

MARY OBTAINS FOR US A STRONG FAITH

Our Lady exhorts us to be strong and firm in the faith. She prays with us and for us that the Holy Spirit may fill our hearts with a strong faith. Evidently Our Lady sees that we need it. If we neglect prayer, our faith becomes weak and then is lost. Our Lady asks us to pray that our whole life may become prayer. It is important to be supported in our journey of prayer because sometimes we are tired, we do not feel like praying ... This encouragement to pray, even between parents and children, is vital for each of us. It is a question of lifting up the one who is down, lending a hand to one who is tired, and helping spiritually the one who needs it. We are called to make our life a continual prayer, a relationship with God our Father, living in his presence and doing his will. **This prayerful faith is expressed in adoration of God and generous service of neighbour** especially those most in need. We would like to remember in this context the invitation given by **Fr Enrico Stasi**, Provincial of Piedmont and Valle d'Aosta, to give importance in the Salesian communities to the commemoration on the 24th of each month.

In our groups and in our families we have to **strengthen adoration and the recitation of the Rosary for the family**. In a letter written by Sister Lucia of Fatima to Bishop Charles Caffara (now Cardinal of Bologna), appointed by John Paul II to plan and establish the Pontifical Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family, the visionary of Fatima wrote that the final battle between the Lord and the kingdom of Satan will be on the family and marriage. Do not be afraid, she added, because whoever works for the sanctity of marriage and the family will always be opposed and fought in all ways, because this is the decisive point. She then concluded, but Our Lady has already crushed his head. This is the key point, because it affects the very pillar of creation, the truth of the relationship between man and woman and between generations. If the supporting pillar is destroyed, the entire building collapses and that is what we are seeing now.

In her circular letter of 24 September, commenting on the Seventh Congress of Mary Help of Christians, **Mother Yvonne Reungoat**, Superior General of the FMA, writes: "I have observed how this presence (of Mary) in our lives brings to light the potential and resources capable of transforming the world starting from the families, and gives a new impetus for vocations to the Salesian Family, especially among young people. The theme is in close agreement with the decision of the Church to dedicate two Synods to the family. **As Daughters of Mary Help of Christians we feel in close harmony with the Association of Mary Help of Christians.**" In this regard we report below the text sent by **Sister Luisa Miranda**, FMA Councillor for the Sector of the Salesian Family, to the Provincials and Visitors.

Strengthened by this spiritual and formative communion we continue our shared journey with the spirit of joy and commitment.



Lucca Tullio, President
Fr Pierluigi Cameroni SDB, Spiritual Animator



With Mary and like Mary

Rigenerated in his Mercy

2. Mercy is the womb of faith

Sister Linda Pocher FMA

Invited to the banquet of the Word

In the Holy Year of Mercy, we want to put into practice the invitation of Jesus: "Be merciful as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36). The Holy Father says, "It is a programme of life as demanding as it is rich with joy and peace. Jesus's command is directed to anyone willing to listen to his voice (cf. Lk 6:27). In order to be capable of mercy, therefore, we must first of all dispose ourselves to listen to the Word of God. This means rediscovering the value of silence in order to meditate on the Word that comes to us. In this way, it will be possible to contemplate God's mercy and adopt it as our lifestyle." (MV 13). The "commandment of mercy" was directed by Jesus first of all to his disciples: those who hear his word intentionally (cf. Lk 6:27). Therefore, looking at them, we can understand what it means to meditate, contemplate and accept the Word. The Gospel tells us that after meeting Jesus they began to stay with him always and everywhere (Jn 1:39). Their whole life was involved in the relationship with the Master and it was precisely this closeness that made them privileged hearers of his teaching. This closeness, combined with the Easter gift of the Spirit, transformed these uneducated and arrogant men into missionaries of mercy.

But how can someone who is not a contemporary of Jesus get totally involved in a relationship with him? In the celebration of the Eucharist, where the Lord invites everyone to the banquet of his word, we can hear his voice and eat his body filled with his Spirit as Congar writes, and the only thing that can drive his loving presence away from us is the misfortune to fall into serious sin! *Participating with faith in the Eucharist is therefore the supreme way to enter with our whole person into a relationship with Jesus.* To stay in this relationship and allow ourselves to be transformed by it, the Church has always suggested that we dedicate some time every day to meditating on the Word that is addressed to us in the celebration. In the Eucharist it is God who invites us into his house. In our daily meditation on the Word of God we invite him and open the house of our hearts to him.

Meditating daily on the Word, we learn to be truly ourselves before God and to allow him full freedom to act in our lives. In practice, this means finding a quiet place, and there, in silence, asking explicitly for the help of the Holy Spirit and of Mary Help of Christians, taking the gospel in hand, and then, in the faith that God is speaking to us, reading and imagining that we are involved in the scene that is related, trying to relive what the men and women to whom he was speaking experienced in the presence of Jesus: amazement at his unheard-of gestures, rebellion in the face of his more radical demands, and consolation in experiencing through Him the infinite goodness of God the Father. Gradually we feel a genuine affection for Jesus growing within us, the ability to name our sins and the desire and the strength to put his teaching into practice.

If listening to the Word of God is to be authentic meditation and contemplation that transforms us, it must involve the whole of our lives and we must be guided by the Holy Spirit, who, as Jesus taught his disciples, has the task of reminding us of all that he said and helping us to understand and make it always alive and effective (Jn 14:26).

Before going on, we ask ourselves: what place does listening to the Word of God really have in my life of faith?

The Mother of Jesus was there

Where God speaks to people, in words or gestures, Mary is always there. Like a mother teaching her child to walk, she takes us by the hand and leads us to Jesus. By word and example she suggests how we are to behave with him. We can only thank her for this maternal presence, because it is a gift that precedes any desire or initiative on our part, as we see very clearly from the story of the wedding at Cana (John 2, 1-11). Contemplating this episode of the Gospel, we can see how the faith of the disciples is the result of God's mercy and how Mary collaborates with Jesus in their transformation from unbelievers to believers. The evangelist writes: "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him." (Jn 2:11). This was the first but also the foundation and paradigm. *The first of the signs of Jesus* indicates the manner and purpose of all his signs. *The beginning of the faith of the disciples is the beginning and the manner of our faith.*



St. Irenaeus says, "The glory of God is man fully alive," or man saved from the threat of death and gifted with eternal life. Precisely in the sign of the water turned into wine, to save a wedding party that was facing disaster, the disciples recognized the work of divine mercy that looks upon the misery of his creatures and saves them. On their first encounter with Jesus they were amazed at his mysterious power and they began to put their trust in Him. This first sign is critical, since it allows Jesus to show them "greater things than these" (Jn 1,50; 3,12). Lack of faith, in fact, is the biggest obstacle that can prevent God from showing his mercy.

Mary's mediation is so important in the creation of the sign, that her presence was mentioned by the evangelist even before that of her Son: "There was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples." (Jn 2,1-2). In the presence of the disciples, she draws the Lord's attention to the poverty of the spouses - "they have no wine". Then she urges the servants to obey him fully - "Do whatever he tells you." The disciples are well aware of what happened, unlike the spouses who receive the gift without knowing it. The sharp reply of Jesus - "What is that to you or to me?" - was incomprehensible for the moment, especially as the prayer of Mary was heard so abundantly. A stone jar could hold from 80 to 120 litres of water! But the disciples could see clearly in her what faith is: intimate and profound knowledge, simplicity in asking, confidence even in the face of contrary appearances, and obedience without any conditions.

Mary had learned all of this over the years at Nazareth, when, docile to the Spirit, she took care of Jesus. At the same time she was being prepared by Him to become the Mother of all believers. And when finally "the hour" of Jesus came at Calvary, and he was abandoned by everyone and hanging on the cross, Mary was still the first to receive the gift. When she was faced with the reality of his blood being shed and the Spirit poured out for the sake of sinners, the deeper significance of the water changed into wine became clear. It was really only a "sign" - a symbolic anticipation of a much greater reality. In the words of Balthasar, "The Lord changes the water of nature into the wine of grace. Not a small glass of wine drawn from the six stone jars, but all the water of human life. Everything we do -

sleeping, eating, loving and dying - everything is taken into this metamorphosis, and in the end we can pour this wine for the Lord as our best wine."

God's mercy, his bending down to us in Jesus, is also the womb of our faith: His goodness which from the beginning of our lives is poured upon us in so many ways. It preceded and accompanied patiently our growth in trust in Him. Perhaps, like the bride and groom at Cana, we too have long enjoyed the intercession of Mary without realizing it, until we met someone who helped us to become aware of it. The experience of discovering the mercy of God the Father and the maternal protection of Mary is also at the origin of the educational method of Don Bosco. So much so that, as Sr. Piera Ruffinato showed clearly in the recent Congress of Mary Help of Christians, "the awareness of being a child of Mary ... is for every member of the Salesian Family a prerequisite if we are to live the way of paternity or maternity which is part of the Preventive System."

But even Don Bosco did not acquire this precious awareness all by himself. Mamma Margaret, with her strong faith and her catechetical skill, was the first to introduce John to "the right relationship with God," and make him feel that he was a "favourite son" of Mary. Mamma Margaret's educational mediation was followed by others equally significant: Don Calosso, his friend Luigi Comollo, Don Cafasso. In different and complementary ways they contributed, throughout his life, to help John Bosco to grow in faith, even to a high standard of holiness. Don Bosco himself says in his memoirs that their help was indispensable.

We ask ourselves: **is there currently someone in my life, who is mature in faith, to whom I entrust myself to be helped to grow in confidence in God and in Mary?**



Become servants, like Mary

In the Chapel of the Scrovegni in Padua, there is a fresco by Giotto depicting the wedding at Cana. The different moments of the story are united in a single framework: Jesus and Mary are located at either end of the table, each of them looking towards the servants and with their right hand raised in the gesture of giving a command. Beside Jesus, John and Peter observe and comment on what has happened. Next to Mary are the bride and groom: she looks at him while he looks out of the picture, thus drawing our attention. In the centre of the scene are the servants: one is listening carefully to Jesus; another one is bowing in the direction of Mary; one is offering wine to the steward; another is filling the jars with water. With their simple gestures, the servants are at the very centre of action, which could not have been accomplished without their readiness and willingness to put into practice the Lord's command.

The faith of the servants, in this case, is stronger than that of the disciples. Mary who said of herself "I am the handmaid of the Lord" (Lk 1, 38. 48) sought the servants' collaboration in order to show the disciples what they are called to become. The servants lived up to her expectations, and did well what they were asked to do. In reality, it was nothing extraordinary, just the usual behind-the-scenes work at any party: bringing water and ensuring that everything is ready for the host and his guests. Jesus likes to call himself a "servant" (Mt 20:28), especially when he is foretelling his passion. But then, at the time of his departure, he says to his disciples, "I do not call you servants, but friends." (Jn 15). We see

the wonder of God's mercy: the one who stripped himself and lowered himself in humble obedience, has a place of honour reserved for him in Heaven! Here again Mary is the first. She, the Servant, becomes the Queen at the King's right hand. Don Bosco wrote to the first missionaries, "In toil and suffering, let us not forget that we have a great reward awaiting us in heaven."

Among the many stars of the Salesian Family Sister Maria Romero shines particularly for her clear faith in Jesus and Mary, which is one with her care for the poor in their material and spiritual needs. "In her presence the action of the Holy Spirit could be felt," said her *misioneritas*, the girls she trained to go out to the edges of the city and the more distant villages. Despite the immensity of her apostolic work, what fascinates us is her sense of being a "humble instrument" of the love of God. Like Mary, the handmaid, Sister Maria obeyed with simplicity and without counting the cost - despite misunderstandings and endless difficulties - in order that God might reach the poorest and wrap them in his mercy.

Readiness and willingness to put into practice the Word of God should be a hallmark of the devotees of Mary Help of Christians, as it was of the servants at Cana. We should ask ourselves, am I willing to do what Jesus asks of me, whatever it may cost?

The paper can be read at the following site:

www.admadonbosco.org/index.php?lang=en

and here: www.donbosco-torino.it/

For every communication you can contact

the following email address: pcameroni@sdb.org

Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice

Via dell'Ateneo Salesiano, 81

00139, ROME

Italy

Provincials and the Superiors of Vice-Provinces
Provincial Delegates of the Salesian Family
Animators of ADMA

Dear Sisters, I greet you with great affection after the intense and wonderful experience we enjoyed during the celebrations for the bicentenary of the birth of Don Bosco. We witnessed intense activity by young people and groups of the Salesian Family, in particular by ADMA in the Seventh International Congress of Mary Help of Christians in Turin; Past Pupils in the Fifth World Assembly in Mornese, and the Salesian Cooperators at the meeting of the new World Council in Turin. These days saw a unique explosion of the Salesian charism with its different faces in a plurality of languages that makes the draft drawn up by our beloved Father Don Bosco appear relevant in today's world.

Now I would like to point out the wealth shared in the *Seventh International Congress of Mary Help of Christians* which was dedicated especially to the family: *Hic domus mea mea inde gloria mea - from the house of Mary to our homes*. The topics, testimonies, prayer, and the presence of families - children, young people and adults - gave a special stamp to this Congress which was meant for the whole Salesian Family. I invite you to visit the website of this event where you will find reports on what we experienced, with documents, photographs and films that make it more lively and concrete. They are available in Italian, English and Spanish. The link is: <http://www.congressomariaausiliatrice2015.org/images/AttiCongressoFinal.pdf>.

In many places ADMA (the Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians), is becoming a force of renewal for families, and this is happening in some of our works. For us, Mary is always the Help of Christians. She is always a source of spiritual renewal for families, groups, educational communities and parishes. This is how Don Bosco saw it:

The Association of Mary Help of Christians offers a way of sanctification and of Salesian apostolate. In particular Don Bosco founded it to involve the majority of the ordinary people in the spirituality and mission of the Salesian Congregation as a second group of his work.

*It emphasizes, in a special way, worship of the Eucharist and devotion to Mary Help of Christians, in all forms, public and private, approved by the Church. It works in communion and fidelity to the Church's Pastors and in collaboration with other church groups, especially those of the Salesian Family.*¹

¹ Regulations 2003. Art. 2

At this difficult point in time, Mary continues to say to Jesus especially for families: *They have no wine*, and she tells us: *Do whatever he tells you* (Jn. 2, 2-5). This commitment to family was mentioned by Pope Francis in his *Letter to the Salesian Family*, and also in the Acts of our 23rd General Council, because today this is an urgent need.

For further details on ADMA contact Sr Leslye Sándigo at lessandigo24@gmail.com. On the website of the Institute you will find a direct link to the web page of ADMA, where the formation programme appears every month in seven languages. We are forwarding in an attachment the *Guidelines and Commitments of ADMA*.

On the feast of the Nativity of Our Lady, the beginning of our salvation, we invoke her blessing on all families and on our educative communities. Together with our Mother Mary, I greet you with great affection,

Sr. Ma. Luisa Miranda L.
Councillor for the Salesian Family

FAMILY CHRONICLE

SEVENTH CONGRESS - MEETING of PRIMARY ADMA

On Saturday 19 and Sunday 20 September 2015 approximately 150 adults in the families of the Primary ADMA of Turin met for two days to share their experience of the Congress. The views expressed were very positive and we are thinking of sharing them in a special booklet that will be put on the website. It was agreed by all that we have experienced something beautiful, spiritually strong and intense. Mary Help of Christians accompanies and renews her association with special attention to the family in keeping with the journey of the Church.



SEVENTH CONGRESS - TESTIMONY FROM ARGENTINA

After days of great joy and intensity in Turin, I want to thank you for the way we were cared for, and I want to congratulate all those who participated in any way and helped to make us feel at home.

I want to ask if there is any plan to form ADMA for Families, because we in ADMA must be aware of the situation of families and know how to deal with their formation. This is a dream I would like to see come true, and I will try to make it happen in my Salesian house, because I was touched by the motto, "from generation to generation". I realize that this is the only way we can pass on to our descendants this love for Mary, our Mother and Help, and for our Father Don Bosco.

(Alicia G. Di Gaetano Channels, Vice-President of the Provincial Council of Southern Argentina).

SEVENTH CONGRESS - TESTIMONY FROM CHILE



I do not know if you can imagine what I felt when for the first time I set foot in the house of our mother Mary. It was as if an electric current passed through my body and my tears flowed without my realizing it.

I can testify with certainty that I felt her embrace welcoming me to her house and my house. And definitely with my five senses I perceived the fullest meaning of the motto of our congress: "*Hic domus mea mea inde gloria mea*".

Every testimony from those who were part of this conference was a priceless treasure ... We do not just listen, but in harmony with the Holy Spirit we feel the message for our lives in the depth of our being. We thank everyone for sharing a part of their lives.

Today, with our eyes fixed on Jesus, guided by our Mother and Help, we advance along the path drawn by Don Bosco. As father and teacher he has left us a clear way of serving the family, not just the one that God entrusts to our care, but also those we meet and serve on our way through life.

Dialogue, respect, love and religion are fundamental in bringing the fragrance of the Holy Spirit into our lives and into their lives. (Lilian Via San Martin, President, La Serena - Chile).

MADRID - NATIONAL COORDINATION MEETING

A meeting of the National Coordination of ADMA in Spain took place at the Provincial House in Madrid on Saturday 26 September 2015. Many lay people and SDB and FMA animators from different parts of the country took part. **Fr. Joan Faner** chaired the meeting and presented and guided the discussion on the different themes on the agenda. At the beginning he was welcomed by Fr Pierluigi Cameroni, World Animator of the Association, who attended the meeting and made his contribution of guidance and support.



The participants shared their experience of the Seventh International Congress, emphasizing both the positive aspects of the meeting and the need to continue their programme of assistance to families, and they expressed their appreciation for the rich content offered. Later they shared different proposals on the formation process of the groups, stressing the importance of the monthly contribution through ADMAonline. There were three themes of a more organizational nature: the drawing up of a regulation for the constitution of a National Coordinator of ADMA; the organization of training days, scheduled for the end of July 2016; and a proposal for some training days in Minorca.

JUDIBANA (VENEZUELA) - DIPLOMA OF AFFILIATION



The members of the ADMA delegation of Judibana were happy to receive the Diploma of Affiliation to the Primary Association at the Shrine of Mary Help of Christians in Valdocco, Turin.

We keep in our minds and in our prayers all our members who have returned to the house of the Father, the pillars of our association and all those who followed them in the beautiful and gratifying journey of more than half a century in the parish of Christ the King in Judibana. Long live Jesus and Mary!