

With the Young on the Roads of Discernment

Dearest Sisters,

I come to you from Castelgandolfo where we are gathered for the summer plenum and for the meeting with the new Provincials coming from four continents. From the reports of the canonical visits of the Visiting Councilors and of the animation visits of the Department Councilors, we have gathered many reasons to thank the Lord for the Post-Chapter journey that is taking place everywhere with love and responsibility for the vitality of the Institute in the various contexts.

A Discernment Experience at Mornese

We thought of you in a special way at Mornese during the Spiritual Retreat, in contact with the source of the charism and through a deeper encounter with Mother Mazzarello. The guiding thread that accompanied us was: Mary, model of discernment, beginning with the Marian texts of the Gospel and from the first dream of little Johnny Bosco when the “Man of venerable aspect” assured him: “I will give you a teacher under whose discipline you can become wise, and without whom every wisdom is foolishness” (MO 62, ed. edited by A. Giraud 2011). What resounded strongly in our heart during our encounter with Mary was the mandate heard by Main on Via Borgo Alto: “I entrust them to you”. It was like a re-launching of the journey of following the Lord Jesus, of discernment, and of missionary openness. This is the prophecy of Mornese.

Evaluation Journey illumined by the Spirit

Each of our communities is called to live discernment as a lifestyle, “an ongoing commitment to welcome the newness of the Spirit, which sometimes leads to huge changes in vision and structures, and sometimes only to small steps forward” (Acts GC XXIII, n. 35).

This is also the journey that we are following in this period of preparation for the three-year Evaluation. It is an opportunity the Institute offers us to revive the awareness of our charismatic identity and re-read life in the light of God’s Word, of the General Chapter indications, and of today’s challenges in order to look toward the future with new hope.

Evaluating the needs of the new life that is sprouting in us and in the educating communities is a challenge, a process that requires special attention because sometimes changes come in an obvious way and sometimes are imperceptible and almost hidden, marked by fatigue and perhaps by interior resistance.

The Evaluation experience that we are living as local, Province, and Interprovincial communities with the laity and the young, begins with the life of each of us and is celebrated in the truth of our being that opens itself to the calls of the Holy Spirit. We are invited to evaluate which changes of mentality and which conversion processes GC XXIII has led us to, which interior attitudes has it favored, which conditions have we set to accomplish them, which difficulties and resistances have we met, and which processes are to be empowered.

The Celebration of Renewed Fidelity

Among the processes of change, we deem as a priority the vital assumption of the Constitutions as the guarantee of fidelity to Jesus and as the fruitfulness of our mission. Let us question ourselves on the way we express this renewed commitment in daily life.

During visits to the Provinces, we notice with joy that in many sisters there is a resumption of the quality of Salesian life at the personal and community levels. Daily reflection with our Rule of life is bearing concrete and promising fruit. We encourage you to continue this journey as a sign of love for Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello and as fidelity to the covenant of love with God that called us to the sequela of Jesus.

St. Francis di Sales wrote: "The Spirit of the Rule is acquired by practicing it faithfully. Fidelity is the measure of love" (Trattenimenti 8). As we approach August 5th, the anniversary of the foundation of the Institute, we thank the Lord for the gift of His fidelity that always sustains and guides us. Our personal fidelity is based on this fundamental fidelity. Let us give praise for the marvelous educational mission, which from that August 5, 1872, has spread throughout all the continents reaching children, adolescents, and young adults of various contexts and cultures. Our vocation, although marked by fragility, in the simplicity of daily life becomes the sign of hope, a call to the young generations to respond to God's gratuitous love, and to realize His plan for each of them. We are certain that life is strengthened by giving it and this is true for each of our communities and for the Institute on the 145th anniversary of its birth.

Listening to the Young as Church

We live in a propitious time also because of the attention the Church reserves for the young, especially through the 2018 Synod on: The Young, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment, which intends to listen to the young, to all young people, excluding no one, because they all have the right to be accompanied on their journey and to feel themselves as protagonists in the outgoing Church (Cf. Preparatory Document).

We, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, consider ourselves particularly involved in the preparation for this Synod because our love for the young and our giving of ourselves for their fullness of life are part of our DNA. Like our Founders, we trust them, the generosity of their heart, their capacity to dream, and to spend their life for great ideals.

As Church, we are convinced that the Holy Spirit acts in the heart of the young and invites them to respond to His plan. He called us by grace to accompany the young in recognizing His voice that invites them to the joy of love and sustains them in responding with decisive choices. In whatever area we work, we place ourselves alongside them to support them on the journey of faith, guiding them to the encounter with Jesus so that they may place their life at the service of others.

For us, it is always a source of awe to recognize that the Salesian Congregation and our Institute were born in the Church thanks to the freshness of the commitment and the generous collaboration of the young accompanied by the wisdom of the Founders. Our missionary history also has its origins in a group of young women between 17 and 25 years of age who had the courage to bring Jesus to faraway lands.

The choice of remaining with the young continues to be for us as well a call to open ourselves to reciprocal giving and to God's surprises. The most precious gift we can give them is to walk together to meet the Lord so they may feel chosen and loved by Him. We believe that Jesus is the expression of fully realized humanity and His presence in history can respond to the deepest expectations of every man and woman, of every culture, religion, and faith.

Our presence among the young, and our commitment to accompany them in their life choices, opens them to the encounter with Him. We live our vocation in the playgrounds, in the classrooms, in the social networks, in the places where the young, especially the poorest, find themselves living. We thank our elderly and sick sisters who, with their offering of prayers, unite with us on the journey of preparation for the Synod event.

In this graced time, we wish each of you to renew “the decision to let yourselves be met by Him, to seek Him each day without pause” (EV, n. 3). Each of us has her own encounter with Jesus and we cannot ever forget it, but we must preserve its freshness and its beauty (Pope Francis, meditation a Santa Marta, 24 April 2015). The encounter with Him is contagious. It generates life and reawakens joy in others. This is the condition so that the young may be accompanied to meet Jesus who can transform their life into a gift of love for others.

Processes of Charismatic Vitality

It is certain that Mary walks with us and accompanies us in a constant discernment process. It is a joy for us to share some meaningful experiences in the life of the Institute.

After a lengthy discernment, much prayer, sharing, and involvement of the sisters, and not without times of fatigue and perplexity, we have concluded some processes of revitalization in the Institute. On June 10th, the new Province of Our Lady of the Snows was erected at Tiruchirapalli, which came about due to the multiplication of the first Indian Province of St. Thomas Apostle of Chennai. Thus, there are now 7 Provinces in this huge Nation, rich in history and for the future.

Every process is a sign of vitality also because it reveals a journey of seeking for a renewed expression of the charism in a territory, without closing ourselves in immobility. On August 5th, the unification of the four Provinces of Spain will take place and is entrusted in a special way to the protection of Mary Help of Christians. On August 19th, the Province of Eastern United States and the Pre-province of Canada will constitute one Province entitled St. Joseph.

In addition on October 8th, the houses dependent on Mother: Mother Angela Vespa, Sr. Teresa Valsé, Mother Ersilia Canta, St. Mary D. Mazzarelo in Rome, and Paul VI at Concesio, Brescia will constitute the Pre-province entitled Mother of the Church.

Mary Help of Christians continues to guide the journeys of revitalization and accompanies us in this particularly intense time of preparation for the Evaluation and for the Synod.

We will be united around Her on August 5th to celebrate the joy of being Her Daughters, stones of the living monument that Don Bosco wanted to raise to Her so that the young could be happy in time and in eternity.

Rome, 24 July 2017

La Madre
and the Sisters of the Council