



SOCIETA' DI SAN FRANCESCO DI SALES

SEDE CENTRALE SALESIANA

Via Marsala 42 - 00185 Roma

Il Consigliere per le Missioni

Rome, 11th Novembre 2019

Dear brothers,

A fraternal and friendly greeting to each of you. May our strong bond of affection and mutual prayer continue to make us rejoice and reassure us in this vocation and missionary journey that we are following together. Greeting you on this day strengthens even more the communion of prayer and mission that the Congregation has with its sick and elderly confreres, on different continents in the infirmaries and nursing homes of the Provinces of the Congregation.

I started writing this letter in Shillong, northeast India, and I am sending it to you from Dili, the capital of East Timor. What I manage to do through tiring days of travel, uniting north and south, east and west, you manage to do much better than me, sometimes without leaving your rooms, but uniting all points of the globe in your prayer and silent offering. Really, thank you and congratulations!

Today is November 11th and we remember, with gratitude and admiration, that courageous and luminous first Salesian missionary expedition of 1875. I still have in my heart the beautiful celebration of the 150th Missionary Expedition presided over by the Rector Major just a few weeks ago in Valdocco. This Expedition – celebrated at the threshold of the Extraordinary Month proclaimed by Pope Francis for the October that has just passed – was also extraordinary and extraordinarily sustained by your prayers and by the daily and silent offer of your life. With all my heart, and in the name of the Rector Major, a warm and sincere “THANK YOU!”

The thirty-six new missionaries, the majority of whom are young practical trainees, were not only the fruit of the extraordinary missionary appeal made by the Successor of Don Bosco, but also a fruitful outcome of your persevering prayers for the missions and missionaries. I pray and exhort you: may this prayerful plea not be extinguished, so that our beloved Society of Saint Francis de Sales may continue to be missionary always and everywhere, as our Father dreamt of, wanted and founded it.

These new and young missionaries of the 150th Expedition are gradually reaching their many different destinations. Continue to pray that their *migratory* difficulties and their efforts to learn new languages, get used to new climates and new cultures will not lessen, but rather make their Salesian apostolic passion grow.

In fact, Pope Benedict XV, writing the Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* one hundred years ago (30 November 1919), wanted to rekindle the missionary *fire* throughout the Church and suggested some steps for this *journey*. *Fire* and *journey* are two key words for understanding this Apostolic Letter as well as the intention of Pope Francis in this extraordinary missionary month, which commemorates its centenary. With your daily offering, even those of you who can no longer move much contribute to ensuring that this *fire* continues to burn in every corner of the Congregation, which is constantly on a *journey*.

A deep pain and a devastating trial were caused by the two martyrdoms suffered during the first half of this year 2019. Two Spanish missionaries, in the same Province of Western Francophone Africa (AFO) were killed in the same country, Burkina Faso – which is one of the eight nations that make up this Province. They are Fr César Fernández (72) killed on February 15th near the border with Togo, and Fr Fernando Hernández (60), killed on May 17th, in our community of Bobo Dioulasso, in our own refectory while the confreres were having their lunch. The Rector Major has written, concerning each of these two occasions, an *ad hoc* letter for the entire Congregation in the world. In the letter of 16 February, he told us:

“I also invite you to ask the Father to help his Human Race to put an end to these escalations of violence that only do harm. And may the Good Lord make his blood, shed on African soil, become the seed of Christians, faithful followers of Jesus, and of young vocations at the service of the Kingdom.

Brothers, let us continue more united than ever in our service to the People of God and to the poorest young people. Evil never has the last word. The Resurrection of the Lord has shown us this and it continues to be true, even in sorrow, that the Lord transforms all things”.

May these thoughts of the Rector Major, dear confreres, fill your long and generous hours of prayer and contemplation. Let us continue to pray for the eternal rest of these new Salesian martyrs, for the vocation and missionary fruitfulness of their blood. We do not pray that the Lord will send more martyrs – definitely not! But perhaps so that all the Salesians of the world may live daily in a “state of martyrdom”. So that they may – always and everywhere – be ready to “give reason for their hope”, to radiate their faith, even if this preaching were to be tinged with the red of their own blood.

May these two martyrs really help us to get closer and closer to the most appropriate answers to the crucial question of the next 28th General Chapter: “What kind of Salesian...?” We could say, a Salesian living in a permanent *state of martyrdom*.

Thank you! I entrust myself to your prayers and blessing! I hope and desire so much that I may come and visit you as soon as possible, when the Good Lord will allow me to do so.

In St John Bosco,



Fr Guillermo Basañes
General Councillor for the Missions