accompanied by the Councilor for the Missions, Sister Ruth del Pilar Mora and her collaborators.

The courage to look to the future

It seems appropriate to look to the future by reviving, in today's contemporaneity, the prophetic impetus of our charism as a gift to the Church and humanity. We would like this to be a process of conversion that truly involves our lives and helps us to become passionate about and welcome a *new missionary call*.

If we go back to our history, we note that the Institute does not focus on missions in its maturity, as it did for other religious institutes and for the Salesian Congregation itself, but from the beginning has a special missionary imprint.

This imprint nourishes the courage, choices, lifestyle, climate of communities and educative works and is concretized, five years after its foundation in 1877, in the departure of 6 young Sisters to Uruguay.

Consulting some historical sources of our Institute, we can see that we are "born for flight". Announcing the first foundation, after that of Mornese, in Borgo San Martino in 1874, Don Bosco says to the sisters, "It is time to open our wings a little." It starts small, but it is about flight, which will continue courageously on the infinite and providential paths of God in the free and boundless space of the proclamation of Jesus.

Already when the Salesian Confreres are preparing for their first missionary expedition, all in Mornese wish to "open their wings" for a desired departure for America. The *Cronistoria* describes a climate of enthusiasm that is increasingly consolidated thanks to the surprising missionary impetus of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello. There is a wonderful promise in the first letter that Don Bosco wrote to Fr. John Cagliero at the beginning of 1876, "Remember that for October, we will send thirty Daughters of M. A. with ten Salesians; some even before, if there is an urgency" (*Letter of 13 January 1876, in Epistolary of don Bosco* curated by F. Motto, vol. V, letter 2255,5). Thirty Daughters of Mary Help of Christians! A surprising promise, beyond any realistic evaluation, but it expresses the unrestrained ardor for the Kingdom of God that was in the heart of the Founder. Don Bosco's intention, 25 days after the arrival of the first missionaries in America, is to continue sending reinforcements, or rather, to send more Daughters of Mary Help of Christians than Salesians, and to send them together. Pope Pius XI had said to Fr. Philip Rinaldi, "You cannot have a mission without Sisters; in fact, there must be more Sisters than male missionaries in the missions" (*Missions Don Bosco, anno cento, Rome, SDB 1975, 14*).

Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello had totally taken on the traits of the compassion of Jesus and the maternal tenderness of Mary. With the same love, they tried to respond to the youth poverty of their time, without closing themselves in categories or territories. They are really the "missionaries of young people". The missionary heart of our Founders makes them "go out" towards the poorest and most abandoned young people, ready to give their lives in order to save them. It is a missionary character that becomes creative audacity and often 'temerity'. "In things that benefit youth in danger or serve to gain souls for God, I run ahead even up to temerity" (*MB XIV,602*). "When it comes to something that concerns the great cause of good, Don Bosco wants to be always at the forefront of progress" (*MB XIX,157.320*).

It is a missionary nature that cannot be stopped. "When we want to do something, let us first examine whether it is for the greater glory of God; known to be such, let us go ahead; let us not give up; and we shall succeed!" (*MB VII,376*).

It is a missionary character that is expressed by creating environments rich in faith, shared charity, characterized by the family spirit and the Salesian evangelical reference values, made visible and witnessed in life.

The missionary spirit of the Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, therefore, is what moves the "I will go". It is not a standing to gaze from afar, but is active to intervene and bring their contribution, even if poor and modest. It is readiness and promptness in seeking all means that promote good, in the conviction that the becoming of things always offers a possibility to work on, in the confidence that the salvation of young people, even if conditioned by difficult times, can be realized with the help of God and Mary.

In our Founders, there is no place for paralyzing fear, nor for fruitless passivity. They count on the fidelity of God and on His paternity that does not abandon His children, but needs them to implement His plans for salvation.

"To keep the missionary ardor alive requires firm trust in the Holy Spirit, because He "comes to our aid in our weakness" (*Rom 8:26*). [...] It is true that this trust in the invisible can give us a certain vertigo: it's like diving into a sea where we do not know what we will meet. However, there is no greater freedom than that of letting ourselves be carried by the Spirit, renouncing to calculate and control everything, and allowing Him to enlighten us, guide us, orient us, push us where He wants.

He knows well what is needed in every age and moment. This is called being mysteriously fertile!" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 280).

Our candidates for the altars are of help and example, among them, Blessed Laura Vicuña, mature fruit of the missionary educative passion of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians; Blessed Maria Troncatti, fearless missionary in the Amazon forest; Venerable Mother Laura Meozzi, pioneer in Poland; the servant of God Sister Antonietta Böhm, missionary for over 70 years in various countries of Latin America. We will be, above all, united in prayer with and through their intercession, on the 30th of October. As in previous years, in the proximity of the Solemnity of All Saints, some characteristic features of Daughters of Mary Help of Christians candidates to the altars will be shared. More information on this initiative will be published in due time on our Institute's *website*.

In concluding, I remind that we will dedicate a three-year period in preparation for the great event of 150th of the first missionary departure, which will begin on 14 November 2024, during the Conference of the formators to be held in Rome, with a solemn celebration transmitted online by the Generalate.

The three-year period will end on 14 November 2027. In the Jubilee year 2025, we will join the initiatives that will take place for the celebration of the first missionary expedition of our Salesian Confreres.

Let us entrust ourselves to Mary, the first missionary of the Gospel, with the certainty that she is Mother and Teacher, Helper who accompanies her sons and daughters still on pilgrimage towards the fullness of holiness. With a heart full of hope and gratitude, aware of the renewed call to "rekindle the fire", I wish you all to listen to the Holy Spirit, our sure guide on the paths of evangelization.

Rome, 24 October 2024

Aff.ly Mother

New Provincials 2024

America

Province "Our Lady of Peace" Bolivia <i>Sister María Gabriela Vivero Herrera</i>	BOL
Province "Mary Help of Christians" Brazil - Recife <i>Sister Maria Américo Rolim</i>	BRE
Province "O. L. of the Rosary of Chiquinquirá" Colombia - Bogotá <i>Sister Angélica Medina Ruiz</i>	CBC
Province "Our Lady of the Snow" Colombia - Bogotá <i>Sister Martha Socorro Ortiz Cumbe</i>	CBN
Province "St. Gabriel Archangele" Chile <i>Sister Marisol del Rosario González Araya</i>	CIL
Province "St. Raffael Archangele" Paraguay <i>Sister Cecilia Camacho Martínez</i>	PAR