



Message to all the members of the Comboni Family

Rome, July 7th, 2023

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the merciful Father and God of all consolation, who comforts us in all our afflictions so that, through the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God, we may comfort those who are in any affliction" (2 Cor 1:3-4)

Dear members of the Comboni family,

we have just celebrated the Feast of the Sacred Heart and animated by the charity that flows from it, we want to feel in communion with every member of the Comboni Family.

The General Councils of the Comboni Missionaries (MCCJ), the Comboni Missionary Sisters (CMS), the Comboni Secular Missionaries (CSM) and the Coordinator of the Central Committee of the Comboni Lay Missionaries (CLM) met from 2 to 4 June at the General House of the Comboni Missionary Sisters.

It was a time of conviviality, sharing and updating each other on the journey that the three Institutes and the CLM are taking. It was the first occasion where the two newly elected General Councils - of both the Comboni Sisters and the Comboni Missionaries - met the whole Comboni Family.

During the meeting, we also experienced intense moments of prayer and communion, remembering the different peoples suffering from wars, conflicts, environmental disasters and climate change. In a special way, we shared the anxieties and apprehensions of the Sudanese peoples still suffering from the conflicts, and those of our missionaries who consecrate their lives in that country and where, before them, St Daniel Comboni also dedicated his entire existence and where he died. The passage that guided us in our reflection and meditation was the famous text of the homily that St Daniel Comboni delivered in Khartoum and whose 150th anniversary we are celebrating (May 11th, 1873- May 11th, 2023). In this homily, Comboni expressed his great joy at returning to his people after a long absence,

"I am truly happy, dearest friends, to be back among you again after so many sad events and so many sighs of affliction. The first love of my youth was for unhappy Africa and, leaving behind all that was dearest to me in the world, I came, sixteen years ago, to these lands to offer my work for the relief of their age-old sufferings. Subsequently, I was called back home for health reasons, the swamps of the White Nile in the vicinity of the Holy Cross and Gondokoro had reduced apostolic action to impotence. I departed through to obedience: but among you I left my heart, and having recovered as it pleased God, my thoughts and my steps were always focused on you. (Writings 3156).

In communion with all the brothers and sisters of the Province of Sudan, we write this message to invite all of you to pray for the gift of peace and consolation for all the peoples living in situations of conflict, and to consecrate Sudan and the other African countries where there is war, Ukraine in Europe, the different places in the Middle East such as Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, in the Holy Land and the different situations in the American continent such as Amazonia, Esmeraldas and Haiti. We also want to express our thanks for all the solidarity received during this period.

Praying for the gift of peace and consolation.

St Paul, in the opening biblical text of the meeting, reminded us that our call is to be people of hope and to be instruments of consolation, and that at the basis of all this is prayer as an instrument of intercession for the gift of peace and consolation. In the Angelus of April 16th, the Pope expressed it this way: *"I follow with concern the events that are taking place in Sudan. I am close to the Sudanese people, who are already so tried, and I invite people to pray that they may lay down their arms and that dialogue may prevail, so that together we may resume the path of peace and concord".* The following Sunday, April 23rd, 2023, he again underlined his concern: *'unfortunately, the situation in Sudan remains serious. I therefore renew my appeal for an end to the violence as soon as possible*

and for a resumption of the path of dialogue. I invite everyone to pray for our Sudanese brothers and sisters'.

We in the Combonian family, once again, renew our invitation to all brothers, sisters and lay missionaries to continue our prayer for the gift of peace, consolation and healing from the wounds of war. We are certain that when we pray for loved and beloved ones, we grow in concern and love for them. In this case, to pray for the Sudanese people is also to redeem the story of many of our sisters and brothers, missionaries in Sudan, who lived and continue to live, love, walk and sacrifice their lives - as did St Daniel Comboni - who loved, in a special way, this land, its ecclesial communities and its people.

Our thoughts and our affection go out particularly to the brothers and sisters who experienced the traumas of war first hand, painful, distressing and disturbing moments that they carry in their hearts and in their prayers.

Thank you for the solidarity received.

In these difficult days, we have appreciated the gestures of solidarity and proximity of so many people who have offered to help and take care of our missionaries and missionary sisters who have had to leave their communities and various places of ministerial service. We would like to remember particularly the Apostolic Nuncios of the Sudan and of Egypt, the Bishop of Djibouti and the Comboni communities of Kosti, Renk, Juba, Aswan, Cairo, Rome and Verona, the staff of the various Embassies and Sudanese authorities, and all those people - so many - who came forward with messages of encouragement, spiritual support and economic cooperation. To all goes our 'heartfelt' gratitude for the affection and esteem shown to us. For our part, we assure them of our remembrance in prayer.

We consecrate the people of Sudan, the local Churches and our communities in Sudan to the Heart of Jesus.

Next September, on the 14th, we celebrate the 150th anniversary of the consecration of the Vicariate of Central Africa to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. *"Yesterday the jubilation felt by all the members of this holy mission for having made the solemn Consecration of the entire Vicariate to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was supreme. The feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross in 1873 marks a new epoch of mercy and resurrection for Central Africa"* (Writings 3411).

Dear brothers and sisters, NOW we are called to pray and intercede for all those brothers and sisters who live in places of conflict and suffering.

In communion with Pope Francis we wish to join in his appeal for peace and in the prayer of the whole Church, invoking the gift of the Holy Spirit so that he may convert us and transform us into peacemakers, even though we are aware of the commitment and passion this requires.

Like St Daniel Comboni, also the Pope makes this appeal, with much hope even if the signs of peace are not perceived immediately. What matters, however, is perseverance in praying, interceding, consecrating this people, this reality, to the loving Heart of Jesus.

Let us pray that Mary, Queen of Peace, will bestow this gift on the Sudanese people. Upon them, we also invoke the intercession of St Daniel Comboni, of St Josephine Bakhita, of many holy men and women of the Sudan and of its Church. We also entrust ourselves to the prayers of our lay and religious missionaries who have lived and died in the Sudan and other countries and now, before God, pray for this beloved country.

May the Lord bless you!

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