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**Prot. MG 30/23**

***To be born in the time of "labour"***

**Dearest Sisters,**

our planning Assemblies are taking place just in these days, while I am writing this letter. I have been so happy to see the whole Orionine Charismatic Family involved in outlining the Provincial and Delegation Projects, thanks to the several photos and videos published on the different social media.

In these same days, I have just come back from the first Assembly of Major Superiors (UISG and USG) held in Sacrofano, on the theme: *"Synodality. A renewed appeal to the prophecy of hope"*. It has been a beautiful experience, which ended with a great desire to grow and "walk together" in the Church, with the purpose of building a better world.

During our last public audience with Pope Francis, while Fr. Tarcisio and myself were greeting him, the Holy Father looked at us attentively and asked us if we had vocations. Then he said twice: "You have a very important charism!".

May these three experiences of light be of encouragement for our daily journey, which is often marked by shadows and difficulties. May the lights we usually turn on at Christmas be synchronized with the many lights of good and beauty lit in our world.

**An expectation**

Very unfortunately, following the recent events of the world broadcast by national or local media, we have been feeling a deep pain for this unbearable situation. It happens that we often hear people say: "I am looking forward for all this to be over!"; "That's enough! We can no longer live like this..."; and we keep living in the hope that something may change...

This time seems the labour of a woman waiting for life, for her child to be born! We can imagine the times of Mary of Nazareth, under the unbearable Roman occupation... the Virgin Mary did not live passive expectation, fearing for the future. Rather, she abandoned herself to the mysterious call of God to give the world a child, a pearl, a priceless treasure, the messiah everyone was waiting for, the Saviour of the world.

**The pearl is born in suffering**

We certainly know the process through which a pearl is born. When a foreign element (e.g. a grain of sand) enters a shell, it defends itself by wrapping it with a compound made of minerals and protein secretions. The result is the pearl, a ball of various sizes that is generated in the shell but is not attached to it.

In our lives, we are always in contact with something or someone that disturbs us and causes us suffering. We often use various immature forms of defence, such as destructive criticism, rebellion, aggression, isolation or separation, which do not produce the pearl. However, if we act with the most integral state of our being, in contact with the Spirit who is living in our hearts, He comes to the aid of our weakness; He teaches us how to welcome these situations and obtain a beautiful pearl from a painful event!

## The painful birth of the saints

Difficult situations become the opportunity for the search for the essential, for the deepest self-knowledge, for interior work and for confident abandonment in the One who knows everything about us and can do everything.

In a written note, Don Orione described his internal torment as follows:

*“And I fled, O Lord, not to hear your voice: I fled, but you were everywhere: you were with me in the depths of my soul, and I was hearing your voice again in the voice of my troubled conscience.*

*Until one day, I fell as if in despair at the feet of a dear Madonna, and there I felt the full weight of my dejection.*

*And while I was bathing with tears the virginal feet of That one who is the Mother of all the afflicted and of all those who cry, I heard a voice coming, similar to that which comes from the womb of a compassionate mother: ‘You won’t be able to live except for love of Jesus!’ (...)*

*And here, abandoned in your arms, give me, oh sweet Lord, the simplicity and humility of a child so that the heartbeats of my love be sharp and almost rays of innocence!*

*Always a child, oh Lord, I want to be always a child! simple, humble and sweet as my children are! Give me your sweet words and the blessings you give to children... O Lord, give me the kingdom of heaven!...” (Writings, 67, 353).*

Every birth is preceded by a time of pain, of labour. Even on a spiritual level, we are accompanied by the "act of pain" of conscience, by the tears of repentance, by “the weight of dejection”, but then we are able to feel the peace of abandonment, the perception of being children to whom Heaven belongs.

Here I also want to quote the experience of Therese of Lisieux at Christmas 1886 (she was 13 years old), told by herself in *The Story of a Soul*.

She wrote: “I was truly unbearable due to my excessive touchiness” (Ms A, 132). Therese was aware that she used to cry too often and too easily, and when she failed to attract attention to herself, she reacted by pouting. This weakness of hers caused her so much suffering: “All reasoning was useless and I was quite unable to correct this terrible fault. I really don’t know how I could entertain the thought of entering Carmel, when I was still in the swaddling clothes of a child” (Ms A, 133).

At Christmas, living a particular situation linked to gifts, and listening to her older sister Céline's suggestion, she could finally react differently. She wrote: “Therese was no longer the same, Jesus had changed her heart!”. Therese, in fact, had finally found the strength of spirit that she had lost with her mother's death. Nine years had already passed! “Jesus, the gentle and little Child had changed the night of my soul into rays of light” (Ms A, 133).

Thinking back to that moment, Therese wrote: "On that night when He made Himself subject to weakness and suffering for love of me, He made me strong and courageous" (Ms A, 133). From that night, Teresa walked on the path of the Lord with more energy and she felt more confident. “Since that night, I have never been defeated in any combat, but rather walked from victory to victory beginning, so to speak, ‘to run as a giant’” (Ms A, 133).

On the occasion of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face (October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023), Pope Francis wrote the Apostolic Exhortation “C'est la confiance”. Here he talked about trust in the merciful love of God, and he started quoting her words: “It is confidence and nothing but confidence that must lead us to Love!” and continued: “Confidence, ‘nothing but confidence’, is the sole path that leads us to the Love that grants everything. With confidence, the wellspring of grace overflows into our lives, the Gospel takes flesh within us and makes us channels of mercy for our brothers and sisters” (2).

## **To be born in the time of labour**

The saints give us proof that fragility and suffering can be transformed into precious pearls, if we open ourselves with trust to the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism constitutes the *birth* to new life in Christ. Indeed, this birth must consciously continue every day "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13).

Therefore, it is necessary to desire and cooperate to this birth, to the salvific but painful passage from the old man to the new man, to the me-Christ.

How do we feel this birth in this time of personal and global labour? I am quoting here two answers from our Sisters:

"When I read the question, I immediately thought of the meaning of the word labour preceding the birth, so I associated the phrase 'to be born in the time of labour' to the pain, the suffering, the physical and also internal/spiritual pain of being born, of coming to light. At the same time, I asked myself: in what times are children born today? Does labour end with birth or does it continue, considering the world as it is? How can we ourselves be reborn and give testimony of life in these troubled times?"

Etymologically, labour before childbirth ends with birth, but I believe that today, more than ever, it can only end with a birth and rebirth in Jesus Christ, that is, placing hope in Him despite difficulties."

Another sister wrote: "It means creating space within myself, having the awareness that a change is needed. If a change happens within me/us, this does not happen without effort. It is just this effort-pain-labour that will bring me to take care of the weakest part of me, without haste and without violence. Rather, with great respect, delicacy and perseverance, for my birth in the spirit, in order to be a new creature and give light to the world, even in this tiring time of shadow and darkness... It is here and now that I am called to be born".

## **The pearl of charity**

The most beautiful preparation for Christmas, that is, the celebration of the Love of God who "*so loved the world* that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16) consists in the desire to welcome God's grace with trust and every day. Also to allow ourselves to be transformed, modelled, conformed more and more to Jesus, the new Man, God Charity. Wishing to be always being born, always growing, always opening up to the new, even if uncomfortable, and generating that precious pearl to make the world more and more beautiful.

Therefore, the spiritual work that may release those creative energies of love within us, always and every day, are beginning anew from the purification of our internal channels (thoughts, emotions, intentions, ...).

We do want to ask ourselves insistently, with sincerity: What is blocking the expression of my love, and therefore my most intimate freedom? What is filling me with fear about the free expression of my creative life? This is a deep work on our part, in order to free love from our hearts.

Don Orione wrote that charity "*is the evangelical pearl that must be sought, found, purchased and preserved. And it is this charity of Christ that, by divine mercy, animates us: Caritas Christi urget nos!*" (Writings, 81, 89). At another moment he added: "*Charity comes from the heart... We must create the new man: the man of charity*" (Writings, 81, 121).

With Don Orione we also look at Saint Teresa in the quoted Exhortation:

"In an age that urges us to focus on ourselves and our own interests, Therese shows us the beauty of making our lives a gift.

At a time when the most superficial needs and desires are glorified, she testifies to the radicalism of the Gospel.

In an age of individualism, she makes us discover the value of a love that becomes intercession for others.

At a time when human beings are obsessed with grandeur and new forms of power, she points out to us the little way..." (52).

In fact, in these troubled times, where so many people find themselves crushed in the middle of a bloody war, or suffer violence of all forms, or do not have the strength to start again a new day, we wish to bring relief and help this Christmas. We wish to be born less warlike and more in relationship with others, less pessimistic and more in abandonment to Divine Providence, less comfortable and more sacrificed for the common good, less... and more... according to the condition that each one feels to present as a precious pearl, as a Christmas gift.

May the witness of Don Orione and his prayer from Heaven strengthen us on this journey: *"Let us glorify the Lord and sing his praises while kneeling at the Nativity Scene, at the feet of the Child Jesus. How sublime and beautiful it is to become tiny at the feet of the Child Jesus. (...).*

*Oh how much I want to love Jesus this Holy Christmas, I want to love Him so much, that I wish my heart would break with charity. And I will tell Jesus to make you feel how much I thought of you, how much I prayed for you during this Holy Night"* (Writings, 95, 231).

Happy Advent journey together with Mary Immaculate, Mother of God, and Merry Christmas full of precious pearls for Jesus!

United with the Sisters of the Council, I am greeting you with much love!



Sr. M. Alicja Kędziora

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Superior general

Rome, General House, November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023  
*Saint Andrew, Apostle*