

A humanity that generates life

Dearest Sisters,

As a first reflection, I share with you the experience lived at the *International Congress of the World Confederation Mornese of the Past Pupils of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*, from the theme, "Do not let hope be stolen from us" (EG 86), held in Sacrofano (Rome) from 25 to 29 May. I do not dwell on the theme that we know well, in this Jubilee year that invites us to be all pilgrims of hope. Rather, I would like to highlight a significant element that once again made the meeting extraordinary.

Speaking especially informally with the Past Pupils of the beautiful atmosphere that was breathed during the Congress, everyone stressed the importance of the typically Salesian experience lived with the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians at the time of their childhood and adolescence. The affection that accompanied their growth in our communities, the benevolence, the loving welcome, the unconditional dedication, created the experience that they were important to us and that our house was also their 'home'.

From that experience rich in humanity, what these women and men - mothers, fathers, professionals, educators - carry in their minds and hearts is sincere affection, the family spirit breathed and lived to the point of full identification with the environment in which they grew up. It is precisely this element that has penetrated their hearts and lives. It was the experience of a humanity that generates life, which knows how to share, sacrifice, welcome with esteem and respect, in the community and among young people, as underlined by article 50 of our Constitutions:

*The Family Spirit,
the creative outpouring of Don Bosco's heart,
must characterize all our communities
and requires the commitment of everyone.
Let each person, therefore,
always welcome her Sisters
with respect, esteem, and understanding,
in an attitude of open family-like dialogue,
of goodwill, and true sisterly friendship.*

The family spirit breathed in the Congress made me think about what a Sister, a little ahead in experience and years, told me some time ago, "Help us to return to a true community life; we are losing the humanity and the joy of fraternal life."

I immediately thought of the audience of Pope Leo XIV on 28 May, in which, commenting on the Parable of the Good Samaritan, he states that "before being believers, we are called to be human." I said to myself, maybe this Sister is right. Sometimes I ask myself, are we really losing humanity? Are we really losing the joy of community life?

Surely "our Camilla", whom we meet in the quarterly DMA magazine, would have something practical to suggest to us. Let's try to reflect together.

The power of meekness

A contemporary author has written that the loss of humanity, the death of human empathy is one of the first and most revealing signs of a culture on the verge of barbarism.

Let us ask ourselves if this risk can perhaps enter also in us, in our personal and community life, sometimes contaminated by the current culture, tendentially centered on individualism, power, and often on the arrogance of the individual, to the detriment of the good of a community, whichever it may be?

The liturgy of this month of June offers us two strong moments of deep reflection: the solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ and that of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. Both celebrations express the absolute love of Christ who gives Himself totally to humanity; who chooses to stay with us in the most humble and daily forms of bread and wine. From His open side, He tells us, "I am interested in you", "I take your life to heart". But also, "Do this in memory of me; take care of others. With heart. Have the same feelings I have; make the same decisions I make; be meek and humble of heart."

Jesus offers us, therefore, a winning strategy, meekness. *"Learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart" (Mt 11:29); and again, "Blessed are the meek Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land." (Mt 5:5).*

The *"land"* to be conquered with meekness is the salvation of the brother and sister, of the child, of the young person, about whom the same Gospel of Matthew speaks, *"If he listens to you, you have won over your brother." (Mt 18:15).* There is no *"land"* more beautiful than people's hearts. There is no territory more beautiful to conquer than the peace found with a brother, with a sister. This is the *"land"* to inherit through meekness!

Meekness is also called exquisite *"gentleness"*. Moreover, in Paul's pastoral letters, the apostle instructs *"a servant of the Lord to be gentle, kind, and patient when teaching and correcting others, even those who oppose the truth, in the hopes that God will grant them repentance." (2 Tim 2:24-25).* And he also recommends, *"But you, man of God, shun all this; aim at righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness" (1 Tim 6:11).*

Meekness is not weakness; it is not resignation or renunciation, but the will to put oneself in play as people. One learns meekness and grows in it, measuring oneself with perseverance with what life puts on one's way. It is an exercise that makes this virtue the mature fruit of asceticism and conquest. A path of inner freedom, which allows one to look at and face reality and people without prejudice and with sincere love.

It is a virtue that has the characteristic of not letting itself be intercepted by the logics of action and reaction of Evil. Jesus shows us that we must be meek towards ourselves in order to learn to be this with others. It takes more strength to *"turn the other cheek"* than to return the evil received.

In one of his presentations, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini said, "The meek person is one who, despite the ardor of feelings, remains flexible and loose, not possessive, internally free, always supremely respectful of the mystery of freedom."

And Pope Francis emphasizes that "Meekness is the conquest of many things. Meekness is able to win the heart, save friendships, and much more, because people are angry but then calm down, think about it, and turn back on their steps, and thus one can rebuild with meekness" (*General Audience, 19 February 2020*).

In his first message to the world on the day of his election as Successor of Peter, on 8 May 2025, Pope Leo XIV spoke of the need for humanity to live a disarmed and disarming, humble and persevering peace, which can only be born from a perspective of respect and dialogue, recognizing the right of others to be what they are. Believing in dialogue and diplomacy to negotiate peace means starting from the strategy of meekness.

Our world is increasingly characterized by speed, competition, and aggressiveness. This is why the meekness that is clothed with gentleness proves to be an indispensable resource, although sometimes underestimated. We live in a reality where confrontation - real or digital, on social media - often

degenerates into conflict, and our days are marked by rhythms that leave little room for reflection and empathy. It seems paradoxical, but it is precisely in this context that gentleness assumes a revolutionary value. It is not only a matter of good manners, but becomes a conscious commitment to improve oneself and society. We welcome with a willing heart these words of Pope Leo XIV as addressed to each one of us; they are a gift from God to live.

Faithful witnesses of evangelical meekness

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is the gentle woman. It is the sweetness of her face and the light of her smile that attract to her Heart the most distant children. She wonderfully harmonizes the virtue of fortitude with that of meekness. Her strength springs from within her. Hers is the solidity of a house built on rock, against which the winds blow in vain and the waves of the sea break. She accompanies Jesus in the great trial against the empire of darkness, without ever wavering and without ever stopping. She stands near the Cross, while she prays, suffers, and offers; she is the icon of the strong woman who fights until victory. However, this divine strength is admirably tempered by a serene calm that never fails, even at the foot of the Cross.

Together with her, Saint Joseph is an example of those who forge their character, not by violence, but by the winning strength of patience. In a world where verbal, physical, and psychological violence seems to dominate, only meekness can disarm it. Initially, perhaps, it will look like it is losing, but in the long run, it always wins.

Don Bosco practiced meekness as a fundamental component of his educational system. In him, it was not synonymous with weakness, but rather of an inner strength that allowed him to face challenges with patience, understanding, and capacity for forgiveness.

Thus, he was able to evangelize and educate young people full-time, starting with the most fragile and abandoned ones, proposing an educational style based on reason, religion, and loving-kindness. Surely, he had learned from Mamma Margherita to live meekness and tenderness, letting the grace of God shape his energetic and fiery character. We can remember the episode that happened in Chieri to protect his friend Luigi Comollo from bullies.

Mother Mazzarello, with the help of Fr. Pestarino, she entrusts herself to the Holy Spirit so that He may guide her in the work of overcoming and purifying her strong temperament, proud and tending towards impatience, until she lets herself be transformed into a meek and humble person. In her simplicity, she becomes an authentic companion of the spirit. Endowed with a rich affectivity, she acts with sweetness, patience, and friendliness. She welcomes and lives with extraordinary simplicity, the birth and development of an educational charism for women, still current and fruitful in good. "You know the spirit of our Oratory, - said Don Bosco to Fr. Cagliari - our preventive system and the secret to be liked, listened to, and obeyed by young people, loving all and mortifying no one and assisting them day and night with paternal vigilance, patient charity, and constant kindness. Well, the good Mother Mazzarello possesses these requirements and therefore, we can be confident in her government of the Institute and the Sisters" (MACCONO F., Saint Mary Mazzarello, vol I, p. 274). Consecrated woman educator, she becomes Mother for everyone: Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Salesians (it is beautiful to remember the relationship with Fr. James Costamagna who always considered her "mother"), young people, women, families.

Thus, shortly after her canonization, we can affirm of Sister Maria Troncatti, her ability to live meekness as a total gift of herself, in humble, patient, tireless service to brothers and sisters, Shuar and Colonists.

They are examples that help us to rediscover the values not to be lost in any way and encourage us to go forward to realize an authentic fraternity, to revive with joy our belonging to a charism that today is more current than ever. We cannot back away; we are all called to witness a humanity that generates life and life in abundance.

A reminder that on June 24, at the Oratory of Valdocco, the name day of Don Bosco was celebrated. According to the Salesian tradition we therefore join the whole Salesian Family in expressing our affectionate wishes to the Rector Major Fr. Fabio Attard, whom we entrust to Mary Help of Christians, so that she may bless and sustain his life and mission.

From Cesuna, where I am with the Sisters of the General Council for the Spiritual Exercises, thanks to the fraternal and affectionate welcome of the Triveneta Province *Saint Mary Domenica Mazzarello*, I remember you with affection and assure you of our prayers, especially for communities living in situations of war, suffering, persecution, and poverty.

We hope that each one of us will willingly give her own contribution to create in her own realities the genuine educational environment of Valdocco and Mornese, and make herself available to live for young people and among young people, seeking only their salvation in Christ. The Jubilee journey we are making as a Church, makes us stronger and stronger in the hope that never disappoints.

Greetings to all with affection.

Rome, 24 June 2025

Aff.ly Mother