# Bicentenary of the Constitutions

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The two Superiors General sent a letter November 17, announcing the celebration in 2017 of the bicentennial of the pontifical approval of the Congregation.

On the occasion of the bicentenary, the General Government of the brothers has prepared a special edition of the Constitutions. Each brother will receive a copy of that book in the next few days. The General Secretariat has just begun the mailing.

The following is the introduction of the book, written by the Superior General.

Jesus invites. "**Come to Me**", (Mt 11:28). We want to go to him. But by which roads? There are so many different ways to live the Gospel...

The Gospel is so great that no one can embrace it exhaustively. We can only follow Jesus by adopting a concrete way and with a definitive group of companions. Therefore, the Spirit stirs many different charisms, so that all can find their way and their home. We need a way that adapts itself to the size of our heart and to the limits that make us human.

The Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary is one of those roads leading to Jesus, a concrete way to savor God in the way of life, a spiritual home where you can experience the power of the Gospel.

Is it correct to say what was just said? Not too pretentious? No, it is not. The Church confirms the validity of the charism received and "*recognizes us as a religious body*," in the words of the Good Father. In the letter of April 14, 1817, he communicated to

the Congregation the approbation of the Constitutions by the Holy See. The official recognition by the Church has a decisive value; it assigns us a place in the Body of Christ and in the passage of the People of God.

**The Constitutions** is the text that describes our particular access road to the Gospel, which makes our community also a "school of the service of the Lord," as St. Benedict said in his ancient rule (Prologue, 45), that inspired many other rules as also ours. "These Constitutions and Statutes," says Article 153, "are **a way of life for us**, Religious of the Sacred Hearts," which allows us to "proclaim the love of the Sacred Hearts through our lives and our ministry."

Now, it is 200 years since this path was approved. On January 10, 1817, Pope Pius VII confirmed the place of our Congregation in the Church through the approbation of the Constitutions. The Good Father, overjoyed, interpreted this as a renewed call of the Lord: *"The Divine Master seems to open up his heart to us and say, come all of you to me."* It is as if the Church, in approving us, told us: "we are counting on you, be useful to the mission of God in the world, you have something valuable that you cannot keep locked up."

Two centuries have passed and the Constitutions remain indispensable to recognize who we are and to understand our place in the Church today. At every step of the way, in each provincial or general chapter, our community seeks to discern what God is urging upon us and seeks concrete ways to love and serve. This exercise of renewal never starts from scratch, it is rather based on what is said in the Constitutions. It is said in words, but always there is much to say through action. There are known but forgotten things; learned but yet to be rediscovered.

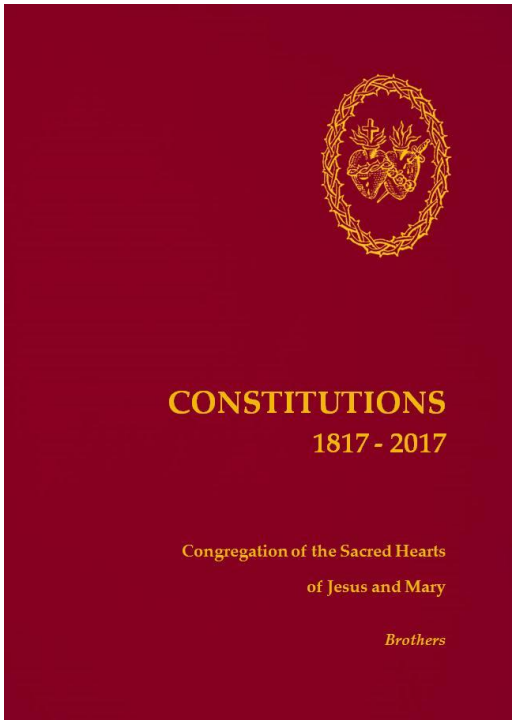
This **bicentennial of the approbation of the Congregation** seems to us an excellent opportunity to publish the special edition of the Constitutions which you have in your hands. Thanks to the work of a group of brothers for whose valuable service I thank them on behalf of all, we have gathered in a single volume, published in eight languages, the current text of the Constitutions, letters of the Good Father announcing the approbation by the Holy See, a historical study that traces the evolution of the Constitutions throughout the history of the Congregation, and the articles of the Rule of St. Benedict which the Good Father recommended for the brothers' reading and meditation.

By putting together these documents, the historical solidarity that unites the different generations of the Congregation since its origins is evidenced in a distinct way. The question arises spontaneously: **who are you today, Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary?** This special publication can help us

answer that question. Seeing where we came from and paying attention to the formulation of who we are, we can nurture the desire to be what we are called to be now and into the future.

Is it just to repeat what we already know? To a large extent, yes. That's because most of the guidelines and decisions of the Congregation in recent decades are really being insistent on things that are already in the Constitutions. But on the other hand, if a brother goes a long time without consulting them, he may find, in rereading them, some pleasant surprises.

In any case, do not have qualms about repeating the essentials again and again. God does the same with us, brings us again and again over the same terrains, places us repeatedly before the same Gospel; but he does it in such a way that it never looks the same. Because we are not acting in a circle closed in on itself, but as a spiral, penetrating as it turns, to an ever greater depth. Always the same Gospel, but never to an already known depth. The same Gospel, ever old, ever new.




Faced with possible signs of fatigue that we can see among us, as individuals or community; faced with the temptation to limit ourselves to repeat already worn out stereotypes; faced with the uncertainty of our times that often leads us to not knowing how to act ... the rereading of our Constitutions presents us with **the challenge of a refreshed youthfulness**, the challenge of daring to begin anew.

I invite you, brothers, to read this book and to meditate on it personally and in community. May the Lord help us to come to Him, to savor him on the way of life, to enter the school of his service, and to proclaim his love wherever we are.

Rome, August 20, 2016