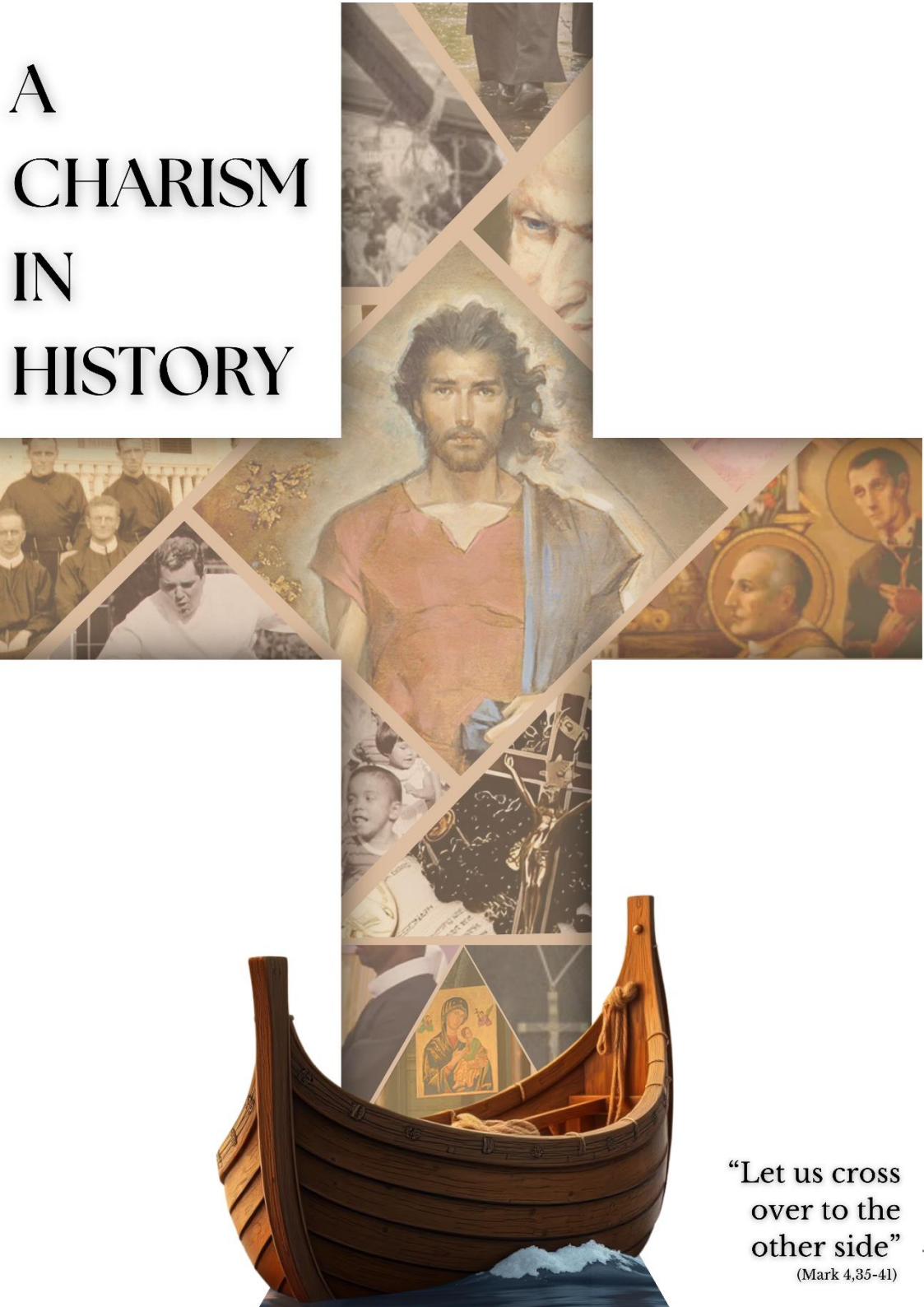


A CHARISM IN HISTORY



“Let us cross
over to the
other side”

(Mark 4,35-41)

SEE:

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Missionaries of Hope in Today’s World

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Introduction

Greetings dear Confreres, Sisters, *Formandi*, Partners in Mission and the entire Redemptorist Family,

Today on the Feast of Annunciation of the Lord, the Secretariat for Evangelisation invites the entire Congregation to reflect on mission. We begin this reflection with the words of the Redeemer from the episode of the storm at sea, “Let us cross over to the other side...” Two texts, the one we send out today and a further one to follow on the Feast of Bl. Sarnelli will be presented to help confreres and Partners in Mission reflect individually and in community as part of the ongoing formation of the (vice) Province and Region and also prepare us for the next *Communicanda*.

1. The XXVI General Chapter through its very first Directive stated, “That the General Government, through a *Communicanda*, meetings, courses, or other means, give directives on how to rescue and strengthen our Redemptorist Missionary Identity. Keeping in mind the common home, social justice, and shared mission” (XXVI General Chapter, Directive 1). In response to this Directive, this *Communicanda* on Mission is addressed to Confreres, *Formandi*, Partners in Mission and the entire Redemptorist Family. Our mission today is facing many challenges. This calls us to reimagine our Redemptorist mission. The context in which the Congregation was born in the 18th Century was marked by significant political and cultural tension. Today, in addition to the tensions and

polarizations in our society, as well as the weakening of democracy, we are living in a period of liminality where a renewed face of the Congregation is emerging.

2. The XXVI General Chapter adopted *liminality* as the archetypal category of our time, which profoundly affects our mission. Liminality is the place on the periphery where we no longer feel safe, because in such a place we experience helplessness, incomprehension, and anxiety. *Liminality refers to a place where we have arrived without having sought it, but where we are discovering countless possibilities. It is a place of discomfort that- paradoxically- makes us experience “being at home”, because that is where the poor and abandoned are to be found. In this sense, liminality can be for us the synonym of Scala today, where we can experience the original charismatic intuition of St. Alphonsus and the original freshness of the Gospel (cf. EG 11).*

3. Christ, the Redeemer, is our centre and our point of reference (cf. John 14:6, John 15:4-12, 1 Cor 12:4-27). He is The Evangelizer of the poorest and the abandoned. The basis, the objectives and the beneficiaries of our mission are very clear in the Constitutions and General Statutes of the Congregation. They clearly define that, according to the spirit and intuition of Saint Alphonsus, the Redemptorists will be missionaries only if they have Christ and the poor in their hearts, if they live and act as helpers of Christ the Redeemer, in an apostolic community (Const. 2).

4. This text for reflection aims also to invite us to reimagine our mission in today’s world, by revitalizing our *Vita Apostolica*. To be a missionary disciple of Christ, it is not enough to know him or to listen to him; we must make him

known by living in a way that reveals to the world the flavour and the light of his Gospel, as he himself says: “You are the salt of the earth... you are the light of the world” (Mt 5:13-15/ *Communicanda* 1/2024). We must be open to the Holy Spirit. “Following the intuition of St. Alphonsus, mission takes a central role in our life and identity (XXVI General Chapter, Final Document 24). We hope this reflection will also remind us that our Redemptorist Mission today should be a shared mission with the laity.

5. Mission, Community and Spirituality are the three pillars of our Redemptorist identity. “The mission of Christ the Redeemer”, which is the mission of God, is the reason for our consecration as Redemptorists (cf. Const., chap. 3). The Congregation exists for the sake of the mission of Christ, this is what is expressed in our Constitutions by the term - *Vita Apostolica*: which includes, at the same time, a life consecrated entirely to God and the missionary activity of the Redemptorists (cf. Const. 1). We are called “to continue the presence of Christ and his mission of Redemption in the world” today (cf. Constitution 23).

6. But this is only the first step in what will become a sustained approach. A loving gaze at our present situation will help us then to discern how to move forward to a hope filled response. Re-imagining our Redemptorist mission will entail improving what we are doing or refining existing systems prevalent in our way of mission (Fratelli Tutti, #7). *New structures for mission demand a new missionary spirit*. We find the Gospel account about the storm at sea, from Mark 4:35-41, quoted at the beginning of this *Reflection*, extremely

significant. In this *reflection leading to a Communicanda*, as the XXVI General Chapter directs us, we will explore the context in which we live, and how it affects our identity and mission (XXVI General Chapter, Directive 2). This will then lead us to reimagine our mission in a changing world (a fluid world) and courageously propose new ways of doing mission in today's world. We will follow a three-step pastoral methodology and structure:

- 1st Text: See - A Charism in History
- 2nd Text: Discern - Reimagining our Mission in a Changing World
- 3rd Text: Act – **Communicanda 2/2025**: “Let us cross over to the other side.”

SEE: A CHARISM IN HISTORY

7. As we enter into this loving and hopeful contemplation of the world that is the mission field of our Redemptorist Family, the Gospel account of Jesus calming the storm at sea seems to shed light on our own experience:

On that day, as evening drew on, he said to them, “Let us cross over to the other side.” Leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat just as he was. And other boats were with him. A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was already filling up. Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion. They woke him

and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Quiet! Be still!" The wind ceased and there was great calm. Then he asked them, "Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?" They were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this then whom even wind and sea obey?" (Mark 4: 35-41)

8. The desire of the XXVI General Chapter was to discern ways to faithfully live the Redemptorist charism and mission in today's world. The capitulars referred to this time of rapid and dramatic changes as a period of liminality in which the world is trying to understand what was and discern what will be. There is a creative tension between the old order which is in the process of transitioning into the new one. This reality is reflected in the Gospel narrative of the storm at sea. When we row, we row forward while looking backward. We can see clearly where we have been, but in order to glimpse "the other side," we have to go through some considerable effort. Pope Francis has described this time of ours as a "change of era", that generates unpredictability and surprises due to the loss of the certainties of the past and the uncertainty of a future that we cannot yet see clearly (cf. Final Document, 26). Indeed, no epoch is without a crisis. In many ways, this is an experience of a storm - a disturbance and an interruption as our Redemptorist family struggles to navigate the stormy sea of changes in the world.

9. Though we may focus on the dangers and threats of liminality, there is also a gift in this moment. Something

new is straining to be born, and our Redemptorist family, having identified ourselves as “Missionaries of Hope in the Footsteps of the Redeemer”, is called to embrace the hope and possibilities inherent in this liminal moment.

10. The capitulars at the XXVI General Chapter acknowledged that the Congregation exists in history. Our charism is always situated and grows amid a variety of economic, political, socio-cultural and ecclesial contexts. We recognize that the Redemptorist mission does not develop in a vacuum. On the contrary, it can only continue and develop when immersed in the contingencies of events and the vicissitudes of history. *Hence to aspire to live our charism, we must anticipate and audaciously engage this history as it unfolds in the spirit of creative fidelity and missionary restlessness – the desire to continuously renew and transform our Vita Apostolica as we respond to the call to become missionary disciples of the Redeemer.* Truly, this is a time in which the questions raised in *Redemptoris Missio* find new resonance:

- Does the mission of the Church in the world today still have meaning? (cf. RM 4)
- In concrete terms, what is the meaning and relevance of the Redemptorist mission in the world today?

Lights and Shadows: The Redemptorist Mission in the World

11. The world today is characterized by both lights and shadows. On the one hand, there are positive developments, breakthroughs and inspirations which make possible real progress and advancements of peoples and cultures. On the other hand, there are serious problems and difficulties that we must face. The ambivalent character of reality represents both the hopes and pains, the joys and sufferings of humanity and the whole of Creation.

12. The documents of Vatican II, particularly *Gaudium et Spes*, identified the need to understand and respond to the question of the search for meaning of the people of today, the “joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties” (GS 1). Recent General Chapters have expressed concern about how the processes of secularization and rapid change affects our Redemptorist identity and mission. We are called to understand the meaning of the hopes and aspirations, the disillusionment and despair of the people of today, a phenomenon that also touches our very own reality as consecrated persons.

13. The path to faith begins for many people today in the context of an increasingly secular society. We do not live in a culture that can be described as Christian anymore. Therefore, the challenge along the path of evangelization is to build meaningful connections between people, giving them a sense of belonging and connecting with others in a

hospitable non-judgmental environment that provides the opportunity to be open to the grace of faith. This calls us to engage in relationships with and in society, to truly listen so that we can respond creatively and sensitively to the longings of human hearts and spirits today. The Redemptorist approach of “evangelizing and being evangelized by” those with and among whom we walk points the way to how we might creatively engage with the people of our time with respect and mercy.

The Effects of a Globalized and Secular World

14. The change of mentality that continues to occur due to the rapid pace of change, especially in the scientific and technological realms, provokes in consciences what Benedict XVI called “the eclipse of God and faith”. John Paul II spoke of a society inclined to apostatize silently from God. In this environment, faith in God becomes irrelevant, and its absence does not seem to generate any nostalgia. It is evident that, in some contexts, particularly in the West, there has been a rupture between the Church, society and the new generations as the Church finds it difficult to re-establish new links and relations. It is evident in the confusion of many young people who, despite maintaining a certain religious sensibility, face challenges in orienting themselves in their search for answers to life’s fundamental questions. The moral monopoly of the Church, which in the past guided the path of the people, has been greatly weakened today, especially by the lack of witness to the Gospel. The Church’s role in society is increasingly

reduced, and its influence is less and less visible. Perceived as a self-marginalizing institution, often entrenched in moral or doctrinal assumptions on issues like abortion and sexual morality, the Church is often seen as not open to listening to the experiences of people.

15. This can be understood as a quest and a drive for authenticity, honesty and integrity. If our Redemptorist family can listen to these longings and respond to it in this light, we might find new doors of engagement and dialogue opening and, with opportunities for renewal and re-imagining our mission.

16. We have also witnessed a loss of confidence in reason and in the institutions that had hitherto generated a vision of meaning and order in society. This loss of confidence in institutions, especially in the Church, has been made worse by scandals of various kinds. This means a slow but steady erosion, not only of the Church's credibility, but also of its mission and its evangelizing role. The speed and depth of the cultural transformation that has been taking place in recent years hardly gives us the opportunity to assimilate, understand and give appropriate solutions. We see, for example, how the rural world, in which our Congregation was born and was powerfully present for so long, has almost disappeared to give way to the large urban cities which are now the *locus missionis*. While we are still trying to decipher the phenomenon of the secularized world, we are again confronted with the reality of the post-secularized world. To the crisis of traditional religious certainties is now added the crisis of secular certainties (Cf. T. Halik).

17. In other places, we find that believers are abandoning their traditional practices to embark on new adventures in search of the meaning of existence and the experience of the transcendent. For example, we find the rise in what some have called - for a lack of better term—neopaganism, in which belief and myths of the past, not from any main religions of the world today, are practiced. Sometimes this includes a kind of syncretism, an amalgamation of beliefs, customs and schools of thought, taken out of their original context. Another reality is that both the practicing believer and the militant atheist are categories that tend to become diluted in the sea of what some, such as Charles Taylor, have defined as disenchantment. While the fundamental elements of faith are tacitly abandoned, many are left with only the expressions of a merely social and cultural Christianity. Thus, faith is privatized, stripped of any moral or dogmatic bond, while at the other extreme, it is expressed in an extrinsic religiosity based on rigorism or authoritarianism.

18. At the same time, we see and are inspired by the altruism and genuine concern of many people, particularly the young. Many people hear and are responding creatively to the cry of Mother Earth, and of the poor. Across the globe, we see people of good will banding together in support of numerous ecological issues, including climate change. Everywhere we look, there are food drives, clothing drives, runs and walks in aid of people affected by various diseases and social ills. This generosity and activism we recognize and name as a shining light, and also as a call to our Redemptorist family to engage, support and connect.

19. There are those sometimes described as “nones” (non-believers, unaffiliated with any religion), who constitute in some countries as the most numerous groups, more than Christians or any other confessional group. Self-sufficiency, total autonomy and indifference to religion are some of their characteristic features. God is not necessary. God is expelled from history and replaced by the idol of technological rationality, to open the way to an anthropological nihilism that reduces people to instincts and tendencies leading them to be shipwrecked in an ocean of banality. Thus, we can identify with what some have called “liquid society” (Bauman), characterized by constant change, mobility, and uncertainty, where bonds are transitory and volatile. In addition, time is lived without certainties, spirituality without God or belonging or religious affiliation, relationships without responsibility.

20. These contextual changes give rise to a new type of people and society. We witness the pursuit of maximum profit at minimum cost and the subjectification of morality. These factors have succeeded in conquering and colonizing the desires and wills of individuals and believers. The quest for success at all costs, maximum profit, ruthless competition individual pleasure and rejection of all belonging characterizes society leading to fragmentation, relativity of choices and the primacy of subjectivity. It is a secularist culture that seeks to organize society based on purely technological rationality, the primacy of individualistic hedonism and the marginalization of the religious dimension of culture (John Paul II).

21. Redemptorist mission is lived in the context of a consumerist society where the word “enough” does not seem to exist. Greater happiness for the individual is predicated on the acquisition of goods and services. There seems to be no distinction between what is wanted and what is needed when it comes to consumption. As a result, buying and consuming define the human person. People enter a cycle of insatiable consumption and are forced to constantly “renew” themselves according to the goods and services they are made to believe they need. All of these at the cost of the degradation of the natural goods in our Common Home.

22. It is not surprising that the culture of possessing and enjoying is leading society to a deficit of hope with the individual ending up living in a world of banality and existential frivolity.

23. At the same time, we witness the proliferation of groups such as Doctors Without Borders, Engineers Without Borders, the Red Cross and Red Crescent, Habitat for Humanity, and a myriad of other volunteer aid agencies. This speaks to an inspiring generosity and a drive to create inter-cultural responses to issues and concerns that transcend borders.

24. The present social context seems to indicate that everyone seeks to enclose themselves in their own bubbles of meaning, outside the broader nuclei of meaning, such as the family, culture or institutions. In this global village, the technological advances in communication bring people closer together, helping everyone to overcome geographical barriers and existential prejudices. Relational connections

are enhanced in spite of physical distances which allows for more dynamic interactions. Despite being more connected, however, the sense of isolation, loneliness and anguish is growing, especially among young people who feel even more excluded. The access to a greater amount of information, does not guarantee feelings of certainty and a wise glance towards reality. On the contrary, fears of the other – differently other - increase, as well as the intergenerational gap in the digital world.

25. Fake news and conspiracy theories abound, fuelling mutual distrust, encouraging social divides and feeding racial tensions. In many countries, social media has become a powerful tool at the service of populist and extremist movements. We feel that the religious categories which oriented us are no longer understood or at worse, totally discarded. The challenge is to find ways to evolve new expressions and languages to creatively communicate the richness and joy of the Gospel.

26. We can observe other changes as well in the mission field. The environmental crisis is increasing. Our world is getting highly technological and digital. Migration, with its consequences, is also growing. Everyone forms one's own criteria and makes one's own decisions, when one wants, how one wants and as often as one wants.

27. In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the world as we know it has changed significantly. Living in the “new normal” has altered the way people relate with each other, society and the Church. With the pandemic came online faith and practices. This offers challenges and

opportunities to communities of faith and to our Redemptorist family.

Redemptorist Presence in the World: Be light in the world! (Matt 5:14)

28. Our identity is grounded in the Redeemer, so we manifest God's love and mercy and his overflowing redemption, in which the dramas and hopes of humanity are interwoven. In the midst of missionary restlessness, a renewed face of the Congregation and our mission is emerging. We recognize signs of hope surfacing in the secular world that indicate an openness to the message of the Redeemer. This time of hope bears the marks of the Paschal Mystery where Christ the Redeemer, dead and risen, continues to manifest himself as Lord of history. This year is dedicated to mission in the context of our Redemptorist Family, which coincides with the Jubilee Year 2025, an invitation to rekindle our own hope as we contemplate the world currents and our call to mission.

29. When we look back on our history, we do not see the past as distant, but as a present that has been shaped and defined by those who have gone before us. St. Alphonsus taught us not to conform ourselves to the mentality of this world (Rom 12:2) but seek its transformation through uniformity with the Divine Will. He was very conscious of the fact that anyone who loses his / her life for Jesus, ultimately wins it (Mt 10:37-42). In his life, Alphonsus embodied the very spirit of "crossing over to the other

side...” That was why, instead of seeking self-preservation in moments of crisis, he always sought the love and will of God - the Supreme Good, even at great cost. It was only by embracing the Divine Will that he was able to respond with creative fidelity to the call of God to become a priest, and then found the Redemptorists, with the associated difficulties and insecurities of leaving the comfort of his home, family and Naples.

30. This attitude, like that of our Saintly and Martyred ancestors, who spent their lives in service of plentiful redemption, now becomes part of our present, and moves us to be builders of the future to continue the Redemptorist mission. Thus, by creatively re-reading our charism and our mission, we succeed in giving them new life and dynamism in the present and making it possible for them to continue to speak to the future. The Redemptorist manner of living and incarnating our charism in history makes us original and at the same time relevant within the Church and society in general.

Continuing the Mission of the Redeemer

31. The contemporary world with its lights and shadows is the mission field in which we are sent to as helpers, partners and missionaries of hope. Here, we are co-workers with Jesus Christ in the great work of redemption (Const. 2). In many of our communities, there is a sincere effort to respond to these challenges with audacious initiatives, but it is also perceived at a generalized level, an evangelization

with weak missionary ardour, a pastoral practice where a sacramentalization of faith persists without adequate formative experience. Our preaching sometimes contains language with little significance for the present culture, especially for the youth (Cf. Document of Aparecida [DA] 100). The challenge, therefore, is how to proclaim the Good News of the Redeemer in the new context that we are encountering today?

32. We understand, then, that we live and develop our mission in this concrete historical moment. In addition, the history of the Congregation, and the history of the Church, shape and influence our way of interacting with the world and the ways in which we navigate reality. In this sense we are the living agents of the Redeemer in history, and the Redemptorist mission partakes in the building of the Kingdom, the seed of abundant life and abundant redemption for the world (Cf. Jn. 10:10).

33. We need to learn how to live in dialectical tension with what we already know, with what is new and with the unknown. Put differently, we must learn how to live in dialectical tension not only with our comfort zones and with what gives us security, but also with what generates fears, to allow ourselves to be surprised by the Spirit of the Redeemer, the Protagonist of history (Cf. Const. 10, 23, 25).

Conclusion: Signs of Hope

34. Pope Francis helps us to understand a deeper perspective of our missionary identity. Some sectors of society seem to keep their anchors in the enormous richness of Christianity, on which Western society has been built. Above all, the potential of the laity is the leaven of many new missionary and evangelizing initiatives in different communities. In the Redemptorist Family, the mission shared with the laity remains a missionary treasure yet to be fully explored.

In the Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025 *Spes Non Confundit* “Hope Does Not Disappoint” Pope Francis speaks of Signs of Hope in our world today. He says, *“In addition to finding hope in God’s grace, we are also called to discover hope in the signs of the times that the Lord gives us. As the Second Vatican Council observed: “In every age, the Church has the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. In this way, in language adapted to every generation, she can respond to people’s persistent questions about the meaning of this present life and of the life to come, and how one is related to the other” (GS 4). We need to recognize the immense goodness present in our world, lest we be tempted to think ourselves overwhelmed by evil and violence. The signs of the times, which include the yearning of human hearts in need of God’s saving presence, ought to become signs of hope.” (Spes Non Confundit no. 7, and nos. 8-15 for the various signs of Hope present in our world).*

35. We conclude this reflection on the invitation to See, to Gaze, to consider with hope our charism in history while seeking to understand our present reality and how the Lord

is calling us to respond with openness to the Spirit to the pressing needs of our world today. We are Redemptorist Missionaries of Hope in the footsteps of the Redeemer responding today just like our saintly confreres from the past did with a missionary dynamism that is constantly creative. The words of Pope St. Paul VI in perhaps the most significant Papal Document ever written on Evangelisation are an impetus to us today, *“Let us therefore preserve our fervour of spirit. Let us preserve the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow. May it mean for us- as it did for John the Baptist, for Peter and Paul, for the other apostles and for a multitude of splendid evangelizers all through the Church’s history- an interior enthusiasm that nobody and nothing can quench. May it be the great joy of our consecrated lives. And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world.”* (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, No. 80).

In the scene of the Annunciation, the Angel announces to Mary that she will be the mother of the Redeemer. Today, we, as a Congregation along with our lay partners in mission, are called to make a similar announcement. In order to do so, the Angel’s words that the Redeemer is with us, dwelling in the depths of this world and always becoming flesh in our lives, must resound in our hearts and minds. This deep intimacy with the Redeemer gives us the

prophetic character of our mission and the boldness to “cross over to the other side” (Mark 4: 35-41).

FOR PERSONAL OR COMMUNITY REFLECTION

- What crisis is the Redemptorist mission facing in today’s world?
- Considering the vitality of the Redemptorist charism, what steps do we need to take to cross over to fulfil our mission in today’s world?
- What do we need to leave behind in order to cross over to the other side, as the Gospel asks of us?
- What weaknesses, as a consecrated man and a lay partner in mission, do I see in my (Vice) Province or Region regarding the mission we fulfil?
- What potentialities, as a consecrated man and a lay partner in mission, do I see in my (Vice) Province or Region and in the Congregation with regard to the mission we fulfil?

Rome, 25th March 2025, Feast of the Annunciation of the
Lord

Secretariat for Evangelisation



CONGREGATIO SANCTISSIMI
REDEMPTORIS
SECRETARIATUS EVANGELIZATIONIS