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**Prot. MG 12/22**

**Re: Circular Letter for Lent**

## **Dearest Sisters!**

While writing to you, the first news of the beginning of the war in Ukraine is arriving. The situation is much serious, not only for the two countries directly involved in the conflict, but because the whole Europe is in great risk, especially their closest countries such as Poland and Romania. We are all aware of the absurdity of war, and it is sad to see humanity's incapacity of learning from history: wars have never been a good solution, peace is not generated by making war, development is not promoted through violence, freedom is not given by domination...

During the last Wednesday Catechesis, the Pope once again called the governors to reflection and dialogue, and made an anguished appeal to all believers to offer fasting and abstinence on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, Ash Wednesday, asking God the gift of peace.

Therefore, we will begin our Lent season of this year 2022 with a greater commitment, making sure that all our prayers, renunciations and offers are directed to snatch the gift of peace and the end of every war in the world from the heart of God. I know that we will answer with seriousness, faith and trust by asking this gift to Jesus, the Prince of Peace. At the same time, for prayer to be effective, it must be accompanied, first of all, by concrete commitment, trying to build this peace in our Communities, overcoming our daily, sometimes silent, "small wars", those we often have among us. It will be the best contribution to obtain the gift of Peace from God, especially in Ukraine.

As I have already anticipated in the letter with the *"Family News"* that you have received recently, the proposal for this Lent has a different modality from the others.

I would like to leave you three suggestions to live together this strong time of preparation for Easter, placing ourselves in the context of the Jubilee of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Don Orione and of the Orionine Vocational Year, but also in the context of the beginning of the local Chapters, scheduled for next months of May and June:

1. Recovering communication.
2. Returning to our Constitutions.
3. Celebrating our Orionine vocation.

### **1. Recovering communication.**

We live immersed in the era of communication, where we can be informed of everything in real time thanks to digital technologies and the spread of applications at hand, which allow us to share news, but also images, voices, videos...

It is a very beautiful thing indeed, that, personally, as you know, I am using very much, with the aim of creating in us a greater family spirit and a greater involvement in what our sisters do in the world. Many of you are grateful for this initiative, because our hearts and prayers are enlarged in this way, and we feel we are a living part of the life of the Congregation.

Nevertheless, we are noting, with concern, a certain difficulty in communicating with those around us, with those who work with us, with those who collaborate in our works of charity... we are often in continuous "virtual communication" but we struggle to have a "real communication" made up of attention, listening, concentration in the "here" of people. I say this not only as an attitude of

"mine" or of "ours" towards others, but also as an attitude of others towards "me", towards "us". Tell me: don't you feel upset when you talk to a person who, instead of looking at you and paying attention to you, is constantly "glancing" at his/her cellular phone?

I believe that we are facing a great challenge, my dearest sisters, which does not mean "demonizing" or "abandoning" the tools we have at our disposal today for communication. Rather, should we put everything in the right place, to restore value to everything that it is really important, to reorganize the scale of values, looking for the humanizing and fraternal quality of a "true" communication.

It is important not to confuse "information" with "communication"... the first is unidirectional: "I am informing you", and sometimes we enter a kind of "race for information", about who gives the news first. The second is circular: it involves me in the dynamism of the "word", of "silence", of "listening", of "answering"... it is very different, isn't it? And I believe that this is exactly what needs to be reduced, cured and purified.

A true and effective "word" is the core and heart of true and authentic communication, as well as an attentive and fruitful silence. Here can we talk of communication. Many problems in our fraternal relationships in our communities or in our workplaces arise from this weak or superficial "communication".

I believe that we need to recover some "spaces" of authentic silence, which is not silence or closure, but which are the spaces to develop meaningful words. We need to get out, a little at least, from this "tsunami" of words, from a kind of permanent "verborrhage" which may end up in superficial and banal chatter or in gossip. Instead of enabling us to true communication and communion, dialogue and empathy, it can make us end up prisoners of a selfish and indifferent individualism towards the others.

So, sisters, the first proposal to live during this Lent season is to take up the "*challenge of communication*", starting from ourselves, in our own community.

Lent is the right time to enable us to do this, without falling into sterile and useless legalisms, but qualifying our time and giving priority to true communication, through the dynamics of "*silence and word*". Everyone may consider what and how to implement it.

## **2. Returning to our Constitutions.**

This second proposal is not disconnected from the previous one, given that our Constitutions and General Norms are a true, authoritative, profound and charismatic "word" that we have close to us. Our Constitutions are the guide for our journey and our life project. On this project of life we have professed our Vows with love, freedom and enthusiasm, and in them we can find the light for faithfulness to the vocation received.

It is worrying to hear those rumours that, from time to time, proclaim that: "the Constitutions are now outdated" ... or "now the Vows are out of date, obedience has gone out of fashion", "the Norms limit my freedom" ... , "the structures of the Congregation are suffocating"..., "today we do not need structures..." , etc. Just to recall a few expressions that may circulate in our environments.

My dearest Sisters, by now you know my mind well, and you know of my personal commitment to the Renewal of our Religious Family in order to get to a change of mentality that will lead us to live a more authentic Consecrated Life, "ahead of the times". But this does not mean that "everything" must be thrown away! No one exists without an order, without an organization and, again, I tell you once more, no one (person, family, institution) exists without a structure.

So, let's ask ourselves: who gives life to a structure? It is certainly not an abstract "idea", as the Pope says, but it is made up of people: each person, each of us personally. It is useless, Sisters, to criticize the "*structures of the Congregation*" or the lack of updating, when "I", "you" may live contrary to this in our everyday life and do not commit ourselves in the "first person" to generate dialogue, welcome, participation, respect, obedience... all things present in our Constitutions.

When the XI<sup>th</sup> General Chapter had asked that *"the Constitutions be revised"* in one of its Decisions, the CIVCSVA replied specifying that our Constitutions were already renewed and did not need a global "revision". On the other hand, they indicated that, if some Articles needed to be adapted to the new concrete realities of the Congregation could be submitted for their approval, with due motivations. With this, the voice of the Church wanted to tell us that the charismatic and theological aspect present in our Constitutions is current and valid, in tune with the Second Vatican Council, and also with the Magisterium of Pope Francis.

Knowing the Constitutions of many other Congregations, I want to say that ours are truly beautiful and updated, but I also feel more and more convinced that it is not by "changing words" that we change a reality, but the conversion of mentality and attitudes.

Therefore, this proposal of mine to commit ourselves, during this Lent season, in order to do a deep and filial reading and meditation of the Constitutions, personally and as a community, intends to lead us to the "rediscovery" of their beauty. It aims to renew our filial adhesion and to give back our "Yes" to the call of the Lord, embracing the commitments that we have made, with love and for love, through our religious profession: not in the name of legalism, but in the name of love. Everyone will see what and how to implement it.

### **3. Celebrating our orionine vocation.**

This third and last proposal for this Lent season refers to what I have mentioned in the Family News and is also linked to the two previous proposals. It is not just a matter of redeveloping our communication and falling in love again with the values of our consecration present in the Constitutions; it is also a matter of knowing how to remember the call and celebrate it together.

The three communitarian meetings present in the booklet I am attaching to this Circular letter are centered on our vocational call and our answer, and have the purpose of making this Lent season a time of *"Resurrection"*. We are called to rediscover the enthusiasm of the "first love", of our "first yes" and "to leave again with Jesus", "to leave again with don Orione", and, especially "to leave again together": as a Community, as a Province, as a Congregation. To leave again in order to arrive at Easter, more beautiful, more joyful, more sisters, more Orionine, also as a path towards the celebration of Local Chapters.

I also entrust this to the organization of each Community and to the creativity of your love and your sense of belonging to the Congregation.

### **With Mary, always...**

Dear Sisters, Mary is our mother and model in this. She has been the freest woman, because she has been the most obedient to the vocation from the Father. She has been the most beautiful woman, because she has been able to mold in herself the attitudes and feelings of her Son. She has been the most communicative woman, because she has been able to welcome the other in silence. She has been the most joyful woman, because she has been able to welcome within herself the light and strength of the Holy Spirit. She has been the bravest woman, because she has known how to join her life and all her being to the Cross and to the Easter of Christ.

Let us look at Mary, embrace Her, follow Her: we will get to Jesus, and we will become saints! We will be united in these commitments, we will celebrate Easter together with joy and we will embrace each other in the choral song of the Alleluia, because life always overcomes death! Have a good Lenten journey!

With brotherly affection in the Lord,

Tortona, February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022.



Sr M. Mabel Spagnuolo  
Superior general