

Message of the General Councils of the Comboni Missionaries on the Occasion of the Canonisation of Blessed Daniel Comboni: a Gift to welcome and deepen

Dearest brothers and sisters,

The news of the canonisation of our Founder and Father, Blessed Daniel Comboni, fills us with wonder and joy. Wonder because perhaps we did not expect it so soon. Joy and deep gratitude for the gift and the challenge that the Lord offers us with this event.

God is great and by entrusting us with this gift certainly wants to tell us, the sons and daughters of Daniel Comboni, something of great importance.

Some questions well up within our hearts:

- What is the meaning of this canonisation for each of us personally, for our communities and for our Institutes?
- What is the challenge which emerges regarding our being missionaries today?
- Which parable of hope does it invite us to announce to the peoples that we serve and indeed to all the people of this time?

We believe that none of us can avoid answering these or similar questions. The plurality of our cultures, our different social and ecclesial contexts, our faith experiences, our pastoral sensitivities, and our gender and age will, without doubt, enrich the canonisation with various interpretations and applications.

This event is a clarion call to “regenerate” the passion for our common charism; a call, which points to a more authentic consecrated life, a sounder spirituality and a more prophetic faithfulness to mission. The canonisation of Daniel Comboni should find us united in following in his path to holiness.

We propose to you, without pretending to exhaust the argument, some starting points for reflection that could serve as the basis for our sharing:

- a) The canonisation of Daniel Comboni publicly witnesses to the genuine love that he had for God, fruit of a child-like relationship that he constantly nurtured in his heart (Trinitarian dimension). The origin and the end point of the total consecration of Daniel Comboni for the mission had no other sources but his participation in the sentiments of the Father, who did not hesitate to send his only Son for the redemption of humanity. In fact, Daniel Comboni, contemplating the Pierced Heart of Christ, the Good shepherd, earnestly desired to give his own life for the regeneration of “Nigrizia”. His holiness, therefore, consists in the radical following of the Lord Jesus until the supreme sacrifice of the Cross – “There, where the great works of God are born and grow” – and in the docility to the Spirit of the Risen One. The Paschal Mystery was, for our Founder and Father, the “unceasing breath” which led him to carry out his missionary service selflessly even in the midst of the most desperate realities. It is this same Mystery that sustained him in his witnessing to that Gospel which transforms death into life.
- b) The canonisation of Daniel Comboni is an event that belongs to the Universal Church (ecclesial missionary dimension). It is the Church itself that puts him forward as a remarkable witness of Jesus Christ and as a model of Gospel like discipleship for all Christians. The missionary charism which Daniel Comboni received from the Holy Spirit and which he lived with heroic passion is now presented by the Church as a treasure that belongs to the entire People of God. Because of this gift, the Church becomes stronger in continuing its mission as a sign of salvation and an instrument for the advent of God’s Kingdom to the ends of the earth. The proclamation of the holiness of Daniel Comboni strengthens the vocation “ad gentes” of the

missionary Church, particularly towards those peoples who are the most abandoned as regards faith. Daniel Comboni's fundamental intuitions "save Africa with Africa", "making common cause with the poorest and most abandoned", "evangelising as a cenacle of apostles", "communion and collaboration at all levels", that underlay his distinct approach to mission and his missionary methodology, acquire, in this prospective new prophetic thrust.

- c) The canonisation of Daniel Comboni rekindles the urgency of mission; in particular towards the most abandoned, those living in inhumane and miserable conditions. (social anthropological dimension). The holiness of Daniel Comboni denounces mediocrity and unmasks every type of compromise with the oppression of the poor. Our Founder belongs in the first instance to his people, that is to the least of the earth and the different "Nigrizia". The proclamation of him as saint challenges all Christians to throw open closed doors in order to listen to the cry of those "far off" and of the "slaves" of our time. It is also an invitation for a clear announcement of the Gospel of liberation. The canonisation of Daniel Comboni thus becomes a courageous event of priceless meaning especially in the face of the intransigent ideologies of today, nationalism or pseudo religion and fundamentalism. The splendid figure of Daniel Comboni shines out as a beacon of hope on a horizon permeated by hate, violence, injustice, fear and disillusionment.
- d) The canonisation of Daniel Comboni places a seal of authenticity on the missionary endeavours of his sons and daughters who with their own lives have witnessed the Gospel in the midst of difficulties, sufferings, persecutions and even to the shedding of their blood (historical martyrial dimension), The combonian tradition (from the Mahdia to our numerous martyrs and to the splendid combonian figures of missionaries who have gone before us or who are still among us) is like a fire which spreads "with its luminous rays" coming from many "cenacles of apostles" which witness for the world to a love without measure. This dimension of martyrdom is required for discernment and is characteristic of missionary spirituality today. The canonisation of Daniel Comboni confirms for us that this experience of cross, which suggests apparent defeat, is rather the origin of the fruitfulness of our charism – "my work will not die". – it is this missionary solidarity that safeguards our sense of history and constitutes humanity's true future.

It is with these sentiments that we ask you to organize an inaugural celebration, on the coming 15th of March. This celebration as the Comboni Family present in different nations will mark the beginning of a special time (lasting until the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception – 8th December 2003). A time of welcoming and deepening of the gift which God extends to us in the canonisation of Blessed Daniel Comboni.

As we recall the birth of our Founder and father, together we want to begin a journey of renewal and of openness towards all that the Lord will present to us. With trust let us be open to his grace and make of the canonisation of Comboni an opportunity for "regeneration" first of all of ourselves: may the Spirit burn in our hearts and in our Institutes, enlivening the passion for God and for the mission. Today there begins a new era in which we are called to "serve God in holiness and justice all the days of our life"!

We feel the importance of journeying together as Institutes, and in step with the Church and with the people. With this in mind a motto will be proposed which, based on the inspiration of Daniel Comboni, will help us to have a common outlook. This motto will also be the starting point for the different initiatives that will become an expression of our "yes" to God and to the mission.

We would like to give some practical suggestions:

- Let us do everything possible to organize the various initiatives together, as the Comboni Family, not forgetting the Lay Comboni Missionaries and other Missionary organisations within the local Church;
- We are sure that every province/region has already formed a team to coordinate activities and to assure communication with the central commission;
- We would encourage your creativity according to your local situation;
- We invite you to involve our candidates in formation, our relatives, friends, benefactors and young people in activities for missionary animation;
- In elaborating your programmes we would ask you to underline the aspect of prayer and the study of our mission as Comboni Missionaries today. In fact we consider it providential that the canonisation of Daniel Comboni falls in a exceptional time of reflection for the three Institutes: the conclusion of the General Chapter for the MCCJ and of the General Assembly of the Comboni Secular Institute and the preparation for the General Chapter of the CMS.

The plan of continuing this celebrative programme after the date of the canonisation of Daniel Comboni in Rome confirms the desire that this celebration will not be exhausted in an external ceremony. Hopefully it will be both “culmination and source” of a journey for the Comboni Family which is more attentive to personalising and incarnating that “holy and capable” which is an essential part of our vocational identity and which gives depth to our missionary choices.

We conclude this message by renewing our joy and gratitude towards God and the Church for this gift that has been made to us in the person and the charism of Daniel Comboni. Let us invoke the Immaculate Hearts of Christ and Mary our Mother, Saint Joseph and all the holy protectors of our Institutes so that they may accompany us during this time of grace and always.

With faith let us put into the hands of Daniel Comboni in a special way our brothers and sisters who give witness to Christ in situations of persecution and constant danger, and our elderly and sick sisters and brothers. To all of you our embrace of friendship and a wish for holiness and peace.

DAILY PRAYER

Father of all peoples,
 your Spirit of holiness
 has made of Blessed Daniel Comboni
 a living image of your love
 for the poorest and most oppressed.
 Help us to perceive,
 in this time of preparation for his canonisation,
 a renewed call for personal and community renewal
 in the charism that has been given us.
 Rekindle in our hearts
 the certainty of being again sent by You
 for the missionary service in the Church.
 May our life and action
 be truly an answer to your love
 and a courageous “making common cause”
 with the brothers and sisters
 You place on our path,
 so that your Kingdom may shine on a world
 awaiting justice, love and peace.
 Amen.

Rome, 15th March 2003
Commemoration of the birth of Blessed Daniel Comboni

Madre Adele Brambilla (Sup. Gen.)
Sr. Annunziata Giannotti
Sr. Maria Aparecida Gonçalves
Sr. Margit Forster
Sr. Luciana Zonta

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