

SG 21-2023  
Rome, 25 March 2023

## CIRCULAR LETTER

### ON THE CELEBRATION OF THE SOLEMNITY OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD

#### 1. Annunciation and Incarnation.

Dear brothers, this is the last Circular Letter of these six years in the generalate. I would like to give thanks to God and to each one of you, brothers.

This message arrives on the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, during this special time of Lent. It desires to be, as always, a message filled with hope. Indeed, *Annunciation* is a message charged with hope.

*“The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary...”* (Lk 1:26), the Annunciation of the Angel to Mary. *“The Word was made flesh...”* the Incarnation of the Son of God. Two realities present each day in our prayer: in the feast of the Annunciation of the Lord, we are given the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Eternal Wisdom, the Son of God. The mystery that has changed the world.

A fruitful dialogue has been accomplished. A young girl, Mary, is the woman chosen to unite heaven and earth. *“The Father of mercies willed that the consent of the predestined mother should precede the Incarnation, so that just as a woman contributed to death, so also a woman should contribute to life...The Virgin of Nazareth is, on God’s command, greeted by an angel messenger as “full of grace” (cf. Lk 1:28). To the heavenly messenger she replies: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). By thus consenting to the divine utterance, Mary, a daughter of Adam, became the mother of Jesus. Embracing God’s saving will with a full heart and impeded by no sin, she devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her son. In subordination to him and along with him, by the grace of almighty God, she served the mystery of redemption”* (LG 56).

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life”* (Jn 3:16). As Sr. Miriam Altenhofen, SSpS says in an article: *“Great things happen when God mingles with us, with us as human beings, with us as humanity. Mary, our model, fulfills an important role in this. She is an important corner stone in the history of salvation. From the beginning, she was blessed to take part in the Divine Dance. God opens his circle to include humanity as collaborators in his saving plan. Mary was blessed by the Divine Mystery from the first moment of her existence. Without her “Yes” and her collaboration, history would have unfolded in another manner.”*

We are thinking about this same humanity that has lived difficult times in these last years, be it from the pandemic, be it from wars... which unhappily continue still. There have been, and, in certain circumstances, continue to be, moments of darkness that cause us to listen again to the prophet Isaiah: *“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone”* (Is 9:1-2; Mt 4:16). The Incarnation is the light and hope that is renewed each day and launches us into new possibilities.

The missionary, like Saint Paul, is one who announces the renewed invitation: “*Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer.*” (Rom 12:12).

If we consider that truth and take it to heart, then we are ready “to take risks for God and for humanity”. Because this “*taking risks*” is a way for “*in addition to the active presence of new generations of consecrated persons who bring the presence of Christ to the world and the splendor of the ecclesial charisms to life, the hidden and fruitful presence of consecrated men and women who are experiencing old age, loneliness, illness and suffering is also particularly significant. In addition to the service already rendered and the wisdom which they can share with others, they add their own particular precious contribution by joining themselves in their sufferings to the patient and glorious Christ for his Body, the Church*” (cf. Col 1:24). – (Starting Afresh From Christ: a Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium, n. 6 – Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, 19 May 2002)

Pope Francis, in simple and profound words on 28 March 2013, Holy Thursday, during his first Chrism Mass told the more than 1600 priests present at the celebration that they must be “shepherds with the smell of the sheep”.

Shepherds with the smell of the sheep, is a kind of “incarnation”; it is to seek identification with the one who first became incarnate, as the Letter to the Philippians reminds us: “*Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.*” (Phil 2: 5-8)

In whatever situation, “smelling like the sheep”. There can be no doubt that the shepherd smells like the sheep. It is not possible that the shepherd is never with the flock. We can imagine how this phrase stirred up so many things within the priests as well as the bishops who were listening to the Pope.

For us Montfortians, lay, religious and priests, who each year solemnly celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation, in the Annunciation of the Lord, something must also stir within us, and bring us to question ourselves as to how far am I ready to “humble myself”, how far am I ready “to muddy myself”, to dirty myself for the sake of the afflicted, the excluded, the unfortunate. The more we are there, in the midst of those who suffer, the more our message of hope will be truer, more credible.

## **2. The Mystery of the Incarnation from the Perspective of Saint Louis de Montfort.**

We are able to walk through various writings of Father de Montfort where he speaks of the mystery of the Incarnation: *The Love of Eternal Wisdom*, the *Treatise on True Devotion*, the *Secret of Mary* and others; nevertheless, I invite you to look at *Hymn 41 – The Loving Excesses of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*. It is an incarnate heart, completely close to human realities, which draws near, which seeks, which loves, because it desires to make us happy, to save us.

I will not attempt to enfold the entire content of this theme; it is a work for the experts. What interests us in this Letter is to consider the theme of the Solemnity of the Annunciation - Incarnation in its life-giving perspective, in Montfort and in us.

For Montfort, to recall the Annunciation of the Lord is to recall that “*The bond of friendship between Eternal Wisdom and the human being is so close as to be beyond our understanding. Wisdom is for the human being and the human being is for Wisdom.*” (LEW 64). In another passage we find: “*In his pursuit of the human being, he hastens along the highways, or scales*

*the loftiest mountain peaks, or waits at the city gates, or goes into public squares and among the gatherings of people, proclaims to the top of his voice, "You children of the earth, it is you I have been calling so persistently" (Prov 8:4); it is you I am addressing; it is you I desire and seek; it is you I am claiming. Listen, draw close to me, for I want to make you happy" (LEW, 66).*

Not to prolong it too much, we can remember in the life of Saint Louis Marie de Montfort the many deeds presented by his biographers, how he was always involved, inserted, "mixed in" with the poor, with their crosses, their uncertainties, their sorrows, and their tears. In imitation of Jesus, the Eternal Wisdom, Montfort made himself friend and father of the poor to rekindle in them faith and hope.

### **3. Dare to take risks for God and for humanity – Our creative fidelity.**

The other context of this message is the preparation for the Montfortian General Chapter, which aims at being a moment of revision of the road already taken, hoping that it might be like the return of the seventy-two disciples sent out on mission: *"The seventy-two returned rejoicing, and said, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us because of your name" .... and listen to Jesus' response: "Do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you but rejoice because the you names are written in heaven" (Lk 10:17-20).*

In this preparation time for the General Chapter, we want to recall that we are sent to work together for a mission that must be incarnated in the reality in which we find ourselves, in the different cultures, on the different continents where we are inserted. It is in those contexts of life, of history, that we are going "to dare to take risks for God and for humanity". It is something practical; it is a "missionary task"; it is "putting your hands into the dough", and it is for God and for humanity.

There, in accord with urgencies now present, we want to announce the Reign of Jesus through Mary, and listen to the praise that Jesus, full of joy, has offered to the Father and which resounds in our hearts: *"I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will" (Lk 10:21).*

We want to be attentive to the inspirational paths that the General Chapter will show to us all, lay and religious, of the Company of Mary. In this sense, hope cannot fail and the Montfortian laity, the Associates from various places of mission, have sent us many messages that should arrive as prayers each day of the Chapter – like these:

*"We wish you a happy time of wisdom and discernment, a time to sincerely work together for the future. May the capitulants let themselves be guided by the Spirit with sincerity and wisdom. May discernment and prayer be the inspiration that sustains the Chapter. May the participants be present for the good of the entire Congregation and its future, and may the ego of each one remain at home."*

*"Our world, our Church is changing... it is important to respond and adapt yourselves to these changes in order to revitalize the parishes, the services, to move from a participating parish to a parish that invites... To transmit the Gospel, being a missionary disciple, following Father de Montfort, Marie Louis Trichet, Gabriel Deshayes and Pope Francis... To unite yourselves to accompany the poor, to walk according to their rhythm, to live together, to know how to work together, to confide... To form an alliance, alone we cannot take a step... Abandon yourselves to Providence, awaken a new hope... Intercede before the Virgin Mary, the Witness of a hope that call us to go farther each time..."*

*“May the priests, brothers and sisters always walk together with the poorest and with those who suffer injustices, following in the footsteps of Montfort, being humble like Mary and faithful to God, like Jesus!”*

And so many other messages that allow us to hear from the perspective of the Montfortian laity what it means to celebrate the General Chapter on the keystone of the Incarnation.

#### **4. Conclusion. Gratitude - the six years that have passed.**

My friends, on the celebration of the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, I would like to thank you because together we have taken a missionary journey, with messages of hope, seeking along these six years to manifest the great love of Saint Louis Marie de Montfort for Jesus Christ, Eternal Wisdom, for Mary, and for the poor. As one of the lay people has told us: *“You Montfortians love much and it has been because of the love with which you realize your mission that abundant fruits may be seen. Only love can explain the efforts, the sacrifices, the perseverance in your “acting together”, in the mission, in spirituality and in administration.”*

In fact, we wanted that it would be a work of a team, of the General Council and of all those who have worked in the general administration, of the Montfortian Family. An administration that has stood out for generous commitment to the mission and for fraternity in human relationships.

On this feast of the Annunciation, I would like us thus to renew our consecration to Jesus through Mary, seeking to live the mystery of the Incarnation in the experience of our lives, walking from hope to hope, recognizing that it is necessary that we become disciples of the Lord, as we recall the ending of the text of the Consecration:

*“Virgin most faithful, make me in everything so committed a disciple, imitator, and slave of Jesus, your Son, Incarnate Wisdom, that I may become, through your intercession and example, fully mature with the fulness which Jesus possessed on earth, and with the fulness of his glory in heaven. Amen.”*



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