



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES**

*Consistory Hall
Saturday, 18 June 2022*

[Multimedia]

Dear brothers, good morning and welcome!

I am pleased to meet you. I thank the Superior General for the words he addressed to me on behalf of all of you who are participating in the 19th General Chapter of the Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus. You had invited me to your home to celebrate the feast of the Sacred Heart, next Friday. I thank you, and I will be there in prayer; but today we are already having our encounter in the perspective and in the spirit of the mystery of the heart of Christ, to which the charism of Saint Daniele Comboni is linked.

The theme and motto of your Chapter also guide us in this direction: “*I am the vine, you are the branches. Rooted in Christ together with Comboni*”. Indeed, the mission — its source, its dynamism and its fruits — depends entirely on union with Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said this clearly to those he had chosen as “apostles”, that is “envoys”: “Apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). He did not say: “you can do little”, no; he said, “you can do *nothing*”. In what sense? We can do many things: initiatives, programmes, campaigns... many things; but if we are not *in* Him, and if His Spirit does not pass through us, all that we do is *nothing* in His eyes, that is, it is worth nothing for the Kingdom of God.

If, on the other hand, we are like branches that are well attached to the vine, the sap of the Spirit passes from Christ into us, and whatever we do bears fruit, because it is not our work, but it is Christ’s love that works through us. This is the secret of Christian life, and in particular, of the mission, everywhere, in Europe as in Africa and other continents. The missionary is the disciple

who is so united to his Master and Lord that his hands, his mind and his heart are “channels” of Christ’s love. The missionary is this, not one who proselytises. Because the “fruit” that He wants from His friends is none other than love, His love, the one that comes from the Father and which He gives us with the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit of Christ that carries us forward.

This is why some great missionaries like Daniele Comboni, but also for example, Mother Cabrini, lived their mission feeling animated and “spurred” by the Heart of Christ, that is, by Christ’s love. And this “push” allowed them to set out and *go beyond* : not only beyond geographical limitations and borders, but before that, even beyond their own personal limitations. This motto should “make noise” in your heart: going beyond, going beyond, going beyond, always looking to the horizon because there is always a horizon; to go beyond. The spurring of the Holy Spirit is what makes us go out from ourselves, from our closure, from our self-referentiality, and it makes us go towards others, towards the peripheries, where the thirst for the Gospel is greatest. It is interesting that the worst temptation that we religious people have in life is self-referentiality. This prevents us from *going beyond*. “But in order to go beyond, I have to think about it, to see”. Go, go, go! Go to the horizon and may the Lord accompany you. But when we begin with this psychology, this spirituality “of the mirror”, we stop going beyond and we always return to our heart which is sick. We all have a sick heart and God’s grace saves us, but without God’s grace, *kaput*, everyone! This is what’s important: to go beyond with the Spirit.

The essential trait of the Heart of Christ is mercy, compassion, tenderness. This should not be forgotten: God’s style, already in the Old Testament is this. Closeness, compassion and tenderness. There is no organization, no; closeness, compassion and tenderness. And so I think that you are called to bring this witness of God’s style — closeness, compassion and tenderness — in your mission there where you are and where the Spirit will guide you. Mercy, tenderness is a universal language that knows no boundaries. But you bring this message not so much as individual missionaries, but as a community, and this entails not only care for your personal style, but also for your community style. Jesus said to his friends: “They will know you are my disciples by the way you will love one another” (cf. *Jn* 13:35), and the Acts of the Apostles confirms this when it narrates that the first community in Jerusalem was esteemed by all the people because they could see how they lived (cf. 2:47; 4:33): with love. And often — I say this with bitterness — I am speaking generally, not about you because I don’t know you — often we find that some religious communities are a true hell, a hell of jealousies, power struggles.... Where is the love? It is interesting that these communities have rules, they have a way of life ... but love is lacking. There is much envy, jealousy, power struggles, and forgiveness is better. It is the witness of love which is what attracts people: the love among us, not shooting one another but always going forward.

Four aspects on which you have decided to work during your Chapter are important to achieve this goal, so that the lifestyle of the community bears good witness: the rule of life, the formation journey, the ministeriality and the community of property. Discernment has to do with the manner,

the way in which to set up and live these elements so that they may respond as much as possible to the needs of the mission, that is, witness. This is very important: it is part of the “ecclesial renewal which cannot be deferred” in a missionary key to which the entire Church is called (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 27-33). It is a conversion that begins from the conscience of each person, involves every community and is thus able to renew the whole institute.

I would like to note that here too, even in the commitment to these four aspects — which are interconnected — it is essential that everything be done in the docility of the Spirit so that the necessary plans, projects and initiatives all respond to the needs of evangelization, and I mean also the style of evangelizing: may it be joyful, meek, courageous, patient, filled with mercy, hungry and thirsty for justice, and peaceful, hence, the style of the Beatitudes. This matters. Even the Rule of life, formation, the ministries and the management of goods, should be structured on the basis of this fundamental criterion. “An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first [...]. An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be. It is familiar with patient expectation and apostolic endurance. Evangelization consists mostly of patience [...] It cares for the grain and does not grow impatient at the weeds. [...] The disciple is ready to put his or her whole life on the line, even to accepting martyrdom, in bearing witness to Jesus Christ, yet the goal is not to make enemies but to see God’s word accepted and its capacity for liberation and renewal revealed. Finally an evangelizing community is filled with joy; it knows how to rejoice always. It celebrates every small victory, every step forward in the work of evangelization” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 24).

Dear brothers, I wanted to quote this paragraph from *Evangelii Gaudium*, knowing that you are aware of it, just for the pleasure of sharing with you the passion for evangelization. May the Lord bless you and may Our Lady keep you. Enjoy the rest of your Chapter. I offer my heartfelt blessing to all of you and to your brothers. And I ask you please to pray for me. Thank you!

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