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Rome, 1 June 2021, the Anniversary of the Founding of the Institute

*«One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear and immediately blood and water flowed out »*

(Jn 19, 34)

Dear Confreres,

Fraternal greetings in the Heart of Jesus.

This year, the celebration of the *Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus* finds us fully engrossed in preparing the next General Chapter, a synodal event that gives us the opportunity to grow in fidelity to the chrism and so to incarnate it in the particular mission of this historic moment. This time is marked by the pandemic caused by the COVID which has been a shock at all levels, by conflicts and wars in different parts of the world and by tensions in some local Churches.

Our Rule of Life reminds us: *«The Founder discovered in the mystery of the Heart of Jesus the thrust of his missionary commitment. Comboni's unconditional love for the peoples of Africa had its origin and model in the saving love of the Good Shepherd who offered his life on the Cross for humanity »* (RL 3).

The Heart of Jesus is for us the anchor that keeps us joined to the source of life and the mission; it is the sap that gives life to our Institute; it is, without doubt, a fundamental element of the charism which helps us to re-qualify and renew our commitment. The Comboni mission, 154 years after the foundation of the Institute, continues in time and space, enriching us with shades of meaning that find concrete expression in new ways of being and living the mission. One of these expressions is, without doubt, integral ecology to which we are called to respond with the courage and creativity typical of our Founder.

In this feast, we renew our desire to follow Jesus in his total giving of himself for the salvation of the world and, in all humility, to place our gifts at the service of the Kingdom. We are invited to find in the contemplation of the mystery of the Heart of Jesus the audacity and the energy to set out where the Spirit leads us. Our missionary commitment will bear fruit only if it emanates from an experience of encounter with Jesus and is a living expression of that love which shines from the Cross towards all men and women, especially the most needy.

To celebrate the Heart of Jesus in a pandemic context that has forced us to seek new paths and adapt to the imperatives imposed by a situation that leaves us helpless and has made us suffer and weep for its victims among the Comboni Family, our own families and the people among whom we work, reminds us that we all belong to one interdependent family. To the loss of human lives we must also add the tremendous increase in the loss of employment throughout the world that inevitably leads to poverty. May the extraordinary gestures of solidarity we have witnessed be also signs of hope helping us to build up our humanity so needful of finding new coordinates that will enable all of us to have life in abundance. The blood and water that flow from the side of Christ are the sign that our fragility has as its final horizon the resurrection, and this lights up our work of proclaiming the Gospel of the infinite compassion of God for humanity. As Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus, let us make this suffering ours and let us renew our commitment in the mission Jesus has given us.

The renewal of our consecration on this Feast Day is an act of trust and an invitation to continue to grow in the vocation the Lord has given us as a gift for all humanity.

We beg the intercession of Holy Mary Our Mother who accompanied her Son at the foot of the cross and that of Saint Daniel Comboni.

We wish you a Happy Feast Day.

*The General Council*