

THE HEART OF JESUS SOURCE AND GOAL OF THE MISSION



REDISCOVERING THE HEART OF JESUS: A MISSIONARY PRIORITY

We are “Combonian Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus”.

The Heart, therefore, is part of our

name: it defines us and is an essential element of our DNA.

The *Heart of Jesus* is a profoundly human heart (“Only God could be so human”, says Boff). Our mission, therefore, is to live and bear witness to the humanity of Jesus – in the light of the Comboni charism – in a world that risks becoming increasingly dehumanised.

Do you want to know the heart of God? See how much compassion Jesus feels in the face of the lost crowd (cf. *Mk* 6:34); see how sad he is when we betray our humanity (cf. *Mk* 3:5); see how he rejoices at the faith of the little ones (cf. *Mt* 11:25); see with how much love Jesus wants to embrace us, as a hen embraces her chicks (cf. *Lk* 13:34); see with how much passion he fights and is willing to give his life for us (cf. *Jn* 10:11-15). There is no God outside the heart and humanity of Jesus!

Unfortunately, as pope Francis wrote in his message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, *No longer slaves, but brothers and sisters* (on 1st January 2015), today this humanity is strongly questioned by a culture based on “a notion of the human person which allows him or her to be treated as an object... [Then] people are no longer regarded as beings of equal dignity, as brothers or sisters sharing a common humanity, but rather as objects» (4). This is that ‘globalisation’ or ‘pathology of indifference’ that the Pope often denounces, and which materialises in a ‘throwaway’ culture and economy. In this context, rediscovering and living the humanity of the Heart of Jesus is a missionary priority. Francis reminds us that “the globalisation of indifference... requires all of us to forge a new worldwide solidarity and fraternity” (6).

THE HEART AS THE SOURCE AND GOAL OF THE MISSION

“I know your works; I know that you are neither cold nor hot ... Those whom I love, I reprove and chastise. Be earnest, therefore, and repent” (*Rev* 3:15-19).

The Heart is the source of the mission and reveals the fullness of its love on the Cross. If we let God pour his *ardour* into our hearts, we will be passionate missionaries: our life and our ‘ardent’ words will be able to warm and infect. If, however, we continue to have a lukewarm heart, we will not be able to announce any Good News. But Jesus does not resign himself to our lukewarmness: he reproaches us, corrects us, shakes us because he wants our love to be equal to his.

The Heart is also the goal of the mission because the aim of evangelisation is to help God enter the hearts of people so that we can remain in Him: “Whoever loves me ... my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him” (*Jn* 14:23). “Remain in me, as I remain in you” (*Jn* 15:4a).

Remaining in Jesus means remaining in his love for his brothers, especially for the least; remaining in his fight for peace; remaining in his thirst for justice; remaining in his ability to forgive; remaining faithful to him for the cause of the Kingdom; remaining in his trusting abandonment into the hands of the Father. It is this intimacy with the Heart that is the source and goal of the mission.

A HEART THAT IS GREAT AND SMALL: THE TWO DIMENSIONS OF LOVE

“There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance” (*Lk* 15:7).

We know that the word ‘heaven’ indicates God, the heart of God. In this passage, Luke is telling us that the heart of God is big but, at the same time, it is small: big, in the sense that it can welcome everyone and excludes no one; small, in the sense that it takes little to fill it, it takes little to move it. It is enough for him to feel embraced with sincere affection by *just one* of his brothers... and Jesus’ heart is filled to the brim with *joy*.

The smallness and greatness of the Sacred Heart correspond to the two dimensions of his love. On the one hand, Jesus weeps for one of his friends, Lazarus: “Jesus wept. So, the Jews then said, ‘See how he loved him’” (*Jn* 11:35-36). On the other hand, Jesus weeps for all of Jerusalem, which represents the community, the society in its political and religious organization: “As he saw the city, he wept over it, saying, ‘If you, even you, had only recognised on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes’” (*Lk* 19,41-42).

We missionaries, too, are called to weep and rejoice for *Lazarus*, to enter into the suffering and joys of the people we accompany; to weep and rejoice

for *Jerusalem*, taking care that the political and economic structures of the city are truly at the service of *peace* and the common good. In the latter case, shedding tears and joy is an expression of what Francis calls ‘social love’ and ‘political love’ (cf. *Laudato si’* 231). In other words, the heart of Jesus, on the one hand, is open to the great horizons of history and to the commitment to justice and peace; on the other hand, he focuses on the problems and wounds that block people’s lives, he is passionate about the hopes, embraces and encounters that shape and give meaning to our daily lives.

The main desire of his heart is summarised thus by Jesus: “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (*Jn* 10,10b).

Christ wants all his brothers and sisters to have a full life, a human life, a beautiful life, at all levels: personal, family, community and political.

This dual dimension of the love of the Heart is also very present in the life and spirituality of Saint Daniel Comboni. On the one hand, our Founder was concerned with freeing some slaves, so that their personal life could be that of a free person; on the other hand, he launched a great project – ‘Regenerating Africa with Africa’ – dreaming of the regeneration of an entire continent, on a religious, cultural’ and political level.

Sometimes it may happen that we accompany people’s daily difficulties with great attention and passion, but then we are completely unaware of the social and political problems that are often the cause of those difficulties. Or we may know everything about social and political problems, but then we lack the tenderness and patience to accompany the small joys and small difficulties of people’s daily lives. The Comboni Missionary of the Heart of Jesus cultivates both dimensions, which are inseparable from each other.

EMBRACING OUR BRETHREN

For Jesus it was very important to feel embraced: “I in them and you in me” (*Jn* 17,23a). The full life of Christ consists in feeling oneself to be in communion with the Father (“you in me”) and in communion with the brethren (“I in them”): the Nazarene desires that his life and his story intertwine with the life and history of his brothers and sisters.

Jesus could not live outside this communion, and, for this reason, he wants to involve the missionaries, primarily Comboni, in his desire *to embrace* humanity: “The Catholic [...] looked upon Africa... in the pure light of faith; there he saw an infinite multitude of brothers who belonged to the same family. [...] Then he was carried away under the impetus of that love set alight by the divine flame on Calvary hill [...] to embrace the whole human family; he felt his heart beat faster, and a divine power seemed to drive

him towards those unknown lands. There he would enclose in his arms in an embrace of peace and of love those unfortunate brothers of his” (*Writings* 2742).

Jesus arouses in Comboni an irrepressible desire to *embrace* and be embraced by Africans, he involves him in a mystery that literally *drives* him into that embrace, and makes his *heart beat faster*. This is the God that our Founder experienced: a God that almost gives you a heart attack for the joy of finally being able to *embrace* your African brothers.

For the imperialist mentality of the time, the African was a person to be enslaved. Comboni, on the other hand, feels that Africans are members of *his own family*, and he wants to give them a *hug* and a *kiss*.

This, therefore, is the mission that Jesus entrusts to our Founder: to *embrace* our most forgotten brothers in our arms.

May the Father help us to be true Missionaries of the Heart of his Son!

TEXTS FOR MEDITATION:

- *RL* 3
- *Jn* 10,1-18
- *Lk* 15,3-7

FOR PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY REFLECTION:

- In my spiritual life, what place does the Heart of Jesus have? How do we cultivate this spirituality personally and as a community?
- As missionaries, in what way are we combatting the globalisation of indifference and building up the globalisation of fraternity?
- In our pastoral activities and our Christian life, do we cultivate the two dimensions of love – at the personal/relational and structural levels – present in the Sacred Heart? In what way?
- Do we embrace our most forgotten brothers? In what way? Is our community involved “in loco” with our marginalised brothers and sisters?

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