

MESSAGE OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL ON THE OCCASION OF THE ONLINE MEETING WITH REDEMPTORIST ASPIRANTS AND POSTULANTS

Dear aspirants, postulants and formators,

1. It is a great joy to be gathered with you to reflect on an essential theme of the formation itinerary: the importance of a life of study in preparation for Redemptorist missionary life. As you know, this year is dedicated to Formation for Mission. It is about reminding the whole congregation of the importance of formation for life and equipping ourselves with intellectual tools and wisdom to be able to help the People of God in their journey of faith and life. Our studies are not only theoretical, but must lead us to humanization, both of ourselves and our recipients. Our formation is aimed at promoting the redemption of the person. Therefore, at this meeting I would like to invite you to immerse yourself in the dimension of studies, understanding them as an integral and fundamental part of the Redemptorist mission. *After all, in times of such rapid change and complex global challenges, studying is not just an academic requirement, but a necessity for mission.* In the context in which we live, we cannot give old answers to new problems. St. Alphonsus sought new answers based on the changes of his time. If we want to evangelize, we must read the signs of the times, interpret them and improve our evangelizing action.
2. Dear young people, you are entering a missionary congregation, and you are welcome! Get ready to proclaim the Gospel in an ever new way, as St. Clement said, with simplicity and closeness to the people, just as St. Gerard and so many other Redemptorist saints, blessed and martyrs did. Take enthusiastic advantage of this time of grace granted to each of you for this discernment and, in the future, to embrace consecrated life in the Congregation. Do not let discouragement take over your path and be curious young people who seek to learn more about the Congregation and its mission in the Church. Immerse yourself in the lives of our saints and Redemptorist spirituality. Connect to *the Scala News site* to learn about the dynamics of the congregation, learn languages, read poetry and general literature, learn about the history of the (vice) province and the region, watch good movies, listen to good music, go to the theater, and take great care of community life. Mutual help in daily work is essential. Create a good atmosphere in the formation center and do not forget the prayer life. All this is part of the formation process.
3. From the very beginning of the congregation, study has always occupied an important place. St. Alphonsus, in addition to being a passionate missionary preacher, was a great practical theologian who applied all his knowledge to help

the most abandoned of his time in various areas. Through his science, he showed the merciful face of God. He knew that in order to bring the Good News to the most abandoned, he needed a sound knowledge of Christian doctrine, moral theology and the social realities of his time. St. Alphonsus identified the poor of his time, approached them and spoke to them about the Gospel in a simple and new way. For him, an ignorant missionary was like an unarmed soldier. In his view, the missionary must be well prepared, not only to preach with enthusiasm, but also with simplicity and depth, to lead people with wisdom and discernment. That is why he devoted much of his life to study and writing, leaving a legacy that influences the Church to this day. Dear young people, write texts, poems, meditations, etc. Scripture apostolate is also part of being a Redemptorist. Today we have so many opportunities to share thoughts on digital platforms that can help God's People grow in faith and encourage them on their journey.

4. For Redemptorists, study is not an end in itself, but a means to better serve. It is not a matter of placing ourselves in an intellectual elite, estranged from reality. Theological and pastoral knowledge becomes a tool to evangelize more effectively, especially the poor and marginalized. This commitment urges us to value formation in our lives as an important aspect of our missionary preparation. I insist that we must be formed for life, to be with the People of God, and never to be estranged from them.
5. As you know, we live in an age marked by rapid changes: technological advances, globalization, environmental and institutional crises (family, Church, politics, education), growing social inequalities, socio-political polarization, wars and many other phenomena. Despite the many challenges, we cannot have a negative view of reality. The question for all is, *what are we doing to create a world that is home for all?* All these transformations pose new challenges to the mission of evangelization, and we, as Redemptorist missionaries, must be prepared to face them with creativity and wisdom. In this context, we are called to be shapers of conscience in the spirit of the Alphonsian tradition. Having a critical eye is important.
6. Many young people today are drifting away from their faith because they cannot find answers to the questions and challenges that the modern world poses to them, and also because they do not understand the proper language of the Church. Many families no longer communicate the faith, and what they receive is only a basic catechesis of preparation for the sacraments. As missionaries, it is our duty to be bridges between faith and reason. The study of theology, philosophy and other humanities helps us to dialogue with these contemporary

issues. *Our challenge as an institution is to reinvent the language of faith without losing its content, making it understandable to the men and women of today, especially young people. To you I address some questions, dear young people: what is the language of our young people today? What language of faith do they present? What do they believe in? Now I ask you: what do they believe in? And what do they dream about?*

7. The Redemptorist missionary has a non-negotiable commitment to the poorest and most abandoned. Woe to us if we turn our backs on them! That is why the congregation exists. But for our work and pastoral care to be effective, we need to know in depth the causes of social injustice, the Church's proposals to transform the world and help it know its rights, forming its conscience. As missionaries, we need to have an insight into the Church's social doctrine, economics, politics and social sciences. We need to have a Samaritan approach to reality (cf. Luke 10:25-37). During this time of formation, do not neglect pastoral work. Take advantage of opportunities that come your way: working on the outskirts of a city, visiting hospitals, and prisons etc.
8. Finally, do not forget that we are in the digital age and the age of artificial intelligence. These are opportunities we have before us to evangelize, but even as formators of conscience we need to be alert to manipulation, superficiality and *fake news*. We need to know the new languages of communication and understand digital culture to be effective missionaries in the virtual environment. However, this should not replace contact with people or methods already tried and effective throughout our evangelizing history. We need to foster fraternal and celebratory encounters in the faith community. *What different message of the Gospel can we offer God's people using digital platforms?* This is a challenge for us Redemptorist missionaries, but also an opportunity. However, to take advantage of it, we need knowledge and training to form others in faith, hope and charity.
9. In our missionary life, there is a profound relationship between study, spiritual life and missionary action. The prayerful reading of the Bible is a form of study as well as prayer. Our founder is an example of a person who combined prayer and study in his daily life. If we look at the works he wrote, we see that they were the fruit of study that became prayer and missionary action (the evening chapels, popular missions, service to the clergy, preaching retreats). All the work Alfonso did to rethink moral theology, moving from rigor to pastoral benignity, was because of the knowledge he had, his ability to listen to God and the abandoned people of his time.
10. St. Alphonsus has always insisted on the importance of forming missionaries who can wisely discern people's needs and offer responses that reflect God's

mercy in their lives. Therefore, dear aspirants and postulants, *Redemptorist spirituality is embodied in reality: it has flesh, feeling, passion, it touches the whole human person in order to redeem him or her.* In this sense, our studies must be incorporated into the contemplative dimension of existence. As St. Thomas Aquinas said, we must contemplate and give the fruit of contemplation to others (*contemplata aliis tradere*). For us Redemptorists, giving the fruit of contemplation to others happens in our missionary work: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor; he has sent me to heal those whose hearts are broken, to proclaim liberty to the captives and sight to the blind; to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18). To do this, we need to know the Redeemer, both through experience with Him and by studying His Gospel and its implications for us today.

11. Dear aspirants, postulants and formators, I conclude this reflection by emphasizing that, in today's world, if we want to be missionaries of hope, walking in the footsteps of the Redeemer, we need to be well-formed men of prayer, outgoing to the existential and geographical peripheries. *The life of study is not just an academic obligation to place oneself in a select group of enlightened people, but a journey of deepening in faith, of encounter with God, of personal and communal maturity, of preparation for the challenges of mission.* The more they dedicate themselves to study, the better prepared they will be to evangelize, to respond to contemporary challenges and to proclaim Redemption. According to Constitution 20, we are to be “apostles of a strong faith, of joyful hope, of ardent charity and ardent zeal, who do not boast of themselves and practice constant prayer. As apostolic men and authentic sons of St. Alphonsus, joyfully following Christ the Savior, they participate in his mystery and proclaim it with the evangelical simplicity of their lives and words. By self-denial they are made available for all that is laborious, in order to bring Christ's abundant redemption to all.”
12. Dear aspirants, postulants and formators, let us follow with joy the example of St. Alphonsus, who was a practical man with concrete evangelizing action, and who never neglected his formation throughout his life, but made it an instrument of evangelization through writing, music and art. May Mary, Mother of Perpetual Help, inspire us in this journey. God bless you all with the gift of perseverance!

Fr. Rogério Gomes C.Ss.R.
Superior General

Rome, September 21, 2024.

(Translated from the Italian Language)