



Comboni Missionaries General Council

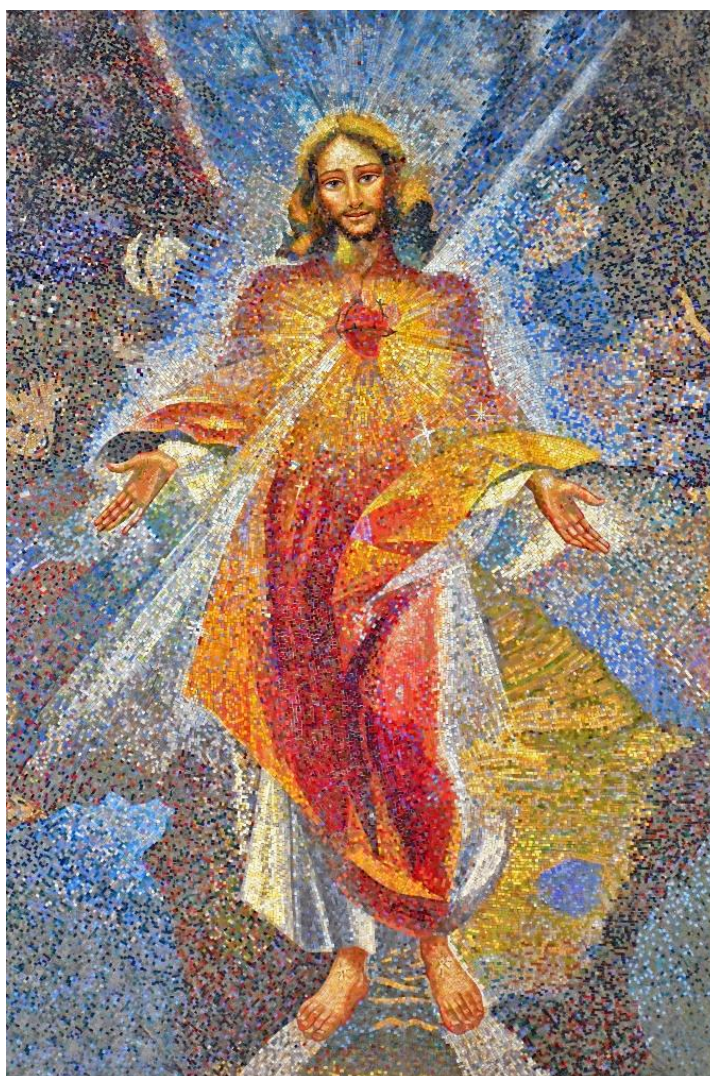
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“Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”.
(Mt. 11,28-29)

Dear confreres,

It is always a great joy for us, disciples and missionaries, nourished by the charism of St. Daniel Comboni, to turn to the sure source of God’s love and infinite mercy revealed in an evident form in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. As individuals and as a missionary family, we are invited to nourish and renew ourselves, to strengthen our missionary identity and our mission today. This we always do as an experience of faith lived in the concrete historical milieu in which we live, where the Heart of Jesus is not only an icon for devotion but continues to forgive, heal, love and offer life in abundance as the Good Shepherd.

The words of Scripture, taken from the Gospel of Matthew, chosen as inspiration for this message, have a dual invitation. On the one hand, we have the invitation of Jesus himself to each of his disciples: “Come to me”. On the other hand, we have the invitation to learn from him because he knows our poverty: “Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart”. These invitations that arise from the Heart of Jesus are nothing more than two facets of the same experience of a personal encounter lived with the Lord. Indeed, he is the refuge and strength of our missionary journey, often marked by so many struggles and challenges. At the crossroads where we find ourselves, especially at this historic moment, as we journey with the people whom we are called to love truly and serve as God’s gift to us, these challenges from Jesus are particularly important. We share the pains and hopes of many displaced people immersed in all kinds of suffering due to senseless wars, such as the one underway in Sudan, a land loved by Comboni; social and economic injustices; persecution and climate change that force many people to leave their homes and migrate in search of a more dignified life for them and their families. We also remember how many continue to be exploited for the benefit of the few, as happened in Comboni's time. Without a doubt, these are difficult times, rather



daunting, but it is in this context that we are invited to turn to and learn from the Heart of Jesus as a source of hope and new life. We are challenged today to be those discreet but credible presences of God's love and mercy “always ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks us the reason for our hope” (1 Pt 3:15).

“Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest.” This generous appeal from Jesus invites us to humbly recognise ourselves as in need of him, needing to be welcomed, loved and forgiven again in order to be internally transfigured into the likeness of the Good Shepherd. In doing so, we can live the mission – in a world that presents many challenges – feeling deeply supported by Jesus as branches rooted in him, something to which the XIX General Chapter also calls us. This is an invitation we can never forget if we want to renew our trust in him and not in ourselves (cf. *Writings* 6880-81) and, in this way, obtain that ‘rest’ that only Jesus knows how to give to troubled, tired hearts in need of care and life. But going to Jesus has an inevitable and unavoidable implication: «Take my yoke upon you», which means being ready to share his mission with that same passion of Jesus that led him to offer his life for us on the cross. We always start afresh from him who is the sure support for the mission in every time and place, as Pope Francis reminds us: “By receiving the ‘yoke of Jesus’ each disciple thus enters into communion with him and is made a sharer in the mystery of his Cross and of his destiny of salvation” (*General Audience, 14th September 2016*).

Hence, the second challenge: **“Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.”** From Jesus we learn to give our lives out of love as he and Comboni did and as many brothers and sisters in our Comboni family still do in discreet and often hidden ways. Even today, this is the path of the mission to which we are invited: to know the sentiments of the Heart of Jesus in order to imitate him; to learn from him so as to share with others; to live to make others live, and always with great humility!

In the course of the Institute's ongoing formation, in this year dedicated to spirituality, the hope for each of us is to familiarize ourselves more and more with the Word of God in order to live our relationship with the Lord in depth. For this, it is necessary to revive our hope in order to have renewed hearts; communities that live joyfully in communion; live the mission as a gift lived in the love of the Heart of Jesus capable of removing our fears and giving refreshment to a lively hope, in compassion and charity.

This Feast is a beautiful opportunity to renew our consecration. We invite you all to do so with our gaze fixed on the Heart of Jesus by offering ourselves again, without reservation, to him who has called us in his love to share this mission in the same spirit as St. Daniel Comboni. We are on the way, often tired and oppressed, but without having lost joy or hope, because Jesus who welcomes us into his Heart nourishes us and sends us out in his name. He never abandons us! We are never alone! His promise remains: “I am with you always, to the close of the age” (*Mt 28:20*).

The General Council