

Dearest Sisters,

We are on the threshold of Lent, a season that helps us prepare to celebrate Easter, the greatest mystery of the Christian Faith. This 40-day itinerary, observed with the whole People of God, offers us a privileged occasion for growing in a more authentic interior life and in an integral self-renewal that is manifested through vital adhesion to Christ in our style of life and mission, characterized by St. Paul's tireless efforts to make himself "all to all."

Let us not allow this liturgical period, overflowing with invitations and stimuli, to pass by fruitlessly. As Benedict XVI wrote in his Message for Lent, it "constitutes an itinerary of more intense spiritual training," which we should take advantage of so as to open ourselves more fully to the mysterious light of the crucified and risen Christ, which is capable of transforming our life.

A JOURNEY OF CONVERSION. The call to undertake a journey of conversion is a fundamental dimension of the Lenten season and harmonizes very well with the attitude we should all adopt in implementing the process of redesigning our presences that was launched during our Enlarged Council Meeting (Rome, 15-25 January 2009). Through our Redesigning Project, entitled, "*Where the Lord Is Leading Us*," which I am sure you have received by now, we feel called to "set out" on a personal and communitarian journey of conversion in the footsteps of Christ the Master, allowing him to precede our every step as we strive to reinvigorate with dynamic and creative fidelity the prophetic dimension of communications in today's world.

The journey we are invited to undertake is above all an interior one: *to move all together* in the same direction, toward Jesus, as Paul did, united by an always more authentic and clear desire to attain "Pauline holiness." The image of a journey is symbolic of life itself, which is a continual "setting out" that often brings us in contact with things that are different and unfamiliar to us but that can influence our way of thinking, feeling and acting. The grace of God uses this *perpetual exodus* to gradually and patiently transform our personal life story.

To live is to move ahead, to grow, to transform oneself. The vigorous plea of Paul echoes within us: "Meanwhile, let us go forward from the point we have each attained" (Phil. 3:16). Nevertheless, we find that it is always hard to set out, leaving behind what we know, especially when our goal is not yet clear and the road leads through the desert, by way of the cross. At times, "setting out" does not only mean leaving behind places, persons and apostolic services; above all it means leaving behind our uncertainties and fears: the fear of failure, of making mistakes, of feeling useless. It is important to discern and identify these dynamics at work in our daily life so as to purify our motivations and return to what is essential, what truly counts, rejecting a contradictory and/or mediocre style of life that dims the beauty of the Pauline vocation.

Our journey of conversion is a constant, ongoing process that takes place in the ordinary events of daily life. Blessed James Alberione said: "We must ask for the grace of conversion every day: conversion from pride, envy, greed, sensuality, laziness, curiosity. We must convert ourselves a little each day, asking ourselves: What do we need to convert ourselves from today? What resolution did we make to Jesus this morning after communion? What did we promise him in our last confession? We must at least convert ourselves a little every week. If our confessions do not lead us to change our life, then perhaps we should worry that we are not making them with the right dispositions. Let us ask St. Paul for the necessary dispositions every morning, so as to begin our day well and correct the defects we still have; so as to begin our week well by making a firm resolution in confession that will help us change and improve ourselves" (*Prediche*, 25 January 1955).

Thus, the Lenten itinerary is a privileged time for a profound, radical and integral conversion. In this regard, I want to share with you a reflection of Fr. Tonino Bello, an unforgettable bishop whose cause for canonization is moving ahead. His official Message to his diocese for Lent 1989 reveals his insight into the profound relationship that exists between the ashes we receive at the beginning of Lent and the water used by Jesus on Holy Thursday to wash the feet of his Apostles. Fr. Bello writes: "Ashes on the head and water on the feet. Our Lenten journey unfolds between these two rites because it concerns taking the head as a point of departure so as to reach the feet of the others. Repentance and service: an obligatory duo that should characterize our 'return home.' Ashes and water: basic laundry ingredients once upon a time, but above all symbols of a conversion that should involve our entire being, from head to foot."

An indispensable condition for the journey of conversion is faith in the One who will never disappoint us because he unceasingly gives us his Love: "My grace is enough for you, for power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Co. 12:9). Fr. Alberione moved ahead in the certitude that "the hand of God" was upon him, in the conviction that God's providential plan was at work in the flow of events. He wrote in 1959: "The Lord lights lamps for us as little by little they are needed. He does not light them all right away, when they are not necessary, because he doesn't waste light. Instead, he gives it at the right time" (CISP, 192). Maestra Thecla too offers us the example of how to live faith as a personal experience of God, remaining open to the action of divine Providence in our life: "We must believe that everything is disposed by our good heavenly Father.... My heart rests tranquil in the Lord, in the heart of God, who is continually thinking of me."

COMPARISON WITH THE WORD OF GOD. During Lent, listening to the Word of God sustains the conversion journey and growth of every believer in a particular way. Consequently, I invite you to return this Lent to the practice of the *Lectio Divina* on the individual and above all community levels. Under the guidance of the Spirit, this privileged instrument enables us to reflect more deeply on the living word of the Master in the texts proposed by the Liturgy, allowing him to question, reinvigorate, shape and direct our journey toward holiness.

I would like to conclude this letter with several recommendations:

First of all, I invite you to put into practice in the community and in the apostolate gestures of *welcome, benevolence, forgiveness, affection, humble and hidden service, dialogue, words of goodness and hope*, and to constantly strive to avoid every sin against charity.

Living in continual conversion, an attitude that characterized the life of our Founder, reminds us that "*Cor poenitens tenete*" ("*sorrow for sins*") means "to habitually recognize our sins, faults and deficiencies...." This leads to "the prayer of faith: the Pact or Secret of Success" (AD 158). I feel that Primo Maestro's recommendation is very timely in relation to the particular moment we are living in history and as a Congregation, and I invite you to pray the Pact both personally and as a community whenever you feel it is appropriate.

Let us also accept the invitation to solidarity extended by Pope Benedict XVI in his Message for Lent. The Pope urges believers to fast during this season not for reasons of physical or aesthetic well being, but out of an interior need to purify ourselves from sin and evil. Fasting teaches us to make those salutary renunciations that liberate us from slavery to self and make us more ready to listen to God and to serve our brothers and sisters.

I also invite you to collect the fruits of your fasting and renunciations so as to help those around us in greatest need. As a Congregation, let us focus special attention on our sisters in Madagascar, who together with the Malagasy people are living difficult and uncertain times. The communities in agreement with this objective can send their contributions to the Bursar General's office, which will see to it that your offerings reach their destination.

May this be a Lent rich in faith, love and hope for all of us—a time during which, through the intercession of our Father St. Paul, the grace of God will transform us more and more into his "living tabernacles."

With deep affection,


Sr. M. Antonietta Bruscato
Superior General