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Prot. MG 202/20
Re: Circular letter for Lent 2020.

Dearest Sisters,

in a few days we will begin the strong time of Lent that accompanies us on the itinerary towards Easter. We have lived a very busy year as General Council, because of the Canonical Visits throughout the Institute, but it has also been a year of grace that has allowed us to see, hear and “touch” all the realities of our Communities, of our works and of each one of you in particular.

There are many things to thank the Lord for: for example, for the great good that, from many of our houses, rises to heaven and honours Don Orione's charism... On the other hand, there are also many challenges that, far from discouraging us, constitute an opportunity to start again, and a motivation to continue to engage in holiness, fraternity and missionarity.

This year has been strongly marked also by the Catechesis on the Vow of Charity, experienced in all our Communities, which will find us united on the Sunday of Mercy of this year 2020, in the choral renewal of this IVth Vow. I am sure that we have received so much grace from these communitarian meetings and that they have certainly been a source of new commitment and renewed desire for holiness in the experience of charity as LMSCs.

Now we are moving towards the celebration of the General Assembly... time is running! This too will be a new opportunity to carry our Congregation in our hands and in our hearts, to look at it with love in the life of each of us, to renew our fidelity and make it, as Don Orione says, “*an instrument of God in order to spread the love of God*”¹.

Yes, dear Sisters, the Congregation is an “*instrument of God*”, so that his love, his mercy, his goodness may spread in the world, among us, among the people, among the poor... The Congregation is each one of us! Therefore, each of us is this “*instrument of God*” to spread his love, his goodness!

To be part of the Congregation is a responsibility, first personal, and then communitarian.

The Congregation is each one of us! We must not fall into the temptation of thinking, speaking, opining, judging the Congregation as something external, that is outside and that I look from the other sidewalk... All that I say, think, opine and judge of the “*Congregation*”, is the reflection of myself, because there is no institution, we do exist, the people who give life, body and meaning to the institution-congregation.

Don Orione repeats to all and each one in particular: “*have great love and zeal for the honour of the Congregation*”². And how can we love, care for and honour the Congregation? Being each one, with our life, attitudes, and actions, “*propagators*” of goodness and of authentic and concrete love.

Lent is the most favourable time to resume the path of holiness with seriousness and new enthusiasm, to mirror ourselves in Jesus, in Don Orione and review our personal and communitarian life, to confront ourselves with the Word of God and Don Orione, and start again... Through the purification of our heart, of our mind and of our whole being, this Lent is the best preparation for the public renewal of the Vow of Charity, which we will do on April 19th, all, in every corner of the earth. This one will also be a gesture of belonging and love to the Congregation.

¹ *Word*, August 5th, 1932, II, 210.

² *Word*, August 5th, 1932, II, 210.

"To become a good man ..."

Every time I read and go back to read again these words of Don Orione they amaze me and strike me, even though they are so well known: ***"To make the furrows become shining of God; to become a good man among my brothers; to lower and stretch out my hands and heart and pick up the dangerous weaknesses and miseries and put them on the altar, so that in God they will become the forces of God and greatness of God. Jesus died with open arms"***³.

Don Orione very often speaks of the goodness of God, immense and ineffable, and frequently calls his people to live this goodness, to *"do good"*, to be good. For Don Orione the simplest and quickest way to make others understand how God loves them, how good God is, is to *"become good"*. By saying so, he wants to express that we can and must live *"charity"*, but that there isn't any charity if it is not expressed in the goodness of a person, the goodness of his words, of his feelings, of his gestures, of his looks. To be good is so simple... To be good is so difficult!

Don Orione, who seems a mystic and a poet in the paragraphs preceding the text I have quoted, then concludes the idea with simplicity, wanting ***"to become a good man among my brothers"***, showing us the true path of charity, the true path of spirituality, mysticism, holiness: **to be good.**

In a letter of 1934 to a priest he wrote: *"With the help of the Lord and of Mary Most Holy, I will try to become good. Indeed, I tell you in confidence that, after the canonization of Don Bosco, it seems to me that I have become better. Pray that it is not a flash in the pan, but true and persevering charity"*

4.



We are impressed by his humanity and his humility. We are also struck by the realism with which Don Orione looks at himself, knowing how much you can *"fly high"* with your desires, with your intentions and words, but how much you can also *"fall low"* if it is not a *"true and persevering"* experience: *"that is not a flash in the pan!"*

Sisters, I don't exactly know about you, but how many times have I found myself making high, sincere intentions... and then... in the face of the first difficulty, in front of the first person who has not been nice to me, in front of an unexpected obedience, of a spiritual trial or of a communitarian conflict... I experimented with myself that those intentions were *"a flash in the pan"*, and not *"true and persevering charity"*... and the worst: justifying everything!

Don Orione guides us in this; he too went uphill, because goodness is a conquest! It is a path of conversion!

Lent is an invitation to examine our heart, our conscience, our mind and to ask ourselves: how much am I a *"good man among my brothers"*, *"a good woman among my brothers and sisters"*? How much do others feel me as good, how much do they perceive me as a good person? How many people could rightly tell me that I am just *"a flash in the pan"*?

The **Vow of Charity**, I have told you many times, is a **Vow of prophecy** as regards the missionary and apostolic aspect, but I think I can tell you that it is, even more, a **Vow of goodness**, as regards our *"way"* of being, of letting life flow, of sowing light, serenity, joy on our steps.

"Always do good...!"

I would like to share with you some passages from Don Orione that are light and encouragement for our reflection during this Lent, which I have chosen in order to focus on the theme of *"becoming good among brothers"*, as an expression also of love and fidelity to the Congregation.

³ *Writings* 100,187; *The Spirit* Vol. VII, XI Charity, 3. I love and I sing.

⁴ *Writings* 38,201, to don Gusmano, from Tortona, April 10th, 1934.

Who can show us the way in this, if not our Founding Father, who was a "giant of charity and goodness"? So let us open your mind and heart so that his words may penetrate and help us today.

*"Jesus is the good Shepherd! Why did he say good and not say: brave, powerful, right shepherd? Because the quality of good is that which suits most the shepherd more than any other. Goodness is the supreme moral beauty, it is the crown of all the most precious qualities. "God created man's heart, wrote Bossuet, and placed goodness in it as a dowry which, better than any other, represents God himself." We estimate science, value, justice, but above all virtues, we love goodness"*⁵.



This is the goodness of the Heart of Jesus, Good Shepherd, this is the goodness that Don Orión lived and that he wanted to inspire in his children: "Yes, we must find ourselves doing good, always good, good for all, and much good to all"⁶.

A goodness that is not only earthly: "I feel that life is going away and I have great desire and ardour to consume it **to do good**. It means that if from Brazil I could not come alive, I will let them take me to death, but **even dead** I want to work **to do good!**"⁷.

When Don Orión uses the word "**always**", he is not indicating a "temporal" dimension, but a "social" dimension. According to Don Orión "**always**" means in all circumstances, in every adversity, in joy and pain, in friendship and enmity.

"**Always do good**" is the "place" of the human, the place where "**evil is never done**"! In this "always" there is no room to "wait for better times", there is no room for preparation, there is no place to "wait" first for clarifications or justifications. According to Don Orión, "**always**" is "**already!**": it is every moment, today, here. "**Always**" are these sisters, these lay people, these poor...

"**Evil never ...!**". It may sound a little strong, but evil is inoculated in silence. It is disguised as a poison, and can express itself in terribly disguised forms of "spiritualism", "mysticism", false humility or shyness... In our environments of religious life "evil" is not always noisy, but almost always it is disguised as "false sweetness": irony, suspicions, murmurs, disqualifications, resentment, mistrust... made of words, gestures, facial expressions, contempt, even through the misuse of the media or of whatsapp: as Pope Francis says: "*the terrorism of small talks*"!

Lent is therefore the best time to ask ourselves: how much can we live the goodness without "borders" of Don Orión (his "**always**")? How much are we witnesses to this universality of love? Lent is the time to ask ourselves: how many times do we pronounce these sentences of Don Orión and then we deny and erase them with our lives? How many people remain "outside" our small and petty "borders"? How aware are we of the evil and dishonour that is done to the Congregation? How conscious are we of how others see our inconsistencies?

"Do good to everyone!"

When Don Orión uses the word "**everyone**" he knows well what it means: his spiritual experience of the love and goodness of God does not even allow him to imagine a good done with partiality, with selection, with interests, favoritisms or preferences. "**Everyone**", first of all within the community with the sisters, with "**all**" the sisters, and then, outside with other people, with "**all**" the people!

This is precisely the characteristic of Heavenly Father, according to Jesus: "*He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the wicked doing that? And if you greet only*

⁵ Writings 82,19, IInd Sunday after Easter, Jesus the Good Shepherd.

⁶ Writings 46,116, Avezzano, 6 / 3 - 915

⁷ Writings 105,372, from Bs. Aires, January 16th, 1935.

your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?" (Mt 5: 45-47).

The reflection from Don Orione that I now share with you is really strong, but clear in order to live a serious Lenten journey, in order to assume the conversion and transformation of our life, in the light of the "goodness" of the Heart of Christ and of Don Orione:

"Jesus came to break down the barriers of selfishness, to give boundless horizons to human brotherhood:" all made in the guise of one". Catholics, Protestants, Mohammedans, Turks, Italians and all men, white, black and olive ones, civilized and savages, the poor, the sick, the idiots, the friends and the enemies, the good and the bad are our neighbours. We all walk the same way, let's shake hands for the same goal: Heaven.



(...) And do we love each other? Brothers in dispute, neighbours who do not speak to each other, relatives who refuse to greet one another. The witty and beautiful people are loved, and the ugly and ignorant people are despised. If the storm takes away the harvest: they are happy, it is fine! When a misfortune occurs to one, are we happy or unhappy? Away the conflict. And envy and jealousy as well. (...)

To save our soul it is not enough to believe, it is not enough to pray, it is not enough to attend the sacraments, it is necessary, it is absolutely necessary to love our neighbour. Beware of disagreements and bitterness. (...)

*When we die how will we be judged? Not from the titles, not from the genius etc. And **do good** not for sympathy or dislike, not for parochialism, nor difference in religion or opinion.*

I have to love everyone holy and my heart must be a great world of love. (...)

*Always put a good word, cry with those who cry. Interpret words and actions in the most favourable way. Put our happiness in being able **to do good, always good, never bad...**" 8.*

Dear Sisters, let us dwell a little upon these words of Don Orione and examine our life, our way of loving and being "good", which is not to be confused with permissive and weak "goodism".

In the light of these words of Don Orione, let us ask ourselves: where do I find myself, where do I have to purify my heart and my behaviour? What do I still have to convert in me, so that my "lifestyle" be based on goodness? How much then does my spiritual life become a concrete and visible action of the goodness of the heart of God the Father?

For a Lent of beauty...

Goodness makes us beautiful! A "good" person radiates peace, trust, closeness, harmony and beauty... A single "good" person is enough to transform the climate of a community, of a working group, of an apostolic service. A single work of "evil" is enough to pollute and cloud this climate. The "good" is good for those who offer it and those who receive it, the "good" always brings joy to those who do it and those who welcome it... the face of a "good person" radiates joy, the face of "evil" radiates sadness, discontent, bitterness, victimization...

"Goodness" does not pass indifferently in front of the other, to anyone else! The good person looks into the other's eyes, gives a smile, extends a hand, offers help, anticipates the need, does not exclude anyone, generates life and resurrects those who are the recipients of his/her goodness... The good person gives him/herself, offers him/herself, sacrifices him/herself for the good, at the image of Jesus.

We can say that charity is expressed in the beauty and joy of "**doing good**": the beauty and joy of a heart full of "**goodness**" that flows from the personal experience of God, the highest Good.

The Passion of Jesus is a path of love and goodness, which leads to the full and eternal beauty of the Resurrection, of Easter. The Passion and death of Jesus are an expression of a goodness that goes so far as to give life for "**everyone**". This is what makes Jesus not only a Good Shepherd, but also a Beautiful Shepherd.

Sisters, let us start with enthusiasm and diligence this Lenten journey, which we are about to start and let us try to offer, in addition to the needs of silence, fasting and abstinence that are asked of all Christians and which help us to be freer and stronger, the serious commitment to become "**good women among brothers**", like Don Orione. Let us not end one day without having made at least a gesture of kindness to someone... starting with those who cost us most or we struggle to live with.

Then we will live a Lent of beauty and joy, a Lent of goodness...!



A Lent which will prepare us concretely for the renewal of the Vow of Charity, which we will all renew after Easter, with a renewed, good heart, full of charity, shining and beautiful.

Together we will make the Congregation more beautiful, we will increase its "**honour**" and it will be an effective "**instrument in order to spread the love of God**", as Don Orione wanted.

I entrust this strong time to Mary, Mother of the Risen One, so that She, who carried the "**embodied goodness of God**" in her womb, may teach us to "**do good always, good for all, never harm to anyone**"!

Happy Lent and Happy Easter to all!

Yours affectionately,

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Superior general



Rome, Generalate House, February 20th, 2020.