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*“To live Christ and to make  
the whole world live of Christ” (DO).*

**Prot. MG 8/24**

**Re:** Lent Circular letter

**Dearest Sisters!**

I am writing this letter from Indonesia, where I am visiting our new community in Haekesak for the first time. In fact, it has been opened on last October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, in memory of Our Lady of the Rosary. Divine Providence is widening the tent of our Congregation and, through us, it wants everyone to experience the good news of Redemption.

The reflection that I am proposing today to prepare ourselves during this Lent, in order to live better the celebration of Easter, has got the first thematic nucleus of our XIII<sup>th</sup> General Chapter as its background: **PASSION FOR CHRIST AND FOR HUMANITY. “I NEED HOLY CHILDREN”!**

In this Orionine Marian Year which has recently begun, we feel particularly invited to walk our caputural and Lenten journey with Mary the Most Holy, Mother of God and our Mother. *She is the first par excellence who lived the passion for Christ Jesus, his Son, and for humanity.* From Her we can learn **to listen to the Heart of Christ and to the groans of humanity through a deeper listening to the Word of God, a more intense prayer and a greater sensitivity to the pain of the world.**

*Saint Teresa of Avila, whom Don Orione wanted as our patroness, will also accompany us on this journey.* This is what he used to say to the sisters about her: “I would like you to be devoted to this great Saint. She belonged entirely to Jesus and as such a true religious must be...”<sup>1</sup>. In fact, Don Orione often encouraged the sisters to «turn our eyes and our hearts to her», «to pray to her and call her to help us», and assured that, if we do so, certainly «She will come and give us as a gift the soul... of the love of Jesus»<sup>2</sup>.

Let us call her on this Lenten journey, let us invoke her help, well aware that achieving what we have proposed in the XIII<sup>th</sup> GC is very challenging.

Let us remember the 3 lines of action of the first nucleus:

- CONSECRATED WOMEN OF STRONG “*EVANGELICAL SENSITIVITY*”, JOYFUL WITNESSES OF THE CHARITY OF CHRIST (1).
- PEOPLE FLEXIBLE AND OPEN TO THE NEWNESS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND GENERATORS OF “*NEW LIFE*” (2).
- “*RELIGIOUS DAUGHTERS*” FOR A NEW WAY OF ACTING AND LIVING CO-RESPONSIBILITY AND COMMUNION (3).

In the first nucleus, a serious commitment to spiritual life is needed in order to be such, in order to become an integral, deep, open and relational person... In other words: a person who incessantly tends towards the fullness of **new life in Christ**.

This journey is explained precisely in the first Preface of Lent: *“Each year You give us this joyful season when we prepare to celebrate the paschal mystery with mind and heart renewed. You give us a spirit of loving reverence for You, our Father, and of willing service to our neighbour. As we recall*

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<sup>1</sup> DOPS, 83.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. D.O. III, 214-215.

*the great events that gave us **new life in Christ**, You bring the image of Your Son to perfection within us”.*

In her last Lent circular letter, Mother M. Mabel spoke about the habit that makes us superficial and insensitive, and invited us to learn to look more deeply, to be able to be moved and to be surprised, and to contemplate the presence of God and of our sister/brother in our life.

*I need Holy children!* – once wrote Don Orione. Today, from Heaven, from where he accompanies us, he needs daughters who know how to live this time in a deep way. His teaching is always current: *“Be small at the feet of the Crucified Jesus: stay with your heart inside the Holy Tabernacle, stay in the hands of Holy Mary, of the Holy Church, of the Bishops and of Our Holy Father, the Pope (...). Our heart must be an altar where the divine fire of charity burns inextinguishable. To love God and to love brothers: two flames of a single sacred fire”* (Writings, 78,85).

It is the right time to work on habits and superficiality, in order to intensify within us the "divine fire of charity" which sometimes tends to diminish.

### **1. From dissatisfaction to the “life of God in me”**

In the "possible step" proposed in the first line of action "Consecrated women of strong ‘evangelical sensitivity’, joyful witnesses of the charity of Christ", the need is highlighted to put "Jesus at the centre of our lives, to live self-formation with greater responsibility and depth in order to renew the spousal bond with Christ: increasing incarnate prayer, meditation on the Word and Lectio divina, Eucharistic adoration, the examination of one’s conscience, the project of personal life and spiritual accompaniment" (n. 9).

We have consciously and freely accepted consecrated life in order to bear witness to God's love for humanity in a joyful way, but we feel that we are not always as we should be, and this displeases and demotivates us. Saint Teresa of Avila in the "Book of her Life" says that she did not fully live her religious consecration. Before fully discovering the overwhelming love for the incarnate God, Teresa had gone through many years of suffering caused by her "double" life, that is, not totally united with Christ.

Regarding this state, Teresa wrote: “I passed nearly twenty years on this stormy sea, falling and rising, but rising to no good purpose, seeing that I went and fell again... I may say that it was the most painful life that can be imagined, because I had no sweetness in God, and no pleasure in the world”<sup>3</sup>. This situation tired her a lot and her soul finally wanted to rest in God, but she couldn't, because her "miserable habits prevented her from doing so"<sup>4</sup>.

And here is how the answer to Teresa's moans comes from the intervention of Jesus himself, of the One who is able to solve her crisis. One day, in front of the statue of the wounded Christ she felt a strange emotion, she felt like her heart was breaking:

“I went to the oratory one day, and I saw a statue which they had put by there, and which had been procured for a certain feast... It was a representation of Christ most grievously wounded; and so devotional, that the very sight of it, when I saw it, moved me – so well did it show forth that which He suffered for us. So keenly did I feel the evil return I had made for those wounds, that I thought my heart was breaking. I threw myself on the ground beside it, my tears flowing plenteously, and implored Him to strengthen me once for all, so that I might never offend Him any more”<sup>5</sup>.

Teresa's eyes stopped on the image of Him who, deep in her heart, loved, but insufficiently, compared to his great, painful love. It can be said that starting from this scene Jesus Christ, God-Man begins to

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<sup>3</sup> V 8,1. The works of the Saint are quoted with the following abbreviations: V = Life; R = Spiritual testimonies; M = Mansions or Interior Castle; F = Foundations, in S. TERESA DI GESU, *Opere*, Ed. Postulazione Generale, O.C.D., Roma, 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr V 9,1.

<sup>5</sup> V, 9,1.

totally polarize her mind, heart and sensitivity, starting a new life that Teresa calls "**the life of God in me**"<sup>6</sup>.

During this Lenten journey we want to see more clearly our habits, automatisms and superficiality in contact with God and with our sisters/brothers sharing with us the journey of life.

It happens to us too, such as Saint Teresa, that we lose something of the freshness and beauty of our consecration. Let us ask ourselves sincerely: what steals from us the joy of bearing witness to the charity of Christ?

***Let us invite our Mother, Mary the Most Holy, into this examination of conscience, and ask for her help to live in truth and humility, and to let ourselves be touched by the love of Christ to be in love with Him and joyfully bear witness to his charity.***

## **2. From the noise of the market to the silence of the castle**

In the "possible step" proposed in the second line of action "People flexible and open to the newness of the Holy Spirit and generators of 'new life'" the need is highlighted to "get involved personally: *"now I am beginning in the name of Jesus!"* (Don Orione). On a personal level, to undertake a process of conversion and greater docility to the Holy Spirit in the events of daily life by implementing the project of personal life, making use of suitable means for discussion (spiritual accompaniment, community, etc.)" (n.17).

The Holy Spirit who inhabits our soul makes us understand with gentle insistence the secret of the happy life that generates life in others. Unfortunately, we often realize the difficulty of listening to his voice, of not being within ourselves, of living in a state of internal split.

In her most famous work, "The Interior Castle", Saint Teresa deals with the beauty and dignity of our soul and uses the allegory of the soul as a castle made of seven mansions to be visited through a spiritual journey.

Starting from her own experience, she writes that there are many who prefer to remain in the noise of the external market than enjoying the joy of union with God in their soul: "There are, however, very different ways of being in this castle; many souls live in the courtyard of the building where the sentinels stand, neither caring to enter farther, nor to know who dwells in that most delightful place, what is in it and what rooms it contains" (1,7).

The true process that the Holy Spirit is encouraging us to do today in this world that absorbs us with its proposals, is to decide to move from the state of distraction, from the ego-centered, self-referential state, to the state of conversion, to the state in which we manage to know ourselves better and to pray better.

Saint Teresa writes: "It is no small misfortune and disgrace that, through our own fault, we neither understand our nature nor our origin" (1,3). One of the holy daughters of St. Teresa, Edith Stein, writes about this:

"We are in search of the mystery that we ourselves are, which is within us, which lives there. Our holy Mother Teresa says that it is truly a strange, pathological condition not to recognize one's home.

Indeed, many souls are 'so sick and accustomed to living among the things of the external world that they are incapable of returning to their interior'. They have thus forgotten how to pray. The first mansion which is reached through the door of prayer is self-knowledge. Knowledge of God and knowledge of self merge mutually into each other.

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<sup>6</sup> Cfr. V 23,1.

**Through self-knowledge we get closer to God. Therefore it is never superfluous, even if we have already reached the highest mansions. On the other hand, ‘we will never come to know each other perfectly if together we do not try to know God’<sup>7</sup>.**

Even Don Orione encouraged in this sense the aspirants during their first spiritual exercises: *"... may He grant you **the grace to know yourselves** and to strengthen yourselves in the will to serve God and the Holy Church of God with humility and with a generous heart, according to the vocation that God himself gave you. ... But proceed calmly: resolute yes, but calm in the Lord, and with full trust in His divine goodness, in His paternal goodness and Providence. Keep your mind and soul serene, so as not to give rise to temptation"*<sup>8</sup>.

No one can force us to take this step. Each one of us, in our own freedom, is called to get personally involved: *"now I am beginning in the name of Jesus!"*.

No one of us can say: "I already know myself", or: "That's how I am", or "I don't change", etc. People who are flexible and open to the newness of the Holy Spirit know that everything is possible for God and they allow themselves to be involved in the process of re-creation to be generators of "new life".

During this Lenten journey, let us try to move more often from the noise of the market to the silence of our interior castle.

Let us try to give up what distracts our mind, especially in the evening, as Don Orione teaches us: *"Let us consecrate the rest, the silence of the evening to the knowledge of ourselves, to the love of God and of souls with prayer: let us put our soul in communion with God: let it be a restorative silence that may repair God and double the strength and fruitfulness of work for the day to come"*<sup>9</sup>.

Let us value prayer, our personal project, a spiritual accompaniment and all other means to respond to the expectations of the Holy Spirit, who wants to use us as instruments of the new evangelization.

Pope Francis enlightens us in this work: "Forgetting God's presence in our life goes hand in hand with our ignorance of ourselves - ignoring God and ignoring ourselves - ignorance of our personality traits and of our deepest desires. Knowing oneself is not difficult, but it is laborious: it entails patient soul-searching.

It requires the capacity to stop, to "deactivate the autopilot", to acquire awareness of our way of acting, of the feelings that dwell within us, of the recurrent thoughts that condition us, and often unconsciously"<sup>10</sup>.

In the light of the Pope's words, let us try to do an exercise of self-knowledge in this Lenten season by answering the following questions:

- 1) Do I remember a situation in which I felt offended or angry?
- 2) How did I feel inside, what did I tell myself?
- 3) How did I behave on the outside?
- 4) Is this reactive attitude a constant in my life?

It is a simple exercise that gives us a new light to understand our reaction and to be able to choose the integral, mature way that creates communion and not separation.

***Let us invite the Virgin Mary, who is the mother of our soul, onto this journey. She is the star that guides our path to know ourselves better and experience prayer as a relationship of friendship with God<sup>11</sup>. She is a model of meditation and prayer (see Luke 2:19) and of openness to the newness of the Holy Spirit.***

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<sup>7</sup> DUPUIS, M., "La persona unificata. Edith Stein", Paoline 2003, 17.

<sup>8</sup> July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1916; *Writings* 85,220.

<sup>9</sup> February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1922, *Writings* 55,216.

<sup>10</sup> General Audience, October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Saint Teresa wrote: "For mental prayer is nothing else, in my opinion, but being on terms of friendship with God, frequently conversing in secret with Him Who, we know, loves us" (V 8,7)

### 3. Towards experience: "My honour is yours, and yours is mine".

In the "possible step" proposed in the third line of action: "'Religious daughters' for a new way of acting and living co-responsibility and communion" the need is highlighted to "strengthen the awareness of being an active and responsible subject, able to revitalize today the foundational intention, by getting used to reading the signs of the times, to discernment, to the 'lectio orionina', etc." (n. 23).

The true journey of spiritual life always leads to the ability to be in relationship with others, to know how to "die to ourselves", to our egoic form, to our human plans and to learn constantly to create relationships, to forgive and to love. Saint Teresa teaches, from her own experience, that the purpose of our enemy is to "cool the charity and mutual affection, which would injure you seriously. Be sure, my daughters, that true perfection consists in the love of God and our neighbour, and the better we keep both these commandments, the more perfect we shall be" (M, 2,20).

May the Lenten journey encourage us to develop the ability to be sisters among ourselves and daughters of the Congregation, which is willed by God himself. How much more good we could do if we recognized our pride, and extended humbly our hand to others, who have been offended for years, in order to realize God's plan together, which we hinder, at times.

Don Orione gives us a great example in this, because for him the realization of God's Plan was superior to personal misunderstandings. He wrote from Rome to his Bishop (Bandi) recognizing himself as an obstacle in carrying out the Work of God: "... I would not want Your Excellency to have understood that the danger came from others; no no, I confess before God and the Blessed Virgin and to You, that the danger has been -and is- myself, with my sins and with a life entirely of ingratitude; I am the Jonah: I deserve -and I beg you- to be thrown into the sea, so that I do not have to suffer the Work of Divine Providence... And I bless the Lord for the help he gives me and I beg Him to continue and work my soul which is very hard, and needs many hammerings, despite my stubbornness, to have it crucified with our sweetest Lord Jesus. Otherwise, nothing will happen, and I hope that our Lord will grant me this great grace, and I would like you to still deign to pray for this purpose. I am very, very hard, and I need to break myself, since I am such that I have not wanted to break myself up until now, may God break me and shatter me well..."<sup>12</sup>.

Don Orione showed himself to be a son of the Church, aware of being an active and responsible subject for the realization of God's plan, but always in communion with his bishop and with his collaborators.

In order to act in this way, it is required a strong faith and a great love for Jesus and for his mystical body, the Church. Don Orione learned it from the saints who preceded him. Saint Teresa, who was all belonging to Jesus, shares her experience by making us listen to the words addressed to her heart: "Behold this nail: it is a sign you will be My bride from today on. Until now you had not merited this; from now on not only will you look after My honour as being the honour of your Creator, King and God, but you will look after it as My true bride. **My honour is yours, and yours Mine**" (R 35).

Teresa wishes to honour the Christ-Groom by accepting to enter the madness of the cross. Meditating on the sufferings of Jesus, she says: "How wise he will be who rejoiced when men accounted him as mad! They did so of Wisdom Itself!" (V 27,15). For the love of Jesus and the salvation of souls, for the good of the Church it is necessary to become "mad", a "cloth" in the hands of the Lord.

*Let us call for help from the Virgin Mary, who knew she shared everything with Jesus and she did not abandon him under the cross. There, she heard the words: "Woman, behold your son". And the disciple whom Jesus loved took her to his place. Let us therefore invite Mary the Most Holy to our life, to everything we do, and let us ask that she may teach us the new way of acting and living co-responsibility and communion in order to contribute concretely to the building of the synodal Church.*

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<sup>12</sup> D.O. III, 394.

The path proposed this Lent is not easy and will certainly cost a lot of effort. It is easier to give up something to eat or to sacrifice oneself physically, than to work on our habits and superficiality in contact with God and with our sisters. It is easier to "pray more" than to prepare for meditation every day and do it in such a way that the Word of God accompanies us throughout the day and bears abundant fruit. It is easier to dedicate ourselves to work than to go inside ourselves and see our internal splits and our immature ways of acting, which hurt others.

***Let us, therefore, invoke once again the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and ours, to help us live in intimacy with Jesus, contemplate his sufferings, ours and those of suffering humanity, and then unite them with his and offer everything to the Father.***

Jesus said to St. Teresa: "You know well the alliance that exists between you and me. For it, what is mine is yours. I give you all my pains and troubles, and with them you can pray to my Father as if they were yours" (R 51).

Let us ask in this Lent: *Father, eternal love, send your Spirit of light and wisdom, send your Spirit of profound healing and holiness, send your Spirit of love. Make me a joyful and trusting instrument of your grace. Make me feel passionate for Christ and for humanity like the Most Holy Mary, Mother of God and my Mother, like Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Luigi Orione and all the saints. Amen!*

I greet you with love, in communion with the Sisters of the Council.



*Sr M. Alicja Kędziora*  
Sr M. Alicja Kędziora  
Superior general

Haekesak (Indonesia), February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2024

*Ash Wednesday*