



Missionaries of Mercy and Joy

November 9, 2017

Dear Confreres and Friends,

We continue our reflections on the Message that the last General Chapter sent to the whole Congregation. This time, we will pause and reflect on the passage entitled: Missionaries of Mercy and Joy which says: "Redemptorists today are called to tell the story of redemption, the story of a God who became close to us in Jesus of Nazareth; the unique personal story of each one of us. It is urgent that we announce "a message of renewal which offers a new joy in the faith and an evangelizing fecundity to believers, as well as those who have grown lukewarm or given up the practice of their faith (EG 11). This task requires that we enter into a lifelong process of ongoing formation, a life project of conforming ourselves to Christ. We call upon all Redemptorists, by their closeness to and love for all persons, to be a living testimony to God's love. It is not enough to experience God's mercy in our lives. We must become an instrument of mercy for others".

From our Communicanda on Redemption

If we read carefully this text, and allow it to enter into our hearts, we will realize that it brings us right to the center of our charism – to the notion of redemption and the most abandoned.

We could develop this reflection in many ways, but this time – perhaps – it would be valuable to rediscover and appreciate once again one of our past Communicandas – the one dedicated to "Redemption," written in 2006. Here we will refer only to some passages of it and hopefully, by doing so, will convince confreres to read the

entire text. It is easy to see that the message of this Communicanda did not lose its importance or impact over the years; it reflects perfectly the reality of our present situation. Moreover, even though it was written over ten years ago, its message matches impeccably the proposal that Pope Francis gives today to the world and to the church.

In paragraph 10 we read: "Redemptorists have an instinctive and pastoral way of understanding and announcing redemption, despite the theological and cultural differences among us. This understanding comes to us from Saint Alphonsus and can be traced within our spiritual and pastoral tradition. We spare no effort in order to help people understand that redemption is always the initiative of God, who loves us in ways the human imagination can scarcely conceive and desires our love in return. In our ministry, redemption is proclaimed both as deliverance from sin and as God's call to live in a relationship of love with him. Generally, we are known for being close to the people, particularly the most abandoned poor. Generous mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation are characteristic notes of our ministry. Just as Jesus invited people to change their minds and hearts, our preaching traditionally includes an insistent call to conversion. The apostolate of the confessional is appreciated by us because the celebration of this sacrament offers people a tangible experience of redemption. Most Redemptorists make an elemental connection between redemption and the demands for social justice, the respect of human rights and an appreciation for the integrity of creation".

Within this perspective, we have to have to locate our unique personal story of redemption. And then, we must have the courage to share it with others. Our life—my life— and our mission stays connected with today's world as it is: full of challenges and complex issues. But it is in this very real world that we must become missionaries of mercy and joy. This was also true for Alphonsus: he was to become a missionary of God's plentiful redemption in his own, very real and concrete world.

We read in paragraph 12 of this Communicanda: "A Redemptorist way of understanding redemption begins with Saint Alphonsus. Not unlike our own era, the society in which God called Alphonsus de' Liguori to proclaim plentiful redemption presented enormous challenges. He lived at a momentous change of epoch, the critical point of transition from medieval society into the brave new world of the Enlightenment. Alphonsus became aware of the most abandoned poor, who too

often were forgotten in the political, economic and cultural priorities of his age. At the same time, he was conscious of his own need for conversion if he was to respond faithfully to God's call. Many of his contemporaries found themselves alienated from God because of the inadequate images of God they were offered and an oppressing legalism in spirituality and morality. Alphonsus combated these distortions of the Gospel with a robust pastoral practice that was imbued with a discerning spirit of prayer and contemplation. His preaching of redemption touched the hearts of people who had come to think of God at best as remote and indifferent; at worst, as a cruel tyrant".

Taking to heart the encouragement of this Communicanda, and beginning with the life of St. Alphonsus, we can easily discern that it is not enough that we simply experience God's mercy in our lives. We must become instruments of mercy for others. It is easy to look at today's world from our own perspective, for this can sometimes mean gazing upon that world from quite secure and well-protected structures. "Alphonsus' idea was to look at the world from the perspective of the "abandoned", those who are constrained by society or even by the Church to live on the margin. This is the standpoint that colours the pastoral strategies of Alphonsus and also conditions indelibly his theological reflection. His vision for the Congregation is as big as one could make it since his point of reference is the entire mission of Jesus. Why did God become man in Jesus Christ? In the answer to this question Alphonsus also finds the reason of existence for his Institute. He discovers in the fourth chapter of the Gospel of Luke a sort of "mission statement" of Jesus, a summary of the sense and significance of his whole life" (n. 15).

Pause and Reflect:

The word of God is the light for my life

Read the passage of the Gospel Luke 4, 16-21, printed below:

"He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom* into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives

and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”

Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, “Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing”.

- What does this text say to you personally?
- Does it touch the story of your Redemptorist life?
- Do you feel invited to be an instrument of God’s mercy?
- Does it fill you with new joy?

Looking into the future

As we continue our journey as a Congregation, we embrace the invitation of the last General Chapter to be: “WITNESSES OF THE REDEEMER – In Solidarity for Mission to a Wounded World”. We know it well that this cannot be done only by our own efforts and talents. Once we realize this, our lives take on a new perspective, and we are convinced that we have to enter into a lifelong process of ongoing formation, a life project of conforming ourselves to Christ. This is the only perspective in which we can become missionaries of mercy and true joy. Our mission finds its center and authenticity only in Jesus Christ.

Let us finish our reflection with the last quotation from the Communicanda on Redemption. It invites us to assume a contemplative attitude as an instrument and criterion in our mission in today’s world: “A contemplative look at our world leads us to glimpse the forces that militate against the Kingdom of God, such as a culture of death that prizes power, pleasure and possessions to the point of the dehumanization, enslavement and wholesale displacement of entire societies. The proclamation of abundant redemption is a call to see this broken world from a contemplative perspective that allows us to discover the ways of the Spirit. We learn to recognize the presence of signs of redemption that allow us to continue with hope and determination. If we have the audacity to ask whether the mission of Jesus makes a difference in our world, then we also need the courage to assume a contemplative stance and permit that the Spirit promised by Jesus will guide us to all truth” (n. 31).

As you take on this contemplative attitude and gaze upon the world around you:

- Do you recognize the presence of signs of redemption that allow you to continue with hope and determination?
- How do you embrace the call to be witnesses to the Redeemer in solidarity for mission to a wounded world?

ONE BODY is a monthly text of prayer proposed by the Center for Redemptorist Spirituality. For more information:

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