

In the Heart of Christ to live and proclaim His love

Dearest Sisters,

The month of June dedicated to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary can become a precious invitation to *start anew from the heart* and to discern every step of our journey of faith, in the light of love, mercy, and tenderness.

At the general audience of 5 June, Pope Francis announced a new document on the cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in order to meditate on the main aspects "of the Lord's love that can illuminate the path of ecclesial renewal; but also, that they may say something significant to a world that seems to have lost its heart." The Pope thinks of a document that "gathers the precious reflections of previous magisterial texts and of a long history that goes back to the Holy Scriptures, in order to re-propose today to the whole Church, this cult charged with spiritual beauty."

The heart is itself the place where the human creature meets God, in a unique and indescribable intimacy. Biblical language refers to expressions such as: "thoughts of the heart", "conversion of heart"; it urges us to "love God with all our heart". Jesus rebukes the disciples because they are "late of heart" in believing (cf. Lk 24:26). He invites them to learn from Him, "meek and humble of heart". Very often God addresses us by speaking to our heart, or by speaking of His own heart.

Contemplation of the Heart of Christ reminds us that trusting discipleship, lived with daily fidelity, makes us serene women, capable of sowing around us gestures of tenderness, peace, and true charity.

The Heart of Christ, source of apostolic charity

The Conference that we lived with so much participation and enthusiasm last June 8, on the figure of Mother Caterina Daghero, presented to us the first successor of Mother Mazzarello as a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians who, with the style of the Co-founder, does not theorize about education, but rolls up her sleeves and tries to give concrete answers to new historical and social needs.

As Superior General, she leads the Institute on the basis of the generating principles of the Gospel and the genuine spirit of the Institute. Charity is a founding and strategic value for her, which is why she gives it priority over everything else, as she wrote from the first *Circular*, "I warmly recommend to you holy charity towards God and towards your neighbor" (*Circular* 22 January 1882). The call to charity, the essential nucleus of the Salesian charism, the heartfelt teaching, and the ardent desire of Mother Mazzarello, finds in her expressions that help to live the love that becomes communion and action in the community, so that it can express itself effectively in the mission.

In fact, she urged the sisters to "be at the forefront of charity!" She said that in the FMA "charity must be active", thus indicating the apostolic dynamism that must be very lively in those who made a choice of Salesian consecrated life (*Charismatic-educational aspects of Mother Caterina Daghero's government*, Rome, 8 June 2024).

Of Don Bosco we know the devotion to the Sacred Heart that was ardent in his soul, animated all his works, gave effectiveness to his familiar discourses, to his sermons, and to the exercise of his ministry, so that everyone was enchanted and persuaded. It also seemed that the Sacred Heart of Jesus cooperated also with supernatural help in the fulfillment of his arduous mission" (Arnaldo Pedrini, *Don Bosco and devotion to the Sacred Heart*, p. 17, Salesian Works via Marsala 1987). Devotion to the Sacred Heart finds one of its most significant expressions not only in the construction of the Basilica in Rome desired by the Pope, but above all in the industrious charity that flowed from the impulse of the *da mihi animas cetera tolle*, source of every apostolic inspiration.

Article 7 of our Constitutions states that the Preventive System "is an experience of apostolic charity that has its source in the Heart of Christ Himself and finds its model in Mary's motherly care."

The *Acts of General Chapter XXIV* point out that the Preventive System has in itself a humanizing power, based on respect for the dignity of the person and his or her rhythms of growth (cf. C 66). Our presence among the girls and boys, the young, pays creative attention to their education and allows finding new answers to situations that seem to have no way out. Mary teaches us, as in Valdocco and Mornese, that presence is also and above all, openness to the "Vade io" (I will go) (cf. *G C XXIV 7*).

I leave you in the Heart of Jesus

For Mother Mazzarello, the heart expresses the depth and radicality of the motivations of the personal religious experience, so much so that we can speak of prayer made with the heart and made of the heart. Above all, there is a mode of prayer to which she continually appeals in her *Letters*, and it is the prayer made in the Heart of Jesus, given to Him in the personal encounter with His divine and human Heart.

The context in which the verbs are placed makes it possible to grasp how this heart is a sacred place, in which an intense encounter takes place between the praying person and the person of Jesus; a place where one can enter, can dialogue, can stay to pray, and also to weave relationships with others.

In *Letter 22*, sent to Sister Angela Vallese, Mother Mazzarello is concerned that her daughters learn, not only human languages, but the language of the soul with God, "Do you already know French well? While studying the languages of this world, study also the language of the soul with God, He will teach you the science of becoming holy which is the only true science... Speak little, very little to creatures. Instead, speak much with the Lord. He will make you truly wise..." In front of Sisters and girls who claimed to have difficulties in prayer, Mother Mazzarello advised them to speak to Jesus also in dialect, but not to lose intimacy with Him.

This requires that each one agrees to follow the essential itinerary of one's inner self: the long, patient passage from the mind to the heart, the center, not only of feelings, but of being. From this interiority an authentic prayer can be born, imbued with trust and serenity. For this mother Mazzarello affirms, "Pray much and from your Heart" (*L 29, 3*). "Love the Lord with your whole heart" (*L 23, 1*). The Heart of Jesus is a place where troubles are resolved to give space to serenity and peace, "Trust in Jesus, put all your worries in His Heart; leave it to Him. He will put everything right." (*L 25, 3*). "Then be always cheerful and when you have worries, put them all into the Heart of Jesus." (*L 47,10*). "Courage. When you are tired and troubled go and place all your worries in the Heart of Jesus and you will find solace and comfort." (*L 65, 3*).

To have recourse to the Heart of Jesus is a sign of trusting abandonment that recalls the invitation of Psalm 55, 23: "Cast your care upon the Lord, who will give you support." And the words of Jesus: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest." (*Mt 11: 28*).

The Divine Heart of the Lord is for Mother Mazzarello also a place of encounter with the Sisters: “I assure you that every morning I speak to you in this adorable Heart and I speak to Him in Holy Communion and tell Him many things for each of you.” (L 27, 6); “When you are united to this adorable Heart, tell Him many beautiful things for me.” (L 39, 2).

The bond of communion rooted in the Heart of Jesus is so strong that distances are annulled, “Although an immense sea separates us, we can meet and be close to one another at every moment in the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. We can always pray for each other and so our hearts will always be united.” (L 22,1).

There is a very human and maternal expression that Mother Mazzarello addresses to the novice Mercedes Stabler, one of the first vocations in Argentina, “...Although I do not have the good fortune to know you in person, I always have you here, close to my heart, and not a day passes that I do not enclose you in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.” (L 62, 4).

Mother helps her Daughters and Sisters never to lose the sense of mission and the goal of their journey. In Mornese, and elsewhere, the need for the following of Jesus is the same, therefore she exhorts Sister Giuseppina Pacotto, destined as superior to one of the two houses of Uruguay, not to demand anything for selfish interest or ambition, but to be authentically humble. With vigilant and foreseeing wisdom, she warns her against forms of immaturity that hinder fraternal life and prevent communion of hearts. Among the reminders, she gives her this one, almost like a spiritual testament: “When the cross seems heavy, look at the one we wear around our neck and say, ‘Oh, Jesus, You are my whole strength and with You burdens become light, fatigue becomes easy, thorns are turned into sweetness. But, my dear, you will have to overcome yourself, otherwise everything will become heavy and unbearable. Here, my dear Sister Giuseppina, is all I have to give you in memory of me.’” (L 64, 5-6).

Mother Mazzarello also invites us not to fall back on our weaknesses, on our sins. She realizes the risk of this attitude becoming a burden that weighs down the heart and imprisons the energies of the soul, which instead must be freed so that we can walk decisively, generous and confident in the educative mission. To confide with spousal abandonment in the Love of Jesus, to place everything in His Heart is for her the true invigorating 'cure' that helps to overcome the symptoms of malaise, due to the sense of discouragement and inadequacy.

In this regard, we read in her *Letters* expressions of great spiritual and formative wisdom, “Never be discouraged when you see yourself full of defects, but turn to Jesus and Mary with confidence and humble yourself without discouragement. Then go ahead with courage and without fear... Always be cheerful and never forget the one who loves you so much in the Lord. I assure you that I will always accompany you with my poor prayers.” (L 66, 4.6).

Mother Mazzarello also urges us to enter fully into the certainty that nothing and no one can ever separate us from the love of Christ Jesus; that only in His love capable of infinite forgiveness, can we breathe the joyful Hope that opens our hearts and minds to God’s horizons.

There is a profound harmony with the words of Pope Francis, “We are walking with Him and we are never alone. Courage, then, courage! Let us not take away the joy of being disciples of the Lord. ‘But, Father, I am a sinner, how can I do it’? Let the Lord look at you, open your heart, feel His gaze on you, His mercy, and your heart will be filled with joy [...]. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the hope of living this life together with Him and with the power of His consolation.” (Audience, 14 September 2016).

I have cited only a few expressions dear to Mother Mazzarello, but there are many others in the *Letters* and in the *Cronistoria*, that can help us to fix our heart and our life in God and to seek nothing but souls, young people to love and bring to Jesus.

I leave to you the task of continuing to deepen the spirituality of Mother Mazzarello, to grow in her knowledge and to renew today the vocational and missionary fruitfulness of Mornese in our beautiful religious Family.

I remember that, in the Salesian tradition on June 24 at the Oratory of Valdocco, the name day of Don Bosco was celebrated. We therefore join the Salesian Family in expressing our affectionate good wishes to the Rector Major, Cardinal Ángel Fernández Artime, whom we entrust to Mary Help of Christians, so that his mission at the service of the universal Church may be fruitful in the good.

In this month, in which we celebrate the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, I invite you to pray in a special way for Pope Francis. May the Lord grant him health and wisdom of the Spirit so that he may continue to guide the Church with the efficacy of the Good Shepherd.

From Sant'Agnello di Sorrento, where I am with the Sisters of the General Council for the Spiritual Exercises, thanks to the fraternal and affectionate welcome of the Southern Province, I remember you with affection and assure you of our prayers, above all, for the communities living in particular critical situations and suffering.

Finally, I greet you with the words of Mother Mazzarello to Sister Angela Vallese and the Sisters of Villa Colón: “I leave you in the heart of Jesus and I pray that He may bless you, make you totally His and keep you always united and cheerful.” (*L 17, 5*).

Rome, 24 June 2024

Affectionately, Mother