INSTITUTE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS
Founded by Saint John Bosco
and by Saint Mary Domenica Mazzarello

No. 1059

Holiness from a missionary heart

Dearest Sisters,

I wish to express my gratitude to each of you, to the communities and to every Province for the expressions of closeness and fraternity I received on the occasion of the 2026 World Day of Gratitude. It was wonderful and comforting to read your messages on the Institute's *website* and through other communication channels. However, I want each of you to feel my affectionate and personal thanks. Thank you, too, for the solidarity with which you generously responded to the invitation to provide a financial contribution for the "Saint Maria Troncatti Complex" (SMT) in Sucúa. This project will encompass the construction of the commemorative chapel, the development of social outreach initiatives, the care and management of the historical archive, and any other needs of the Institute.

Together with you, I wish to thank the Provincial of Ecuador, Sister Lupe Judith Erazo Arce, her Council, and all the Sisters of *Sacred Heart* Province, for having given me the opportunity to become acquainted, although in a short time, with the various facets of Ecuadorian reality, a Country so beautiful and diverse in its geography, climate, and anthropology, and unique for its location, which places it at the "Middle of the World."
I had the possibility of joyfully connecting with the communities of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, numerous Provincials from across the Americas, the Educating Communities, the Salesian Confreres; and of encountering a multitude of young people, laypeople, children, Past-pupils, Salesian Cooperators, and members of the Salesian Family. All participated in these gatherings with a true family spirit and a palpable sense of belonging to the Salesian charism.
I have thus witnessed the great good that has been accomplished and continues to be realized within this Province, marked by the presence and holiness of Sister Maria Troncatti, but also by the fervent desire that her testimony of holiness may serve as a source of help, support, and guidance for the present and the future, both for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and for the new generations. We still feel resonating in our hearts the echo of the theme that accompanied us during the preparation and celebration of the World Day of Gratitude, "Be missionaries everywhere."

An itinerary of missionary holiness

During my visit to this dear Province, I walked with deep emotion in the footsteps of Saint Maria Troncatti, visiting the places where she lived and spent her life right up to her very last breath for her brothers and sisters, to whom she was for everyone, their *Madrecita*. The mission she confronted, with passion and apostolic ardor, was entirely new and completely unfamiliar to her, as is documented in her letters and in the various biographies dedicated to her.
The countless hours spent walking through the intricate Amazonian wilderness, amidst toil, exhaustion, and the uncertainty of encountering people whose customs, traditions, and way of life were unknown to her did not deter her from her resolve to give herself totally to the Lord and to the people entrusted to her care. More than a journey, for me it was a pilgrimage undertaken on "holy ground," where I sought to walk with the same attitude as Moses before the burning bush. I witnessed firsthand the power of Sister Troncatti's holiness, made visible in the miracles that occurred through her intercession, yet experienced above all in the daily miracle of the vitality of a charism that continues to be profoundly missionary, especially in this land.

The visits to various missions and the regional meetings allowed me to share special moments of family life with the Sisters, the young people, and the laity.
During these gatherings, I sensed from the local Church, the bishops, the priests, and the civil authorities, a sincere appreciation for our presence and for our commitment to education, within a journey of the Salesian Family is being increasingly valued and strengthened.
One of the most significant experiences was the personal encounter, the face-to-face dialogue, with Saint Maria Troncatti, with her holiness of life which I had always assumed to be normal and ordinary. I realized, however, that this is not the case at all. It is true that by studying biographies, reading her letters, one gains insight into a person's journey complete with their flaws, virtues, inner resources, struggles, pain, and tears, all that pertains to human nature, including the sheer effort required to navigate a daily existence that was often harsh and difficult, set within an unfamiliar and sometimes hostile environment. Yet, what Sister Maria endured and *how* she endured it was truly extraordinary, for it was sustained by a love that was both courageous and heroic.

Docility to God's will and confident abandonment in Mary

The secret of a life like that of Sister Troncatti is to be found in her unconditional trust in Jesus and in her total entrustment to Mary, Mother and Help.
It is salutary for us to reflect that she, now a saint, walked the very same road as we do, in her humanity and fragility. Her personal story inspires wonder, yet what strikes us far more deeply as we follow in her footsteps and visit the places where she lived and worked, is the extraordinary nature of her self-giving, or rather, the extraordinary nature of God's work within her.
This becomes evident when listening to the testimonies of those who knew her personally, or through the memories passed down by their families. Hers is a holiness steeped in the Gospel, the holiness characteristic of a person deeply rooted in the Word of God, docile to His voice, surrendered to His will, and entrusted completely to Mary Help of Christians, who, in every circumstance, served as her support and comfort.
It was the Help of Christians who worked through her hands, her intellect, and her nursing skills. All this explains why what took place in the daily life of Sister Maria Troncatti was by no means ordinary. She healed with the powerful efficacy of the *Hail Mary*, drawing the sick and suffering back to faith, to trust in the Mother of God and Mother of all. In this way, she restored to their feet those wounded not only in body but also in their very humanity and dignity, relying solely on the strength of faith and trust in the presence of Jesus and the intercession of the Most Holy Mary.
The instruments she used in her clinic, and later in the hospital, should be regarded as part of a professionally adequate kit, one more befitting a surgeon than a mere nurse. The difference lies in the fact that a surgeon operates with every available resource in specialized settings, whereas Sister Maria always worked amidst situations of emergency, hardship, and precariousness. She was a docile and effective instrument in the hands of God, who used her to bring healing to the bodies and hearts of the Shuar people and the settlers.
The Marian dimension, so evident in the life of Sister Troncatti, is an invitation for each of us to examine whether we are aware that Mary Help of Christians is present in our lives, and that the pairing of *holiness - missionary spirit* is one of the distinctive features of our spirituality.
For Sister Maria, as for all missionaries, the secret of apostolic fruitfulness lies in having allowed herself to be grasped by Jesus, centered solely upon Him, her solid rock and sure source of hope. The Eucharistic life holds primacy in her experience of faith. And this finds expression in the daily gift of self, at times monotonous, often interwoven with sacrifices and toil, perhaps even with defeats and frustrations, yet a context in which the missionary heart is molded into a spirit of availability, the robustness of the interior life, and the gratuitousness of love.

Gazing upon the Crucified One gives life and wings for work. This is the certainty of faith that sustains Sister Maria Troncatti, a certainty that, however, does not remove suffering and trials, but illuminates them in the light of the Paschal Mystery.

A Holiness with a Salesian Face

The model of holiness proposed by Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello is that of the *Da mihi animas, cetera tolle* and of *I entrust them to* you: a total self-giving to God for the salvation of the young. It is "a model so radical and austere as to leave us astounded: an obedience without limits, very generous; an essential, ascetical, yet joyful lifestyle; impressive industriousness in service of the communal mission; boundless charity; a loving, tender, and deeply affectionate relationality, coupled with a chastity that is rigorously guarded and defended; a continuous practice of the presence of God and of loving dialogue with Him; absolute fidelity to the smallest prescriptions of the Rules, especially regarding devotional practices; a capacity to adapt to any circumstance, even to the point of extreme sacrifice; and a most ardent apostolic zeal" (GIRAUDO Aldo, *Introduction, in BOSCO Giovanni, Teachings on Spiritual Life. An Anthology. Introduction and notes edited by Aldo Giraudo*, Rome, LAS 2013, p. 11).

Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello envisioned their sons and daughters as being wholly oriented toward the absolute primacy of God in their lives, characterized by radical detachment and self-giving without reservation, living everything for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

To understand the profile Don Bosco envisioned for his daughters, we can turn to the *Appendices* of our Constitutions and reread the letter he wrote on 24 May 1886, in which he addresses the actual needs of the Institute:

"Before God, it seems to me that the Institute needs Sisters who are imbued with the spirit of self-denial and sacrifice that fills them with the desire to work and suffer for Jesus Christ, and for the good of their neighbor. It needs Sisters who are firmly convinced that exact obedience, without criticism or complaint, is the path they must courageously tread in order to attain their own perfection and holiness. It needs Sisters who can master their own affections and keep their hearts fixed on God alone in order to be able to say together with St. Francis di Sales, "If I knew that one fiber of my heart was not for God, I would tear it out." Of Sisters who do not regret having left the world, or long for the possessions and conveniences they have renounced. Of Sisters who deem it a privilege to live in a condition of poverty and privation, in imitation of their Divine Spouse Jesus who, being rich made Himself poor, in order to enrich people in order to enrich people with His grace and to make them heirs of Heaven. Of Sisters who have no other ambition on earth than to follow Jesus Christ who was humiliated, crowned with thorns, and nailed to the Cross so that they may thus praise Him surrounded by the angels and saints in the glory of Heaven. It needs Sisters who have a strong physical constitution, good character, and a reasonable cheerful disposition, who desire above all to become saints, not by doing anything extraordinary, but only by the ordinary."

This is a spirituality characterized not by introspective or self-referential traits, but rather by being a concrete expression of the title "Daughters of Mary Help of Christians", synthesis of a charismatic vision, of a project, and of an inspiration: to be an active and solicitous *help*, especially to young people, in their journey of human and Christian maturation.

Our mission, however, is not defined merely by individual activities; rather, it serves as the paradigm for the educational - evangelizing mission of a Religious Family called to share with young people the beauty and joy of encountering Jesus. The root of this spirituality lies in the vocational unity that, as Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, we are called to live out. The great challenge for our spiritual journey is to achieve a balance between activity, at times demanding, and union with God within our work and the concrete situations of daily life, just as Mother Mazzarello emphasized to the missionaries at the house in Las Piedras (Uruguay), "Preserve, as much as you can, the spirit of union with God; remain continually in His presence" *(L 23, 3).*

It is interiority, the life of union with God, that lends depth to action, nourishes joy, strengthens loving-kindness within the community, sustains creativity and courage, and ensures apostolic

effectiveness. It is a path that renders ever more radiant our identity as a "*Living Monument*" desired by Don Bosco as a sign of his gratitude to the Help of Christians and which calls upon us to be, today, his "thank you" extended through time (cf. C 4).
On 8 May, we commemorated the first anniversary of the pontificate of Pope Leo XIV. As we thank him for having accepted the call to be the Vicar of Christ, Bishop of Rome, and Shepherd and Guide of the People of God, we invoke upon him and his Petrine Ministry the gift of the Holy Spirit. With the same heart of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello, we assure him of our daily prayers and our commitment to live with joy and missionary zeal our fidelity to the call of Jesus and to the Salesian-Mornese charism.

On 24 May, I will be at the Basilica in Turin, where I will entrust to Mary Help of Christians peace among nations, all our Educating Communities, and especially those enduring suffering and hardship, the young people who are so dear to our hearts, and the needs of the world and of the Church.
I wish you a joyful Feast of Mary Help of Christians, which this year coincides with the Solemnity of Pentecost! May the Holy Spirit grant us the grace to live the present moment with intensity and to glimpse a future of renewed hope for all.
I greet you with affection and gratitude.

Rome, 24 May 2026

Affectionately, Mother

New Provincials 2026

America

Province “Our Lady of Guadalupe” MME
Sister Luz María Martínez Trujillo

Province “Saint John Bosco” VEN
Sister María Henar Alcalde Giraudo

Europe

Province “Saint Mary Domenica Mazzarello” AUG
Suor Maria Maul

Province “Sacred Heart” BEG
Sister Carina Aerts

Province “Saint Thomas of Canterbury” GBR
Sister Gillian McCambridge

Province “Mary Help of Christians” IPI
Sister Maria Giovanna Mammarella

Province “Our Lady of Jasna Góra” PLJ
Sister Halina Koćwin

Middle East

Province “Jesus Adolescent” MOR
Sister Roberta Tomasi