



Message on the Occasion of the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

To be formed is to be configured to the Heart of Jesus the Good Shepherd

“What is your name?... Go to your home and family and announce to them what the Lord has done for you and the mercy he has shown you” (Mark 5,9 ff)

“In the mystery of the Heart of Christ, the missionary contemplates, in their fullest expression, Christ’s innermost attitudes and makes them his own: his unconditional giving of himself to the Father, his all-embracing love for the world and his involvement in human suffering and poverty” (RV 3.2)

“Formation must, as a priority, concern itself with interior motivations and educate towards facing, with creativity, competence and flexibility, the challenges emerging from new situations” (Ratio Fundamentalis 113)

Dear Confreres,

In communion with all humanity, this year we are celebrating the solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the extraordinary context of the COVID-19 pandemic that is still causing so much that is tragic and sorrowful all over the world. With confidence in God, we address an invitation to the whole Institute to contemplate the Heart of Jesus while opening our hearts to the mystery of his love so that this mystery may touch us deeply, free us from all the forces that keep us imprisoned and isolated and may help us to be faithful to our consecration and our mission.

As missionary disciples we enter the school of the Heart of Jesus who, in his humanity, reveals to us the Heart of God – the Heart of the Good Shepherd who goes out, approaches the poor, the suffering and the marginalised, inviting them to emerge from their isolation and their incommunicability, prepared for communication and a quality encounter with God, with others and creation. It is about participating in that love that always communicates itself, and that, if it is received by the beloved, always gives life, brings about growth and educates in the sense of the Latin word *educere*, which means bringing out what is best in the human being.

It’s important to remember that this encounter with Christ sets in motion a process of conversion, of formation and transformation, or better still, of “Christification” that lasts a lifetime and must touch the heart. The content of our initial and ongoing formation consists of the holiness and transformation of the person into Jesus Christ according to the dual complementary orientation of the *sequela* and *imitatio Christi*. Therefore, to be converted into another Christ is for us a privilege granted us by God’s mercy and grace and, at the same time, a responsibility that commits us to the

coherence of life with the pressing and incessant question: "*What would Christ and Comboni have done in this same historical situation of mine?*".

It is Christ who, with his merciful heart, takes the initiative of asking each one of us "*What is your name?*", as he did of the possessed man referred to in the passage above. To know a person's name, according to the Hebrew mind, means entering into the depths of his personal life. This question shows his interest in us as people loved by God and helps us, on the one hand, to reinterpret what is within and around us so as to discover where our hearts lie, who we really are and, on the other, shows us the Heart of Christ full of love, compassion acceptance and tenderness.

As Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus, both in our initial and ongoing formation, it remains the commitment of the person and of the Institute to cultivate, deepen and contextualise our spirituality of the Heart of Jesus so that our whole life may increasingly adhere to the "programme" contained in our name.

It is Christ who, with his welcoming heart, shows his full trust in others, no matter what their situation, values them and restores them to their communities, to their homes, symbols of places of hope, of cordiality and human warmth. Life is made up of quality communications and relations. Saint Daniel Comboni speaks of the Institute "*as a Cenacle of Apostles, a centre of light sending out so many rays that shine, giving warmth and revealing together the nature of the Centre from whom they emanate*" (cf. *Writings*: 2648). Our hope is that the Heart of Jesus may truly be a **centre of communication** among all the confreres and that we may make of fraternal communication an instrument for building bridges, to unite us and share the beauty of being brothers in mission, in an epoch marked by contrasts, division and indifference.

Lastly, as we reflect this year on the theme of ministeriality in the Institute, let us pray that the contemplation of the Heart of Christ may help us to live the mission, not superficially as a role to be filled but as a service to the Kingdom of God and an expression of a process of *kenosis* and decentralization. We wish you all a Happy Feast of the Sacred Heart!

The Secretary General of Formation and the General Council