

PROVINCIAL CIRCULAR

Salesian Province of Mary Help of Christians, Guwahati, Assam, India

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My Dear Confreres,

Greetings from Don Bosco Provincial House, Guwahati!

Even before her earthly existence, God had Mary in His mind and ordained that she, unlike Eve, would promote virtue (obedience), oppose anything that destroyed healthy relationship and would promote life, not death (the wages of sin is death, Rom 6:23). Right from the start, Mary's life was awe-inspiring and fascinating for its purpose/mission oriented living. At the fall of Adam and Eve, God ordained that henceforth the good would always be at enmity with evil, ensuring that the good triumphed ultimately. God told Satan that "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel" (Gen 3:15).

God prepared Mary from the first moment of her conception for the redemptive mission. In order she might worthily conceive the Redeemer in her womb and give birth to Him, God gave her a special privilege. In the Dogma, *Ineffabilis Deus*, Pope Pius IX on 8th December 1854 pronounced that "the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin".

MARY IN THE BIBLE – ALWAYS COLLABORATIVE AND HELPFUL

Both the Genesis prediction to crush the head of Satan through her Son and the Immaculate Conception were privileges accorded to her by God, which Mary made use of to collaborate with God and to help



her offspring. Her submission and promise “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38) showed how she helped God and committed herself for the mission of making the Word dwelt among humankind (Jn 1:14).

Soon after the Annunciation, Mary went in haste to help Elizabeth. She believed that with God everything was possible. Gabriel told her that Elizabeth was in the sixth month of her pregnancy. Such time as this was when someone who was barren for so long would need. Mary’s eagerness to help kept her with Elizabeth till John was born. Creating in one’s life an attitude to help and assist especially the needy, without counting the cost (travelling a long distance) and accepting inconveniences that came from such decision and actions, all these the religious could learn from Mary’s life.

At Cana’s wedding, the presence of Jesus and Mary sanctified marriage. Such solemn festivity incurred detail planning and implementation. Despite that, anything could go wrong. The wine had run out. Mary was observant and concerned. Her active presence made her notice what others did not. She realized that only miracle could save the situation. Upon her motherly insistence, Jesus whose time had actually not come, turned water into wine and saved the couple from humiliation.

At the foot of the Cross, Mary’s presence with the apostle John was noticed by Jesus and before he expired, he entrusted them to one another. She was silent, shedding tears of sorrow but her presence at the foot of the “shameful cross” was the best accompaniment that a dying person could hope for. Physical presence accompanied by helpful attitude could still be the best accompaniment that the suffering, the dying, the marginalised, the despised and the rejected would desire and Mary set an example for this.

Crucifixion during the time of Jesus was ignominious and ultimate punishment. For the majority of onlookers, it was the end of Jesus. Jesus’ death had the same impact on the apostles despite their Master’s oft repeated “after three days.” Later, even when everyone saw him and believed, Thomas insisted on placing his fingers on the wounds. It was Mary who kept the disoriented apostles together in prayer till they all dispersed for the “Go and Preach” mission after the Pentecost.

APPARITIONS OF MARY – CONTINUITY OF HER INTERVENTIONS IN HUMAN HISTORY FOR ITS SALVATION

At the completion of her earthly life, Mary was assumed body and soul into heaven and crowned as the Queen of all Saints and Angels. Hence Mary is alive and is in heaven. We shall reflect about the messages that she delivered in her apparitions at Lourdes and Fatima which are but her intervention in humanity for its salvation. I have not presented all the messages from these apparitions; nor are they in the right sequence. What I have given below is only a selection of some important messages from these Marian apparitions.

Our Lady of Lourdes

During her eighteen apparitions to Bernadette Soubirous at the Grotto of Massabielle at Lourdes (France), the messages that the Blessed Virgin Mary delivered to her and through her to the world could be interpreted as **“God is love and he loves us as we are.”**

On 11th February 1858 Bernadette, Toinette and Jeanne went looking for firewood. In front of the grotto, Toinette and Jeanne crossed the icy water. Bernadette hesitated to follow them because of her chronic asthma. She then heard a noise like a gust of wind, but none of the trees were moving. Raising her head, she saw in a hollow of the rock a small young lady, who looked at her and smiled at her. That was the first Apparition of the Virgin Mary.

In Bernadette’s time, the grotto was a dirty, hidden, damp and cold. It was there that the Virgin Mary, dressed in white, the sign of total purity and the sign of God’s love, deigned to appear. There was a contrast between this damp and obscure grotto and the presence of the Virgin Mary, the Immaculate Conception. It reminded of the wealth of the goodness of God and the poverty of the human person. Jesus went to sit at the table of sinners because he came to search out that which was lost.

It was the place where God left a message for humankind, the message that “God comes to tell us that he loves us” – this was the heart of the Message of Lourdes and he loves us as we are, with all our successes but also with all our wounds, our weaknesses and our limitations.

During the third apparition on 18th February, Mary spoke for the first time. Bernadette held out a sheet of paper and a pencil to write down her name but she lovingly replied, “What I have to say to you does not have to be written down.” This was an extraordinary statement. It meant that Mary wanted to enter into a relationship which was of the order of love, at the level of the heart. The heart in the Bible, signified the very centre of the person, that which was the depth of the person. Bernadette was right away invited to open the depths of her heart to the message of Love.



Later in her life, Bernadette narrated her feelings when the Virgin Mary asked her, “Would you do me the kindness of coming here for 15 days?” She said that she was overwhelmed. It was the first time that anyone had addressed her in a formal way. She described these words by saying that the Virgin looked at her “as one person looks at another person.” Bernadette felt that she was respected and loved and had the

experience of being a person. We are all worthy of our dignity in the eyes of God because each of us is loved by God.

People around her asked Bernadette whether the Virgin Mary spoke to her. She replied, “Yes, now and again she would say, **‘Penance, penance, penance, pray for sinners.’**” Penance meant conversion. Conversion involved turning the heart towards God and towards others. Praying for sinners implied that sin would not make human beings happy as sin is something that is contrary to the love of God.

Our Lady at Lourdes specifically asked for reparation of sins committed by people throughout the world. The conversion of sinners was/is something that should always be at the forefront of our minds, first starting with our own conversion. Another pertinent message that Our Lady gave here was this: “I do not promise to make you happy in this world but in the other.” We know a world of violence, lies, sensuality, profit and war. But we know also a world of charity, solidarity, and justice. These two worlds exist on our earth. When Jesus, in the Gospel, invites us to discover the Kingdom of Heaven, he invites us to discover in our world, as it is “in the other.”

Our Lady of Fatima

In 1917, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to three young children at Fatima (Portugal), namely Lucy, Francis and Jacinta, who were cousins. Francis and Jacinta died in an influenza pandemic within three years after the apparitions. Lucy went on to become a Carmelite nun. She told the Church the details of the Fatima prophecies, the first parts of which have been common public knowledge for many years.

On 13th May 1917 the three children – Lucy, Jacinta and Francis took their flock of sheep to a natural hollow in the ground known as the Cova da Iria to graze, just outside the town of Fatima. While the sheep were grazing and the children were playing, there was a sudden flash of lightning. The children looked up, bewildered into the sky. They started to gather the sheep thinking a storm was brewing in the distance although the day was pleasant and there was no other sign of bad weather, when there was a second flash that caused alarm. A few meters away stood a lady of dazzling light. Their eyes were unable to comprehend the lady’s brilliance and beauty. The children smelled roses.



“Where are you from?” Lucy asked her. “I am from heaven,” the lady replied. “What do you want of us?” asked Lucy. “I came to ask you to come here on the thirteenth day of each month for six months at the same time, and then I will return here a seventh time.”

The Fatima apparitions of our Blessed Mother were undoubtedly the most prophetic of modern apparitions. There were the three parts of the “secret” referring especially to the frightening vision of hell, devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Second World War, and the prediction of the immense damage that Russia would do to humanity by abandoning the Christian faith and embracing Communist totalitarianism.

But more than these, when we think of Our Lady and the Rosary, we could first think of what Our Lady said at Fatima. It was there that she asked the faithful to pray the Rosary each day. “Pray the rosary every day to obtain peace for the world and the end of the war” was what the Virgin Mary told the three children on 13th May 1917 on her first apparition.

After several other messages the lady asked them to recite the Rosary daily before she rose in a cloud of light and glided away into the eastern sky. Lucy warned her cousins to say nothing of what they had seen out of fear of disbelief, but Jacinta was too excited. Predictably Jacinta told her parents about the apparition and there was a general reaction of disbelief. Lucy’s mother was convinced that her child was lying and punished her continually when she refused to deny her story. Other children laughed at them and even spat at them. But the visions of Mary and her series of prophecies remained apparent to the three children.

At first, Lucy, Francis and Jacinta had great difficulty trying to share what they had seen, because the government of Portugal was heavily opposed to religion at that time. A short time later another vision appeared. Witnesses reported, “I looked at the sun and saw it spinning like a disc, rolling on itself. I saw people changing colour. They were stained with the colours of the rainbow. The sun seemed to fall down from the sky. The people said that the world was going to end. They were afraid and screaming.” Investigations into the Fatima event have confirmed that the miracle of 13th October 1917 known as “the dance of the sun” was seen over an area of 32 by 20 miles, an area of over 600 square miles.

On 13th May 1917, on her first apparition, Our Lady asked Lucy and her two cousins as to whether or not they wished to offer themselves to God to endure all the sufferings that He may be pleased to send them, as both an act of reparation for the sins with which He was offended and an act of supplication for the conversion of sinners. On receiving their answer in the affirmative, she told them that “You will have much to suffer. But the grace of God will be your comfort.”

On the same day, Our Lady exhorted them to “Pray the rosary every day to obtain peace for the world and the end of the war.”

In her second apparition, on 13th June, Our Lady conveyed the message of the desire of Jesus to establish devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in the world. She told the

children that “I promise salvation to those who embrace it and these souls will be beloved of God like flowers arranged by me to adorn His throne.” It was evident that Our Lady was concerned about the lack of purity and chastity in the world and the great reward of those who persevere in this virtue.

On 13th July 1917, during the third apparition, Our Lady once again gave the children the message to “Pray the Rosary every day in order to obtain peace for the world and the end of the war.” She also invited the children to “sacrifice yourselves for sinners and say many times, especially when you make a sacrifice, ‘O Jesus, this is for love of Thee, for the conversion of sinners, and in reparation for the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary.’”

During her fourth apparition on 19th August 1917, again Our Lady exhorted the children to “Pray, pray much, and sacrifice for sinners, for many souls go to hell because there is no one to sacrifice and pray for them.”

On 13th October 1917, in her sixth and last apparition, Our Lady expressed her desire that a chapel be built in that place in her honour. She declared herself as the Lady of the Rosary, exhorting them to continue to pray the Rosary daily. She said that the war was about to end, and the soldiers would soon return to their homes.

When Lucy asked her if she would cure some sick persons and that if she could convert sinners, she replied that some would obtain the grace of healing. She said that people must amend their lives and ask forgiveness for their sins. Finally appearing more sad, she added that the world should not offend Our Lord any further as he was already offended much before.

We can take solace in Our Lady’s words given here from across time and space. She will help us. She asks us to pray the Rosary; she invites us to conversion. Our Lady wants nothing more than to lead us to her Son. This is why she is such a powerful intercessor. She is asking us to continue to pray for the conversion of souls and the entire world.

MOTHER MARY, MODEL OF PRAYER & CONTEMPLATION

In this month dedicated to the Rosary, we are asked to fix our gaze on Mary, the perfect model of discipleship to follow and to imitate her. She has been given to us; we can take her home as did the beloved disciple. Whoever has Jesus’ mother in his home will experience the love of Jesus. She is our Mother, our guide, and our model. As our *Constitutions* say, we contemplate and imitate her faith.

Mary was that committed and faithful disciple who said, “Yes, let your will be done.” She stands in front of life’s mysteries saying yes: yes to the moment, yes to the event, yes to the relationship with God. She stands in contemplation before life’s mysteries—whatever life gave. Speaking of her, St Luke says that Mary “kept all these things in her

heart.” And this not only with regard to the extraordinary events of the conception of Jesus and of his birth and infancy, but also of his entire life, of his ascension to the right hand of the Father and his wonderful interventions in history. Proof of this is the canticle of the Magnificat, the mirror of Mary’s heart, which can be considered the model of the interior life and of the global outlook that every true religious must cultivate within himself/herself.



Moreover, Mary “treasures” those moments, even when she is perplexed, even when she doesn’t understand, even when she is misunderstood. She keeps in her heart and treasures whatever life offers her—both light and darkness, confusion and understanding, sorrows and joys. Whether at Nativity or at the losing of Jesus or at the cross, she remains faithful and committed to God.

It is only fitting that we ask our Blessed Lady to help us to develop in our heart each day this specific aspect of Christian hope, even as we make efforts to pray and encourage the Rosary prayer—which is considered the

summary of the gospels.

ROSARY AS A MEANS TO UNION WITH GOD AND HOLINESS

I wish and pray that the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary prompts us to give renewed importance to the personal and communal practice of praying the Rosary meaningfully and devoutly. It is a simple and popular devotion, highly recommended by Don Bosco, St Francis de Sales and other saints. It is a Biblical prayer, within the reach of all for contemplating the person of Jesus Christ and the central events of salvation history. It brings us closer to Christ and intensifies our familiarity with him.

The commemoration of this Marian event on 7th October and throughout the month of October invites us to discover in praying the Rosary, a practical way of preserving in our hearts the fullness of Christ-event: there are twenty of them and we call them “mysteries.” It is on the basis of these facts that we can nourish our relationship with Christ and, while contemplating in them the ineffable richness of the incarnation and redemption in the context of all the grave problems, especially the coronavirus disease that surrounds us in this crucial era that could be a threshold to the much needed transformation of the world structures. The prayer of Rosary reminds us of the secret for the effective functioning of every disciple, who must be “like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

If prayed well, the Rosary (as with all our prayers, especially the Holy Eucharist) can become an instrument of encounter with the divine, holiness, transformation, newness and healing both physical and spiritual. Prayer makes us contemplative and attentive,

and it can also make us sensitive to God's voice in the humdrum of our lives. A boring, monotonous recital can turn into a creative connection to the source of all life.

The prayer and meditation of Rosary invites us to conversion and transformation. We are challenged to grow and mature like Mary, and thus configure ourselves into Christ himself. When we pray the second part of the Hail Mary, we ask our Mother to "pray for us, sinners." The consciousness of our personal and corporate sinfulness pushes us to transform ourselves and thus be agents of transformation. We transform people to the degree we have been transformed. We can bring the good news including the forgiveness of sins, only inasmuch as we ourselves have journeyed through forgiveness—receiving it as well as giving it.

CONTEMPLATION OF THE MYSTERIES OF THE ROSARY

Many of us do feel bored to pray the Rosary, and we even try to miss it whenever possible. However, there are some confreres who meditate on all the twenty mysteries in their personal time on a daily basis. Once again, it is not merely the "saying" of the Rosary that is important, but the actual heart and mind that we put in by going deeper into the practice. We even feel bad when some of us rattle off and try to finish the Rosary prayers faster. The fact of distractions too need to be addressed while praying the Rosary. Animation especially when our own hostel boys and parishioners join us for the Rosary is one way of helping them to find meaning in the Rosary, pray it devoutly and develop a taste for it.



The style of the Salesian praying of the Rosary amazes other Christians. We walk and pray, even as a community. This is unthinkable for others who are not used to the Salesian traditions. While it is a good way to pray the Rosary, especially for the youngsters in our settings and oratories,

we need to be careful about not making it a time of easy distractions. Let it not become a mere ritual.

I have personally seen so many of us praying the Rosary while travelling or moving on to the next programme. I appreciate your commitment, and encourage you to make them into a moment of contemplation. Let it not be a practice of ticking off the prayers to complete them to give us personal satisfaction. I invite other confreres to seriously get into the habit of praying more than one part of Rosary a day, in order to make this

prayer as part of our religious conviction and growth.

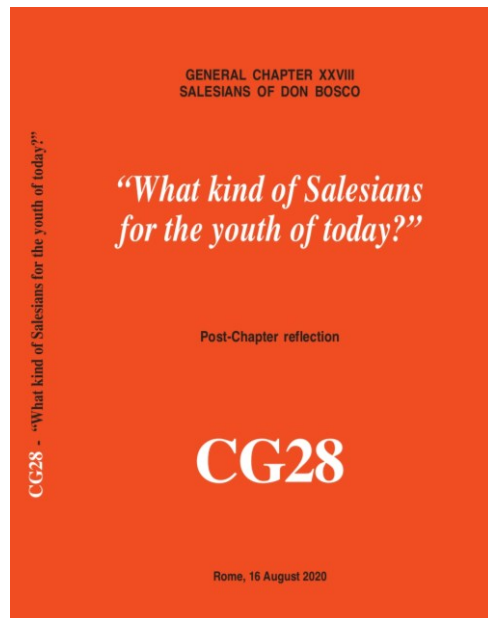
In his Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus*, Paul VI wrote: “There has also been felt with greater urgency the need to point out once more the importance of a further essential element in the Rosary, in addition to the value of the elements of praise and petition, namely the element of contemplation. Without this the Rosary is a body without a soul, and its recitation is in danger of becoming a mechanical repetition of formulas. By its nature the recitation of the Rosary calls for a quiet rhythm and a lingering pace, helping the individual to meditate on the mysteries of the Lord’s life as seen through the eyes of her who was closest to the Lord. In this way the unfathomable riches of these mysteries are unfolded” (*Marialis Cultus*, 47).

I wish and pray that this month of October help us to live with creative fidelity our devotion to Mother Mary through the Holy Rosary, and also to introduce our young people to this kind of simple and practical prayer and meditation. Perhaps not only in the month of October, but also we need to take up the contemplation of the mysteries on a daily basis in our personal lives, besides praying together in the communities.

POST-CHAPTER REFLECTION – ACTS OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL 433

On 16th August 2020, two hundred and five years after the birth of Don Bosco and hundred and sixty two years since the birth of our Congregation, Fr Angel Fernandez Artime, Rector Major presented to the Congregation the Post-Chapter Reflection, four months after the General Chapter was concluded abruptly due to Covid-19. In it, among many other rich presentations, he has in a special way offered to each confrere of the Congregation, the “programmatic guidelines ... for the six-year period from 2020–2026.” The study reflection visualised the progress of the congregation in “What kind of Salesians for the youth of today” through becoming the Salesian of Don Bosco forever, renewed invitation of DA MIHI ANIMAS CETERA TOLLE, the Salesian Sacrament of presence, the Salesian Pastors today and particularly, through absolute priority for the young, the poorest and most abandoned and defenceless.

The Rector Major hopes that these programmatic guidelines should certainly be motive for study, analysis and further exploration both by the Provinces and **by each confrere, especially by the Rectors** for their service of animation and governance of the local communities. Certainly, the Provincial and the council is expected to make its study, interiorization and implementation its priority.



The digital form of the book has already been circulated to all the communities. I request each confrere to heed the invitation of the Rector Major to internalize, to meditate and live these reflections which are the fruits of the General Chapter 28. I request all the Rectors to animate their own communities during the spiritual reading, the *lectio divina*, during the assembly of confreres, the day of the community, the House Council and even during the meditation and prayer.

I too will animate the communities during my visits but together with the Rector Major and his council, I would earnestly invite each confrere to consider these reflections as the special and priceless gift of the Rector Major and the General Chapter 28. May the Lord help us to be like Don Bosco who attuned his life to the promptings of the Spirit and proved himself docile to his inspirations. May Our Blessed Mother Mary, Help of all the members of the Salesian family and of Christians, who “treasured all these in her heart,” intercede for us to make the charism of Don Bosco, ever fruitful, even as we prepare ourselves to celebrate the Centenary of the arrival of Salesians to North East.

May Blessed Michael Rua, whose feast we will celebrate on 29th October, inspire us that we become imbued with the spirit of Don Bosco. When beatifying Don Rua, Pope Paul VI stated: “The Salesian Family owes its origin to Don Bosco, to Don Rua its continuation; he developed the Saint’s example into a school, his Rule into a spirit, his holiness into a model. He turned the spring into a river.”

SYMPOSIUM BOOK RELEASE



On 14th September 2020, I was happy to release the volume *Evangelization and Catechesis*, a collection of last year’s symposium papers edited by Fr Biju Michael, our Regional, and Sr Lydia Komuhra FMA, Vice Provincial of Guwahati. This symposium had been held on the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee of our Province, and as preparation for the Centenary of 2022. The first copies of the book were presented to Sr

Lydia, and Sr Escociana Vas MSMHC, Vice Provincial of Guwahati. I am grateful to Fr Biju Michael and others who worked hard to bring out this volume.

FR PAULUS GURIA

Fr Paulus Guria, who had been missionary *ad gentes* in the Province of Africa - Grand Lakes (AGL), applied to the Rector Major to join ING due to health reasons. His request has been accepted and is now permanently incardinated in our Province. We welcome him back to the Province, and wish him well in his ministry.

CONDOLENCES

Fr Ethelbert's sister **Mrs Albina Toppo** expired on 14th September 2020 in Mumbai, due to Covid-19. She was 74. May her soul rest in peace. We offer our heartfelt condolences to Fr Ethelbert Minj and the family members.

The elder sister of Fr Joseph Puthenpurackal (PJ), **Sr Martin SVM**, 76 yrs, passed away on 14th September 2020. She had been hospitalised for two weeks for heart-related problems. We pray for the eternal repose of her soul. We offer our condolences to Fr PJ Joseph and the family members.

The mother of Fr Solomon Dennis, **Mrs Pushpa Jose**, aged 80, passed away on 28th September 2020, after a heart attack. We pray that God may give her eternal bliss and peace in His Kingdom. As we offer our heartfelt sympathies and condolences to Fr Solomon, we also pray for him and all the bereaved family members.

CONCLUSION

Dear Confreres, May the month of Rosary bring us closer to Mother Mary and to Jesus. As Don Bosco became a promoter of the devotion to Our Lady and to Rosary, let us also in our own simple and humble ways promote the Rosary prayer, and help people to love Mary more and more.

May God bless you all!

Yours affectionately in the Lord,



Fr Januarius S Sangma, SDB
Provincial

