



### **Homily for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Religious Profession**

**ROME, Italy** - During the celebration of his 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of religious profession which was celebrated in the Church of S. Maria delle Grazie alle Fornaci in Rome on October 19, 2023, Fr. Pier Luigi NAVA, SMM delivered the homily in the presence of the Prefect of the Dicastery for Consecrated Life and numerous colleagues.

**“Misericordias Domini in Aeternum narrabo”** (Ps 89). I allowed myself a variation that suited me more. The plural has always caught my attention and my reflection: *misericordias*. Fifty years are a narrative of mercy, punctuated with faces, encounters, friendships, significant experiences and others less so, story of mercies, gift of the Mercy of God, since its origin in the vocation to the Company of Mary. Mercy of which I am always a beggar: I feel it even more after fifty years in which the counting of days is a barely positive count, because in addition to the undeniable losses, the missed opportunities to access the wisdom of the heart accumulate.

I read the well-known expression – ***professio in manibus*** – above all as a profession in the hands of God's Mercy, hands that hold our hands as a gesture of affection and welcome. I have been able to see how my fidelity is nothing other than a gift of His Mercy, otherwise I repeat

with conviction a verse dear to the French School of Spirituality and to my Founder: without me, we can do nothing! (John 15:5). I think that's exactly how it happened.

***In Aeternum.*** We are travelers to the Lord. An image evoked on several occasions by Saint Louis-Marie, it fundamentally refers to the theme of “*quaerere Deum*”, of the search for God. I was never a great walker - except during the years of my initial training - but I also traveled certain paths, looking for him and in the end, I understood that it was not me who was searching, but I have been found. I was fine with that. Otherwise, I would have already gotten lost. The well-known verse of the Apostle Paul: the time has become short (1 Co 7:29), others translate it by the time that remains. That convinces me more, at least it doesn't waste time!

***Tibi servire libertas*** (TD 170). The freedom to serve you and, at the same time, the freedom that comes from serving the Lord. Without a doubt a grace. Montfort places the grace of freedom in the entrustment of our fidelity to the Lord in Mary. The high meaning of the well-known formula of “Consecration to Jesus Christ, eternal Wisdom incarnated by the hands of Mary”. Freedom inherent in the vocation to the mission of the Company of Mary. The rhythmic cadence of the ***Liberos*** (children/free) invocation of the Prayer for Missionaries. Freedom which is understood as availability and also as detachment. The apostolic detachment, as the Founder calls it. Overcoming the clutter of the ego to make room for the Mystery, even for the “things” that become ballast in our lives. Saint Louis-Marie invented an expression of undeniable mystical inspiration: ***Marie milieu mystérieux***. Mary is the space that holds the Mystery. We realize too late how much, in detachment, we risk our freedom by giving ourselves to the Lord, that is, by opening ourselves to the gift of the Mystery. Even in this case – unfortunately – these are lessons that are learned after the maximum time. At least for me.

In this perspective – keeping the mystery and being guarded by the Mystery – it is dear to me on this occasion to evoke an ancient custom of the Company dating back to around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The names of the newly professed were placed in a gilded brass heart which opened like a case. The Marian monogram engraved above recalled the title of Mary Queen of Hearts. The heart is the symbolic par excellence of the French school of spirituality and of our Founder. Simple and evocative ceremony: the names of the newly professed were kept in the heart of Mary and the heart was placed like a necklace around the neck of the statue of the Virgin. The “holy design” - a well-known expression from ancient monastic sources - that is to say that our fidelity in perseverance has been entrusted to the Heart of Mary, the pledge of our perseverance in fidelity. Nothing devotional or sentimental. This was taken seriously as a sign of filial affection. I hope and pray that the B.V.M. Queen of Hearts, can still keep my name in her Heart. *Deo gratias et Mariae!*

*Fr. Pier Luigi NAVA, SMM*