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 Rome, September 11, 2024
 Memorial of Blessed Celeste Crostarosa

"Missionaries of hope in the footsteps of the Redeemer"

YEAR DEDICATED TO MISSION FORMATION

The Lord instructs us to revive the gift of God dwelling in us

Const. 77-90, EG; 050-085; Mt 10:5-15, Lk 9:1-6, 2 Tim 1:6

DEAR BROTHERS, FORMANDI, LAY ASSOCIATES OF OUR REDEMPTORIST MISSION AND FAMILY, AND ON THIS SPECIAL OCCASION, ALL NUNS OF THE ORDER OF THE MOST HOLY REDEEMER,

1. Julia Marcella Santa Crostarosa was born in Naples on October 31, 1696. She entered the Teresian monastery S. Maria dei Sette Dolori in Marigliano in the spring of 1718 and professed as a Carmelite on September 21, 1719. In October 1723, the monastery was closed, and she entered the Visitation convent of the Most Holy Conception in Scala, Salerno, in January 1724. After a few days, she began her novitiate, taking the name Sister Maria Celeste of the Holy Desert; she then renewed her vows as a Visitandine on December 28, 1726. While still a novice, on April 25, 1725, after the celebration of the Eucharist, she began to have the intuition to found a new Institute. Encouraged by her confessor and novice mistress, she wrote the rule, the centerpiece of which is the community as a *living memory* of the love of the Redeemer. In 1730, she met St. Alphonsus and, thanks to his help, on May 13, 1731, the Order of the Most Holy Savior was born, whose Rules were approved by Pope Benedict XIV on June 8, 1750, changing its name to the Order of the Most Holy Redeemer. On September 14, 1755, she died in Foggia, recognized by the people as the *Holy Prioress*.
2. Celeste's story is complex, and her life was not easy. Particularly hard were the moments of tension with Monsignor Falcoia over her defense of the original intuition in defining the community's rules. She was forced to leave Scala. However, the friendship and fraternal communion with St. Alphonsus and the other Redemptorists, beginning with St. Gerard, remained unaltered. With deep faith in God and perseverance, she succeeded, in Foggia, in implementing the original project. Her hagiography, on the website of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, reads, "The Servant of God, from her youth, strongly experienced the call to holiness and mystical marriage with Christ, the demanding spouse, and always went in search of radicality in religious consecration, of which she proposed a reform, conceiving the life of the Nuns as a perfect imitation of the

life of Christ and the religious community a living memorial of his redeeming love for all. The Eucharist, the torn heart of the Savior, and devotion to the Virgin Mary formed the permanent center of her spirituality. Immersed in prayer and contemplation of the mystery of Jesus the Redeemer, Sister Mary Celeste faced with steadfastness not only the daily spiritual struggle to strive for perfection but also a series of obstacles and misunderstandings that she encountered on her life journey."¹

3. One of the concepts dear to Mother Celeste is that of a community that is a *living memory of the Father's love in Christ*. This requires that the sisters allow themselves to be transformed by the Spirit into a *living portrait of the Redeemer*. This profound experience and intimate communion, lived on a personal level, enable the community to be a radiant witness of hope for the whole Church, particularly for those most deprived of it. Mother Celeste's is a *spirituality that seeks to live communion with Christ in such an intimate and transforming way that the lives of the faithful become a living proof of God's redeeming love. It is a spirituality of deep contemplation, always characterized by the tension to radiate in a meaningful way the redeeming love of Christ, ever-present and active in the world.*
4. According to Hildegard Magdalen Pleva: "*Viva Memoria* is a constant and dynamic process through which the person is inwardly changed, gradually stripped of the false self, to reveal the Christ who dwells within her. According to the intention of God the Father, this is the Jesus in whose life we have been called to participate by virtue of His incarnation as a human being. The gradual revelation of the dynamic life of Jesus within the soul makes the person and actions of Jesus Christ present in our world and time. According to Mary Celeste, the constant and dynamic process of personal and spiritual transformation is accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit in an environment born of virtue and availability to God in moments of silence and solitude" (PLEVA, H.M. "Viva Memoria. In WALES, Sean, BILLY, Dennis. *Dicionário de Espiritualidade Redentorista*. Goiânia: Scala, 2012, p. 301).
5. From the earliest centuries, the Church has recognized the value of the contemplative life, which is characterized by the search for intimate union with God through constant meditation and liturgical life centered in the Eucharist, the Sacraments, and *Lectio Divina*, asceticism, cloistered and community life, silence, solitude, simplicity and austerity of life, work, a life of charity, constant study, spiritual reading, and self-knowledge. As Pope Francis reminds us in the Apostolic Constitution *Vultum dei quaerere*, on women's contemplative life, "the contemplative life, from the first centuries down to our day, has always remained alive in the Church, in the succession of periods of great vigor and others of decadence, thanks to the constant presence of the Lord, combined with the Church's ability to renew herself and to adapt to changes in society: she has

¹ Cf. <https://www.causesanti.va/it/santi-e-beati/maria-celeste-crostarosa.html>.

always kept alive the search for the face of God and unconditional love for Christ as her specific and characteristic element" (No. 9). Therefore, we must recognize the importance of the Order within the Church, particularly for the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, since both institutions have the same charismatic source, the Redeemer.

6. The Order is having difficulty in many places due to aging Nuns and lack of vocations. Like other Congregations and Monasteries, the Order is also experiencing a time of restructuring through Federations. *I appeal to all confreres and Secretariats that promote vocations to make the vocation to contemplative life known, especially in the Order of the Most Holy Redeemer. The contemplative life of the Sisters enlightens and spiritually sustains the dynamism of the Congregation in its various apostolic works. Through contemplation, the Sisters always remind us to keep our gaze fixed on the Redeemer, the reason for our life, and to whom we consecrate ourselves for his mission.* In many places, the confreres assist the monasteries by helping with the celebration of the Eucharist, confessions, spiritual counseling, and formation. I thank these confreres who provide such service to the Order! *Even if there are difficulties, I encourage the Nuns to make their mission, spirituality, and lifestyle known through different means of communication, especially social networks, without losing the deep dimension of contemplation. They should not be discouraged even when community life is difficult, the number of nuns is insufficient for daily work, and vocations are scarce. One must listen to the request of the Redeemer and, in obedience to his word, cast the nets into the deepest waters of this world without fearing the future and the upheavals of our history (cf. Luke 5:4).*
7. May Mary, Our Mother of Perpetual Help, St. Alphonsus, and Blessed Mary Celeste Crostarosa protect the Order, awaken new vocations to the contemplative life, and give encouragement and perseverance to all the Nuns who spend their lives seeking to be a living memorial of the Redeemer in this world.

Fraternally in Christ the Redeemer,

Fr. Rogério Gomes, C.Ss.R

Superior General

Original: *Italian*