



*"In the fullness of time, God sent his Son,
born of a woman" (Galatians 4,4).*

Dear Confreres,

The approaching celebration of the Nativity of Jesus moves us to wish you all a Happy Christmas. We do so fully aware of how hard it may be for us to utter such greetings. The difficulties we experience may derive from two recent events. Firstly, we had the document of the European Union – later withdrawn – with its guidelines for communication in which, to avoid offending the sensitivities of people of different culture or religion, it was suggested that we say "*Happy Holiday and not Happy Christmas as not all are Christian.*" Secondly, we have the discomfort, as we did last year, that we are going through due to the renewed increase in Covid 19 infections all over the world and the new strains, more infectious than in the past.

The measures taken to protect us and avoid new infections involve closing borders, isolating and discriminating against people and entire countries, increasingly compromising their social life and economic recovery and, by so doing, increasing the number of poor people in the world.

These two signs alone indicate how we are living in a historic moment in which we are in danger of living in a way contrary to the celebration of the birth of Jesus, ignoring the spirit of Christmas that speaks to us of welcoming, tolerance, closeness and fraternal relations between people of other races, cultures and faiths.

In this moment of uncertainty and fragility, we feel even more the need for Good News, a Gospel that warms the heart and is capable of overcoming the physical and socio-economic distances imposed by the pandemic and attitudes of indifference, especially towards the weakest and the poorest. This Gospel is the fact that "*God sent his Son, born of a woman*". It is the child of Bethlehem, the bread that satisfies, the son of Mary and Joseph, the universal brother who comes to throw down walls and open our narrow horizons. He, the Word made flesh who has come to dwell among us, espouses our humanity and intimately unites us to Him.

Christmas is an invitation to contemplate Him in his humanity, to allow ourselves to be carried away by that beauty of his that fills us with wonder and awe. It was, above all else, this attitude that took hold of Comboni at the grotto in Bethlehem and accompanied him on his mission: *My God! Was that the place where Jesus Christ chose to be born?... I entered it and, though birth is more joyful than death, I was nevertheless more moved than on Calvary, at the thought of the condescension of God who humbled himself to the point of being born in this stable (W 111).* We wish to ask for each one of us the grace of amazement before God who incarnates himself today in the poor, the humble, the refugees and the migrants, and in those castoff people who inhabit the peripheries of the world.

Amazement will bring us to see the invisible, to contemplate the presence of the Child in the many situations in which we are immersed every day: the resilience of the poor who are able to rise again and fight for a more dignified life; the self-giving of so many men and women who, forgetting themselves, generously undertake the service of others; the life of so many men and women missionaries who, day after day, quietly announce with joy and generosity the Good News of Bethlehem. Lastly, we are amazed because God always comes to us without ever becoming tired of us and invites us to lift up our gaze and contemplate his faithfulness.

As we continue our journey towards the XIX General Chapter, we celebrate Christmas fearlessly proclaiming that God is born for everyone and that neither walls nor laws nor limits of time and space can prevent his grace from breaking through. Let us say it to everyone, with our words and our life, that the fullness of time has come and that the Son of God is among us, for good, and He is creating a new world where compassion, tolerance, closeness and love are part of our lives and cast a new light on the darkness that so often surrounds and disturbs us. In the midst of our missionary activities and in the silence of our hearts, let us surrender in amazement to the Child of Bethlehem!

A Holy Christmas and a New Year of Peace and Light in 2022.

The General Council