

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS IN THE ROSMINIAN CHARISMATIC FAMILY

Footpaths of Hope, Pathways of Peace

*Rosminians in today's Church:
Synodal, Missionary and Merciful*



A heartfelt thank you to our friend Carlo Carlini for illustrating the cover of the letter, which he interprets as follows: life is uphill, the struggle is the same for all mankind, and the Holy Family presents itself to us with the true colours of the family in God's plan. The Star is the signal for humanity to follow, and Christians give a heart of hope to the less fortunate of their brothers and sisters. In their hearts is the holiness of people who have answered YES to the call.

The meaning is as follows: The Love we received at the Lord's Christmas, grateful for this great joy, we give it back as a sign of fraternity and hope.

To Carissima Mother, Sister Antoinette and dear Rosminian Sisters of Providence, to the brethren of the Institute of Charity, to the beloved novices, postulants, aspirants and all the young people who are on a path of discernment to religious life, to the Adoptive Daughters and Sons, to the Consecrated Ascribed and Ascribed, to Mother General Sister Maria Servatrix and the Sisters of Our Lady of Usambara, Servidor General, Deacon Alexander Toro together with the Sisters and Brothers of Familia Fuente Real, to the dear Carmelite nuns of Maracaibo, El Alto de Escuque and Lushoto, to friends of the Rosminian family, alumni, people close to the communities, to relatives, family members, close believers, co-workers, people of goodwill,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Merry Christmas 2024!

With the whole Church, we stand at the Holy Door with the desire to be pilgrims of hope with the Pope and with all the good people, those whom God loves.

We learnt from the Pope that the holy door is also the door of a prison, or the door of your home, your workplace, the entrance to your school or hospital; it is also the holy door of your heart, so that you may recognise that you are walking on holy ground (Ex 3) and take off your shoes in adoration before your brother and sister, in service, in daily Eucharistic silence.

We stand at the holy door, on what will it open? What vistas, and what paths will it open up for us? Do they simply correspond to our responsibilities, our duties and commitments, to what we must do, or are they something more? Are they walkable paths or rundown highways? Are we equipped to walk -missionary disciples- or do we prefer the game of rearguard, do we prefer not to see and to be distracted by something else, do we decide that everything is over, and we just want to turn off the light?

It is the Jubilee of Hope, and the Pope calls us to be pilgrims of hope! The Jubilee since the Bible indicates a time of stopping, rethinking and becoming aware (cf. Leviticus 25). We want to make ourselves pilgrims in order to see with our hearts and recognise OUR hope (1 Tim 1:1) and where our hope lies: what must we do? (cf. Lk 3:10; Acts 2:37).

Peregrinantes in spem

Reflecting on the Jubilee slogan, it has been written that the official expression in Latin means movement - not simply pilgrims, but in fact 'pilgrimaging', this is the meaning of the verbal form 'peregrinantes'. But, above all, it says 'in spem', not so much pilgrims 'of' hope, but 'in' hope!

The holy door opens onto the path of hope, which is the way, the truth and the life (Jn 14:16), Jesus Christ our only hope. Jesus is the way-hope in which we walk. Only in this way can we recognise "to what hope we have been called" and affirm with the Apostle that hope

does not disappoint, because its foundation is the love of God poured into our hearts (cf. Rom 5:1-2.5).

A personal recollection, when I met Pope Francis in 2018, as one of the chapter fathers; it was simply a handshake, the Holy Father asked me where I was, and I answered in Venezuela... he immediately told me: 'stay there to give people hope'.

I recognised the same words spoken a few weeks earlier to the Venezuelan bishops on their *ad limina* visit: "Give hope, instil hope, be a sign of hope among the people!"

So, what must we do to communicate hope, to be active witnesses of hope, to be a rock of security and refuge for others? These are not human securities, that is why the Church tells us that it is a journey, that we are pilgrims, and we move together, with a presence.

Those who have lived in post-war situations or dramatic social conditions under totalitarian regimes know what it means to humanly cling to another person, to cling to every glimmer of human salvation, to 'have hope hanging by a thread', to feel that everything depends on that 'if God wills it'.

False hopes

Everyone can then reflect on the false hopes that we must not foment, on the referential and toxic attitudes of earthly and fallacious hopes, and on worldly hopes that already have in them the germ of frustration. The poetic reflection by Fr Clemente Rebora, among the religious poems, is beautiful in this regard:

*I hoped for myself: but nothingness grips me.
I hoped for time: but it passes, it passes.
in what it creates: it is not enough and leaves us.
I hoped for the good to come on earth:
But everything ends, overwhelmed, in distress.*

*I have sinned, suffered, sought, listened
the Voice of Love that calls and does not languish:
And here is the certain hope: The Cross.
I found the one who loved me before
and loves me and washes me, in the Blood that is fire,
Jesus the All-Good, the Infinite Love,
the Love that gives Love,
the Love that lives well within the heart. (...)*

And more simply, when I promise to visit a sick person or an elderly person and I do not keep my word, I am nourishing a false hope; when I make intentions of charity or service that then turn out to be inconstant, when I do not put into practice the ordered charity as Blessed Rosmini teaches us, both in its moral order or in one's state of life and in the order in

which Providence has come to me; when I say one thing and think exactly the opposite in what refers to fraternity, charity, service, then I am destroying hope in myself and in others, I am approaching the dark paths of reality and a world without hope.

Sometimes, to kill - mortify - hope in ourselves and in others, judgements such as 'it is of no use' are enough; to bar the path of hope, words such as 'I have no time' or 'impossible' are enough, Blessed Rosmini would say this is a form of spiritual blindness, which proceeds from deep selfishness. "Do not grieve the Spirit within you!" (Eph 4:30). "We cannot live as those who have no hope" (1Tess 4:13), and sometimes we live as "desperate people".

We also shield ourselves "It cannot be done", "my superiors do not allow it" "These are the orders received", and we do not want to "see with the eyes of the heart, hear with the ears of the heart", "always resisting the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:51-60)

They become 'prophets of doom' in the long run, closed in their petty interests, who cannot see beyond their noses and can no longer listen to the brethren through whom the Lord is speaking to them.

Instead, it is a matter of seeing with the heart, as Mary, the first of believers, does (cf. *Dilexit nos*, no. 19).

In reality, even in the most complicated existence, even in people shrouded in a dark blanket of resentment and criticism, even for those who say that everything is going wrong, if he looks into his heart he sees hope shining through because it does not come from him or his abilities, but from the Lord: it is He, our hope (*return to the heart*, writes the Pope in *Dilexit nos*, nos. 9-16, *a heart that unites the fragments*, nos. 17-27).

Hope is always possible, which is why we can also say in front of the cross '*ave spes unica*' 'Hail, our only hope', not so much the gallows of condemnation, but that wood sprinkled with the blood of the Son of God, who loved us up to that point without any interest, selfishness or 'return', because he is God. All crosses are transformed, in hope.

There are two brothers whom I have chosen as companions in personal prayer in recent months, two young priests who have received from the Lord the cross of physical suffering, the Italian Michele Botto and the Venezuelan Giovanni Pacheco. With great sorrow Father Michele passed away a few weeks ago, now it is he who I hope has chosen me as a companion in his prayer to the father.

Michele and Giovanni are men of hope, that hope that faces suffering knowing that there is a secret of salvation and eternal happiness in it.

Until the end, Michele repeated 'all is well' and 'thank you' with eyes shining with hope. Then it was enough to meet Mama Ida's eyes for confirmation and sometimes the situation was really critical, but Michele's was the light of hope of eternal life. I hope for eternal life! (cf. *Spes non confundit*, no. 19). In fact "in hope we have been saved" (Rom 8:24).

It is a hope that has its roots where the cross is, in the grotto of Bethlehem, in the humility of the crib and of our daily lives, in relationships of fraternity and proximity.

Witnesses of hope

I can receive hope from many witnesses who have been like Jesus. I visited Fr Frank Quinn on his birthday, now in a hospice in Ireland, a great Rosminian missionary in Tanzania, he is very old and has Parkinson's disease... he could not speak at that moment, and he filled his little blackboard three times to communicate with us, with impressive tenacity. When I greeted him, he signalled for me to give him a blessing, I too then asked him for a blessing, and in a clear voice, he immediately replied, with joy, in Kiswahili: ...*awabariki Mungu*.

This is hope in action, never giving up, moving forward, and responding at all times to the call to life.

Other witnesses? They are many, a great cloud says the letter to the Hebrews (Heb 12:1).

The Vietnamese Cardinal Francois Xavier Van Thuan, today Venerable, is a great witness in Christ our hope (1Tim 1:1)

A life in the sign of hope, in prison for thirteen years, eight of them in total isolation, forced into insignificance, and yet what authentic meaning his life took on in hope, what light of hope from his imprisonment for the Church in Vietnam and for the whole Church!

I am struck by the fact that the pastoral letters written from prison, the daily messages - a thousand for a thousand days - written on the back of pages of old calendar blocks, provided to him by a boy and then copied by hand and circulated, all have as their *leitmotif* the joyful testimony of hope.

None of us can feel hopeless or discouraged if 'Uncle Francis' - as the young people in Tanzania and Uganda called him later - was able to hope in these dramatic situations.

Uncle Francis tells the young people: *This is how the book, The Path of Hope was written...now translated into eight languages. The grace of God gave me the energy to work and to continue even in the most desperate moments. I wrote the book at night, a month and a half because I was afraid, I would not be able to finish it. I feared that I would be transferred to another place When I got to 1001, I decided to stop: it's like the 'Arabian Nights'.*

(...) I wrote my second book in 1980, The Path of Hope in the Light of the Word of God and the Second Vatican Council, and then my third book, Pilgrims on the Path of Hope, always at night and in secret. (...)

It is very true: all prisoners, including myself, wait every minute for release. But then I decided: 'I will not wait. I will live the present moment, filling it with love. (...)

Father Maximilian Kolbe lived this radicalism when he repeated to his novices: 'Everything, absolutely, without conditions'. I heard Dom Helder Camara say: 'Life is learning to love'. Mother Teresa of Calcutta once wrote to me: 'The important thing is not the number of actions we do, but the intensity of love we put into each action'. How do we draw on this intensity of love in the present moment?

In his prayer 'in prison, for Christ', we read:

(...)

In the darkness of the night

amid this ocean of anxiety, of nightmares,

I slowly awaken:

"I have to face reality.

"I am in prison,

if I bide my time

to do something really big,

How many times in my life will I be presented with such opportunities?

No, I grab the opportunities that present themselves every day,

to perform ordinary actions extraordinarily.

Jesus,

I will not wait, I will live in the present moment, filling it with love.

(...)

The path of hope is paved with small steps of hope.

The life of hope is made up of short minutes of hope (...)

He bore witness to this light of hope in his catechesis to young people during the Jubilee Year 2000, collected in the diary book: *Five Loaves and Two Fishes. From the suffering of prison, a joyful testimony of faith.*

I find in the words of Card. Van Thuan those other examples of life "in hope" that I wanted to propose to you, St. Teresa of Calcutta, St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe, and then also Charles de Foucauld, St. Damian of Molokai and St. Josephine Bakhita

Mother Teresa, it seems from her personal diaries that after the call of Jesus, while travelling by train to be with the poorest of the poor, she did not experience the consolation of prayer for decades, yet these were the years of her greatest missionary activity and service of love, the response to that first Love (Rev 2:4), to that light of hope that had illuminated her whole life and every personal darkness.

Father Maximilian instantly substituted himself for one of his comrades to go into the death chamber in the face of the latter's plea to the guards to save him. A heroic act, which, as St John Paul II would recall on the day of his beatification, was the fruit of many daily and repeated acts of love, sacrifice and hope in a better world in which justice dwells.

Brother Charles, killed by those for whom he had spent all his energy, perhaps misunderstood. It is the story of many missionary martyrs, impossible without unshakeable faith nourished by hope, a life matured in the love of God.

He wrote to a non-believer friend in a letter of March 1902: 'Imitation is inseparable from Love, you know that. Whoever loves wants to imitate. It is the secret of my life: I lost my

heart to that Jesus of Nazareth, crucified 1900 years ago, and I spend my life trying to imitate him, as far as my weakness can".

Father Damian, stayed with the lepers, at one with them, mission and vocation merged forever in the gift of himself. He is a rock in faith and hope, which has enabled him to live such love for his neighbour.

Finally, Josephine, singled out, by Pope Benedict XVI as an example of hope beyond beatings and mutilation, a hope that was an encounter: 'he who truly loves me, and whatever happens I am awaited by this Love'! (cf. *Spe Salvi*, n. 3-4).

The knowledge that there is One who even in death accompanies me and with His "rod and His staff gives me security", so that "I need fear no evil" (cf. Ps 23:4) - this was the new "hope" rising above the lives of believers, like Josephine Bakhita (*Spe Salvi*, no. 6).

All of these, "hoped against hope", when they could have given in to despair or simply let it go, not getting involved, but decided to follow the Spirit, "he will teach you, he will counsel you, he will tell you ... what you must do" (cf. Lk 12:11-12), Christians "gripped by the Spirit" (cf. Acts 20:17).

"My" hopes

From our daily and weekday hopes which we understand that it becomes impossible "not to hope" because it is part of our being enlightened by the light of the Word - not a transcendental operation but the encounter with Jesus and contemplating him in the silence of Bethlehem, of Calvary, of the Eucharist - we can understand the hope for the world of a peace that is indispensable, of a concordant action for humanity as such, above the interests, conveniences, egoisms and nationalisms of all kinds, hidden in the folds of our daily living.

And yet, even the path to world peace seems to start from the dim light of personal hope, from the kindness I can live with those close to me as the Pope points out to us in *Fratelli Tutti* (nos. 222-224), after dealing with fraternity in the world's great scenarios, to become - each one of us - artisans of peace (no. 284).

As Charles Peguy writes, hope goes hand in hand with humility. "The faith I love most, says God, is hope (...) the little hope. Like a little girl who does not have the strength to walk (...) but it is she who makes the other two walk" (in his work *Hope. The portico of the mystery of the second virtue*).

Just like the tenacious hope of that mother who does not give up on recovering her son from drugs, like that grandmother who still tries to help her family in every way, like that priest who continues to invite young people to church, hoping against hope like Abraham, our father in faith (Rom 4:18).

Every morning the doors of hope open, and the windows of hope open, and the light of the sun of righteousness, Jesus, the one who renews all things, who renews us every day, who renews our community and the face of our Rosminian family, "I am doing something new, right now it emerges, do you not see it?" (Is 43:19), "I make all things new" (Rev 21:5).

And it is he who prepares for us new heavens new earth in which justice will reign (2 Peter 3:13; Isaiah 65:17; Rev 21:1), it is not we who build him a house, but he builds it for us (2 Sam 7:4-17), he builds for us our family, our society, our parish, our Institute, the Church!

Feel these beautiful promises that the Lord tells you through the Prophet Jeremiah in your heart brother and sister ... 'he will rejoice over you, he will renew with his love, he will exult over you with shouts of joy' (Zeph 3:17).

He for you before you for him, he always *comes first* for us (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 24), and this is the real hope, which we can touch with our own hands in the days of our lives and which we are invited to live to the point of becoming apostles and witnesses.

In the encyclical *Spe Salvi* Pope Benedict almost establishes an identity between hope and faith (*Spe Salvi*, nos. 2-3), following Paul's word about Abraham who against all despair hoped. There is only one price, Pope Francis tells us, open your heart to this faith and He will do the rest (cf. catechesis of 29 March 2017: *Hope against all hope*).

The new shoots

Hope for the Christian is not something that has to happen, but it is a fact, a reality that has already happened, it is the Christ event that is at the centre of history, and it is at the centre of my life.

It is the pressing invitation, like that of Fr. Founder in the Maxims to "restore" his unique presence and dialogue with him at the centre.

If hope in this perspective awakens freshness for a future of light and peace, much - everything - remains to be done that is why hope refers to the prophetic spirit, to proclamation, to personal witness.

I will raise for David a righteous shoot (Jer 23:5) a shoot from the trunk of Jesse (Isa 11:1).

It is so interesting that the evangelist Matthew, in saying that Jesus would be called Nazarene (Mt 2:23), wants to allude to several intertwined meanings: Nazarene - consecrated to a mission - or to 'nacur' the 'remnant' from which a new people arise, or rather 'necer', bud, sprout. He is the shoot of justice and holiness, who will be called "Lord our justice" (Jer 23, 5-8).

We ask ourselves what are the new shoots in the Church, in our small religious family, in consecrated life?

Sprouts point to a future of hope and at the same time require care and protection so that they can develop and grow.

The sprouts, like the tender baby of Bethlehem, the face of the newness of God made small and born in the human generation, express novelty, renewal and youthfulness.

The new shoots in the Church are also prophetic responses to what humanity and society need. They are also prophecies of charity and calls to service addressed to us by the Lord in the humility of Bethlehem, from exile in Egypt and from hiding in Nazareth.

The bud of the synodal Church

The Church's response to the challenge of hope is to be a Church - a synodal, missionary and merciful community. It was the Pope who added this third adjective at the beginning of the second session in October, and being a Church of mercy characterises the path of hope and peace in the world. Being a synodal Church means in fact living conversion of heart and reconciliation, being Church before Jesus mercy.

A so-called Christian who does not enter into God's gratuitousness and mercy is simply an atheist disguised as a Christian. God's mercy makes us trustworthy and responsible., said the Pope at the Synod's first General Congregation on 2 October.

Misericordia et misera are the two words St Augustine uses to describe the encounter between Jesus and the adulteress (cf. *Jn* 8:1-11). He could not have found a more beautiful and coherent expression than this to convey the mystery of God's love when he comes to meet the sinner: "Only two remained: misery and mercy" (letter at the conclusion of the Jubilee of Mercy, *Misericordia et misera*).

It is the path to the future, the Pope said in 2016, it is the synodal style for the Church today, it is also the door that opens onto the paths of hope to trace the path of peace.

Conversion, repentance, reconciliation: this is the dimension that allows us to live the jubilee in our hearts.

Pope Francis in the concluding Mass of the Synod (27 October 2024) commented on the condition of blind Bartimaeus as that of the Church before Jesus.

(...) Blind Bartimaeus, then, represents that inner blindness which restrains us keeps us stuck in one place, holds us back from the dynamism of life and destroys our hope. This can help us reflect not only on our own lives but also on what it means to be the Lord's Church (...) before the questions raised by the women and men of today, before the challenges of our time, the urgency of evangelization and the many wounds that afflict humanity. Sisters and brothers, we cannot afford to sit back.

A sedentary Church, that inadvertently withdraws from life and confines itself to the margins of reality, is a Church that risks remaining blind and becoming comfortable with its unease. If we remain stuck in our blindness, we will continuously fail to grasp the urgency of giving a pastoral response to the many problems of our world. Let us ask the Lord to send us the Holy Spirit so that we do not sit in our blindness, which in other words can be a worldliness, complacency, or closed heart. We cannot stay sitting in our blindness.

(...) It is good if the Synod is urging us as a Church to be like Bartimaeus: a community of disciples who, hearing that the Lord is passing by, feel the joy of salvation, allow ourselves to be awakened by the power of the Gospel, and to cry out to him. The Church does this when it takes up the cry of all the women and men of the world, of those who wish to discover the joy of the Gospel, and of those who have turned away; the silent cry of those who are indifferent; the cry of those who suffer, of the poor and marginalized, of children who are enslaved in so many parts of the world for work; the broken voice of those who no longer have the strength to cry out to God, either because they have no voice or because they are in despair. We do not need a sedentary and defeatist Church, but a Church that hears the cry of the world – I wish to say this even if some might be scandalised – a Church that gets its hands dirty in serving.

His is an image of the synodal Church. The Lord is calling us, lifting us when we are seated or fallen down, restoring our sight so that we can perceive the anxieties and sufferings of the world in the light of the Gospel. And when the Lord puts us back on our feet, we experience the joy of following him on the way. We follow the Lord along the way, we do not follow him enclosed in our comforts or we do not follow him in the mazes of our minds. We follow him only along the way. Let us remember never to walk alone or according to worldly criteria, but to walk on the way alongside him.

Brothers and sisters, not a seated Church, but a Church on her feet. Not a silent Church, but a Church that embraces the cry of humanity. Not a blind Church, but a Church, enlightened by Christ, that brings the light of the Gospel to others. Not a static Church, but a missionary Church that walks with her Lord through the streets of the world.

Synodality is the Church's response to the drama of a world without hope and peace. In the conclusion of the Synod's Final Document entitled "*I also send you. Forming a people of missionary disciples*", we read:

Synodality implies a profound vocational and missionary awareness, the source of a renewed way of living ecclesial relations and new dynamics regarding participation. It also means adopting the practice of ecclesial discernment and a culture of ongoing evaluation. These cannot come about unless accompanied by focused formation processes. Formation in synodality and the Church's synodal style will make people aware that the gifts received in Baptism should be put to use for the good of all: they cannot be hidden or remain unused. (n. 141)

More simply we ask, what are the hopes of the priest? What are the hopes of the nun? What are the hopes of the parish priest? What are the hopes of a lay person involved in the parish, of a young person discerning a vocation, of an elderly person preparing for surgery? What are the hopes of a poor person attending our social centres, those of a teacher at one of our schools, or of a parent?

What are the hopes of our young men and women religious, and those of young priests? Will we discover in the answers the new shoots "not of a time of change but of a change of epoch" for the renewed hope of humanity?

What are the hopes of our communities? What are the hopes of our Congregations?
What spirit of prophecy do we recognise in them?

It seems to me that the reflection of the theologian Jurgen Moltmann (1926-2024) is inspiring in its response to hope: a hope that seeks to understand, hope to know and understand.

Even the philosophy and theology of Blessed Antonio Rosmini can be understood as "hoping and thinking" if we think of the moral, theological and eschatological purpose of "reducing truth to a system". To give an answer and "rethink thinking" (Antonio Staglianò). I would reread Fr. Founder's Theodicy in filigree with Moltmann's "Theology of Hope", together with Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical "Spe Salvi".

The sprout of being a missionary

A renewed light for the entire Rosminian family, a source of justice, in recognising our identity: the Rosminian is a missionary!

We are missionaries because we respond to the Lord's call to charity "drawn out" of contemplation; we are missionaries because we live in total availability: we are sent and we choose neither the places, nor the work of charity, nor the companions, nor the times, like Jesus the envoy of the Father (*Lumen Gentium*, 3-4; *Ad Gentes*, 3).

You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and appointed you that you may go and bear fruit and that your fruit may abide; that whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he may grant it to you. This I command you: love one another (Jn 15:16-17).

I am a mission on earth! (*Evangelii Gaudium* 273).

Mission becomes a matter of love (*Dilexit nos*, 208) and requires missionaries in love, who allow themselves to be conquered by Christ (ibid., no. 209).

It is a love that becomes community service (ibid., n. 213).

Those who do not carry out their mission on this earth will find not happiness, but disappointment. So, you should let Him send you, that you let Him lead you where He wills. Never forget that Jesus is at your side at every step of the way (...) He has promised, and He Will do it: "I am with you always to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20) (ibid., n. 215).

In your way, you too must be a missionary, like the apostles and the first disciples of Jesus, who went forth to proclaim the love of God, to tell others that Christ is alive and worth knowing. (...) It is not important whether you see immediate results; leave that to the Lord who works in the secret of our hearts. Keep experiencing the joy born of our efforts to share the love of Christ with others. (ibid., no. 216).

The shoot of hope that God has for you and in you

God also hopes! He trusts and hopes in you, he expects something from you, from each of us. God makes himself small to need his creature; there is no doubt about this action of God towards us, all the parables of Jesus proclaim this truth!

God is a woman who mixes yeast with three measures of flour, God is a merchant who goes in search of precious pearls, God is a master who has entrusted his treasures to his servants, God is a farmer who contracts labourers to work in his vineyard, God is the shepherd who is willing to leave his whole flock to look for a sheep that was lost, God is the woman who loses sleep to find her coin.

It is so obvious that we all care about him because he has hopes for us: everyone, everyone says Pope Francis.

At the introduction to the Synod, the Pope referred to a homily by an ancient father of the Church, Macarius Alexandrinus: (...) *Macarius himself, in his homily, tells us that the Holy Spirit kindles, in those who receive him, a fire, a "fire of such joy and love that, were it possible, all without discrimination, bad and good alike, would take into their hearts". This is because God accepts everyone, always; let us not forget: everyone, everyone, everyone, and always; and he offers them all new possibilities in life, right up to the last moment. That is why we must forgive everyone, always, aware that the willingness to forgive comes from the experience of having been forgiven. Only one is unable to forgive: the one who has not been forgiven. (2 October 2024).*

S'io m' intuassi come tu' in mii (Were I in thee even as thou art in me)

This verse of the Highest Poet, Dante Alighieri, (Paradise IX, 81) seems to me to express the profound depth and desire for the love of God in Pope Francis' third encyclical letter, *Dilexit nos, on the human and divine love of the Heart of Jesus Christ*.

Writes Francis, *His open heart has gone before us and waits for us, unconditionally, asking only to offer us his love and friendship. (Dilexit nos n.1).*

The Pope reminds us that the algorithm cannot control the heart, *ultimately that I am my heart, for my heart is what sets me apart, shapes my spiritual identity and puts me in communion with other people. (ibid., no. 14).*

Faced with fratricidal wars and the scenario of a world without a heart (ibid., no. 22) and faced with one's mystery, *perhaps the most decisive question we can ask is, "Do I have a heart?" (ibid., no. 23).*

It is a 'social miracle' to see that the world can change from the heart: It is only by starting from the heart that our communities will succeed in uniting and reconciling differing minds and wills so that the Spirit can guide us in unity as brothers and sisters. Reconciliation and peace are also born of the heart. (ibid., no. 28).

Hope comes to us, it is in the present not in the future, it is in the now, not waiting, procrastinating or waiting for things to change by themselves. Hope is now because it is today of salvation, and the 'social miracle' is produced from the heart of every single person.

It seems indispensable to me to recognise the "self-transcendence of the heart" in our Rosminian spirituality, travelling through knowledge and grace as self-transcendence of the heart.

In this sense "Rosmini's work is altogether a theology and a philosophy of the heart". In this regard I refer to an illuminating paper, by Prof. Karl Heinz Menke, "*May my heart be yours*": *theology of the heart in Rosmini* (pp. 273-286), in the volume: *Antonio Rosmini, filosofo del cuore? Philosophia e theologia cordis nella cultura occidentale* (1995).

The key for Rosmini is in objectification or self-transcendence.

Uniquely Christ, says Rosmini, was the self perfectly existing in another. Hence it can be said: that where men are in the you of their neighbour, they begin to know the truth of the individual real. According to Rosmini, the man who is most in communion is also the man who understands the most Menke, *My Heart Be Yours*, p. 284).

The formation of the heart is the *unceasing work, that is, a constantly progressive effort at self-transcendence or 'in-objectify oneself'*. *He who refuses the formation of the heart cannot recognise the truth and cannot implement it; he who opens himself up to it, on the other hand, does not sin even when he does not observe a commandment or a prohibition* (ibid., p. 284).

Grace as self-transcendence of the heart (...) *He who allows himself to be grasped by the sacrifice of Christ converts his sin into obedience, into being for the sake of others - in Rosmini's terminology: into "in-objectification"* (ibid., p. 285).

God requires and expects the participation and collaboration of the person like two hopes meeting, that of God and that of man, the heart of the person before the heart of Christ (cf. *Dilexit nos*)

One completely misunderstands Rosmini's intentions if one interprets his insistence on trust in the unconditional love of divine Providence and if one interprets the recurring concepts of 'justice' and 'passivity' in the theocentric sense of a 'God all - we nothing'.

The opposite is true. Since the triune God is love, he does not want man as a pure recipient, but as the giver of himself. It can be further emphasised: since he is love, God cannot act in the world and in history without those who accept his love.

In the eyes of absolute love, no man is replaceable; each is one mission, the rejection of which, means a lack of grace, a lack of God's presence in this world (ibid., p. 285).

Prof. Menke states that this movement of in-objectivation or self-transcendence for Rosmini is so fundamental that he likens it to what in his spiritual writings and letters he calls

holiness, or indifference, humility, self-abandonment, annihilation, spiritual struggle and sacrifice (cf. p. 283).

Prof. Menke notes that Romano Guardini already counted Rosmini together with Pascal, Solov'ev and Newmann as belonging to the great tradition of the "philosophia et theologia cordis" since *he describes man as a "synthesis" of body and spirit, will and reason, and therefore as an "antenna" for the real* (p. 273).

Self-transcendence tends to prayer as its centre:

Make yourself known, O my God, communicate your nature to mine so that I may do what you do, and will what you will (Spiritual Writes, p. 223).

Father, I ask you for that good which he knows - that good which his heart loves - I ask you for what he has already asked of you, all that he has asked of you (ibid., p. 225).

Let my heart be yours - my heart be yours. I ask of you what that heart of Jesus Christ desires that I ask of you (ibid., p. 227).

I would also like to pray with you in the words of Venerable Francois Xavier Van Thuan, arising from his experience as a bishop in prison: 'I have chosen Jesus'.

*(...) I chose you,
and I have never felt regret.
I hear you say to me:
"Remain in me. Remain in my love!"
But how can I stay in another one?
Only love can realise
this extraordinary mystery.
I understand that you want my whole life.
"Everything! Is for your love!"*

*On the path of hope
I follow your every step.
Your wandering steps towards the stable in Bethlehem.
Your restless steps on the road to Egypt.
Your swift steps towards the house of Nazareth.
Your joyful steps to ascend with your parents to the Temple.
Your tired footsteps over thirty years of work.
Your solicitous steps in the three years of proclaiming the Good News.
Your anxious steps in search of the lost sheep.
Your painful footsteps in entering Jerusalem.
Your solitary steps in front of the praetorium.*

Your steps weighed down under the cross on the way to Calvary.

Your failed steps, dead and buried in a grave not your own.

(...)

How unworthy I am to be an apostle.

(...)

I will lose everything:

But you will remain with me.

Your love will be there

flooding my heart

with love for everyone.

My happiness will be total...

That is why I repeat:

I chose you.

I don't want anything but you

and your glory.

Finally, I would like to recall how one of my predecessors, Father Bernardino Balsari, consecrated "the Institute of Charity, its houses and its works to the Sacred Heart of Jesus" in his Christmas letter of December 1922, inviting all the communities to this solemn act with a letter setting out the reasons and spiritual roots in the teachings of Fr. Founder and the Fathers of the Church whom he loved.

The model for living this devotion, following Rosmini in the Discourse on Charity, are St. Paul and St. John the Apostle, imitators of the heart of Jesus: *and we have believed in the love God has for us* (1 Jn 4:16).

Let us renew this Consecration of "communion and protection" as Fr. Balsari indicated, in this Jubilee of Hope!

Hope does not disappoint: Jubilee 2025

Hope is related to joy *joyful in hope and strong in tribulation*, the liturgy repeats to us with St Paul (Rom 12:12).

It is that consolation that is the presence of the Holy Spirit for whom we ask to be always in joy "semper gaudere". *Joy and hope* are the horizon of the Church, in the midst of *tribulation and suffering* (Gaudium et Spes, no. 1).

It is the joy that blessed Fr. Founder points out to us as essential and a synthesis of all life, his final word: Adore, be silent, Rejoice!

The Jubilee is first and foremost a time of thanksgiving, of rejoicing for the essentials of life that we rediscover truer, greater and more beautiful behind the tears of repentance, conversion and pilgrimage.

God has been good to us, and we are glad (Ps 125), as the fruit of the Holy Spirit! Dayenu! Much less would have sufficed, but God has worked wonders for us! What would have become of us if his providence had not sustained us?

Dear brothers, sisters, and friends, I wish you to weep for joy and commotion not only remembering the social year that is ending or the beginning of the jubilee year and lifting your eyes and soul with hope, but to rejoice in the daily moments throughout the year!

We thank God the Father of all goodness and mercy for having called our novices and novices, postulants and aspirants to live out their baptismal vocation to the full, and for having awakened in many the restlessness to respond to his call: for our aspirants and young men and women who are on the path of discernment, for those who participate in vocations groups, for the brothers and sisters who are in formation to be ascribed, and for the new ascribed. I thank God the Father for the brothers and sisters who dedicate themselves to their formation and accompaniment.

Together we thank Jesus for having associated to his eternal Priesthood the priests Fr. Binix, ordained in India last 9th October, and Fr. Henry Mutune, who will be ordained in Kenya on 4th January 2025; we thank him for having called to service as deacons last 1st July in Rome Henry and Dani, and next 4th January 2025 in Kenya the dear brothers Reagan, Simon and Joseph Tembo.

We thank the Holy Spirit for the gift of joy and perseverance in the religious life and ministry of the brethren, for the anniversaries of the sisters' consecration, we pray for them that each day may be a Jubilee of hope in their life and the heart:

Religious Life's Jubilee

80th anniversary: Guido Malacarne.

70th anniversary: Gianfelice Vago, Gregorio Ferri, Mario Natale, Robin Paulson, Eric Willet.

65th anniversary: Vito Nardin, Thomas Coffey, Simon Giles.

60th anniversary: Giovanni Errigo.

40th anniversary: Paul Stiene, Polycarp Shayo.

25th anniversary: Vinod Kurian, Tom Thomas.

Priestly Ordination's Jubilee

55th anniversary: Giuseppe Bonacina, Gianfelice Vago, Nazzareno Natale, Robin Paulson, Peter Mullen, David Myers, Michael O'Neill, Michael Melican, Matthew Gaffney.

50th anniversary: Aidan Cunningham

25th anniversary: Michele Palermo, Jorge Rincon.

10th anniversary: Paul Gillham, Alfred Kimaryo, Aristid Shayo, Isaiah Nchimbi, Justus Okibo.

Let us give heartfelt thanks to Providence not only for persons, brothers and sisters, we also join in rejoicing for the works, things, everything that has been given out of pure grace and enables us to serve and live charity.

In particular, we give thanks for the call to be present as Rosminians in Uganda and Vietnam, where the Lord has been opening the door of hope to us for some years now with the gift of vocations.

In Uganda, with the official inauguration on 30th November of the new Blessed Antonio Rosmini parish in Kiroba in the Diocese of Jinja. We thank Providence for the new community formed by the first parish priest, Fr Modestus, and Br. Joseph Tembo.

In Vietnam, we give thanks for the solidarity and closeness received from the Christian faithful - truly the constant experience of God who loves us first! - and for the hospitality offered by the Immaculate Conception Parish in Ho Chi Minh on the top two floors of the parish house for the community of candidates and aspirants.

The 'Vietnamese mission' for the apostolate in Vietnam was established last September. It consists simply of three Scholastics, nine aspirants and one candidate, yet the Holy Spirit with the gentle breath of His Love constantly preceded us, surprisingly anticipating our steps and preparing the way for us. The resulting joy is the unmistakable sign of His presence in our midst. We thank the Good Shepherd for these young brethren for their enthusiasm in the mission and Christian witness.

Uganda and Vietnam are new shoots for the Institute of Charity too, shoots for a greater charity, gifts from the Lord to our small family.

I know that there are many of these "shoots" of hope in the Rosminian family: listening to Mother Antonietta, Deacon Alexander, Mama Gaspara and the missionary testimony of Mama Servatrix, I have experienced the joy of great hope and the desire to walk with confidence and patience, the child of hope (cf. *Spes non confundit*, no. 4). Let us not drop our arms (Zeph 3:16) in any reality or community of the Rosminian family: *Dayenu!* Much less would have sufficed, but instead...

Rosminian Jubilee 2028

Hope then does not disappoint, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Spirit that has been given to us (Rom 5:1-2.5)

The words of the Apostle, which the Pope used to announce the Jubilee of Hope, direct our journey in Jesus our hope.

Hope is born of love and based on the love springing from the pierced heart of Jesus upon the cross. (...)

By his perennial presence in the life of the pilgrim Church, the Holy Spirit illumines all believers with the light of hope. He keeps that light burning, like an ever-burning lamp, to sustain and invigorate our lives.

Christian hope does not deceive or disappoint because it is grounded in the certainty that nothing and no one may ever separate us from God's love. (Spes non confundit, no.3).

We make ourselves pilgrims from the Jubilee of Hope 2025 to the Rosminian Jubilee 2028, on the bicentenary of the beginning of the Institute of Charity at Sacro Monte Calvario in Domodossola.

So, a pilgrimage that will continue, we recognise that we need it to rediscover our identity and to live our spirituality to the full.

The holy year is the start for the Rosminian family of a pilgrimage of faith, hope and Charity in the footsteps of Antonio Rosmini, to live our vocation to the charism of charity to the full (cf. *Spes non confundit*, n. 5: a journey of hope)

But the Church embraces us in an even greater journey of peace and fraternity.

We also know that this holy year will lead towards another fundamental anniversary for all Christians: in 2033, in fact, the two thousand years of the Redemption accomplished through the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus will be celebrated. We are thus facing a journey marked by great stages, in which God's grace precedes and accompanies the people who walk zealously in faith, industrious in charity and persevering in hope (cf. 1 Thess 1:3) (Spes non confundit, no. 6).

With solidity we are anchored in hope (*Spes non confundit*, n. 18). On the long road we cannot fail to travel, we receive orientation, direction and purpose from the hope in which we abound (Rom 15:13) so that even in our daily actions everything is illuminated and nourished by the reasons of our hope (1 Peter 3:15).

The image of the anchor expresses our life firmly gripped in hope, a sign of security and certain guidance (Heb 6:18-20), beyond storms, sin, fear and death. The Pope invites us: (...) *Let us even now be drawn to this hope! Through our witness, may hope spread to all those who anxiously seek it. (Spes non confundit, no. 25).*

Steps of Hope

Some anniversaries that we want to remember also have the value of steps of hope.

The 150th anniversary of Domodossola's Collegio Mellerio Rosmini (1874-2024) was celebrated, with initiatives that saw the ancient theatre converted into an Auditorium dedicated to the memory of Don Tullio Bertamini (1924 - 2013), whose 100th birthday it was.

This year we commemorated 160 years of the Rosminian presence in the United States (1864-2024). A foundation that goes back to the origins; missionaries known to Fr. Founder and prepared by his first companions. In his Christmas letter of 1963 Fr Giovanni Gaddo celebrated the resourcefulness of Fr Costa, called the Apostle of Illinois, and his first companions. It was a story of service in education and parish ministry that led to a presence in some thirty communities. We humbly follow in their footsteps with perseverance today with our presence in Florida.

The sixtieth anniversary of the *Colegio Juan XIII* in Cabimas, Venezuela (1965-2025), founded by Fr. Giovanni Zantedeschi with his first missionary companions, in particular for this school and pastoral activities related to Fathers Andrea Adobati and Arturo Villotti.

The year 2025 also marks the 50th anniversary of the death of a great ascribed, Professor Michele Federico Sciacca (1908-1975), a passionate scholar of Antonio Rosmini, himself a great writer and fervent animator of young people in philosophical enquiry, the soul of the International Centre for Rosminian Studies, and the creator of the Cattedra Rosmini. An apostle of intellectual charity, as a service to the system of truth.

Remembering and celebrating these events is part of the Jubilee, it makes us retrace paths of hope to still build a future of peace in justice.

Signs of hope

Hope - to quote Charles Peguy again - is the little sister in the house who asks a lot of questions all the time, and joyfully wants us to go and play with her and asks if we recognise her, if we can find her in hide-and-seek... do you see the signs of hope in your daily life, around you?

What are the signs of hope now present in my life?

What signs of the times around me call for hope?

Peace, transmitting life, freedom and amnesty initiatives that transmit hope, works of mercy, closeness to the sick and the weak, caring for children, students, engaged couples, the younger generations, the joy and hope of the Church and the world! (*Spes non confundit*, nos. 7-12).

The Pope also points to other signs of the times, the response to migrants, the elderly -grandmothers and grandparents- and the billions of poor, who often lack the necessities of life (nos. 13-15).

What are the signs of hope for our small Institute, for the Rosminian family? What are signs of times for us as a community on the road of missionary disciples?

Secondary and seemingly insignificant, minor things are actually a sign for us, they "hearten" us, they point us to his presence, and we can recognise him as John: *It is the Lord!* (John 21:7):

... They found a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes...

...Upon seeing the star, they felt immense joy...

... then Mary answered: Here I am, I am the handmaid of the Lord!

... A voice was heard from Heaven: You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased!


...Jesus began to say: this word which you hear with your own ears is fulfilled today

... Jesus answered them: only the sign of the prophet Jonah will be given to you.

What signs of hope do I recognise day by day?

Hope is the smile of a Child, who is born for us!
May we all be comforted by his smile and his sweet gaze,
and infected by Joy become his missionary disciples!

I embrace you, in His heart,



Marco Tanghetti
Father General

Rome, Christmas 2024
Beginning of the Holy Year 2025
Jubilee of Hope

WORKSHEETS - PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY STUDY

WORKSHEET 1

We now know a little more - from our twofold experience in the Synod - the method of conversation in the spirit. Perhaps we can begin to use this means that fosters discernment by means of listening to everyone, silence and sharing at a deeper level between people to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Churches (Rev 2:7) in our communities, parish councils and internally.

You can find the passages of the conversation in the Spirit at www.synod.va

In fact, we read in the final document of the Synod about synodal spirituality (nos. 43-46):
The renewal of the Christian community is possible only by recognising the primacy of grace. If spiritual depth at both personal and communal levels is lacking, synodality is reduced to organisational expediency. (...) Conversation in the Spirit ... has been experienced as a path of renewal that transforms individuals, groups, and the Church. The word 'conversation' expresses something more than mere dialogue: it harmoniously interweaves thought and feeling, creating a shared vital space. That is why we can say that conversion is at play in conversation. (...) Grace brings this human experience to fruition: conversing 'in the Spirit' means living the experience of sharing in the light of faith and evangelical atmosphere within which the Holy Spirit's unmistakable voice can be heard.

WORKSHEET 2

Let us pray and meditate together on this prayer by Robert Kennedy.

Let us contemplate ourselves in hope, with our flaws and weaknesses, with our small crosses "that we carry with repugnance".

It is also a prayer whose sentiments are those suggested by Blessed Antonio Rosmini as necessary to begin daily meditation, "ordered to the purification of the soul" (Lez. Spir. VIII).

I abandon myself, O God, into your hands. Turn and turn this clay, like clay in the hands of the potter. Give it a shape and then break it, if you will.

Ask, command, what do you want me to do? Humbled, humiliated, persecuted, misunderstood, slandered, disconsolate, suffering, useless to everything, I have only to say, following the example of your mother: 'Let it be done to me according to your word'. Give me love par excellence, the love of the cross, but not of the heroic crosses that might nourish self-love, but of those vulgar crosses, which I unfortunately bear with repugnance... Of those crosses one encounters every day in contradiction, in failure, in false judgements, in coldness, in the rejection and contempt of others, in the malaise and faults of the body, in the darkness of the mind and in the silence and barrenness of the heart. Then only Thou shalt know that I love Thee, even if I do not know it, but this is enough for me.

Amen.

WORKSHEET 3

The Synod and its journey are a fruit of hope for the journey of the whole Church and at the service of all humanity. The Final Document was taken up by Pope Francis as the guide after the Synod, in addition to ten particular themes entrusted to as many commissions for decisions to be taken by June 2025.

Let us discuss the three main areas of synodal discernment, reading them in our communities and ministries (document at www.synod.va):

- Together on the boat: the conversion of relationships
- 'Casting the net': process conversion
- An abundant catch: the conversion of bonds

WORKSHEET 4

The Pope's encyclical '*Dilexit nos*' speaks to the heart of the Rosminian and reads the great challenges of the Church and the world 'with the heart', 'with a heart that can see', 'we before the heart of Christ'.

Let us dialogue together, highlighting Rosminian aspects and insights that help us develop what the Church is asking of us today.

Blessed Antonio Rosmini says that ours is a 'religion of the heart'. A passage from the Constitutions that can enlighten us to begin our meeting of sharing and discernment, the definition of the Rosminian, "a person directed to his own interior life":

"The state that we love and choose is lowly and humble, a life hidden with Christ in God; the member in our way of life is a person directed to his own interior life, weeping over himself, grounded in the bitterness of penitence " (C 525).

And from '*Dilexit nos*':

" Taking the heart seriously, then, has consequences for society as a whole. The Second Vatican Council teaches that, "every one of us needs a change of heart; we must set our gaze on the whole world and look to those tasks we can all perform together in order to bring about the betterment of our race (Gaudium et Spes, 82). For "the imbalances affecting the world today are in fact a symptom of a deeper imbalance rooted in the human heart" (GS, 10). (Dilexit nos, 29)

WORKSHEET 5

The Holy Father asked to rewrite Canon Law and the *Ratio Fundamentalis* of Priestly Formation in the light of synodality (Final Document No. 148), which is the way of being Church today. Participation, communion, mission. How does pastoral conversion see us on the way? How does the conversion proposed by Blessed Antonio Rosmini in the Five Wounds of the Church move us to action in the Church today, in the face of the challenges illuminated in the four-year synodal journey?

