With Gratitude and Hope

Final Message to the Confreres from the Symposium

We Comboni Missionaries coming from our different circumscriptions have gathered in Rome along with other members of the Comboni Family for the celebration of the 150 years of history of our Institute. For us all, to celebrate means first and foremost to recall our origins and the history God has been writing with us and with the peoples we have met on our journey. To remember is not an exercise in archaeology, but a living process of thanksgiving to God, entrusting our future into his hands. To remember is to set out again and afresh.

**Our Heritage: From Gratitude to Faithfulness**

The birth of our Institute did not happen in a laboratory. Rather, it is the fruit of a long process of life and mission. It was a painful birth at a time of major change in the world. We were born in a context of poverty, without any particular ecclesiastical, political and economic support. This event – in itself nearly unique in the history of the missionary movement of the XIX century – granted us greater freedom to respond to our special vocation. Even though the process of finding a juridical form for our mission was certainly not straightforward, it is clear that Comboni desired a family of missionaries with these distinguishing marks:

* *ad vitam*, namely missionaries not only available to offer their time, but also their very lives for the mission;
* catholic, meaning not constrained by nationalistic mentalities;
* in love with God and the peoples, making common cause with the poor.

Pope Francis tells us that “the joy of a missionary always shines against the backdrop of a grateful memory”. **Gratitude** means to know you are loved and then – moved by this love – to go out to share this experience with others. Gratitude is not static, but dynamic; gratitude is movement, inwards, outwards and forwards; it is a journey. In this perspective, the reunion of the Institute, the new Rule of Life, and the canonization of Saint Daniel Comboni become qualifying moments of our history and opportunities to set off again and continue his journey with creativity.

Gratitude means to recognise in our history God’s **faithfulness**, mirrored by the generous fidelity of countless confreres, both from the past and the present; faithfulness to the Gospel, to Comboni, to a challenging mission, to prayer, to evangelical poverty, to God’s people and to internationality.

**Journeys of Regeneration**

Today we have the tools for the study and a better knowledge of our Founder and our history, and this symposium contributed to this end. We are aware that whenever in history we have reconnected to Comboni and his charism we have taken a significant step forward.

A ‘reconfiguration’ of our Institute is necessary. We face the challenge of a type of mission that is always on the move, still far from fulfilment. The aging of the members of our Institute along with the decrease of vocations in many of our circumscriptions, the new paradigms of mission and our changed role within Local Churches are just a few of the challenges that add anxiety to our present situation. Today mission calls for a kind of witness that goes far beyond works and questions our life-style; it also demands of us a total self-giving.

We believe that the reconfiguration of our Institute unfolds along four paths: spirituality, humility, fraternity and ministeriality.

1. **Spirituality**. This is not only about rediscovering the beauty of prayer, but rather developing a spirituality of God’s presence in the history of peoples and lives of each person. The poor become our teachers with their faith and hope and they teach us this spirituality, without which we risk to become arid and lose the meaning of our missionary journey.
2. **Humility**. Aware of our limitations and fragilities, we are called to move from being protagonists to being witnesses. Today it is not just “doing mission” that counts, but first and foremost “being mission”. Words and works are no longer enough, as there are many who can talk and work – even better than we do. The challenge ahead of us is to bear witness with our lives to the treasure we hold in our hearts.
3. **Fraternity**. Many among us have expressed both in the conferences and in the group-work the desire that we love each other more, like brothers. We need to grow in the quality of our community relationships. This problem is all the more manifest in our poor community discernment and planning, as well as in the low quality of our brotherly sharing. Some among us do not feel at home in our communities. To be brothers means to give space to one another, even across cultures and ages, and oftentimes demands moments of reconciliation, also in a sacramental way. More fraternity would help us to link mission and consecration and would improve our community discernment.
4. **Ministeriality**. Today’s new social contexts urge us to review our ministeriality. We need to be better qualified in different fields of evangelization, and to improve our team-work with other members of the Comboni Family and of the Local Church. Mission is the reference point for any formation program. Ministeriality alone is not enough if it is not grounded in Christ’s passion for humanity.

From this anniversary we set off once again, as brothers, aware of challenges and difficulties, but also full of hope:

“The missionary never loses heart in face of difficulties. All crosses are meritorious, because we work only for Christ and the mission” (Saint Daniel Comboni)

“May the Spirit make hope overflow in you” (Pope Francis)