

Do not be afraid to be holy!

Dearest Sisters,

For the title of this circular, I am inspired by the appeal that John Paul II had made on several occasions to young people, "do not be afraid to be holy!" We remember this particularly in the message of 29 June 1999, recalling World Youth Day in 2000, in which it reiterated the need to be holy but, above all, not to be afraid of being holy.

We are still in the joyful atmosphere of the canonization of Saint Maria Troncatti and we carry within us, as the days pass in this month of November, not only the memory but the grace of a unique and exceptional event. The resonances I receive from various parts of the world testify that we are deepening, on a personal and community level, the good that this canonization has brought us. We prepared ourselves in time, but having experienced it in such an intense way by all the evidence, the need to return, with our hearts, minds, and in prayer, to what this canonization leaves us as Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. In fact, how does this event affect our lives? What is it asking us to change? Why can't we just go on like nothing happened?

Surely in this month of November, illuminated by the celebration of the solemnity of All Saints, we cannot help thinking about how this dimension should be present in our lives and in Salesian spirituality

The grace of canonization

It is important to understand the reasons for a canonization. Why does the Church canonize saints? Is it done to exalt their lives and their person or, rather, so that we may celebrate the great works of God, the Holy One alone, in the hearts of His sons and daughters? Why can we welcome a new call to conversion, to the authenticity of life, to rediscover a certain hope that opens us to look to Heaven? Holiness is a call to Heaven. It is a reality that belongs to God, who speaks to us of Him, of the miracle of His saving and transforming action. Let us look to this event, so that our hearts may be open and our eyes may be enlightened to read the daily, to understand what is close to our hearts and what we consider important to us, as St. Paul states to the Ephesians, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him. May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to His call, what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones" (*Eph* 1:17-18).

Saint Maria Troncatti, as well as Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello, teach us that saints are not extraordinary people and reminds us that we are all called to holiness. In everyday reality, however, we often behave as if holiness were an unattainable goal and tend to lower the level of our faith, our love, rather than pursuing something great and beautiful that makes us happy in time and eternity. The lives of the saints teach us that it is possible to live strongly rooted in today with its complexity, keeping in mind the invitation to shine like stars in the world (cf. *Phil* 2:15). We are called to involve young people on this path, as we read in Article 5 of our Constitutions:

*We proclaim
our will to live for the glory of God
by our service for the evangelization of young people,
walking with them on the path to holiness.*

As Salesian educators, we orient every person entrusted to us to experience the transforming encounter with Jesus Christ, especially in the Eucharist and Reconciliation and to open ourselves in the presence of Mary, Teacher and Guide. In our charismatic tradition, these are the columns of the educational building and have a central place in the path of holiness with a Salesian face, according to what we read in article 71 of the Constitutions:

*This sacramental and Marian life
is the foundation of Salesian spirituality
and education.
It becomes a serious commitment
to “cheerfulness, work, and prayer,”
that leads young people
to become apostles among their peers
and is a genuine way of holiness for them.*

The temptation that boys and girls sometimes have is one of a certain self-distrust, of resignation, of sadness, so much so that they think it is useless to believe in something bright, important, beautiful, precious. Every person, however, who wants to make their life something unique to fulfill God's plan, must fight against sadness and the temptation that they are incapable of facing life. Our mission is to help young people become upright women and men, never folded in on themselves, as was the curved woman of the Gospel whom Jesus heals, restoring to her the ability to see "beyond", to "look up".

Saints with missionary hearts

Missionaries, from a human perspective, are generous and bold men and women, but their greatness lies not so much in their resources, their skills, their deeds accomplished, but rather in their holiness. They are women and men of faith, of hope, of great love, of a strong inner life, belonging totally to God and passionate about evangelization. The secret of their apostolic fruitfulness must be sought precisely in this profound dimension of life, which testifies to their full docility to God's will and their boundless generosity. They are missionaries, because, first of all, they are disciples.

“Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that they encounter the love of God in Christ Jesus; we no longer say that we are disciples and missionaries, but that we are always disciples-missionaries. If we are not convinced, let us look at the first disciples, who immediately after knowing Jesus' gaze, went to proclaim Him full of joy, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (Jn 1:41). The Samaritan woman, as soon as her dialogue with Jesus ended, became a missionary, and many Samaritans believed in Jesus “because of the word of the woman” (Jn 4:39). Even St. Paul, starting from his encounter with Jesus Christ, “began at once to proclaim Jesus, that he is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20). “And what are we waiting for?” (EG 120).

With this conviction and joy, we recently celebrated in Turin Valdocco, the 150th of the first missionary departure of the Salesian Confreres. On 8 and 9 November, approximately 160 young people, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and Salesians of Don Bosco, shared two days together organized by the Italian Missionary Animation. The days were an experience of formation, sharing, prayer, and celebration for all, in a beautiful family atmosphere. It was an important moment for the wider involvement of young people who have had missionary volunteer experience in Italy or abroad. It was a sharing that has brought them back to the heart of the Salesian mission;

the predilection for poor young people, experienced not only for young people, but with young people themselves.

Subsequently, on November 11, in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, 7 Daughters of Mary Help of Christians of the 148th FMA missionary expedition; 15 Salesians of Don Bosco of the 156th SDB missionary expedition, and 9 of the previous expeditions, received the “missionary crucifix” during the Eucharistic Celebration presided over by the Rector Major, Fr. Fabio Attard, with whom the General Councilor for Missions, Fr. Jorge Mario Crisafulli also concelebrated.

I was present with the Vicar General, Sister María del Rosario García Ribas; the General Councilor for Missions, Sister Ruth del Pilar Mora; the Provincial of “Mary Help of Christians” Province (IPI) Sister Emma Bergandi; and of “Holy Family” Province (ILO) Sister Stefania Saccuman.

In a climate of great silence and emotion, at the beginning of the Eucharistic Celebration, the Rector of the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, Fr. Michele Viviano, commemorated November 11, 1875, when Don Bosco, 150 years ago, in the very same Basilica, celebrated the first Salesian missionary departure for Argentina. That beginning, realization of the dream of going “*to the ends of the world*”, marked an experience of faith and hope that continues to this day. Since that blessed day, the missionary gesture has been repeated every year, an expression of a charismatic identity that makes itself a shared mission to bring the Gospel to young people, especially the poorest.

The celebration of 150th continued in Genoa, on the morning of November 12, at “Porto Antico”. It was a pilgrimage made in faith and in memory of the first ten Salesian missionaries who left that place. We retraced by boat the route they took to reach the point where the ship “Savoie” would depart.

Another emotional moment was the inauguration of the Museum of Missionary Expeditions, in the Salesian Institute, where the small room where Don Bosco stopped many times during his numerous trips to the dear city of Genoa is located. The Museum is not only a place of reenactment, as it is not only a question of remembering Salesian history, but of becoming aware of the extraordinary richness of a charism spread throughout the world that asks us to be solicitous and attentive, to live today, faithful to Christ, the Salesian mission in every place where one is called.

A shared missionary journey

As already anticipated in the letter addressed to the Provincials and Provincial Secretaries by the General Councilor for Missions, Sister Ruth del Pilar Mora, the Missions Sector, in collaboration with the PEM team (Mission Spirituality Project), is proposing to the entire Institute, in preparation for the 150th anniversary of the First Missionary Expedition, an online Pilgrimage to the places in South America, where our first missionaries arrived in 1877. With the Sisters of the General Council, we desire this opportunity to be valued by all, including the involvement of the educating communities (*animating nucleus, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Past Pupils, Salesian Cooperators, lay people who share our mission, young people, etc....*).

We therefore ask you to participate as much as possible in the *online Pilgrimage*, registering not individually, but as an educating community. We hope to make a significant and missionary journey renewal in preparation for the anniversary of our First Missionary Expedition, which will be in 2027. The meetings will last an hour and a half and will be held through the Zoom platform, with translations into Italian, Portuguese, French, Spanish, English, Vietnamese, and Polish.

At this particular historical moment, when war and tensions are being experienced in many regions of the world, I invite you to pray intensely for peace, especially in the novena in preparation for the solemnity of the Most Holy Mary Immaculate. This year, the novena will draw inspiration from the biography of Saint Maria Troncatti, which highlights Mary's presence and special protection in her personal, community life and in her mission.

We too turn to Mary with unshakable confidence to ask for the precious gift of peace which, according to the expression of Pope Leo XIV, is “*unarmed and disarming*”. A peace that is not

based on force, on war as an instrument for achieving peace, but on dialogue, justice, forgiveness; a peace that overcomes resistance at various levels with meekness and humility and that has as its sole purpose the good of all. Peace is an urgent need of all peoples and is the fruit of courageous people who intend to pursue it.

In this regard, I still recall the word of Leo XIV, *"Peace is certainly a gift from God, but at the same time, it requires women and men capable of building it every day"* (Discourse, 14 November 2025).

With the Sisters of the General Council, I wish all of you, your families, educating communities, young people, adolescents, and children who are entrusted to you, a holy Christmas of peace and hope.

A special thought of good wishes and prayers to the Rector Major, Fr. Fabio Attard, to the Salesian Confreres, and to the entire Salesian Family.

We pray, above all, for the educating communities living in situations of war, violence, persecution, injustice. We have the certainty that the Helper watches over each of them and all that they are suffering is precious to the heart of God.

With affection, I wish you a bright Christmas and a New Year 2026 filled with the Lord's blessing.

Rome, 24 November 2025

Aff.ly Mother

New Provincials 2026

Province "Saint Rose of Lima" Peru <i>Sister Evelyn Díaz Barriga</i>	America PER
Province "Morning Star" Korea <i>Sister Myeongja Claudia Han</i>	Asia KOR
Province "Mary Help of Christians" Pacific Region <i>Sister Hieu Maria Luong</i>	Oceania SPR