

Called anew to collaborate in God's Work

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Dear brothers and sisters,

At the time of your receiving this letter the superiors of the congregation will be assembling in Bandung, Indonesia. From the 3rd to the 13th of September, the Council of the Congregation (sisters) and the Enlarged General Council (brothers) will be meeting at the diocesan house in Bandung. In the case of the brothers, this is the Council that precedes the General Chapter. Its priority task is to set the agenda for the next General Chapter and the norms for the election of the General Government.

In the General Councils we have had in the past (2021-2022), a major theme has been to rethink together the mission of the Congregation. Following our canonical visitations, we have seen as a General Government the relevance of deepening this theme that concerns us all. Tell me, where are there not challenges that force us to rethink our way of being present in the local churches and of collaborating with the mission? Looking at the reality into which we are inserted begs the question as to whether, or not, we are living through processes of change that force us to review our service to humanity? And as a Congregation, whether we be many or few, old or young, how do we allow the Lord to bring to fulfilment the work that He has begun in us and that precedes us in our world?

We live in uncertain, demanding times. In the face of the questions and challenges we perceive in our world, in our Church and in our religious family, we are overwhelmed. Our own frailties, the short-comings of our brothers and sisters, and the things that do not turn out as we expect, can lead us to be content with trying to do as well as we can. I wonder if in the awareness that the mission is beyond us and that our strengths are not up to the task, there is not a new call from the Lord, that he is making to each one of us and to the Congregation as a whole.

In this context and on the occasion of our Councils of the Congregation, I believe that it is good for us to go to the spiritual source from which our founders drank. Their response to mission was first and foremost to seek and make themselves available to what God was already doing in the world and in the Church. Not that they had great clarity from the start about what to do and how to do it. They discerned and responded to God's calls to collaborate with his action (*L'oeuvre de Dieu*) and to "be useful to the Church". As time went on and the ministries diversified - education of children, formation of seminarians, parish missions in France, missions ad extra - the more they perceived that the Congregation was definitely "God's action".

This meant that any pastoral initiative or definition of the style of community or the service of authority was the response to an experience matured in adoration and service. There, in contemplation in action, the brothers and sisters discovered that the Lord Jesus and Mary were counting on them. The focus, then, was not on them, with their achievements and failures, but on what the Hearts of Jesus and Mary wanted to reveal through our brothers and sisters. Their collaboration in God's action was the response, full of ardour and zeal, to the initiative of God who is always first to give his love and associate us with his action in the world.

All this was said in the name that our founders wanted for our congregation: **Zealots and Adorers of the Sacred Hearts**. This is a name that contains a mysticism, a resolution and a missionary spirit that enabled them to face obstacles, to integrate fragilities, to learn from failures.

"We need a name which will remind our brothers each day of their duties and obligations, which will help them never forget that they must sacrifice themselves out of zeal for the Lord; that they will fail at their most essential vow the moment they want to live for themselves and not work for the salvation of their brothers and sisters" (Memorandum on the Title "Zealots", 6 December, 1816).

The Good Father concludes saying:

"It is under the title Zealots that we have joyfully borne more than twenty years of persecutions and trials. It has been our consolation, our happiness and, I would dare say, our strength and our support. (Memorandum on the Title "Zealots", 6 December, 1816).

With the approval of the Congregation by the Holy See, the Good Father re-reads history and discovers as a constant that God, who initiated the work, has faithfully sustained it, in spite of the hostility of the context and the precariousness of means.

"The Lord has not ceased to bestow on us the miracles of his Providential care. He has led us by the hand." (Circular Letter of the Good Father, 14 April 1817).

In these reflections, our founders pondered the passage of time. What they did not see so clearly at the beginning became for them a conviction of faith. They confirm that the centre is God and his action, his provident love, the passionate love of Jesus and Mary which makes his consecrated men and women his zealots. In short, the founders perceived in this ecclesial recognition, a second call to the Congregation. It is not the many or few forces of the Congregation that give it its value, or the many or few resources it has, or the audacity of its decisions that give it its prestige. It is above all a question of making ourselves available to God's action, being useful to the Church. It is a matter of helping each other to respond with gratitude, generosity and resolution to this call.

God is counting on each one of us to carry on his work. We ask that each of us, in our personal prayer, and also in our communities, pray for our Councils of the Congregation. Let us ask the Lord, through the intercession of the Good Mother and the Good Father, to help us to recognise the action of God who precedes us in our world and in our Church, and to give us the grace to support his work, our mission, with promptness and perseverance.

Faternally,

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