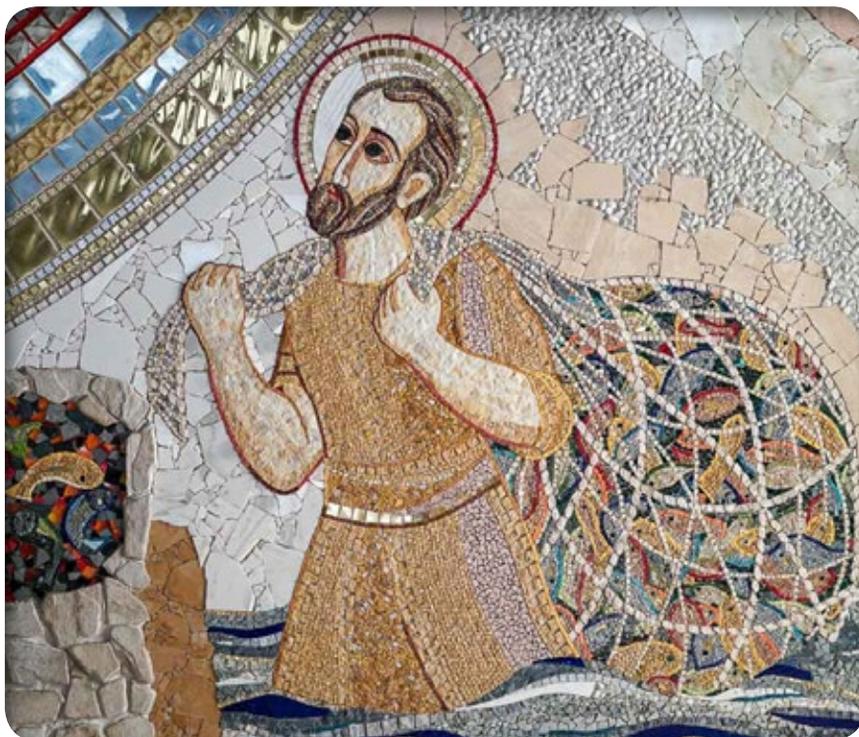


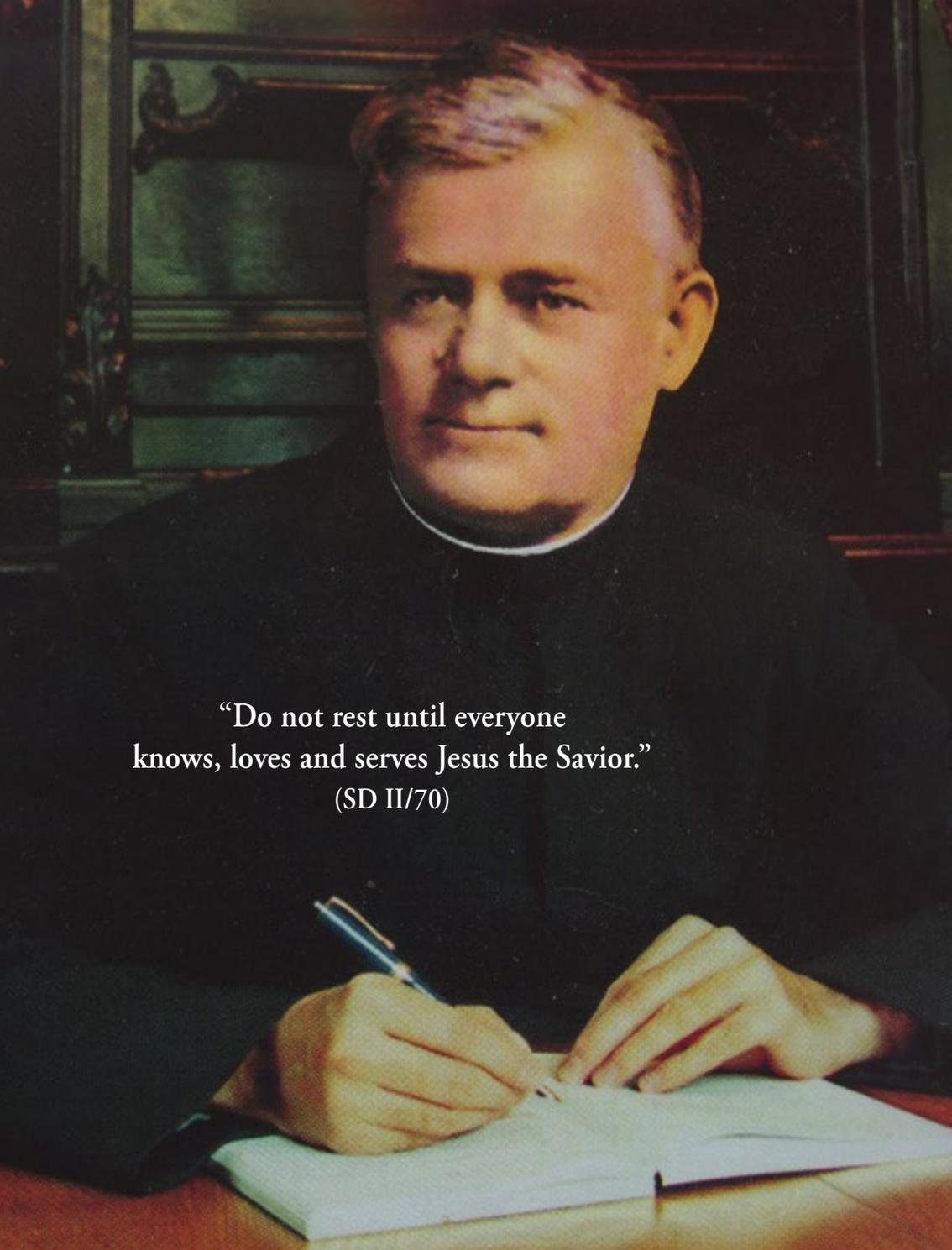
# Ready to Re-ignite Together the Way of our Mission

Fr. Milton Zonta, SDS  
Superior General



**SOCIETY OF THE DIVINE SAVIOUR - SDS**  
**Pastoral Letter to the Salvatorians**

**December 8, 2019**



“Do not rest until everyone  
knows, loves and serves Jesus the Savior.”  
(SD II/70)

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# Ready to Re-ignite Together the Way of our Mission



*Fr. Francis Jordan sending the Salvatorians into the world, 1892 - Mother House, Rome  
Painting by Br. Aegidius Röder SDS*

1. Dear confreres, I send you warm greetings from our Motherhouse in Rome. Since the end of the General Chapter held in Germany, I have often asked myself: What can we do so that the “Declaration of Priorities” of the XIX General Chapter does not remain just a document? What could we do so that the decisions adopted will not only bear fruit, but abundant fruit? Furthermore, which inner attitudes can encourage us today, as Salvatorians, in our mission of making Jesus Christ known by the best means available? I am still convinced that it would do us much good if we developed a deeper and truer missionary-apostolic spirituality within the Society; a spirituality to follow Jesus in accord with the General Chapter that helps us to join Him (fraternal community), live like Him (ongoing formation) and walk with Him, as we lay down our lives (apostolate). Fr. Francis Jordan is the model par excellence to this end. He inspires in us high aims, a global vision and a great apostolic missionary passion. Therefore, I have decided to address you in this fraternal letter, inviting you all (formandi included) to read the “Declaration of Priorities” in prayer and from the perspective of the Salvatorian charism. Let the Word of God show us the way together and help us with the implementation of the different elements included in the priorities that our Society set for the next six-year term 2018 – 2024.<sup>1</sup>



Fr. Milton Zonta, SDS

<sup>1</sup> The 2018 General Chapter underlined Mission as the essential core of our Salvatorian identity with the following priorities: “Community: Gathered for Mission; Formation: Directed toward Mission and Apostolate: Sent in Mission.” (See: “Letter from the XIX

2. I was very pleased when the XIX General Chapter held in 2018 invited us to tackle the essentials of our apostolic vocation, since the apostolic missionary dimension has always been the central key to our identity as Salvatorian religious men. In the words of the Chapter members: “The mission is the integrative axis of everything we are and do.”<sup>2</sup> However, in order to grow in this essential core of our identity, it is not enough to study specific pastoral missionary actions for today. It is also necessary to study its spirituality or its life in the Spirit. This obviously means to be educated in a lifestyle that responds to Fr. Francis Jordan’s mandate: use all means to know and better spread the love of the only true God, which is reflected in the face and actions of Jesus, the Savior of the world. Nevertheless, we should be clear from the beginning: no spirituality is possible without a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. “Your life must be in Christ,”<sup>3</sup> warned Fr. Francis Jordan based on his relationship of alliance and belonging to God in Christ and in the Spirit. Moreover, an intense spiritual life was the secret of our Founder and of everything that was done by the first Salvatorian missionaries.
3. In this pastoral letter, I would thus like to elaborate deeper on the topic of the Salvatorian apostolic missionary spirituality. The aim is to strengthen inner attitudes that help us to give a more fruitful answer to the charism we received and to the decisions of the last General Chapter. I believe that this need to root our life more strongly in Jesus Christ and to revive the theological dimension of our lives is more and more pressing. During my visitations to different communities, I have seen how urgent it is to have a spiritual depth when facing the fast pace of life and the fragmentation we are exposed to. We need a spiritual depth that keeps, supports and nourishes our apostolic mission in the Church in a

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General Chapter”, December 25th 2018, pages 10-17).

2 See “Letter from the XIX General Chapter”, December 25th 2018, page 12.

3 JORDAN, Fr. Francis. Talks of Fr. Francis Jordan in the Motherhouse, March 11th 1898.

dynamic and vital way. This is the framework by which I would like to propose a prayerful reading of the biblical text by Luke 5, 1 -11. I believe that the well-known story of the catching of fish is a biblical image that can help us rediscover the meaning of our apostolic consecration. That is, the charism of living united to Christ, the Savior, and of making Him known to all people, following the example of the Apostles.

### PRESENTATION OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

4. The scene is set at the Lake of Gennesaret, also known as the ‘Sea of Galilee.’ According to Luke, the Evangelist, Jesus sets out on his apostolic journey acting only within the limits of Galilee. However, in the account in Luke 5, 1-11, we see Jesus walking by the Lake of Gennesaret, calling people to collaborate in his mission of evangelization. As we will see later, the Word of Jesus would change the life of some fishermen to the extent that they leave their boats, their nets and even the large amount of fish they just caught. They leave everything to follow Jesus, building a new relationship with Him that entails the imitation of His lifestyle and their identification with His destiny. Only because of love and because of this identification with Jesus, they can be sent to proclaim a new way of understanding and experiencing God’s presence (the Kingdom of God). However, Jesus chooses them carefully for the task and devotes much time to instruct them through His word and His life.



For the purpose of our reflection, I propose to divide the biblical text<sup>4</sup> in four parts:

5. **Hungry for the Word (1 – 3).** In this section, a crowd is pressing in on Jesus and listening to Him, while He teaches them from one of the boats. Jesus' compassionate attitude here invites us to rediscover the specificity of our apostolic vocation: making the words and actions of Jesus Christ known and, at the same time, giving testimony by being close to the crowd of today with a missionary spirituality of compassion, depth and daily witness.
6. **Jesus' Invitation to Put Out into Deep Water (4–7).** After experiencing failure (a fruitless fishing night), the disciples obey the Word of Jesus and lower the nets into deep water. Jesus' mandate encourages us today to overcome every frustration we might find in our community life and to rediscover how important it is to strive for quality in our spiritual union with Christ and our brothers, so that our mission and evangelical testimony become more fruitful.
7. **From Sinner to Fisher (8 – 9).** Confronted with Jesus' presence and actions, Simon Peter acknowledges on his knees that he is a sinful man. "Do not be afraid" – Jesus answers – "from now on you will be catching men." This calling removes the disciples from their place of stability and puts them on an extensive path in which they will learn to live with Jesus. From this perspective, I invite you to rediscover the spirituality of our formative journey, which orientates us towards mission as a lifelong process.
8. **Complete Availability (10 – 11).** The disciples leave everything and follow Jesus in a radical way. They are set to learn how to save people from

<sup>4</sup> Translator's note: The text used for the reflection is taken from The New American Bible.

death and bring them back to life. Following the steps of Jesus inevitably requires an absolute change of values. In this respect, I invite you to reflect on our ability to empty ourselves and open up to new missionary styles, to offering other spaces and times to make Jesus known and to be nourished by His Gospel.

## A – Hungry for the Word The Mission, a guiding principle of our Society

*"While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret. <sup>2</sup>He saw two boats there alongside the lake; the fishermen had disembarked and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup>Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat." (1-3)*

### **"The crowd was pressing in on Jesus..."**

9. The scene is fascinating. What Jesus experiences when he arrives at the lake contrasts with the rejection He suffered at the synagogue of his own village, Nazareth.<sup>5</sup> These people do not reject Him; on the contrary, the presence of the crowd, anxious to hear Him preach, is almost suffocating. The people are demanding, they do everything possible to listen to 'the Word of God'. Jesus is not just teaching the Word, He Himself is the Word of God. And he is moved with compassion for those people who are confused and have nobody to guide them or to nourish them with the Word of God. How important is it for Jesus to satiate the hunger of these people!
10. In today's times, compassion has to come first and last in our apostolic

<sup>5</sup> See Luke's Gospel 4, 21 – 30.

mission. It is up to us to find a way to go out, meet and look at the faces of people with the same compassion of Jesus. Fr. Francis Jordan, moved by compassion for “(...) people who will be lost due to a lack of instruction,”<sup>6</sup> recommended his fellows of the mission to approach all people and to walk the ways others could not walk. I am sure that more compassionate actions, especially towards the little and the sick ones, toward those who are despised and forgotten, connect us with the essence of the Gospel and the tradition of so many Salvatorian missionaries.

11. Our speeches, communications and declarations will mean nothing if we do not focus on the essential, that is, helping people to know the person of Jesus Christ and nourish them with His teachings and His actions. The most important thing is the passion for evangelization because as Pope Francis explains: “God’s people do not expect or need superheroes, they expect shepherds, (...) consecrated men who know about compassion, who hold out a hand, who stop before the fallen one...”<sup>7</sup> God’s love for His people is the first thing we have to offer to humanity. Let us not remain indifferent, let us live out the mission, teach the Word of God and approach those who suffer close to us. “May we never abandon them!”<sup>8</sup>



6 JORDAN, Fr. Francis. *Spiritual Diary*, I/78 and I/178

7 FRANCIS. Speech to Priest, Religious Men and Seminarians in Santiago, Chile, January 16th 2018

8 FRANCIS. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 48.

### “Getting into one of the boats...”

12. Jesus sees the boats and takes the initiative by asking Simon to lend Him one. The action of “getting into a boat” also means that Jesus enters the fishermen’s world and questions their ordinary ways in their daily life. He immediately “asks” them to go out a short distance so that they can see the multitude from another perspective, understand and distinguish His words from the rumors among the crowd. This change of scenery requested by Jesus is a missionary invitation to the fishermen to change perspective because reality is different when seen from the inside or from the furthest place outside one can reach. Jesus invites His disciples to look at the people the way He looked at them Himself: capturing the suffering, loneliness, bewilderment and abandonment that many of them were enduring.
13. I remember what Pope Francis told us in his meeting with the superiors general of religious orders: “I am convinced that the great changes in history are achieved when reality is not seen from the center but from the periphery.”<sup>9</sup> The Pope explained that being on the periphery gives us an interpretative key that helps us enter into the logic of Jesus. Looking from the peripheries means primarily to remove ourselves from the center, to move out of our safe self-reliance in order to look with compassion, generosity and hope at those who are the furthest removed from the world. A Salvatorian apostolic life is significant when it is able to look at the reality of those people who are distant, often forgotten and hungry for teachings about the mercy and love that the living and true God has for everybody. We recognize this “outreach movement” towards the people furthest removed from the world, in our first Salvatorian missionaries. They left everything behind to go to the vast and remote mission region of Assam in India.

9 FRANCIS. Dialog with the Superiors General (USG), November 29th 2013.

14. In the Gospel, we often see Jesus' invitation to change perspective and look at those living in exclusion through God's eyes. The disciples learn to move to the boundaries towards those little ones who do not count. While doing so, they also discover their dignity and truer identity as persons loved by God. Changing perspective does not mean to distance oneself from people by adopting a typical attitude of "masters" who put themselves first or above everybody. The disciples of Jesus will listen, learn and at the same time, teach and walk with those who were considered less important, unwanted or distant. Thus, we understand that our apostolic missionary identity is shaped in the dynamism created between two poles: evangelizing and being evangelized. In essence, from the moment we learn to look through the eyes of Jesus Christ, we start seeing a world that needs to feel compassion and God as a Father who invites all to seek together a more human, more fraternal life.

#### "... taught the crowds"

15. In the Gospel, it is Jesus who asks the fishermen to help Him take care of the people and their desire to listen to the Word of God. Sitting down, Jesus talks to the people, and the fishermen around Him listen to His preaching. This image of Jesus, pausing without hurry to invite people to trust in God, is really beautiful. Jesus does not teach like the religious teachers of the Law. He teaches with authority because He has the ability to be close to people and deeply close to God in prayer at the same time. This shows a "double closeness,"<sup>10</sup> as Pope Francis calls it.

16. Both in Jesus' time and today, people are not looking for religious doctrine but for a word that helps them to lead a meaningful life and to trust in an infinitely merciful God. A faith lived in a routine and repetitive way, based on the practice of religious obligations, is not attractive to people anymore. Many good ordinary Christians are full of

doubts and confusion and distance themselves from our communities. And nobody helps them to recognize and wake up to a faith that is alive in Jesus Christ, the merciful face of the Living and True God. In this reality, I think that nothing can be more relevant and urgent than the contribution of Fr. Francis Jordan's charism: using all the forces available "to achieve the end that all people might know more and more the one true God and Him whom He sent, Jesus Christ, and that they might live holy lives and save their souls."<sup>11</sup>

17. I am pleased to see that our understanding of the specificity of the Salvatorian charism, as a gift at the service of the Church's mission of evangelization, is growing among us. Nevertheless, I would like to find a higher number of Salvatorians committed to focusing their apostolate on helping people to go beyond a relationship with an "unknown Jesus," this is neither attractive,

nor appealing or moving for people's hearts. Those specific apostolic actions that move people's hearts and lead them to know Jesus Christ are



more valuable than any speech or justification. As Pope Benedict XVI said: "being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a Person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction."<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, this is what supports the credibility and fruitfulness of a typically Salvatorian action of evangelization.

10 FRANCIS. Homily at the Casa Santa Marta Chapel, Vatican City, January 9th 2018.

11 JORDAN. Fr. Francis. Rule of 1882.

12 Benedict XVI, Encyclic *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 1.

## QUESTIONS TO LIVE MORE AUTHENTICALLY OUR MISSION

18. The Mission is not just our goal: the Society itself is Mission. Salvatorians are and do Mission. But there is no mission without missionaries. What are the most relevant aspects of your personal history that you understand as mission? Do you feel the Word of God moving you to go towards others? Jesus looked around Him and reacted to suffering people with kindness and compassion. What can awaken us, fill us with compassion and make it grow in ourselves in an active way towards those in the peripheries? Which aspects of our Salvatorian charism could we live out, transmit and propose to those Christians that distanced themselves from the Church? Without nurturing a permanent and vital encounter with Jesus Christ, our teachings are mere words; they do not motivate, transmit or evangelize. What else can we do to match our words with the testimony of our intimacy with God, following the example of Fr. Francis Jordan?

### B – The invitation to Put Out into Deep Water Community, gathered for mission

*“<sup>4</sup>After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch’. <sup>5</sup>Simon said in reply, ‘Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets’. <sup>6</sup>When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing. <sup>7</sup>They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come to help them. They came and filled both boats so that they were in danger of sinking.” (4 - 7)*

#### “...have caught nothing”

19. The central and most relevant part of the account starts with an in-depth dialogue between Jesus and the fishermen. Although Jesus solemnly

addresses Simon, he also speaks to Andrew, James and John who are present. The mandate is therefore expressed in plural, directed to the whole group of fishermen. They have worked hard all night and caught nothing. Once again, they are frustrated by the poor result achieved despite having used a means they trust so much. Jesus surprises them with His impossible request to go out and fish again in broad daylight, when the chances of success are practically zero. He asks them to move confidently forward towards deeper waters. He makes their confusion and frustration go away once they arrive.

20. I would like to recall here what Pope Francis has repeatedly pointed out about the dangers of “spiritual worldliness as a subtle way of seeking one’s ‘own interests, not those of Jesus Christ’.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, it means choosing the criteria of the world and shifting the mission from the center of our lives.



Without realizing it, we start to live a worldly consecrated life, centered in itself and to follow criteria of comfort, individualism, excessive privacy and personal success. In some cases, I believe it is urgent to change direction towards Jesus’ mandate and to put out into “deep” water, before it is too late. “Putting out into deep water” means just to let the Gospel permeate our existence and rebuild a deep relationship with Him, who is the core and the source of life, strengthening our fraternal relationships.

<sup>13</sup> FRANCIS. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 93.

21. Despite the fact that most of us long for friendship, acceptance, respect, harmony and significant work, we cannot close our eyes and pretend that everything is fine. Faced with the difficulties of fraternal togetherness, we need to pay close attention to two enemies. The first one is a perfectionist vision of community (which tolerates no weakness). That means, wanting it all without the patience needed to face difficulties with objectivity. The second one is a pessimistic interpretation of community life (which gives up any dream of fraternity). With this attitude, one gets comfortable in the situation on the pretext that no growth is possible with “certain brothers”. In both scenarios, it is necessary to admit that community renewal does not happen overnight. There is no panacea either. Each Salvatorian has to take on the commitment and responsibility of constantly discerning what is essential in our fraternal life of apostolic mission.

**“Master, at your command I will lower the nets.”**

22. Furthermore, I would like to point out how, in the Gospel, Simon addresses Jesus as “Master”, which means that, somehow, he was already Jesus’ disciple and trusted Him. We all know that Simon had experienced Jesus’ generosity by then, when He healed his mother-in-law during His visit to his home.<sup>14</sup> In this passage, Simon not only tells Jesus what is on his mind but, at the same time, declares his trust in His words, since He is his Master and it is Him who requests it. This close relationship between Simon and his companions with their Master brings the experience of discipleship to my mind. It is not something automatic; it grows in the disciples’ heart in a fragile and progressive way.

23. It is also clear that following Jesus means to belong to a new family in which members have not chosen each other. Jesus calls each one by their name and invites them to share and to carry out a common mission

<sup>14</sup> See Luke’s Gospel 4, 38 – 39.

as brothers. Therefore, our shared project of community and apostolic mission is based on the awareness that we are not together because life is easier in a community or because we like the people, but because we were gathered by Jesus Christ, who is the Master of us all. However, let us not fool ourselves. This theological foundation of our vocation should not be taken for granted. Every member of our community must clearly know the main reason why we live and walk together. Without this theological foundation, I am convinced that no external instrument would help us to build relationships in community life.

24. Quality community life needs the constant exercise of putting Jesus, our Savior, at the center of our existence. “Let yourselves be conquered by Him, take on his mind and his way of life; Let Christ meet you.”<sup>15</sup>, Pope Francis said to all consecrated men and women. In this sense, I would like to say that praying together is an indispensable experience if we want to build a Salvatorian community toward mission. A community that does not pray becomes trivial and loses its identity. “Therefore we must never think” – Fr. Francis Jordan said – “that because we are called to the apostolate we are any less called to the spiritual life or that we should curtail self-sanctification.”<sup>16</sup> Despite leading an intense and committed apostolic life, nothing justifies not living an authentic and vivid community prayer life. It is vital getting together around a prayerful reading of the Word to achieve a deeper contact with the Lord Who invites us to “lower our nets” in one common direction.

**“...their partners came to help them”**

25. In Luke’s account, the effect of the Word of Jesus is verified immediately. The “all night and nothing” becomes “a great number of fish” is absolutely

<sup>15</sup> FRANCIS. Message for the vigil of prayer on the opening of the Year of Consecrated Life, November 29th 2014.

<sup>16</sup> JORDAN, Fr. Francis. Talks of Fr. Francis Jordan in the Motherhouse, December 2nd, 1898.

disproportionate to the circumstances of the action taken. In fact, listening to the Word of Jesus is always rewarded with the abundant life He offers. The fishermen immediately react and start to work together. Without their mutual support, they are in danger of tearing the nets or even sinking. They are in deep water, where nets are heavier; they need their partners' help.

26. According to the mandate we received from Fr. Francis Jordan, our life style is deeply rooted in the experience of friendship and mutual help that is set in motion around Jesus. In other



words, working together in apostolates is not “optional” in our case. For Salvatorians, communion and mission belong together. One would be meaningless without the other, because communion without mission would become intimacy and mission without communion would get lost in activism. Thus, we face the permanent challenge of living a true fraternal experience as a sign to the world, to convey that it is possible to put community interest and apostolic goals before individual ones.

27. We should never minimize the value of the testimony given by praying and working together in mission; even more so in this time, in which division, failure, discrimination, prejudice, exclusion and individualism have become an overwhelming reality in the present world. I believe it is urgent that each one of us commits to “building community” as a way of living out the evangelical values, accepting our failures and virtues,

our limitations and potentialities. Pope Francis reminded us that living together, praying together and working together is our first apostolic word and a way to witness the Gospel, since “community is the first and most believable gospel that we can preach.”<sup>17</sup> Walking together in community is a central aspect of our apostolic consecration. Or at least, it should be. If we Salvatorians do not bear witness of the life of God in us, we are worthless.

#### QUESTIONS TO LIVE MORE AUTHENTICALLY AS AN APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY

28. The experience of fraternity becomes an ideal for life and a starting point for our mission in the Church and in the world at the same time. In some of our community meetings, we could share the following questions: For what did I join the Society of the Divine Savior? Which steps do we need to take in order to correct trends and to create moments of growth, communion and mission? Without having a continuous experience of encountering Christ and the presence of the Spirit in our life, community deteriorates. Today, it is our task to rediscover and live in depth the “mystique” of living together<sup>18</sup>. In this sense, how much time do we devote daily to a prolonged prayer in our houses? Which other initiatives might help us to experience a solid and prolonged prayer that transforms the community from within? The apostolic charism of Fr. Francis Jordan finds its best expression not in each one of us separately, but as a group, since it is together, we serve better the aim of the Society. How could we foster our team working and share the responsibilities of the mission? Which initiatives do we need to promote in order to strengthen our sense of belonging and of collaboration for the mission?

17 FRANCIS. “Rejoice...” A letter to consecrated men and women, Rome, February 2nd 2014, no. II, 31

18 “We sense the challenge of finding and sharing a ‘mystique’ of living together (...) a genuine experience of fraternity, a caravan of solidarity, a sacred pilgrimage... to go out of ourselves and to join others.” (See Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 87.)

## C – From sinner to fisherman A formation directed toward Mission

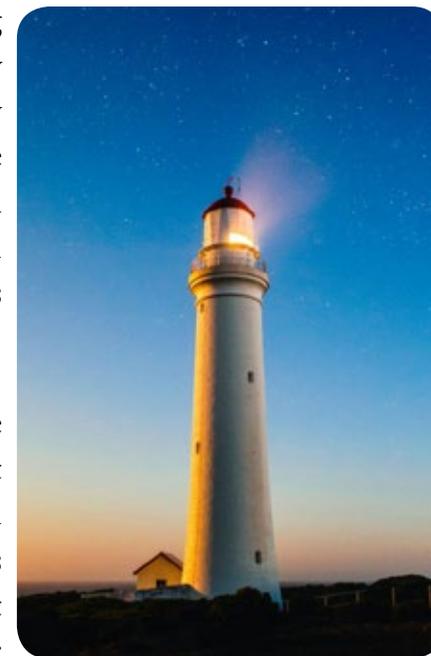
*“<sup>8</sup>When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, ‘Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.’ <sup>9</sup>For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him and all those with him.” (8 - 9)*

### “...he fell at the knees of Jesus...”

29. A radical change happens in Simon’s life, so much so that the evangelist Luke calls him “Simon Peter” for the first time. The name “Peter” (kefas = rock) points at his mission and destiny. It is not something added to his person, but a call to a formation and maturation process until he becomes the “apostle Peter” who is ready to give his life for Jesus. It is not difficult to imagine how Simon’s eyes open when he sees Jesus for who He really is and the consequences of his friendship with Him. Simon and his partners realize that they are called to come even closer to Him, to assume His lifestyle of communion with the Father and of service to others. From this perspective, we understand that each vocation implies a constant transformation, a permanent, lifelong process of growth.

30. Pope Francis explained that “vocation is always a work of God. He leads us beyond our initial situation, frees us from every enslavement, breaks down our habits and our indifference, and brings us to the joy of communion with Him and with our brothers and sisters.”<sup>19</sup> Fr. Francis Jordan said that the apostolic vocation consists in an attitude of always being on the way “...like the morning light that walks and lengthens to perfect day”<sup>20</sup>. It makes us recognize the profound meaning of centering our life in Jesus Christ. Consequently, each Salvatorian is responsible for

assimilating this new understanding of formation as the regular way to live their vocation and follow Jesus in a dynamic way. To have an experience that grows deeper in time and is better understood in retrospect, a commitment that leads to another.



31. However, the fact that some Salvatorians still believe that formation is limited to the initial stages of Salvatorian life remains a matter of concern. This mindset is rather harmful for our apostolic lifestyle and mission. If formation is not taken seriously as a way to answer to our human, spiritual and apostolic vocation, there is a danger of giving way to the comfortable lifestyle of a “worldly spirituality”, which destroys our identity as consecrated and apostolic men. In the end, answering Jesus’ call to follow Him is not a sweet, emotional moment, but a daily vocational growth marked by the regular rhythm of prayer, recollection, community and work. Thus, no Salvatorian is exempt of a continuous formation in his consecration, in charism and in apostolic spirituality, which is actually the most important formation of all.

### “...I am a sinful man”

32. I would like to underline that Jesus seems to be sitting in the boat with Simon Peter kneeling before Him. Simon does not call Jesus just “Master” any more, but he recognizes Him as the “Lord”. Without the Lord’s help, his work would have not succeeded. Simon Peter did not know that he was so weak and unworthy of living in the presence of

19 FRANCIS. Message for the 52nd World Day of Prayer for Vocations, April 26th 2015.

20 JORDAN, Fr. Francis. Spiritual Diary, no. 1/54

the “Kyrios” (the Lord of everything). At that moment, Simon Peter possibly faces that part of him that he often avoided seeing. Despite his weaknesses, Jesus does not part from him, but He entrusts him with a new mission, a radical change in his ideas that will make him grow as a person and learn to merit the name “Peter”.

33. I suppose that some of us have also gone through enthusiastic moments in life, filled with the will to radically change everything; moments that progressively evolved into phases of true rightsizing. We are not questioned by our outstanding glories and virtues, but by our weaknesses and pettiness. Nevertheless, vocation is a gift that remains despite our many weaknesses and incoherence. And if we want to grow, we need to know and accept ourselves, because “all of us consecrated people, young and not-so-young, are in need of adequate help with the human, spiritual and vocational moment we are experiencing”<sup>21</sup> with no exception. Therefore, the call to the mission that Jesus has entrusted us as His friends entails a constant effort to give and take appreciation, support, encouragement and brotherly forgiveness. It is not about perfection; the goal is to pursue a path of maturity and good formation.



34. The way Jesus counsels His disciples lets us realize the importance of a spiritual counselor who can help us to discern and fully accomplish our

apostolic mission. Fr. Francis Jordan is our best example. He was a man who sought counsel in others to clearly discern God’s will for his life. In fact, the experience of being guided helped him to become a wise spiritual counselor himself and to help many people to meet Jesus and join him in the mission. Nowadays, there are many Salvatorians serving as spiritual directors, but not all have a spiritual counselor themselves. Consequently, I would like us to recall that all Salvatorians, with no exception, need to face our weaknesses, our problems and the spiritual illnesses we carry within ourselves. We all need to find a spiritual guide (if we do not have one yet) who can counsel us, talk to us and help us discern what God is asking from us, so that we can continue His mission with joy, passion and hope.

**“For astonishment seized him and all those with him”**

35. In Biblical language, astonishment or fear signal that God is approaching. In this case, the silent reaction of the fishermen is therefore understandable. The catch of the fish lets them speechless, astonished, and allows them to discover their own truth. They are witnessing an unexpected sign of God’s greatness and transcendence in their lives. At the beginning, they felt the need to talk and justify their actions, but now, there is only silence because Jesus has something to say. Nevertheless, after their experience of a “great silence”, Jesus extends them a clear invitation to put out into other seas, to risk on a new path. Frequently in biblical texts, God expresses Himself in silence. A silence that is not just the absence of words, but “a silence that speaks”. In fact, this kind of silence is the point of entry to listen to the Word of God.

36. Unfortunately, it is still very worrying that many of our houses seem to lack interiority and time for peace, reverence and experiencing God. Our formation model generally educates in thinking with earnestness, acting with professionalism and using without wasting; however, I

21 FRANCIS. Address in the Plenary Assembly of the CICLSAL in the Vatican, January 28th 2017.

presume that we should do more to reinforce a formation that fosters being and growing from within. We often forget the essential dimension of interiority without even realizing it. Everything puts pressure on us to make us move fast, to deprive us from the inner experience. Without practicing tranquility, inner peace and personal silence, we preach a God that is insufficient, spoken, interpreted, “downloaded from the internet”, instead of a God that is source of experience and foundation of our missionary-apostolic life.

37. From the same perspective, I dare say that the real problem of many of our communities does not lie so much in personal failure. I am much more concerned about the lack of the deep spiritual life that, when experienced, transforms and teaches to live faith from within. I presume that nobody is free from the need to be educated in interiority, consciously and persistently. Besides, Pope Francis expressed it very clearly: “...the growth proper to the Church, that which bears fruit, is in silence, in hiding, with good works, and the celebration of the Lord’s Paschal Mystery. We should not think on a Church that grows through events, that is not capable to grow in silence.”<sup>22</sup> In sum, in a culture of noise, superficiality and publicity, silence is a privileged resource that helps us to grow as consecrated men and to live a deep relationship with God and the others.

#### QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN AND IMPROVE OUR FORMATION DIRECTED TOWARDS MISSION

38. Today, it is natural to talk about formation as a life-long process. Living the Salvatorian identity means to continuously grow in every aspect of life: human, spiritual and apostolic. How did you live the aspect of ongoing formation in your vocational development? Which new community initiatives could promote a formation that focuses on

living the Salvatorian apostolic life more intensely? We should not walk carelessly! Thus, the aspect of spiritual counseling is growing in value as a means to go deeper into the consecration and the apostolic mission. Which aspects of spiritual counseling helped you more? Are we able to request the assistance of an expert to engage in exercises of community discernment that help us to better know God’s will and carry out our mission? Any Salvatorian apostolic activity without interiority risks putting the essential last, that is, the development of a life of intimacy with Jesus Christ. I assume that we talk much about God, but where and when do we listen to His quiet presence deep in our hearts? In practical life, how much room do you make for your formation in spiritual life, which is the foundation that sustains a life of consecration and apostolic mission?

### D – Complete Availability Apostolate: sent in Mission

*“<sup>10</sup>And likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon. Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.’ <sup>11</sup>When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.” (10 - 11)*

#### “... you will be catching men.”

39. Jesus makes Simon understand that, “from now on” (not before), he and his companions have the task of participating in His mission and carrying the Word of God to the peoples. Jesus’ expression, “Do not be afraid,” could be interpreted as Him saying: “Do not fear being a sinner and walking with me”. In regular fishing, men catch fish to kill and eat them. Now, Jesus calls them to another kind of catch. They will be “catching men”. The Greek word used by the evangelist Luke in the

22 FRANCIS. Homily at the Casa Santa Marta chapel, November 15th 2018.

Gospel means literally “catching alive” in the sense of bringing them back to life. Actually, this is the mission proposed by Jesus: delivering people from the power of death (deep water) to give them freedom and true life. It is the beginning of a new stage in the life of Simon and his companions.

40. The disciples’ mission of proclaiming the Good News of salvation for all peoples reminds me of what Fr. Francis Jordan recommended when he sent out Salvatorians to the mission in the world. He warned them not to exclude any available means, as long as they pursue the goal of making the love of the One True God known and Him whom He sent, Jesus Christ, thus making more disciples for Him. This apostolic vision is not closed in on itself, not limited to a specific work or restricted to a culture, but open beyond every frontier. The vision of the “universality of means” is an important criterion to discern about our apostolic activities and to avoid falling into the trap of appropriating the means and confusing them with the charism. I think it is necessary to consistently ask ourselves if we are managing works that have a long Salvatorian tradition but no longer convey any recognizable characteristic of an authentic Salvatorian apostolate.

41. Fr. Francis Jordan knew how to read the signs of his time and make the corresponding choices to align himself with Jesus’ apostolic mandate: spread His Spirit of salvation and make His Person known as well as the message that God wants everybody to have life and have it more abundantly. Today, it falls to us to educate ourselves in a prayerful reading of the signs of our time, to align ourselves with the evangelizing mission of the Church and to choose the means that better correspond to our charism of helping to know, love and follow Jesus Christ without excluding anyone. The diversity of means, more than a random choice of activities, is the true way of Salvatorian evangelization.

### “...they left everything...”

42. The evangelist Luke emphasizes a sense of radicalness with the expression “they left everything”. At the beginning, the fishermen are generous and zealous disciples of Jesus, but they are not fully committed. A progressive understanding of Jesus’ life and words brings about a total change of values in them. Until then, they were fishermen and disciples but, afterwards, “they brought their boats to the shore”. They bring their boats out of the water and leave “everything” in the name of something grand; they become just followers of Jesus. In other words, the fishermen make a beautiful choice. They leave the pointless and vain effort of “catching nothing” to gain a different meaning for their lives in following Jesus. On the other hand, Jesus’ invitation leaves no room for doubt. Whoever wants to follow Him needs to be able to leave everything in order to find a much more valuable treasure.



43. The disciples are called to live with less, a call that makes me think of our present need to educate ourselves in simplicity and availability, in a visibly more evangelical apostolic life. We made the free choice of living in evangelical poverty to follow Jesus; but it sometimes becomes apparent that we have followed paths of comfort, well-being and individualism that lead to a dangerous isolation. We have possibly neglected our ongoing formation in its dimension of complete availability for the

mission and forgotten Fr. Francis Jordan's recommendation for our Society: "The members should possess nothing as their own; whatever they acquire, they acquire for the Society".<sup>23</sup> In this respect, I believe that we need to convert at a deeper level in order to heal "the disease of consumerism"<sup>24</sup> that is affecting us all. Obviously, it requires a deep spiritual life to encourage us to abandon a possessive relationship with things, people and even with our own life.

44. I also presume that the future will bring a greater need for Salvatorians with human and evangelic integrity, spiritual depth and coherence with their apostolic consecration. In this sense, our efforts to best plan the apostolic mission and to continuously improve structures are very valid and necessary. However, I think that we mostly need an internal transformation, a real effort to understand that the Salvatorian vocation and apostolic mission express themselves through the people who are available and reach out to others. "To go out of ourselves and to join others is healthy for us." – says Pope Francis – "To be self-enclosed is to taste the bitter poison of immanence, and humanity will be worse for every selfish choice we make".<sup>25</sup> Therefore, no Salvatorian is exempt of a continuous formation in availability, universal vision, temperance and the joy of the essential.

### **"... and followed him."**

45. The open-handedness of Simon and his partners is complete, that is, their trust in the new Guide for their life is absolute. According to Luke, discipleship takes the form of a journey. Being Jesus' disciple means to follow Him along His way, from Galilee to the end of the world.

23 JORDAN, Fr. Francis. Rule of 1884.

24 Pope Francis defined consumerism as a serious "disease" that stops us from being generous towards those in greatest need. (See the homily at the Casa Santa Marta chapel, November 26th 2018).

25 FRANCIS. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 87.

This point of view shows how discipleship is not something static but implies a dynamic of mobility, setting out to follow Jesus. From its beginnings, the Salvatorian apostolate has found a source of inspiration in the itinerant example of these first followers of Jesus. In contexts of persecution, they spread the faith and left for the peripheries of the world to transmit the Gospel. The first members of the Society were very much aware of being true "apostles" of Jesus Christ. They felt sent out into the world to give their life among the poorest of the world: in India, Ecuador, Austria and even in the Motherhouse in Rome, where the poor also knocked at our door.

46. According to our Founder, no nation, no people, no human space is excluded from our apostolate. Logically, it entails an education in permanent discernment to remove ourselves from the center and spread the Good News beyond the boundaries known to us. Pope Francis persistently reminds us of the urgency of abandoning self-reference: "we cannot passively and calmly wait in our church buildings".<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the Pope said to all consecrated men and women: "I ask you to work concretely in welcoming refugees, drawing near to the poor, and finding creative ways to catechize, to proclaim the Gospel and to teach others how to pray".<sup>27</sup> Being faithful to Fr. Francis Jordan, I presume that we cannot remain indifferent before the problems of the Church today and not seek to constantly deepen our spirituality and to act from our apostolic charism.

47. In my opinion, it is urgent to make the effort of going out of ourselves, of our quiet spaces. We need to discern and find actions that better express the Salvatorian approach. We all should ask ourselves, for example, if

26 FRANCIS. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 15.

27 FRANCIS. Apostolic Letter to Consecrated Men and Women. no. II/4. Vatican City, November 21st 2014.

the means we use to counsel lay Christians fully express the richness of the Salvatorian charism. Let us ask ourselves if we can envisage different apostolates, linked to the reality in which the poor, the excluded, the migrant, the marginalized of the world live. Let us not fear to ask ourselves if we are still able to open and maintain spaces for the youth, aimed at deepening their experience of Jesus Christ. Also, let us question if we can open our scope of collaboration to other groups for peace, justice and care of creation, our common home. I have the clear conviction that we can do much more from the specificity of our Salvatorian charism to help people to know the Living and True God, revealed by Jesus Christ. I wish that making Jesus Christ known to those both close and distant from faith would infuse everything we are and do in the Church and with the Church.



#### QUESTIONS TO BETTER LIVE THE CALLING TO BE SENT IN MISSION

48. Our Founder was well convinced that the goal of the Society is contributing to the mission of evangelization, choosing the most appropriate means that better help to make Jesus Christ known to everybody in every place. In the context in which you live: which apostolic activities help people better to know the person of Jesus Christ and his Gospel of salvation? In your opinion, which aspects of our Salvatorian charism and mission are not negotiable, independently of the context in which we live? Pope Francis tirelessly requests us to be available for answering the hardest and more urgent needs of the Church today in the best way possible. For you, which Salvatorians are signs of apostolic missionary availability

that invites us to go out to the peripheries of the world? How could we educate ourselves to become more ready to go wherever we are needed? Ready to do whatever is necessary, the most urgent, and the more demanding tasks of our mission? The number of possibilities in the use of apostolic means is infinite. They require from us not to get comfortable but to move forward paying attention to the identity of the charism, open to the signs of the times and to the needs of the Church in each place. Which new apostolic experiences could help us to go out of our small worlds? Which formation are we Salvatorians offering lay Christians and the youth to foster their vocation in the Church and to join forces in the task of evangelizing.

#### CONCLUSION

49. According to the participants in the XIX General Chapter, “go, enflame all!” is the key that we need to go back to today as the “source of inspiration” that drove Fr. Francis Jordan to start an apostolic mission in every continent. This central key of our charism utterly changes our perspective and brings us back to the true meaning of our living in an apostolic community, our planning the ongoing formation and our taking on apostolates that are aligned with the evangelizing mission of the Church today. The perspective indicated by the General Chapter makes us question whether we are faithful to the spirit of the mission, whether we keep it alive without falling back into the trap of self-reference, which prevents us from giving an answer according to the new situations that are specific to our time. For some of us, following the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion might be a difficult challenge; others might find it impossible and others might fear to make mistakes. Despite all this, we should not be afraid of putting our trust in God; let us learn how to discern – personally and in community – and make it an essential attitude in life. It will slowly and continuously teach us to understand and to listen to God’s will for us and the Society.

50. With the same aim, I would like to reiterate my recommendation to our community superiors: Please devote some time to dialogue about the content of this letter. You can choose the way you consider most useful according to the reality of your Unit. Bear in mind the history of missionary courage, enthusiasm and commitment of countless Salvatorians who went out to the existential peripheries of the world and shared their experience of knowing the one true, good and merciful God with everybody. I encourage you to move forward, beyond any obstacle, comforted by Pope Francis' words: "Challenges exist to be overcome! Let us be realists, but without losing our joy, our boldness and our hope-filled commitment. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigor!"<sup>28</sup> It is important to be available and ready not to give up, certain that God's Providence is with us when we live the present with passion and embrace the future with hope.

51. Christmas time is imminent.

Therefore, I would like to invite you to celebrate this solemnity with a missionary attitude in life. Let us go beyond mere repetition of the Christmas traditions of the world. We should not only experience Christmas just as a fun time, only to keep on doing the same things. More



specifically, let our houses show how important the birth of Jesus, the Divine Saviour, is. This is the "principal feast" for our Society. It is an excellent opportunity to strengthen our fraternal bonds and experience beautiful moments with our confreres and the many people we love.

52. For us, Christmas is Jesus! He is the full expression of the only Living and True God. Let us then renew our apostolic enthusiasm like the shepherds of Bethlehem, and make the One known, who, being in a manger, is the greatest revelation of God's love: Jesus, the Saviour. In fact, this is our most genuine apostolic identity, which make us express with profound conviction: "I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world".<sup>29</sup>

53. As I suggested in previous years, I encourage you once again to take some time alone on Christmas Eve to contemplate God's tenderness in a manger nearby. Reflecting in silence, let us pray for the grace to grow in fraternity and passion for the mission. Let us all pray and feel the communion among us and especially with those who suffer and need us most. Finally, I would like to thank you for all the good you do for the Church and the dispossessed as you follow the charism of Fr. Francis Jordan. I send you my greetings and my blessing. May God give you the best Christmas gift: a deep spirituality and passion for the mission.

*Francis Jordan, SDB*  
Superior General

28 FRANCIS. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 109.

29 FRANCIS. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 273.

Mission is leaving,  
walking away,  
abandoning everything,  
going out of oneself,  
breaking the shell of selfishness  
which imprisons us in our "I".

It is to cease revolving  
around our own selves  
as if we were the center  
of the world and of life.

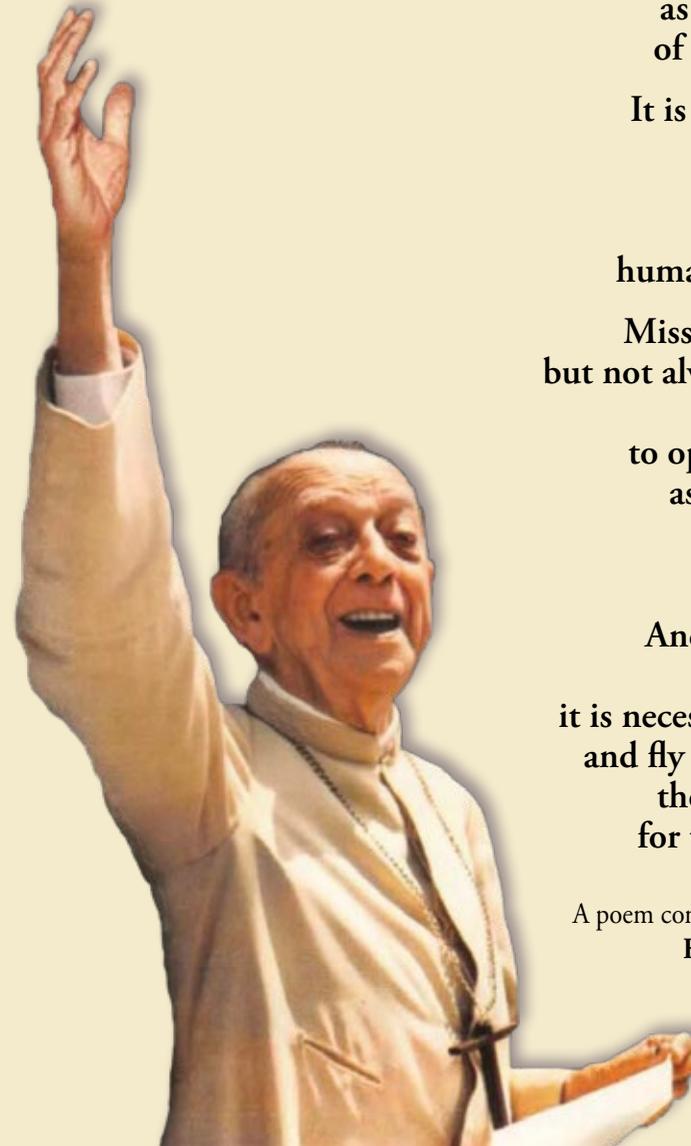
It is refusing to be locked  
into the problems  
of the little world  
to which we belong:  
humanity is much greater.

Mission is always leaving,  
but not always eating up miles.

It is, above all,  
to open oneself to others,  
as brothers and sisters,  
discovering them  
encountering them.

And if, to discover them  
and love them,  
it is necessary to cross the seas  
and fly through the heavens,  
then, mission is leaving  
for the ends of the earth.

A poem composed by the late Archbishop  
**Helder Camara** (1909 – 1999)  
of the Archdioceses of Olinda  
and Recife (Brazil).





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