



Piccole Suore Missionarie della Carità
(Opera Don Orione)
Casa generale
Via Monte Acero, 5 – 00141 Roma
www.suoredonorione.org



Prot. MG 06/21

Re: Circular letter for Lent
and renewal of the Vow of Charity

Dearest Sisters,

the beginning of the Lent Season corresponds this year to our time of preparation for the upcoming celebration of our **General Assembly of evaluation** which, as you know, had been scheduled for October 2020 in Poland. Very unfortunately, due to the terrible pandemic we have been experiencing (and still are), it has been now moved to next March, from 8th to 15th, in physical-digital mode.

For this reason, first of all, I would like to renew my invitation to accompany us with your prayer and fraternal closeness, so that we can live a true moment of communion, reflection, evaluation and relaunching of our Congregation, overcoming all the difficulties that we will surely have with this unprecedented on-line mode. Please, pray for us, pray and support us with your love and closeness!

The pandemic had also prevented the Celebration of the renewal of our Vow of Charity, at the conclusion of the Catechesis that we all followed during the years 2019/2020. As you remember, we had planned to renew the IVth Vow all together on the Mercy Sunday of 2020, but unfortunately we haven't been able to do that.

I think the time has come, if God wishes, to live this beautiful and important moment in order to resume our enthusiasm and commitment to holiness and charity, especially in the new contexts that Covid-19 has provoked. We cannot say that things have remained as they were before the Covid, it would not be honest of us! Many things have **deeply changed**: in relationships, in daily life, in the apostolate, in the economic situation, in the dynamics within our Works, in the ways and proposals for formation and animation, and so on...

In the plan of love that the Divine Providence has for each of its creatures, the renewal of the IVth Vow this year (and not before as we had planned) does make sense, and will make us more aware of our vocation and mission, **in the here and today of realities**; in order to be holier and more prophetic in this historical moment which has been struck by new and deep spiritual, physical, moral, familiar, financial wounds...

During our usual evaluation and planning meeting held in December 2020, with the General Council we have decided to propose the same date to renew the Vow of Charity together, as the XIIth General Chapter had asked of us to do. **I therefore am inviting all LMSCs to schedule on the calendar of all communities, the renewal of the IV Vow: April 11, 2021, Sunday of Mercy.**

In communion with your Provincial or Regional Superiors, I am asking you to organize this event according to every reality and possibility, with the ways that you think are most suitable, trying to live a strong moment of unity and relaunching of our religious life as LMSC.

Lent is offering us the opportunity to prepare ourselves well and seriously for this celebration.

How can we prepare ourselves? I am proposing now some reflections that may help us, both personally and as a community.

To revisit the itinerary of the Catechesis on the IVth Vow

On a personal level, please, take again the Catechesis of the Vow of Charity and renew the memory of the reflections that most impressed us. Recover and deepen the themes you feel that you needed more time for meditation, reflection and discernment, and renew the commitments undertaken.

During my Canonical Visit in 2019, I thanked the Lord, especially for the several witnesses that you shared with me on the itinerary of deepening on the Vow of Charity. Many of you told me that it was such a rich “resource” that you would have liked to have it in your hands more times to enjoy it and make it come to life. So, now we have this opportunity!!

Listening to Pope Francis again

On a personal and communitarian level, I am proposing that you take up the Homily of Pope Francis of February 2, 2021 and, in particular, the words he said at the end of this Mass (I am attaching the texts to this letter¹).

In these texts Pope Francis is offering us some very important and concrete lights for our Lenten journey, through the virtue of “*patience*”:

- **Patience**, first of all, is not a “*passive*” or “*resigned*” virtue; in the biblical sense it rather springs from trust in God's promises and, therefore, always puts us “*on our way*”. It is the patience of Christ that we will follow during Lent and, in a stronger way, in his Passion.
- “**God's patience**”, as Francis says: “*Simeon's patience is a mirror of God's patience*”.
- “**Our patience**”, continues the Pope, and he invites us to ask ourselves “*what is patience?*”
- **The three “settings” of patience**, he concludes, “*I would like to point three “settings” in which patience can become concrete: our personal life, community life and patience towards the world*”.

Listening to Don Orione again

We cannot reflect on this very important theme in our journey of holiness, without looking at Don Orione, in order to follow his footsteps and his words: “*patience, patience, patience, with patience miracles are made*”².

That’s why, to complete these reflections, I am therefore proposing to you to listen and meditate, personally and as a community, some passages from three letters of Don Orione that you will also find at the end of this letter.

Through some of his expressions full of love and clarity, Don Orione helps us to deepen this virtue of “*patience*”:

- “**patience and gentleness are learned**”: in the first passage that I am proposing to you, Don Orione puts together patience and gentleness as a journey “*to be learned*”, at the school of Jesus, in order to gain Heaven.
- “**the three ‘p’ ... and another ‘p’ ...**”: it is not the first time that Don Orione uses this linguistic strategy, in this case the fourth “**p**” refers to patience, to have with “*priests, the poor and the little ones*” (the first three “**p**”-according to the Italian language).
- “**Patience and maternal tolerance**”, with strong but paternal words Don Orione “*is forming the responsible for formation*”, giving priority to serenity and benevolence in the community, avoiding

¹ Here below (link from the Vatican site) you can find these texts in any language:

http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/homilies/2021/documents/papa-francesco_20210202_omelia-vitaconsacrata.html

² Don Orione, Writings 85, 66.

severity and meanness. This third text concludes with a very beautiful expression that synthetises all our reflection: **"With patience everything is won, everything is won!"**

Walking towards Easter

Sisters, let us enter into this strong season of Lent which has the Solemnity of Easter as its goal, and let us prepare ourselves, like travellers, with openness and freedom, with hope and responsibility to undertake the journey.

Not as lonely travellers, but as a family, as a community, as the people of God did by walking in the desert, trusting in the promise of God and in the guidance of Moses.

During the Christmas season we set out *"following the star"*; now the *"star"* will lead us to Easter, where we will find Jesus and Mary again. The *"star"* will now guide us in crossing the desert of Lent, like sisters, keeping our hands, supporting each other, helping each other not to lower our gaze, not to slow down, to keep hope alive, to mature the *"patience"*, with the certainty that **"with patience everything is won, everything is won!"**.

I am inviting you to organize yourselves as a community in order to have, at this time, at least one moment a week to meet and read, reflect and share what the Lord may arouse in the hearts of each one. In this way we will enrich each other and offer each other the comfort of fraternity and friendship, because in our communion we will find the strength not to waver when the path becomes dark, tiring or steep.

I would like to remind everyone that it is necessary to take into consideration the **Articles of the Constitutions and of the General Norms modified and approved by the General Chapter of 2011**, present in the dossier that was delivered to you to be included in the Constitutions. At this moment, I remind you the **General norms Art. 37 - Spirit of penance, in what concerns Lent** in a particular way. I have to remind you this because, unfortunately, many Sisters still continue to use obsolete Articles³.

Once again I entrust **the General Assembly and each delegate** to your prayers, so that together we may listen to and welcome the voice of the Holy Spirit for our Religious Family.

On Sunday 14 March, at 11:30 am (Italian time), the **closing Mass of the General Assembly will be celebrated** in the General House in Rome, which will be broadcast live through the official Facebook @suoredonorione. We are looking forward to seeing many of you joining us in communion to thank the Lord together.

Let us walk towards Easter with a generous and joyful heart, because Jesus is our life, our joy and the reason for what we are and do.

Together with the General Councillors, I greet and embrace you with love in the Lord. We keep united in prayer,



Sr. Mabel Spagnuolo
Sr M. Mabel Spagnuolo
Superior general

Rome, Generalate House, February 7th, 2021.

³ If you do not have the dossier, the Articles are also in the **Minutes of the XIth General Chapter of 2011**. They are: Constitutions Art. 117; General norms Art.23, 24, 25, 29, 32, 34, 37, 59, 223 §2 e 241.

FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD
25th WORLD DAY FOR CONSECRATED LIFE

**EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION WITH THE MEMBERS OF THE
INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND THE SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE**

Vatican Basilica
Tuesday, 2 February 2021

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Simeon, so Saint Luke tells us, “looked forward to the consolation of Israel” (*Lk 2:25*). Going up to the Temple as Mary and Joseph were bringing Jesus there, he took the Messiah into his arms. The one who recognized in that Child the light that came to shine on the Gentiles was an elderly man who had *patiently* awaited the fulfilment of the Lord’s promises.

The patience of Simeon. Let us take a closer look at that old man’s patience. For his entire life, he had been waiting, exercising the patience of the heart. In his prayer, Simeon had learned that God does not come in extraordinary events, but works amid the apparent monotony of our daily life, in the frequently dull rhythm of our activities, in the little things that, working with tenacity and humility, we achieve in our efforts to do his will. By patiently persevering, Simeon did not grow weary with the passage of time. He was now an old man, yet the flame still burned brightly in his heart. In his long life, there had surely been times when he had been hurt, disappointed, yet he did not lose hope. He trusted in the promise, and did not let himself be consumed by regret for times past or by the sense of despondency that can come as we approach the twilight of our lives. His hope and expectation found expression in the daily patience of a man who, despite everything, remained watchful, until at last “his eyes saw the salvation” that had been promised (cf. *Lk 2:30*).

I ask myself: where did Simeon learn such patience? It was the born of prayer and the history of his people, which had always seen in the Lord “a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and fidelity” (*Ex 34:6*). He recognized the Father who, even in the face of rejection and infidelity, never gives up, but remains “patient for many years” (cf. *Neh 9:30*), constantly holding out the possibility of conversion.

The patience of Simeon is thus a mirror of *God’s own patience*. From prayer and the history of his people, Simeon had learned that God is indeed patient. By that patience, Saint Paul tells us, he “leads us to repentance” (*Rom 2:4*). I like to think of Romano Guardini, who once observed that patience is God’s way of responding to our weakness and giving us the time we need to change (cf. *Glaubenserkenntnis*, Würzburg, 1949, 28). More than anyone else, the Messiah, Jesus, whom Simeon held in his arms, shows us the patience of God, the merciful Father who keeps calling us, even to our final hour. God, who does not demand perfection but heartfelt enthusiasm, who opens up new possibilities when all seems lost, who wants to open a breach in our hardened hearts, who lets the good seed grow without uprooting the weeds. This is the reason for our hope: that God never tires of waiting for us. When we turn away, he comes looking for us; when we fall, he lifts us to our feet; when we return to him after losing our way, he waits for us with open arms. His love is not weighed in the balance of our human calculations, but unstintingly gives us the courage to start anew. This teaches us resilience, the courage always to start again, each day. Always to start over after our falls. God is patient.

Let us look to *our patience*. Let us look to the patience of God and the patience of Simeon as we consider our own lives of consecration. We can ask ourselves what patience really involves. Certainly it is not simply about tolerating difficulties or showing grim determination in the face of hardship. Patience is not a sign of weakness, but the strength of spirit that enables us to “carry the burden”, to endure, to bear the weight of personal and community problems, to accept others as different from ourselves, to persevere in goodness when all seems lost, and to keep advancing even when overcome by fatigue and listlessness.

Let me point to three “settings” in which patience can become concrete.

The first is *our personal life*. There was a time when we responded to the Lord’s call, and with enthusiasm and generosity offered our lives to him. Along the way, together with consolations we have had our share of disappointments and frustrations. At times, our hard work fails to achieve the desired results, the seeds we sow seem not to bear sufficient fruit, the ardour of our prayer cools and we are not always immune to spiritual aridity. In our lives as consecrated men and women, it can happen that hope slowly fades as a result of unmet expectations. We have to be patient with ourselves and await in hope God’s own times and places, for he remains ever faithful to his promises. This is the foundation stone: he is true to his promises. Remembering this can help us retrace our steps and revive our dreams, rather than yielding to interior sadness and discouragement. Brothers and sisters, in us consecrated men and women, interior sadness is a worm, a worm that eats us from within. Flee from interior sadness!

A second setting in which patience can become concrete is *community life*. We all know that human relationships are not always serene, especially when they involve sharing a project of life or apostolic activity. There are times when conflicts arise and no immediate solution can be expected, nor should hasty judgements be made. Time is required to step back, to preserve peace and to wait for a better time to resolve situations in charity and in truth. Let us not allow ourselves to be flustered by tempests. In the Breviary, for tomorrow’s Office of Readings, there is a fine passage on spiritual discernment by Diodochus of Photice. He says: “A tranquil sea allows the fisherman to gaze right to its depths. No fish can hide there and escape his sight. The stormy sea, however, becomes murky when it is agitated by the winds”. We will never be able to discern well, to see the truth, if our hearts are agitated and impatient. Never. Our communities need this kind of reciprocal patience: the ability to support, that is, to bear on our own shoulders, the life of one of our brothers or sisters, including his or her weaknesses and failings, all of them. Let us keep in mind that the Lord does not call us to be soloists – we know there are many in the Church – no, we are not called to be soloists but to be part of a choir that can sometimes miss a note or two, but must always try to sing in unison.

Finally, a third setting is our relationship *with the world*. Simeon and Anna cherished the hope proclaimed by the prophets, even though it is slow to be fulfilled and grows silently amid the infidelities and ruins of our world. They did not complain about how wrong things are, but patiently looked for the light shining in the darkness of history. To look for the light shining in the darkness of history; to look for the light shining in the darkness of our own communities. We too need that kind of patience, so as not to fall into the trap of complaining. Some people are masters of complaining, doctors of complaining, they are very good at complaining! No, complaining imprisons us: “the world no longer listens to us” – how often do we hear that - or “we have no more vocations, so we have to close the house”, or “these are not easy times” – “ah, don’t tell me!...”. And so the duet of complaints begins. It can happen that even as God patiently tills the soil of history and our own hearts, we show ourselves impatient and want to judge everything immediately: now or never, now, now, now. In this way, we lose that “small” but most beautiful of virtues: hope. I have seen many consecrated men and women who lose hope, simply through impatience.

Patience helps us to be merciful in the way we view ourselves, our communities and our world. In our own lives, do we welcome the patience of the Holy Spirit? In our communities, do we bear with one another and radiate the joy of fraternal life? In the world, do we patiently offer our service, or issue harsh judgements? These are real challenges for our consecrated life: we cannot remain stuck in nostalgia for the past or simply keep repeating the same old things or everyday complaints. We need patience and courage in order to keep advancing, exploring new paths, and responding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. And to do so with humility and simplicity, without great propaganda or publicity.

Let us contemplate God’s patience and implore the trusting patience of Simeon and of Anna. In this way, may our eyes, too, see the light of salvation and bring that light to the whole world, just as these two elderly individuals did in their words of praise.

WORDS OF THE HOLY FATHER AT THE END OF THE CELEBRATION

Please be seated.

I would like to thank the Cardinal for his words which are the expression of all, of all the concelebrants and of all the assistants. We are few: this Covid puts us in a corner but we bear this with patience. It takes patience. And keep advancing, offering our lives to the Lord.

That young religious woman who had just entered the novitiate was happy... She found a kind, holy, elderly religious woman... “How are you?” — “This is paradise, Mother!”, says the young woman. “Wait a little; there is purgatory”. Consecrated life, community life: there is a purgatory, but it takes patience to carry on.

I would like to point out two things that may help: please flee from gossip. What kills community life is gossip. Do not speak ill of others. “It is not easy, Father, because sometimes it comes from the heart!”. Yes, it comes from the heart, it comes from envy, it comes from many capital sins that we have within. To flee. “But tell me Father, is there not some medicine? Prayer, kindness...?” Yes, there is a medicine which is very “homemade”: bite your tongue. Before speaking ill of others, bite your tongue so that it will swell and fill up your mouth and you will be unable to speak badly. Please, flee from gossip which destroys a community!

And then, the other thing that I suggest for community life: there are always many things that do not go well. From the superior, the consultor, the other one... There are always things we do not like, right? Do not lose your sense of humour, please: this helps us so much. It is the anti-gossip: to know how to laugh at oneself, at situations and also at others with a good heart, but do not lose your sense of humour. And fleeing from gossip. What I am suggesting now is not very clerical advice, let us say, but it is human: it is human in order to carry on with patience. Never speak ill of others: bite your tongue. And then, do not lose your sense of humour: it will greatly help us.

Thank you for what you do, thank you for your witness. Thank you, many thanks for your difficulties, for how you bear with them and for the great suffering due to the lack of vocations. Go forth, take courage: the Lord is greater, the Lord loves us. Let us follow the Lord!

THREE LETTERS FROM DON ORIONE ON "PATIENCE"

"Given your delicate position and what you have said and written to me, I recommend patience: it is a virtue highly praised and recommended in Sacred Scripture. With patience everything is won!"

The perfection of virtue lies in patience; and it is with patience and prayer that we buy Paradise. The way to learn patience and sweetness is to raise one's eyes and heart to Jesus Crucified and to the pierced heart of Our Lord.

*Patience and gentleness are learned only in the school of the One who said: *discite a me quia mitis sum et humilis corde*. With his life, with his Passion and with his most sacred death, Jesus Our Lord taught us patience. (Writings 24,131, Letter from Tortona, Nov 22th, 1924)*

"Dear Fr. Risi, I will never be grateful enough to you for what you have done and are doing for the Congregation. I beg your pardon for writing to you like this, but you do feel how much love is inside here for you!"

Please, take care that in the House there may be more union of hearts, more union with you, and be jealous of having the affection, heart and esteem of your priests in your hands.

*Target these three things: **there are three P**: the priests, the poor, the little ones (children). They are the three great forces: and you will do miracles of good. And, if I have to tell you something else, **it is always another P**. Patience! Patience! Patience!" (Writings 6,221; Letter from Tortona, June 1923)*

To you, dear Fr. Adaglio, I recommend patience, patience and maternal tolerance, and a great deal of breadth of heart. Bow to your brothers like a mother to her children. With them I would dare to tell you not to think with the head, but with the heart. Even in food and clothing, take care that they have the necessary and even a few more things.

Our Lord not only multiplied the bread, but he wanted to multiply the fish, too. To feed those crowds, bread was enough, but no, Jesus wanted to multiply the fish in his divine love. Let us go as Jesus did, so that they have something and how to mortify themselves.

We do not tolerate the sin of gluttony, but neither are we nor do we want to be considered stingy. In some Houses it makes me great pain to hear complaints and even murmurs towards the Superiors because they do not give them, nor provide, even when possible, what is necessary or suitable, though in poverty. Or it happens that people wait, wait and time never arrives, and so people get irritated and alienate themselves from the Congregation. (...)

The patient, Scripture says, is worth more than the strong. We must commit ourselves, my dear Fr. Adaglio, as much as we can, to bear the defects of our neighbours. I think that a great part of love of neighbour lies in this. And who is closer than our brothers, with whom we are living?

"Love your neighbour as yourself" (Mt XIX). This is the great law of the charity of Jesus Christ; but how rarely do we treat others as ourselves! This I say to my confusion and to your warning.

Let us comfort ourselves, therefore, let us animate and console ourselves, dear Fr. Adaglio: Endure one another! St. Paul says to the Colossians, and to the Thessalonians: Comfort one another! And to the Galatians: Carrying each other's burden. So let us implore Our Lord always (and it will be the work of every day and every hour) to give us patience, tolerance and charity, and patient charity rather than zealous charity. With patience everything is won, everything is won!" (Writings 4,273-275, Letter to Fr. Adaglio, Rome, February 20, 1923)