



C.Ss.R.

PIRITUALITY

ONE BODY (Eph 4,4)

UN SOLO CORPO (Ef 4,4)

UN SEUL CORPS (Eph 4,4)

UN SOLO CUERPO (Eph 4,4)

JEDNA WSPÓLNOTA (Ef 4,4)

UM SÓ CORPO (Ef 4,4)

EIN LEIB (Eph 4,4)

ΕΙΝ ΓΕΙΒ (Εβρ 4,4)

12 - TO REDISCOVER FREEDOM FOR THE GOSPEL

The hymn, the greeting of the presider and a prayer open the meeting, in a place appropriately adorned with symbols of mission.

Mission at the crossroads

"To proclaim the gospel is the profound nature of the Church" (*Evangelii nuntiandi*, 14). In 1975 these words of Paul VI re-awakened the **missionary consciousness** of the Church. Compared to that time, the horizon of mission has changed, starting from the way we perceive the world now, and the challenges which we have before us.

Many factors render our planet ever smaller: from the media of social communication to those of transport, from mass tourism to the migration of peoples. All these cast a new light on the statement of Jesus: "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son" (John 3,16). Our **world** with its kaleidoscope of colours and cultures; the world with its craving for life and its despair; the world, that is to say, not just the patch of ground in which I pass my days.

It's a strange **crossroads** before which mission finds itself today. On the one hand, the massive power of the great of this world, the seduction of advertising and of everything that creates a scene and a spectacle can render our voice irrelevant, and provoke a sense of defeat and resignation. But there's another road, the one travelled by men and women of good will, where the proclamation of the Gospel is seen to be beautiful and necessary, precisely because it's a question of a different voice. On the one hand, there's what Pope Francis has called "the globalization of indifference". On the other, a world illuminated by the spirit of the beatitudes. Mission means **opening our eyes** in the face of this crossroads.

Let's look at our world and at the **signs** which it sends out to us. Let's think of the obsessive demand for connection which affects everyone a little: existences which call for the proclamation of a God who is love, of a Father who is present to us in our restlessness. The individualism which infects the life-style of many people creates an unrecognized space for that compassion, which is the heart of the Gospel. The malaise which afflicts so many people today, starting from the West, lays bare a spiritual void which people individually are unable to fill. In a world where fault is always attributed to others, it's crucial to recall the responsibility of the individual person, and the role of conscience. An economy which is increasingly marked by an unrestrained liberalism which benefits only a few calls for a renewed proclamation of justice and the common dignity of the children of God.

We are also aware that opening our eyes is not enough, if meanwhile we fold our arms, simply because we find ourselves powerless. Prayer enables us to enter into the logic of **grace**, which instills courage and brings about serenity, because it's up to us to do our duty (Luke 17,10) as simple servants.

Prayer is after all the condition for rediscovering **freedom** for the Gospel. We cannot give up on that if we wish to advance the process of restructuration. If the grace of God helps us to discern, everything will be up for discussion: empty or dormant structures, presences that are not urgently demanded by our charism, practices and life-styles which slow down the necessary missionary dynamism.



Your word is a light for my steps.

A hymn is sung to welcome the gospel. The passage of Lk 10,1-9 is read aloud. A shared reflection by the participants might consider the following elements, among the many which the passage suggests:

- the image of the **way** which sums up mission in one word. We have a tradition at our back, we rely on an institution, but the temptation is strong to identify our being Church with both of these. Lying in wait also is the risk of closing ourselves within our own problems, of contenting ourselves with our own little area. The command of Jesus: “go” sets us on the road, in an attitude of listening and confrontation. This tunes us in to the cry for life which rises from the world, rather than to the complaints which often clip the wings of a possible enthusiasm.
- The **proclamation of the Kingdom**, the object of mission. This is first and foremost the tidings of a God who is close, a God who wishes simply to establish his lordship: which is peace, healing, welcome and real interest in others. The temptation here is to reduce mission to a beautiful sermon or effective catechesis. Or to attract the attention of others with images of power, whereas Jesus actually invites us to go unarmed like lambs in the midst of wolves, with equipment reduced to the essential.

From the Redemptorist tradition

From the beginning the missionary dream of Alphonsus Liguori was **without frontiers**. His stay at the Chinese College (1720-1732) ripened in him the desire to go to distant countries: a desire which he had to sacrifice only because of the pressing needs of the abandoned whom he encountered in the south of the Kingdom of Naples. This desire never faded from his heart, so much so that he passed it on to the first Redemptorists and expressed it in one of his important works *The victories of the martyrs* (1775), which some decades later was to kindle the missionary zeal of many, among whom was St. Daniele Comboni.



But what happened between 1756 and 1761 is still very telling for us. Like other Congregations, ours too received in 1758 an invitation to send missionaries to the East, to Mesopotamia, to evangelize the Nestorians. The circular sent from Pagani to the other four Redemptorist communities got an enthusiastic response. Not just some of the fathers, but also students and novices said they were ready to go. So much zeal burst like a balloon when the founder understood the conditions demanded by Propaganda Fide: i.e., that the volunteers would have to leave the Congregation. For

Alphonsus this was impossible to accept, given the many missionary fronts opened in the Kingdom of Naples.

More or less at the same time, Alphonsus encountered insurmountable difficulties in sending confreres to Sicily. The first project for a foundation was outlined in 1756, but its acceptance on the part of the confreres was very cold. **Mesopotamia yes, Sicily no.** Even the General Consultors raised objections: e.g. too many unknown factors, the risks of being attacked by brigands. But the founder was the one who really focused the problem: “no one wants to leave his mamma”.

Many hours of prayer were to be needed, and it was necessary above all to wait until 1761 to have the first foundation in Sicily, in Agrigento, and to overcome certain contradictions present within the missionary zeal.

Constitutions today

“The **genius of Alphonsus**, that intuition which has been recovered in our renewed Constitutions, was his belief that it is the **mission which gives unity to our entire life** as Redemptorists. This unifying force is called ‘**vita apostolica**’” (*Communicanda* 2 [1999], 13). The origin and source of our spirituality is found precisely in our Mission.

At the end of these reflections on the theme of the sexennium, it's vital to remember something which counts more than everything else: our vocation to follow Christ in his redeeming and

evangelizing life for the sake of the abandoned, and to do so with that unified and zealous heart which the Constitutions call *vita apostolica*.

Much work has been done since the Council in order to reread the true intuition of our founder in the light of our times. A great work is still in the pipeline, and no one can regard himself as exempt from it. It is that of assimilating the **language** and the **spirituality** of the **Constitutions**. But it's also to ask oneself how to incarnate today the **key points** of the alphonsonian project, that which our founder cultivated in his heart, making it as a personal "vow" before applying for the approval of the king and the pope. The choice of the **abandoned** as the 'world' in which to incarnate oneself, the primacy of **evangelization**, attention to the **concrete life** of the people, **popularity**, the education of the people so that they might become **protagonists** of their own desire for holiness, the involvement of the **laity**, our **adaptability** to the various situations – these are the emergent points of this project.

We must have this identity of ours at heart and put it at the service of the Church with the appropriate style of **prophets**. The Church has need of our charism. Not just for the reason of our own mode of being and action, not just because there are never enough workers for the harvest; but, before everything else, because even the wisest pastoral programs run the risk of **neglecting someone**, that is to say the abandoned. God has aroused our charism in history, so that we can remind the Church first and foremost of this.

Finally, our praying together at this moment reminds us of another appeal which history is addressing to us: the re-discovery of that "fundamental law of our life" which is the **community** (Const. 21). God has called us, but not as lone individuals, God has called us **together**. Our response to the mission is likewise not the work of solitary navigators, but the expression of our being Church according to the Redemptorist tradition, the fruit of our **searching together**, with the intention of harmonizing differences and giving the world the witness of those who live as "a single missionary body" (Const. 2).

*If so wished, one can take the opportunity for a common renewal of our vows. Or for sanctioning the commitment of the laity to the mission. Or else, we can read the *Supplex libellus* which is found in our Constitutions and Statutes. This is followed by a hymn.*



CONCEPTIO IN SPIRITU SANCTO
Questo immagine è tratta dal quadro profetico e tenuto con gli spiriti del Santo Spirito e Santa Maria. La figura è stata dipinta da Raffaello in occasione della sua visita in Roma, in occasione della sua visita in Roma, in occasione della sua visita in Roma.

Conclusion

*The prayer to the Virgin Mary from the encyclical letter *Lumen Fidei* (no. 60) can be used:*

Mother, help our faith!

Open our ears to hear God's word and to recognize his voice and call. Awaken in us a desire to follow in his footsteps, to go forth from our own land and to receive his promise.

Help us to be touched by his love, that we may touch him in faith. Help us to entrust ourselves fully to him and to believe in his love, especially at times of trial, beneath the shadow of the cross, when our faith is called to mature.

Sow in our faith the joy of the Risen One.

Remind us that those who believe are never alone.

Teach us to see all things with the eyes of Jesus, that he may be light for our path. And may this light of faith always increase in us, until the dawn of that undying day which is Christ himself, your Son, our Lord!



ONE BODY is a monthly text of prayer proposed by the Center for Redemptorist Spirituality

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