



Prot. No. 0000 234/2023

Rome, September 08, 2023
Feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary

MISSIONARIES OF HOPE IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE REDEEMER

Year dedicated to Community Life

Const. 21-75; EG 026-049; Lk 6,12-16

“Strong in faith, rejoicing in hope, burning with charity, on fire with zeal, in humility of heart and persevering in prayer, Redemptorists as apostolic men and genuine disciples of Saint Alphonsus follow Christ the Redeemer with hearts full of joy; denying themselves and always ready to undertake what is demanding, they share in the mystery of Christ and proclaim it in Gospel simplicity of life and language, that they may bring to people plentiful redemption” (Const. 20).

TO ALL VOCATION CANDIDATES AND FORMANDI OF THE
CONGREGATION OF THE MOST HOLY REDEEMER

Dear vocation candidates, aspirants, postulants, novices, and professed:

1. After the *online* meetings with all the Redemptorist Formandi of the five Conferences of the Congregation and as a conclusion of this lived experience, I am sending you this message on behalf of the General Council, the Secretariat of Formation, and the Coordinators of the Conferences. I do so from the bottom of my heart, in gratitude for your participation and with an expression of encouragement for the journey you are undertaking through discernment to be “Missionaries of Hope in the footsteps of the Redeemer”. *Redemptorist formation has an expression manifested in the five Conferences of the Congregation. And each expression is a fragment that makes up the beautiful mosaic of the Redemptorist vocation.*
2. It is important that each person can thoroughly discern their vocation in making a life choice. One should not be discouraged in the face of the difficulties that

arise. If the deep motivations of vocation are not clarified and well-grounded in the experience of the community, in the charismatic identity and the deepening of the same, in the Christian and Redemptorist spirituality, and an identification with the mission in favor of the most abandoned, total availability and conviction for the service, in that case, it would be easy to give up. *Why did I choose to follow Jesus Christ in the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, made up of religious priests and brothers? What attracts me to it? What does its charism demand of me? Am I ready to give my life for Abundant Redemption and to persevere to the end?* All those who begin our vocational process should ask these questions so that their answer is sincere before themselves, God, and the Congregation. Religious profession is like Mary's "yes": God calls, entrusts the mission, and we give our "yes" recognizing our frailties since we must be faithful to the Lord on the cross and in the resurrection. In this sense, I invite you to experience the hour of God in your own life, with its mysteries, being profoundly human and always seeking to conform your life to the Gospel and our Constitutions. *There is no perfect religious life or Congregation! There is one in which each member, with their joys and sorrows, with their potential and limits, responds enthusiastically to their "yes" each day. A consecrated life outside the world, insensitive to the world's pains, betrays itself as a project of redemption.*

3. Today's world presents us with easy solutions. God's ways are never easy. And often, we only see part of the journey. So, our challenge is to discover the other parts of the journey. Discernment is essential to this. After all, *are we not followers of the Way* (Acts 9:2; 22:4; Jn 14:6)?
4. Sometimes, the Lord accompanies us, and we do not recognize him. He takes us to the crossroads of Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:28-31). He will leave his signs, his heart that burns, and his eyes that open to see the dark part of the road. *It is in the daily itinerancy of the road that the Lord shows his redeeming face.* It is by *walking with Him that redemption is affected.* And this is encouraging, even when we only know part of the route. And this route is discovered throughout life. And on every stretch, even those filled with obstacles, with their *way of the cross...* there is the Lord who reveals himself in his mystery, waiting for us, carrying our cross, wiping our bloodied face, washing the wounds of our feet. *The Lord who accompanies us knows all our fears and dark nights but continues to call us to follow him as he did the apostles. He does not abandon us because he is faithful.*
5. Dear vocation candidates and formandi, *prepare yourselves to be profoundly human men, recognizing your weaknesses, seeking to be better every day, open to dialogue, and with an open spirit to learn new things with missionary audacity.* The house of formation should not be a bubble that keeps you away from the world but a place of preparation to launch you into the world, into the mission of the Redeemer. *The silence or the cry of the abandoned must be heard inside the house of formation.* Otherwise, it will only be a place where a programmed script is fulfilled through academic studies for the religious profession and priesthood. *And religious profession and priesthood that do not*

*place the Redeemer as their foundation and do **not** clothe themselves with the mantle of the poorest of the poor, becoming kenosis, are incapable of being redeemers, cannot be salt, light, and leaven in today's world (cf. Mt 5:13-16, Mt 13:33). What covering are we wearing today as religious?*

6. *The Congregation does not want "supermen" but profoundly human persons who make the simplicity of their daily life a place for God's action. Our saints, blessed, venerable, and martyrs were not untouchable, thaumaturgical persons. They were men who, with their personalities and frailties, suffered a process of conversion throughout their lives until they touched their most profound humanity. They encountered the action of God, who saves each person in their personal history with their deserts, exodus, crosses, and Easter. They forgot themselves in favor of others, consuming their days for the sake of Abundant Redemption - *dies impendere pro redemptis* - . These ordinary men became extraordinary because of their profound awareness of faith and mission. Therefore, dear young people, *we too are called to make the simplicity of each day the place where God meets us*. Only in this way will we realize that holiness is not an old-fashioned word but our destiny in God.*
7. For us Redemptorists, holiness is not characterized by a separation from the world (*fuga mundi*) but by assuming with all our strength the mission of the Redeemer, through religious profession and as a response to our baptism: the mission of the Redeemer. *We are Redemptorist missionaries. A Redemptorist who does not love the mission, who does not like to live in community, who is not available to be in demanding places, who does not have compassion for the most abandoned, and who does not cultivate a personal mysticism, needs to undertake a process of profound conversion (cf. Const. 1, 3, 11, 20, 21, 41, 54). These criteria are fundamental for personal discernment. Is Redemptorist life the life I want to embrace?*
8. One of the current challenges facing society is perseverance in personal commitments and relationships. To use Zygmunt Bauman's metaphor, everything is liquid: society, family, community, love, friendship, etc. On the one hand, we can choose to live this phenomenon or, on the other, live the life that calls us to persevere in our consecration to Christ the Redeemer. This perseverance is not an easy task because it means overcoming the difficulties of every day and rethinking them with the help of spirituality, community, friendship, and the sense of mission: spending our days in favor of redemption. We cannot give up at the first conflict, crisis, or frustration. *Perseverance demands resilience, deep adherence of the heart, discernment, humanity, humility, and openness to others and the Spirit*. Am I persevering in my commitments, or do I give up at the first difficulty? Do I want to persevere in the Congregation, or do I want to have an experience and, if it goes well, I will stay...? *Persevering does not mean chronologically prolonging one's life until death. One can live many years of Redemptorist life and not be persevering; to formally adhere to the institution as a form of survival rather than a commitment*

of one's life to the mission. Perseverance involves the whole being, with its weaknesses and strengths, and the willingness to give the best of oneself.

9. Be *curious* persons who seek to learn every day and are interested in the things of the Congregation. *Do not neglect personal formation for life!* In the social context in which we live, it is necessary to go beyond philosophy and theology. *How can we be formators of conscience if we do not prepare ourselves for this mission? What response will we give to the new problems the People of God poses to us?* St. Alphonsus inspires us in this search. The philosophy, theology, and spirituality we learn in the Institutions must pass through the sieve of science, of concrete life that will confirm, demystify, and tell us if our knowledge can face and transform reality. Therefore, be men of vast cultures who live and speak with simplicity, learn new languages to open themselves up to new horizons, and overcome the limits of their own culture from the Gospel in the search for the common good. *Never be afraid to learn more to proclaim the Gospel in an ever-new way!*
10. Finally, the Congregation to which you wish to dedicate your lives is no longer the Congregation of the time of St. Alphonsus, of Gerard, of Clement... it was born and expanded, thanks to missionary boldness, to *distacco* (detachment) of so many confreres who preceded us. Today the Congregation is present in more than 80 countries without losing its charism. Today it is up to us to continue this task. What kind of Congregation do we want for the future? A Congregation enclosed within its own walls? Or a religious family that is ever more aware of its missionary spirit based on the *kenosis* of Christ, at the service of the abandoned and welcoming the laity in its mission? Thus, in this new face of the Congregation, the process of restructuring and reconfiguration give it another expression, calling us to a conversion of heart and mentality and to move out of our comfort zones. *The future of the Congregation depends on how we listen to the Spirit, remain faithful to the charism, interpret it in the context of today's world and persevere to the end.*
11. Dear young people, what are you looking for? Come and see (cf. Jn 1:38-39). *Don't be afraid to say "yes" to Christ the Redeemer who calls you. Share with others the joy of being a Redemptorist. Joy is our characteristic! It is a joy that comes from the encounter with the Redeemer, and we share it by proclaiming his Gospel.* Encourage other young people to give their lives as Redemptorist missionaries for the sake of the most abandoned. And those of you who are already in our formation centres, persevere to the end and spread the joy of the Gospel! You are not a number, you have a face and you are important to the Congregation!
12. Dear vocation candidates and formandi, go forward! Courage! May Mary, the Mother of the Redeemer, protect and give you the necessary perseverance. And may our Saints, Blessed, Venerables, and Martyrs inspire you to walk the ways of the Redeemer, being always missionaries of Hope!

Fraternally, in Christ the Redeemer,



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Original: *Spanish*