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Rome, August 01, 2023
Solemnity of St. Alphonsus Mary of Liguori

Missionaries of Hope in the Footsteps of the Redeemer

YEAR DEDICATED TO COMMUNITY LIFE

Const. 21-75; EG 026-049; Lk 6,12-16

DEAR CONFRERES, FORMANDI, LAY ASSOCIATES OF OUR MISSION AND REDEMPTORIST FAMILY:

1. On August 1, 1787, in the town of Pagani, Alfonso Maria de Liguori left this world to meet his beloved Redeemer. Alfonso needs no introduction. His life and his story speak for themselves.
2. It has been 236 years since his departure. In this sense, *reflecting on community life*, the fundamental question is: what does his life and history tell us today, and what does it inspire in us? I consider important some points that we can extract from his life and history, which we cannot forget:
 - a) *The experience of God as the center and foundation of personal and community life, missionary and moral action.* From a very young age, Alphonsus chose the Redeemer as the center of his life. This did not mean that, throughout his life, he did not have his questions and discouragements. He transformed all this into the strength to draw ever closer to Jesus Christ and to love him intensely. His Christology derived from this living experience. It was not something theoretical, an academic exercise, but something born from his concrete experience. This guided his personal and community life, theological research, and missionary activity toward the simple people. *One cannot understand Alphonsian theology, Christology, Mariology, spirituality, and morality, if not from the experience of God's love in the concreteness of human history, and the consequence of this is manifested in kenosis, distacco, compassion, redemption, tenderness, pastoral kindness....*
 - b) *Love for the most abandoned and a deep sense of social justice.* In Alphonsus, the experience of God is translated into concrete realities: love of neighbor, inspired by the family and intellectual formation he received and the condition of the poor of his time. He knew how to read the reality of his time and discern where he should place himself in this ecclesial and pastoral context. This Alphonsian gaze should constantly stimulate us, as a Congregation, to discern where we should be (cf.

Const. 4-5). *The poor for us is not a sociological category but one on the geographic and existential periphery whom we must love and serve.*

- c) *Community life from the perspective of the mission.* Alphonsus founded the Congregation composed of priests and brothers. The community has always been in function of the mission. I think that Alphonsus already had in mind what our Constitutions call an organized community (cf. Const. 44). Alphonsus says: "A community without a head would be a ship on the high seas without a helmsman; an assembly without rules, a Babylon of disorder and confusion. The necessary regulations, inherent in every well-regulated gathering and family, are in themselves relative to peace, to good order and to the conspiracy of individuals for the end that each one has proposed for the good of the State or of Religion" (Sant'Alfonso, *Lettere*, 9 dicembre 1759). This statement of Alphonsus challenges us to read and meditate on Constitutions 21-76 and to ask ourselves: how are we living our community life, and what is the quality of it? *Indeed, this has repercussions on our mission. The community should not be where we do not want to be, but a welcoming place to fulfill ourselves as persons and mission. And this is a constant challenge for us; we should not be discouraged in this task!*
- d) *Constant formation for the sake of missionary work and towards a change of the ecclesial mentality, spiritual and moral-theological.* Alfonso reminds us that our formation never ends. We are in ongoing formation from the moment we enter the formation process, which continues throughout our lives. It is meant to humanize us more and more, to give us tools for our constant conversion and work with the People of God. *We cannot, as Alphonsus, undertake a change of ecclesial, pastoral, spiritual, and moral mentality if we do not update ourselves and are not interested in personal and community formation. The social context of constant change must stimulate us to search for adequate answers to the new questions of our interlocutors. The same constant formation gives us the necessary humility to be aware that we do not have "magic" answers for everything and removes us from the comfort of dogmatic answers that no longer convince the men and women of our time. For this reason, the life of Alphonsus encourages us, as professed members, and lay associates, to pay attention to daily formation.*
- e) *Perseverance in difficult matters.* Alphonsus inspires us to persevere. From the time he left his father's house and became involved in the courts, in the work of the *Incurabili* Hospital, in the foundation of the Congregation, he had to live with the tensions of the world of his time: political, economic, social, ecclesial, even the incomprehension of his confreres. Despite everything, he did not give up because he believed in God, had confidence in himself, and never lost hope in human beings. Not only did he persevere in everything he did, but he also instituted the vow of perseverance for the Redemptorist Missionaries. That vow is still very important not only for consecrated persons but also for family life. *The time has come for us as a Congregation to begin to reflect on our perseverance.* Every year a large number of confreres leave the Congregation. Some for canonical reasons, others who leave too quickly, and others for diocesan life. This reality cannot go unnoticed. We need to discuss it in our formation journey and in local communities. *How are we incarnating the charism in our being? How is our sense of belonging to the Congregation? How is the quality of our community life? How is our relationship with the vow of obedience and the*

exercise of authority? These and other questions concern our vow and oath of perseverance.

- f) *Simplicity of life and language.* Another characteristic of our Father and Founder, which we must maintain, is the simplicity of life and language. It is linked to availability for the mission and service to others. In this sense, it becomes like an "antidote" against selfishness, self-referentiality, and remaining in one's own "comfort zone". This reality also goes hand in hand with the simplicity of our language. The Gospel we communicate must be translated not only into concepts accessible to those with whom we dialogue in ministry (interlocutors) but must also resonate with our simple way of living.
 - g) *Our mission demands movement (exodus) and detachment (distacco).* The history of our Founder was marked by various exoduses to the demands of the mission. Alphonsus had to restructure his personal and missionary life to be faithful to the charism received from the Spirit and thus guide the mission and the Congregation. In this way, he motivates us to broaden our horizons and take on the novelty of restructuring ourselves for the mission as a way of responding with fidelity to the charism and the signs of the times.
3. Finally, like Alphonsus, we must remember Mary Most Holy in our lives (Const. 32). To her, Alphonsus dedicated writings, prayers, music, and paintings. For him, Mary was not only the Mother of the Redeemer but also his companion, counselor, and inspirer, because of her perseverance in the mission at the foot of the cross and the birth of the new communities (cf. Jn 19:25-27; Acts 2:1-12). May Mary and Alphonsus, with his apostolic zeal, encourage us to be Missionaries of Hope, walking in the footsteps of the Redeemer.

Fraternally in Christ the Redeemer,

P. Rogério Gomes, C.Ss.R.

Superior General

Original text: *Spanish*