

## MARY INVITES US TO TAKE UP THE CROSS

Our Lady is very practical. Like a decisive and strong Mother she calls us to conversion. Lent is a time of conversion, a time of grace, a time of penance, and a time of renunciation. We need to do more, we need to change our lives, and we need to love more. We need to be people who love God above all things, who pray and are in contact with God. It is a question of fighting against the constant temptation of apathy, compromise and mediocrity that renders our life dull and insignificant.

*At the root of so much evil and confusion in the world today is the fact that **many people are lost, they are sheep without a shepherd, aimless and leaderless, without meaning in their lives.*** Today unfortunately everything has become has become trivial, we have no goal, we have no desire to be holy. Today the world offers us footballers, dancers, and film stars and we no longer have true models. Today our youth are distracted by so many things, so many vanities, while Our Lady asks us to leave the vanities and follow Jesus who died on the cross for us. Today, unfortunately, there are no longer figures like St Philip Neri, Don Bosco and many other saints, who were like magnets that attracted young people.

*The purpose of life is to take up our cross and follow Jesus and to share the glory of his Resurrection.* Conversion lasts a lifetime. When we waken each morning we should say: today I want to be better than yesterday, because there is a battle between good and evil going on within us always. It is a question of taking up the Cross every day, looking at Jesus and walking after him as true disciples, journeying together as disciples in an adventure of the Spirit. We are called in a special way to love, to pray, to do what Jesus asks us to do and what he himself did first - **to love unto death.** We contemplate Jesus with the crown of thorns, scourged, wounded and dripping blood, humiliated unto death on a cross. Our Lady urges us to be proud to be Christians, to be joyful witnesses. The early Christians were martyred and abused and many Christians today are suffering death in many parts of the world, while the world remains indifferent. Our Lady calls us to bear witness with courage that they may see that we Christians are different, because we have patience, love, understanding, we pray, we are light in the darkness, and we are hopeful.

Our wish for a Happy Easter is that, guided by Mary Help of Christians, we may leave the land of slavery, and walk towards the promised land of a life lived in the joy of the Resurrection.





## With Mary and like Mary Rogenerated in his Mercy

### 7. The mercy of God heals us and sets us free

*Sister Linda Pocher FMA*

#### God's patience

On 17 March 2013, Pope Francis, a mere four days in office, went to St Peter's Square and launched without hesitation his call to us to allow ourselves "to be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20). The opportunity was given him by the Gospel of the day: the meeting between Jesus and the adulteress (Jn 8.1 to 11). The Pope stressed the attitude of Jesus toward the sinner: "we do not hear words of contempt, we do not hear words of condemnation, but only words of love, mercy, and an invitation to conversion ... Brothers and sisters, God's face is that of a merciful father, who always has patience. Have you thought about God's patience, the patience he has with each of us? That is his mercy." It is this patience of God that changes the world. The Father awaits us in faith. He has faith in us, in the fact that sooner or later we will return to Him and that we will give him the chance to cancel our sin forever. *The Father can heal and wants to heal whatever it is in us that prompts us to evil. He can and will free us from the consequences of sin. In this way, wiping out our sins, God makes the world little by little "less cold and more just."* And there is no sin, however grave, that God cannot forgive and wipe out forever: "Come now, let us argue it out" says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool" (Isaiah 1.18).

"I remember," the Pope went on, "in 1992, when the statue of Our Lady of Fatima was brought to Buenos Aires. I went to hear confessions. An elderly woman came to me, eighty years old, humble, very humble. I looked at her and said: "Do you want to go to confession?" "Yes," she said. "But if you have no sins?" And she said to me: "We all have sins." "But maybe the Lord will not forgive them." "The Lord forgives everything," she told me quite definitely. "But how do you know?" I asked her. *"If the Lord did not forgive everything, the world would not exist."* I felt an urge to ask her: "Tell me, madam, have you studied at the Gregorian?" Because what she said is the wisdom that the Holy Spirit gives: the inner wisdom of the mercy of God. Let us not forget this word: God is never tired of forgiving us, never! "Oh, Father, what is the problem?" Well, *the problem is that we get tired, we do not want it, and we get tired of asking for forgiveness. He never gets tired of forgiving, but we, at times, get tired of asking for forgiveness."*

And why do we get tired? Because *in reality it is not easy to ask for forgiveness.* To ask for forgiveness I have to recognize my guilt, great or small as it may be. But it is easier to minimize: to think that I do nothing seriously wrong and so postpone going to confession, or go just as a formality. To make a good confession I need to break every compromise with evil and I must admit that I cannot do so without God's help. But it is much easier to "play the victim": complain about everything and expect others to change. So I end up confessing the sins of others, instead of my own. I seek consolation instead of conversion! Certainly God is not offended by my poverty, the effort I make to repent and to stand naked before Him who created me and loves me as I am (Psalm 138; Isaiah 43; Lk 12,7). Unfortunately, however, my resistance really has the power to prevent God accomplishing in me the wonders of his forgiveness!



A sincere desire to be forgiven is what opens the heart to receive God's forgiveness: **do I feel in me this desire? If I do not feel it, do I ask for it insistently every day in prayer?**

## The roots and the fruits of our actions

Our moral life is a complex reality. Sacred Scripture compares it to a tree (Ps 1; Lk 6,43). We can imagine that the trunk is made up of our daily actions, while the roots are everything that guides and influences our actions - past experiences, beliefs, habits - and the fruits are the consequences of our actions. The complication comes from the fact that *every good action we do strengthens the link with the good and makes us grow in virtue, while every bad action reinforces the addiction to evil, and plunges us into sin*. And here is the point: *the more we are virtuous, the more we are free to grow in goodness and to avoid evil; the more we are evil, the more we are slaves*, that is, we cannot, by sheer force of will leave evil for good: it takes the intervention of God who sets us free and gives us a chance to start again (Rm 7.18 to 25). We can be sure, too, that at the root of good works there is always the love of God (Eph 2:10). It is more difficult to find the root of our evil deeds. They may come either from a wrong use of our freedom, or from the way we have been taught, or from some nasty wound of the past that has not been healed.

This dialectic of vice and virtue is not just for "great sinners", but applies to all Christians. In daily life in the family, at work, in the community, it is not always easy to distinguish good actions from bad, especially when it comes to private actions or intentions, which are not seen and do not seem to have an immediate effect on the life of others. The Word of God comes to our aid, and suggests that we learn to recognize the tree by its fruits (Mt 7,20). The first fruit of sin is the sadness that tends to melancholy and often is accompanied by shame or contempt for oneself and fear of being judged by God. Other fruits of sin are: envy, greed, jealousy, discord, a lack of self-control, impatience with our duties, eating disorders, sexual or emotional disorders. These are the exact opposite of the fruits of the Spirit: "love, peace, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5: 20-22). The tone and effect of our confession changes when we find the courage to open our hearts before God and, starting from the bad fruits that we recognize in ourselves, go back along the road that leads us to discover the roots of our sins! It is certainly a difficult and delicate task, one we cannot venture on alone: it is important to be guided by an expert confessor or a good spiritual guide.

Don Bosco was very familiar with this method! In the biography of Michael Magone he has left us a vivid example of the miraculous conversion that can result from a good confession. Michael Magone was a street kid. His father was dead. His mother had several children and few resources to care for them. She had to work full time, which did not allow her to take care of their education. Michael, left to himself, had become the "universal trouble-maker" at school and in the parish. On the streets of Carmagnola he was "the general". A chance meeting with Don Bosco one autumn evening changed his life. At first Michael acted the tough guy. But then the sincere interest of the priest touched his heart. Michael knew that his life was in danger, some of his companions had already gone to jail. He feared the same fate, but did not know what to do to get himself out of trouble. Don Bosco understood immediately and offered him a lifeline. He invited him to Turin and offered him the chance to study.

At the Oratory Michael found it hard to accept the discipline of the environment. The first day he ran around like a madman during recreation, but soon sadness got the upper hand. He realized that he had acquired many bad habits which he could not get rid of. He saw that his comrades were joyful, serene, and diligent about their duties, and it made him suffer. One day he confided in a boy who was acting as a sort of guardian angel to him, "My companions are good. They practise their religion and become even better. And what am I? A rascal who cannot take part, and this makes me really sad and very unhappy." Don Bosco saw that the boy was becoming aware of the evil fruit of his past choices. He approached him and, with gentleness and discretion, prepared him for confession. He helped him to pick up the thread of his conscience and to surrender to the mercy of the Father all those things, past and present, which kept him from being always cheerful and doing his best in study, in prayer and in his relationships with others. The boy was transformed to the point that Don Bosco offered him to others as a model to be imitated.

**Do I try to return to myself and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, look into my heart: do I find any evil fruits in me?**

### Mary and the Church intercede for us

The Holy Year of Mercy is a particularly favourable time (2 Cor 6,2), to break once and for all with evil and bind ourselves to the good that is Jesus. The Jubilee, in fact, also brings the chance to receive the gift of *indulgence* thanks to the intercession of the Church. "In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, God forgives our sins, which he truly blots out; and yet sin leaves a negative effect on the way we think and act. But the mercy of God is stronger than even this. It becomes *indulgence* on the part of the Father who, through the Bride of Christ, his Church, reaches the pardoned sinner and frees him from every residue left by the consequences of sin, enabling him to act with charity, to grow in love rather than to fall back into sin." (MV 22).

The Church on earth lives in close communion with Mary and the saints who are already in Heaven. This beautiful reality of our faith is represented in images of Our Lady of Mercy to be found in churches and shrines around the world. In them we see Mary who, aided by the angels and saints, opens wide her mantle to welcome all those who rely on her. Mary and the Saints, with the offering of their lives and their prayers, support us in our struggle against evil and always lead us closer to Jesus. Forgiveness comes from his blood shed on the cross and it is for each of us so much more effective, the greater is our desire to be forgiven and our willingness to change our lives.

The communion of saints is a gift from God, which is realized in a special way in the celebration of the Eucharist. In it, the Holy Spirit unites us to Jesus, and to the brothers and sisters present, past and future, and especially to the Saints and to the Blessed "whose number is beyond counting (cf. Rev 7:4). Their holiness comes to the aid of our weakness in a way that enables the Church, with her maternal prayers and her way of life, to fortify the weakness of some with the strength of others. *Hence, to live the indulgence of the Holy Year means to approach the Father's mercy with the certainty that his forgiveness extends to the entire life of the believer. To gain an indulgence is to experience the holiness of the Church, who bestows upon all the fruits of Christ's redemption, so that God's love and forgiveness may extend everywhere.*" (MV 22).

The conditions for receiving the indulgence are: to approach the sacrament of confession and receive communion; to pray for the Pope's intentions; and to enter through the Holy Door. In his desire that the mercy of God may really reach the ends of the earth (Acts 1.8), the Pope decided that in every diocese one or more holy doors be opened. Also, anyone who is unable to perform the pilgrimage on account of illness or because they are in prison, can receive the indulgence by offering their situation of suffering to God with a sincere heart.

Let us take advantage of the Jubilee indulgence with joy and gratitude, knowing that, the greater our desire to be forgiven, the more effective the action of God's mercy will be in our lives!



The paper can be read at the following site:

[www.admadonbosco.org/index.php?lang=en](http://www.admadonbosco.org/index.php?lang=en)

and here: [www.donbosco-torino.it/](http://www.donbosco-torino.it/)

For every communication you can contact

the following email address: [pcameroni@sdb.org](mailto:pcameroni@sdb.org)

## FAMILY CHRONICLE

### MEMORIES OF 2016 SPIRITUALITY DAYS

I am happy to have participated in this event and it was valuable for me to meet so many people that I got to know during the International Congress of Mary Help of Christians. I really felt a family atmosphere of joy. Of all the talks that were given many phrases have remained in my mind and heart but especially:

- "Mary's journey from her fiat to the Magnificat becomes the model for every Christian on their pilgrimage of faith from their initiation to God's plan and to the full enjoyment of the beauty of God's plan, through service and the grace of every day, reaching out with concern to people in need, meeting others in friendship, and the missionary effort to bring Jesus into someone else's house..." (Sr Maria Ko)
- The invitation of the Rector Major Fr Angel to 'infect' the people we meet with enthusiasm for the Salesian Family.
- The exhortation of Fr Franco di Natale to take the journey step by step, but without ever stopping. Each at their own pace, but always moving. I felt my heart touched and I felt challenged personally by these expressions. I think they are a wonderful invitation to live the pilgrimage of faith and life to the full, in friendship and Salesian joy, and without fear. I think this may be for me, and for us young people of ADMA in particular, a beautiful personal challenge and an exciting adventure to live together, to continue to walk and to grow in faith, trusting in God and letting Mary take us by the hand in order to understand God's plan for us and help us to fulfil it.

I thank the Lord for letting me know the Salesians and for the gift of being able to be part of this great family (Elizabeth from Youth ADMA in Turin).

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### TIRUCHY (INDIA)



During the Extraordinary Visitation to the Indian Province of Tiruchy, Fr Václav Klement, Councillor for the East Asia-Oceania Region, met with 13 members of the Association of Mary Help of Christians (ADMA), who are working in the Duraisampuram parish of the Salesian community of Sivakasi - Vidivelli.

**SPAIN - RENEWAL OF**

## THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE

The national committee of the Mary Help of Christians Association held a second annual meeting to draw up a roadmap for renewal. The meeting was held in Atocha, Madrid on 13 February 2016. It was attended by lay members and spiritual animators SDB and FMA of the six existing ADMA areas in Spain, coordinated by the National Delegate, Joan Faner, SDB. During the meeting there was discussion on the current situation of the association, as described in the report of the Provincial, Fr Cristóbal López. He said that ADMA is the most popular group that maintains and spreads devotion to Mary Help of Christians and the Salesian spirit.

They need better organization (Governing Council, members, well-prepared meetings, minutes), more formation and a deeper sense of belonging. Along with this they should also see if they can achieve greater male participation and more young members. In some cases there is a need to improve the quality of accompaniment on the part of leaders and spiritual animators. The rules for the election of the National Committee formed and run by lay people were presented and approved at the meeting. Two lay members from each area will be elected on 18 June. This represents a significant step forward in lay co-responsibility for the Association.

There was discussion also on participation in the **School of Delegates of the Salesian Family** to be held in El Escorial in late July 2016, and the proposed content. Finally Fr Mario Pardos, animator of the Valencia area, reported that the **new book of the "Mary Help of Christians" series on the International Congresses** is now available to all. (Joan Faner).



## CATANIA (ITALY) - RETREAT

From 17 to 19 February the Salesian Family of Catania had a retreat on the theme of the jubilee year, given by Fr Pascual Chávez. In three days they reflected on **Mercy**: 1. The merciful Father; 2. The Son who is Merciful like the Father; 3. The Sons and Daughters who are merciful like the Father and the Son; 4. Mary, Mother of Mercy. Several of our members of ADMA participated (see photo).

## LETTER FROM MOTHER YVONNE, FMA SUPERIOR: *Together we celebrate the Father's mercy (11 February 2016)*

The meeting with the Rector Major and the General Council of the Salesians offered us an opportunity to reflect together on the family from an educational perspective. Fr Andrea Bozzolo, SDB, spoke about a key synodal event highlighting the link between the family and the Church, and some challenges facing the Salesian charism: affective formation, accompaniment of young people who are preparing for marriage, promotion of women at all levels, pastoral work with families who come into relationship with our works or who are part of the Salesian Family, youth ministry and vocations ministry.

In line with the 23<sup>rd</sup> General Chapter and the aspirations of the Synod on the family, we are invited to explore these issues so vital for today, creating local opportunities for dialogue and reflection with the Salesians and other groups of the Salesian Family, especially the Salesian Cooperators, Past Pupils and ADMA. **The pastoral care of families in the educational mission is, in fact, one of the holy doors to open and enter with wisdom, courage and merciful love.**

## MADRID (SPAIN) - MEETING OF DISTRICT COUNCILS

The annual congress of the local Councils of the Madrid area took place in the Salesian parish of St. Francis de Sales on Saturday 20 February 2016. There were 15 Councils and 60 participants as well as some SDB and



FMA. The meeting was led by Fr Mariano Saez de Castro, spiritual animator of the Central Zone and Salesian Rector of Estrecho. The local council prepared this meeting with great affection and enthusiasm. It was the 81st anniversary of the Local ADMA, as the President Ms Concepción Esteban Sumastre told us. We shared some personal testimonies about the presence of our Mother Mary Help of Christians in our lives.

Fr Manuel Miñambres, local spiritual animator, took care of all the details of the liturgy. We had adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and celebrated the Eucharist. At the end a hymn broke out spontaneously in front of the beautiful image of Mary Help of Christians (Gloria Blanco).

## ALEPPO (SYRIA) - AN APPEAL: ADORATION FOR PEACE

Clashes and bombings continue in Aleppo, the city that is the symbol of the war in Syria. The young people who attend the oratory there have made a request to the Salesians and to all Christians who are spared the horror of war **to do an hour of Eucharistic adoration together with them every Monday afternoon, praying for peace for Syria.** The city of Aleppo is surrounded. It is not possible to enter or leave it freely. Bombs and rockets fall daily on entire neighbourhoods of the city. Everyone has someone to mourn for and there is nowhere they can feel safe. But hope is not dead. The young people keep hope alive as they continue to struggle in order not to surrender to the logic of hatred.

The Salesian work, which previously housed a large vocational school, still has an oratory and a large church. Fortunately it is in one of the areas least affected by the violence. It is much frequented by young people who come there to find a bit of peace and normality. "This Oratory has always attracted many young people and has given many vocations to the Church and to the Salesians. Now there are also many young men and women who come from other areas of the city because many churches have been destroyed," says Fr Georges Fattal, Rector of the Salesian House.

The Salesians are totally committed to the young people: "We try to put ourselves at their service, to offer them a smile in these painful times" he says. The young people recognize this commitment and are the first to believe that it is possible to resist discouragement. Together, young people and Salesians are turning the situation of war into an opportunity to deepen their faith. In this same spirit Fr Fattal is working to bring the Jubilee of Mercy to life for the young people of Aleppo. "In this unimaginable situation, we want to practise forgiveness and mercy and make them feel part of the Church that welcomes all her children."

Sixth notebook of Mary Help of Christians: From the House of Mary to our houses



This Sixth Notebook of Mary Help of Christians is meant to keep alive the memory of the bicentenary of the birth of Don Bosco and of the institution of the feast of Mary Help of Christians.

The first part, edited by Fr Pierluigi Cameroni, documents how Mary Help of Christians was present in the life and mission of Don Bosco and how the *Father and Teacher of the Young* saw in Mary Help of Christians the guide and supporter of his educational and pastoral work.

The second part, edited by Fr Roberto Carelli, contains the catechesis that accompanied the journey of ADMA (Association of Mary Help of Christians) in preparation for the Seventh International Congress of Mary Help of Christians, the Salesian Family event held in Turin and Colle Don Bosco from 6 to 9 August 2015.

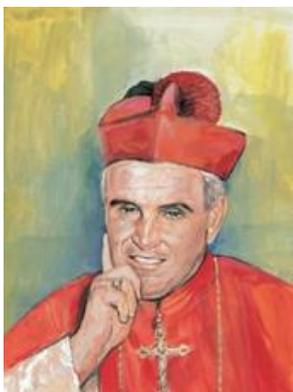
The Congress, under the motto "Hic domus mea, mea inde glory - from the house of Mary to our homes," was intended to show the maternal presence of Mary, Mother of the Church and Help of Christians, in our experience of the beauty of being family and responding, with the apostolic heart of Don Bosco, to the challenges that the family is facing today.

April 18th:

147 years of the  
foundation of the ADMA

*Missionary Intention*

*That the Salesian Family all over the world may be a source of inspiration for strong and fruitful Christian families.*



*Testimony of Salesian holiness*

As soon as he was ordained bishop **Venerable Stephen Ferrando** (1885-1978), a missionary in India and founder of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians, wrote to the Rector Major Fr Peter Ricaldone: "*Beloved Father, on 10 November I was consecrated bishop. I bless the Almighty God who has looked upon my lowliness so that his mercy might shine forth through me. I am a bishop, a Salesian Bishop, and I have no other desire but to honour my mother, the congregation to which I owe all I have [...]. Nothing remains for me except to recommend to your paternal heart the beloved mission of Krishnagar.*"

Happy Easter to all our members and ADMA groups