

Mary, maternal presence in our life

Dearest Sisters,

I begin this circular by recalling the World Feast of Gratitude, to thank the Lord for all the gifts received in this time. It is an appointment that makes our being a family stronger and brings us back to the origins of the charism. In fact, in Salesian Spirituality, the Feast of Gratitude has great educative value. Educating and educating ourselves to say "thank you" is the first act of recognition of God's love and what our sisters and brothers with whom we share life, are and do for us.

Nothing is taken for granted and nothing is due in our existence, but everything is a gift and is more easily understood in this paschal time of grace and hope.

Together we retrace the stages of salvation, what Jesus lived for us, until His last breath, until He gave His life for the salvation of all humanity.

We are united and grateful to the Vietnamese Province *Mary Help of Christians* who prepared this festive event with care, love, and strong involvement.

In the chorus of gratitude, we join in the joy of our Salesian Brothers who have just completed their 29th General Chapter. We wish them a fruitful journey in the six-year term, which opens with the guidance of the new Rector Major, Fr. Fabio Attard. We assure him and all the newly elected Councilors of our prayer, closeness, and collaboration.

The Marian Identity of the Institute

I would like to continue the reflection begun in Circular 1047, thanking once again the Lord and all the Sisters who collaborated on the *Practical Commentary on the Constitutions*. Receiving this text, a Missionary Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, with 70 years of religious profession and 66 years of life in the missions, wrote to me, "I am this way (for my elevated age) among the few of your daughters, who at receiving this *practical Commentary* feels sorry that it did not arrive earlier, but if I still have time available, reading this text will certainly help me to better prepare myself for the encounter with the Spouse."

They are expressions that make us think and rejoice, because the Lord is with us, always, and renews us in fidelity also through this gift, in every age of life.

I reiterate once again the importance that each Daughter of Mary Help of Christians should personally receive the text indicated. It is not just any book, but a sure guide to holiness, an aid for a vital deepening of the Constitutions, a support for communion, a concrete means that can help us to make our existence and our mission generative of life in the heart of the Church and the world.

Perhaps, sometimes, we lack the necessary knowledge of our *Rule of life* which, if not radically adopted, does not transform our lives, does not sustain us in conforming to Jesus the Good Shepherd. The text of which we speak, introduces us into the depth of the motivations that have animated us from the beginning to follow Jesus. I wish to start from this precious reference to highlight the presence of Mary in the Constitutions. Our Marian identity characterizes, like a red thread, the various parts of the constitutional text and is expressed in particular in some articles called Marian.

But it also touches others, as a brush stroke that gives the right color to the background of a masterpiece, or like the notes of a musical motif that is repeated with every piece, but is always new.

Article 4 of our Constitutions opens with reference to the founding experience of the Institute, which was born in the Church to contribute to the salvation of young women and men through education. In that experience there is Mary, who invites Don Bosco to take care of poor girls. She considers her daughters. Mary is, therefore, Inspirer, Mother, and Teacher. For this reason, we can say that the Institute "belongs entirely to Mary"; it is Hers. In fact, it experiences Her maternal and preventive care, not only at the beginning, but throughout the history of yesterday and of today.

The Marian dimension is a specific characteristic of the identity of the Daughter of Mary Help of Christians. It strongly defines her life and extends to the educative mission to be, as she who is Mother and Helper, 'helpers' of the young, promoting their growth so that Christ is formed in them (cf. Gal 4:19).

Another article defined as Marian is 44, centered on the word of Don Bosco, "It is Mary who guides us." This conviction fills our lives and those of the educating communities with joy and comfort. There are many reasons for deep reflection. I dwell here on the two titles that we find in the above-mentioned article, "In Mary, the Immaculate Help of Christians let us contemplate the fullness of our self-giving to God and neighbor."

Immaculate Helper: two connotations that deeply touch our identity and mission. The Immaculate recalls the preventive pedagogy of God and the dynamism of love, which has the immense power to open the hearts of young people to His grace. The Help of Christians is the defense of the children and the poor. She is the care of a mother who takes by the hand, nurtures, guides, educates, shapes, and supports growing life.

Mother and Educator

Mary is considered the Mother and Educator of every Salesian vocation (C 79). She accompanies us on our journey of configuration to Christ and helps us to direct our lives towards Him. Her presence is not dissociated from that of Jesus. On the contrary, references to Mary in our Constitutions refer to Him and to the ecclesial community. She is the first disciple of the Son, who lives in perfect union with Him (C 4).

First of all, Mary embraced with total dedication the kind of chaste, poor, obedient life that Jesus chose for Himself (C 11), thus realizing in the most perfect way the following of Christ.

In the articles concerning *chastity*, we read that it makes us transparent to God's love and a reflection of Mary's motherly goodness (C 14). To strengthen the gift of chastity, the Daughter of Mary Help of Christians relies on the Virgin Mother who gave the world the Savior (C 17).

Thus, in article 18 on *poverty*, we imitate Mary, the humble handmaid who gave everything to her Lord. Article 32 states that, in *obedience* lived with simplicity and readiness, we make our own the Fiat of Mary who, by her adherence to the will of God, became the mother of the Redeemer and our mother.

Docile to the Spirit, we will be persevering in prayer with Mary and like Mary, to intensify our communion with God and open ourselves to Christ, present in sisters, brothers, and in every reality (C 37). Mary is for all of us guide and help on the path of docility to the Holy Spirit. In meditation, in the silence of our whole being, like Her, "the listening Virgin", we will let ourselves be permeated by the power of the Holy Spirit (C 39).

In the aforementioned article 44, Mary leads our lives to the fullness of self-giving to God and neighbor. She is for us a teacher of availability to the Word of the Lord. Our attitude towards Her is that of "a grateful and trusting love", imbued with "simplicity and confidence". Our relationship with Her is not limited to prayer, but nourishes apostolic passion, so that we are committed to

transmitting the love of Mary to young people and to become a guide and support for those entrusted to us, so that they may meet Jesus.

In the article on the Preventive System (C 7), our specific spirituality and method of pastoral action, there is a significant biblical and Marian foundation. The experience of "apostolic charity" has as its source, the Heart of Christ Himself and finds its model in Mary's motherly care. The specificity of Her mediation lies in the fact that it is a maternal mediation. She keeps present in the event of salvation the feminine dimension, which has its permanent center in her.

Her motherhood is not only an unrepeatable biological event, but a generation that continues in the Church as a mystery of grace, because it continually makes Christ be born in listening, in conversion, in the realization of the Word of Jesus, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice." (Lk 8:20).

As regards the service of authority, the Daughter of Mary Help of Christians seeks to express with a motherly heart the strong yet tender love of Mary, making herself all things to all the Sisters (C 114). According to the words of Don Bosco and the Marian experience of Mother Mazzarello, she is the real Superior of every community and of the Institute. Whoever is called to be an animator must, like Mary, be the first in docility to the Holy Spirit, to serve the Father's plan in each person entrusted to her (C 52).

Mary with us and in us

Don Bosco dreamed of the "living memory" of Mary Help of Christians. This expression is the updated version of the term "Living Monument", as indicated by the Formation Plan of the Institute: "Each of us is a living memory of Mary, the Virgin of the Magnificat, in fidelity to the charismatic project of Don Bosco who wanted the Institute to be "a living monument of gratitude to Mary Help of Christians", (Cronistoria, 305-306), sign and witness of God's love for young people" (*Rooted the Covenant. Daughters of Mary Help of Christians Formation Plan*, p. 30).

Mary Domenica Mazzarello, the "first stone" of the living monument of gratitude raised by Don Bosco to Mary Help of Christians, was convinced that God calls us to be "true images of Our Lady" (*Cronistoria III*, 216). In fact, a daughter reflects in herself the physiognomy of her Mother.

This conviction was taken up years later by Fr. Philip Rinaldi. He recognized that Don Bosco wanted to model his monument on the Blessed Virgin and wondered what the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians had to do to really contribute to forming this monument to Mary.

The monument must portray in the best way the features of the person it represents; and thus, the thought of Don Bosco in founding this Institute was that each Sister would be a faithful copy of Mary. Don Bosco wanted that in every Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, the image of Our Lady should be reflected (cf. *Circular of Fr. Philip Rinaldi to the FMA, 24 May 1922*).

It is up to each of us to highlight in our own lives the features of Mary's face, to be her living memory today, to respond to God's call, and make the charism more vital in the Church and in the world.

Finally, I would like to invite all of us and the educating communities to reappropriate with new vigor, the Marian paradigm in education. Being a Marian Institute is an appeal to "take Mary home", that is, to inspire our educative mission from Her. In the time of technology in continuous and rapid change, I am convinced that there will be no new humanism without a solid Marian spirituality lived out in education, capable of reanimating, regenerating life and hope in the perspective of the Gospel. The educators who have as reference the Preventive System of Don Bosco, are called to reflect Mary in themselves, to intuit the emerging needs, to keep alive amazement at the work of God in the heart of people and history, for openness to the Spirit, for wisdom and joyful resourcefulness in guiding every young person entrusted to them to meet Jesus.

I wish for myself and for all of you to be strongly attuned to Mary, to love her with the heart of a true daughter, and to make some aspects of her beauty and maternal solicitude shine in our lives. In this way, we can be her "living memory" in today's history.

Let us continue to invoke the gift of peace throughout the world and support with our prayers and offerings, the communities sorely tried by war, violence, injustice, and natural disasters, by ever new forms of poverty.

To Mary, Mother of the Risen One, we entrust all people, especially children, young people, and families, who live in situations of distress and who are waiting for a better, more humane future in solidarity.

May everyone enjoy the fullness and joy of Easter that continues in our lives.

Rome, 24 April 2025

Aff.ly Mother