



Rome, 1 June 2020
153rd anniversary of the Foundation of the Institute

Let's start again from our frailties

"Everyone's eyes are on you waiting, and you provide them with food in due course. You open your hand and satisfy the hunger of every living thing." (Ps 145.15-16)

I concluded that Father Marani was right, and that the only banner, refuge and fortress in which to place all my trust was God, who is a gentleman, and the only gentleman, who has a mind, a heart, and a conscience, and who can make us work miracles" (Writings 6881)

Dearly beloved confreres,

Greetings and prayers from Rome for each one of you and for the peoples you accompany in this difficult time for everyone and in very special and unexpected circumstances.

We are living in a time that is as if suspended and full of surprising disclosures, a time that forces us to review criteria and priorities, that challenges our sense of freedom by calling us to responsibility, that questions our security and lays bare our weaknesses. We live between a past that memory struggles to preserve and a future that our thoughts cannot perceive and, in our prayer, we entrust everything to God.

Like every anniversary, the memory of the 153rd anniversary of the founding of our Institute becomes an occasion for a celebration that, recalling the past, strengthens our hope in our future. But even more, it becomes for us a gift and an invitation from the Lord to stop for a moment to evaluate our life and our mission. In this way, by looking into our eyes, by listening to the Lord, we find the strength to start again as missionary disciples towards our brothers and sisters who are waiting with confidence for the Word of the Lord. Let us start again from the discovery that we have all made in these months of confinement, our common weakness and fragility.

Looking at the life of our Father and Founder, Saint Daniele Comboni, in the years from 1859 to 1864, we find that, after the defeat and the failure of his first journey to Africa, he stopped, as a contemplative in action, "to observe for new movements of the Spirit", open to the ecclesial and social reality that surrounded him and available to the Spirit who, from above, finally enlightens him on his new start: "... waiting for the new movements of the Spirit of God, always ready to sacrifice everything and overcome everything, in order to follow and fulfil the Lord's will" (Writings, 464).

A look at our history bears witness to the promise of fruitfulness, hidden in this starting afresh from our weaknesses, in total openness to God: the preservation of the Combonian heritage, after the death of the founder, and the configuration of the Institute as a religious congregation (1881-1885); the return to the mission, after the Mahdia (1900); the restarting, after the doubling of the Combonian heritage with the creation of the two congregations FSCJ and MFSC (1922-1923); the embrace of Africa and the new openings after the painful mass expulsion from South Sudan (1964); the painful search for conciliar renewal and the rediscovered unity of the two Combonian congregations in the historic General Chapters of 1969-1979, of which we recalled last year the 50th and 40th anniversaries, respectively, and which carried out the apostolic reconfiguration of the Institute as we know it today.

A careful look at our present invites us to have the courage to start afresh from our weaknesses, again and again, leaving to God the initiative and the primacy. Saint Daniele Comboni urges us in this sense and direction, inviting us to "have courage for the present and especially for the future". The next 19th General Chapter of 2021 will certainly be a providential and qualified moment for this departure.

As Pope Francis also invited us to do at the extraordinary moment of prayer on the St. Peter's Basilica' square in Rome on March 27 last, we live "this time of trial as a time of choice to resetting the course of life towards the Lord, and towards others", towards those who wait for the Gospel. For our part, we are certain that the Lord stands at our door and knocks (Rev 3:20) to renew our life and our mission with the promise of renewed apostolic fruitfulness.

Happy celebration of the anniversary of the Foundation of our Institute and a good beginning of the month of June, a month dedicated to the contemplation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Studium Combonianum and General Council