

FEAST OF SAINT DANIEL COMBONI

10th OCTOBER

*We will all die; what a little thing it is for us
to offer our lives to Jesus, when he died for us.*

(S 5822)

Dear Confreres,

We greet you all with affection wherever you are, offering your missionary work, because we want to be in communion with you on this occasion, when we are celebrating the feast of our Founder.

Some days ago, the General Council travelled to Limone sul Garda, on the occasion of the closing of the General Chapter of the Comboni Sisters and to close even in this way our canonical visit to the communities of the Italian Province.

Limone, indeed, besides being a beautiful and attractive tourist place, speaks particularly to all of us, followers of the footsteps of St. Daniel Comboni. To visit the church in which St. Daniel received the sacraments, beginning with that of Baptism, to enter the small house whose walls heard his infant cries, to walk through the lemon grove once trudged up and down by that boy, to climb along the steep path that connects Limone with other villages and, from above, to contemplate the blue lake of Garda, allows our imagination to better understand his letters and everything else that little by little expanded his heart and prepared him for the challenges of the African mission.

Followers of an inheritance

Limone has been the cradle and crucible of a dream. It was interesting to hear how some people, residents of Limone, express themselves on their missionary and bishop fellow countryman. He seems alive and present in their lives, a source of pride and blessing for all of them.

The feast we are celebrating can also be an invitation for us to ask: what is the place that our Founder occupies in our life? We are the followers of a gift received from God and that reached us through St. Daniel. How can we bear witness in the places we work to that same passion he felt for the missionary cause? It is a gift that can be enriched or depleted. It will be enriched if we offer the best of us, working generously and tirelessly to reach the ideal of the Kingdom, as Comboni did. It will be depleted if we are satisfied with what we have achieved and do not share the gifts that each one of us has, but we keep them hidden for fear of losing face or because it is more comfortable to remain where we are, without trying to go further.

To experience communion despite our differences

Limone is located on the slope of a mountain. St. Daniel was able to go beyond, looking for new horizons; he had the courage to go further than the known environment, venturing into a faraway continent, visualised in his mind only from the description given by passing

missionaries and enriched by his youthful imagination, enlightened by faith in the Son of God. Comboni was able to discover another kind of beauty in peoples different from his own. He allowed himself to be captivated by the life and fate of so many men and women who considered his brothers and sisters. We too are invited to discover the beauty of the people, those who live with us and those we encounter in our work, in spite of our differences, certain that we cannot love what we do not know.

Our Institute today is more than ever international, namely Catholic, because that's how St. Daniel desired us to be from the beginning. How do we experience the challenge of internationality? Comboni invited all he met to work in the mission. Are we able to convey the same missionary zeal which abided in the heart of our Founder, about which the last General Chapter tells us? *We want to have a relationship of communion with God and share this with those among whom we live. We want to read life and history in the light of faith, assuming a new style of life and communion grounded in evangelical choices* (AC 2015, 29).

Implementing the Chapter guidelines

When we discover the gift that freely reached us, we cannot but live in an attitude of gratitude to God and are compelled to get busy. When we are also able to be grateful, we live in the joy that comes from discovering that we are bearers of good news, as the last General Chapter proposed to us, on the footsteps of the *Evangelii Gaudium*.

In almost all our meetings of the various sectors it has become a praxis to approach the reality in which we are to become familiar with so that our work may bear fruit, because it is inspired by and is contextualized in that particular place. We live in difficult and challenging times for everyone, but we have the promise that we are not alone. Let us not become discouraged when we take into account that not only the Risen Lord walks with us, as he did with the disciples of Emmaus (Luke 24), but also when we are aware that Comboni is present by his missionary witness, allowing us to begin this life journey: *I shall stay at my post until death* (S 5329) *despite all the obstacles of the world* (S 5584).

On this feast, we ask ourselves how to ensure the specific Comboni style in our activities. The Chapter reminds us: *We feel the need to recover the sense of belonging, the joy and beauty of being true 'cenacles of apostles', Communities characterized by profoundly human relationships. We are called to value, above all among ourselves, interculturality, hospitality and the 'conviviality of differences'. The world has great need of such witness* (AC 2015, 33).

May the small town of Limone sul Garda, where St. Daniel was born, and the city of Khartoum, where he died, remind all of us that God can do wonders when we let him act in us, as our Founder did. Happy feast to all!

Cordially,

THE GENERAL COUNCIL