

OFFICIAL OPENING
XI GENERAL CHAPTER

CARITAS CHRISTI URGET NOS!

Celle Ligure, 31 October 2021

Sia lodato Gesù Cristo!

Tumisufu Yesu Kristu! (Praised be Jesus Christ!) *Milele na Milele. Amina* (Now and always. Amen)

Praise be to Jesus Christ!

Iso Missihaik studiyayirikkatte! (Praised be Jesus Christ!)

Alabado sea Jesu Cristo! (*Dios te bendiga - Que Dios le pague*)

With a heart moved and filled with gratitude, I welcome to this Assembly, the official beginning of the celebratory time of the XI General Chapter of the Sisters of St. Joseph Benedict Cottolengo.

I greet you first of all, dear Chapter Sisters, pleased to welcome each one of you, convoked here from different regions of the world, to experience together the celebration of our XI General Chapter, representing a thousand other Sisters, our beloved Congregation.

My greeting and our greeting, Chapter Sisters, extends, on the wave of the sea, our embrace reaches all our dear Sisters. Yes, all you Sisters who crowd our hearts and who we feel are present here. You elderly and sick Sisters who are the pillars and roots of our communities. You contemplative Sisters, memory of the Mystery and missionary strength. You Sisters who are close to the little ones, to the people in difficulty, the sick, the lonely, the fragile and you take care of them with the tenderness of mothers. You young Sisters whose dreams open up the freshness of our charisma and its life-giving prophecy. You junior Sisters, you novices and candidates with passionate hearts who seek the Love and Tenderness of God. To all of you Sisters, in Africa, in America, in Asia, in Europe, Deo gratias for your presence and your life given!

My greeting carried on the wings of the wind spreads to all the members of the worldwide charismatic Cottolago family.

Together with you Chapter Sisters, I wish to embrace first of all the guests, the sick, the elderly, the little ones, the simple, the young, all the poor, our true treasures in every Continent, the privileged focus of our evangelizing mission. To all of you "*our pearls and masters*", beloved children of God the Father, to all of you our brothers and sisters, may our maternal and tender embrace, our moved and joyful thanks come to you, carried by the rays of the sun.

My own, and our cordial greetings, are addressed to you, Father Carmine Arice, successor of St. Joseph B. Cottolengo, and Father of the Little House, to you Brother Giuseppe Visconti, Superior General of the Brothers, Deo gratias of your presence. In you we greet with gratitude all the Cottolengo Priests and Brothers, generated by the Little House of Divine Providence, like us Sisters, in order to incarnate together in history the charismatic dream of communion and

evangelical prophecy that the Holy Spirit aroused in the heart of Saint Cottolengo, our Father and Founder.

I greet the laymen and laywomen of Cottolengo, you aggregates, oblates, friends, benefactors, volunteers and you collaborators, all of you share the charism of Cottolengo in your lay reality, in your family and work situation. In these days you follow our work with closeness, affection and prayer. Deo gratias for existing all together in this beautiful Little House, mystical body and house of Divine Providence for the poor!

In this atmosphere of universality, I greet with much gratitude, Don Sabino Frigato, Episcopal Vicar for the Consecrated Life of the Diocese of Turin. Today your presence here is significant and makes visible our belonging to the mystical body of Christ, to the People of God, because "*the consecrated life is an integral part of the Church, of her eschatological character, of her evangelical genuineness*" (Pope Francis, Homily, 9-11-2021). And it is a gift of grace to live our Chapter precisely in the historical time in which the universal Church has started its path of the Synod 2021-2023: "*for a synodal Church, communion, participation, mission*". Deo gratias!

Sisters, our XI Chapter has completed the first stage, the time of the convocation, of the consultation of the sisters in the communities and of the assemblies in the circumscriptions. This stage lasted one year and was brought to completion only by Divine Providence which guided and sustained us in going through the pandemic difficulties and hardships, in every land where our communities are present.

With the same trust and abandonment in God the Father, we begin this celebratory Chapter, time that we wish to live both in the awareness of being an intercultural community, called to go beyond welcoming differences to initiate processes of transformation as the fruit of the inter-relationship between sisters of different cultures, and in the synodal dynamic suggested by Pope Francis: encounter, mutual listening, spiritual discernment. Everything is gift, grace, providence and at the same time everything is responsibility, awareness, restlessness, research.

We are in a globally difficult and complex historical time, marked by crises with many faces that drag us and contaminate us, for this reason I feel the need to invite me and you to look at and touch Jesus and his Gospel with more intensity and coherence, to listen to and taste with more gratitude and wonder the Saint Cottolengo and his charism.

Let us look with a profound gaze at Mary who leaves the walls of Nazareth to run and bring the joy she has in her womb. Let us stay with Mary of Magdala who goes out in the dark to look for her Beloved, she runs, she looks for Him but does not find Him, she stands there without understanding and weeps, and her transformed eyes open to a new light and to listening to the voice of the Beloved who calls her, He is near, He is looking for her, He fills her with joy and from Mary's encounter with Jesus the new evangelisation begins.

As consecrated women, we too are called to be the light of the Gospel, to be women who profoundly believe in God, the good and provident Father, to allow ourselves to be attracted by Him and to allow ourselves to be divinized by a true encounter with Him. Thus, pregnant with His Love, we will become mothers who carry Christ on today's roads, who generate meaning in the lives of the women and men we meet, who feel called to love more than to do good.

Courageous women and mothers of faith and love, of freedom and hope, these are the new ways of evangelization that are already dawning, that have already sprouted like slender shoots of

novelty in the ordinary of our life, in the fraternal relationships and closeness among the Sisters, in the daily life of our houses, in the simple relationships of our proximity with the poor, with the people who crowd the streets of life, the streets of the existential peripheries, with the lost people who walk on paths of pain, of non-sense, of loneliness.

We all desire to bring the joy of Jesus to the poor as Saint Cottolengo told us, "*you are their mothers...many times the afflictions that the little ones feel in their hearts are more serious than those they feel in their bodies; it is here that you must help them, you must speak to them about God...showing them that they are children of God*" (DP 214).

The Love of God fills us, embraces us, inhabits us, *Caritas Christi urget nos!* We are mothers pregnant with His divine Love, when we are authentic with our poverty and frailty that His love frees and saves, when we are on the road because His Love challenges us deep down and brings out the preciousness and the handful of light that we all have inside. "*The house of God is us if we cherish freedom and hope!*" (Heb 3:6).

As a Congregation we are challenged to be open, searching, generative, evolving, to have broad horizons and dreams together, to ripen the ears of grain swollen with grains and to be patient with the darnel that gets tangled in the struggles of life. We are called to move to the other side of the sea, all travelling in the same boat, trusting in God the Father and his maternal providence that is with us in the boat always, and we will discover other seas that we do not see today, we do not know.

Certainly on our journey we encounter adversities, problems, storms, but God is with us, indeed God is in us, and He gives us strength, He enlightens us step by step, not to go far from problems and storms, but to go through them with the gift of perseverance and patience. For we believe that in our walk together, inhabited by Love, nothing "*can ever separate us from the Love of God, in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Rom 8:39).

"*Have faith in Divine Providence, and be quiet; hope in the Lord, and you will see that all will be well.*" (DP 274). "*Have faith, have faith*" (DP 319) whispers to our hearts the Saint Cottolengo, and do we "*have faith in Divine Providence*"? (DP 113). Certainly the path of our Congregation, and at the same time the path of the Little House, is not marked out or clear, but "*we know that everything contributes to the good of those who love God*" (Rom 8,28).

I repeat incessantly to myself, to us, the words that reveal to us the shining, strong and tender faith of our Founder, Cottolengo: "*Never will anyone among mortals remain confused and without opportune help who in the arms of the eternal God throws himself in hope and hopes for everything from him. ... A Father, yes, a tender Father, who loved us from whole eternity, who created us in time and whose wise Providence is always committed to our care and protection*" (Homily of 14-1-1827).

Let us stay in the embrace of this God, tender Father and providential Mother! We will not be a house of the perfect, we will not write a history without mistakes, but we can be every day the recomposition of fragments and shards because we are in the hands of the God of Love and tenderness, of paternity and maternity, of providence and care, of custody and joy, of beauty and holiness. And in this Love, we will be inventors of paths of trust among us Sisters, we will be inventors of paths that go towards God and towards man, and we will find the fullness of the heart, a big and spacious heart crowded by many, especially by those who are more alone and forgotten.

Dearest Chapter Sisters, we are called with simplicity and humility, with openness and freedom of heart, with positivity and truthfulness of thought, with *parresia* and synodality of Sisters, to leave space for the Holy Spirit to be open to His surprises. To live the Chapter is to walk on the same path, it is to walk together, *"it is to discover with amazement that the Holy Spirit blows in an ever-surprising way, to suggest new paths and languages"* (Pope Francis, homily, 10-10-2021), it is to allow oneself to be edified *"to become God's house through the Spirit!"* (Eph 2:22).

Feeling profoundly united with all the Sisters of the Congregation, sustained by the unceasing and choral prayer of the entire Cottolengo Family of earth and Heaven, especially the Sisters of the Monasteries, the elderly and sick Sisters, of our dear Guests and of all the people who love us and who are close to us in various ways, in the presence of the Episcopal Vicar for Consecrated Life, of the Father of the Little House, of the Superior General of the Cottolengo Brothers and of all you Chapter Sisters, convoked here, as provided by can. 166 of the Code of Canon Law,

**I HEREBY DECLARE OFFICIALLY OPEN,
TODAY, 31 October 2021, in CELLE LIGURE,
XI GENERAL CHAPTER
of the Sisters of SAINT JOSEPH BENEDICT COTTOLENGO
on THEME:
*"OUTSIDE THE WALLS: THE COURAGE TO DARE".
NEW WAYS OF EVANGELIZATION".***

May the Virgin of Listening, Mother and Queen of the Little House, our Father and Founder, Mother Marianna Nasi, the Venerable Sister Maria Carola Cecchin, Blessed Brother Luigi and Father Paleari, our Sisters who already enjoy the fullness of Love intercede for us, assist us and accompany us to celebrate this event of grace with faith and hope, and with gratitude for the beauty of the Cottolengo consecrated life in its charismatic originality of the complementary monastic and apostolic vocations.

"Love God, go forward in the presence of God, courage in the Lord and joy, love and no fear" (DP 1) to listen with a spacious heart to the Holy Spirit, because He is the only protagonist of this event and paraphrasing Pope Francis, we wish each other *"good journey together! Let us feel together pilgrims in love with the Gospel and the Charism of St. G. B. Cottolengo, open to the surprises of the Holy Spirit. Let us not miss the occasions of grace of encounter, of mutual listening, of discernment. With the joy of knowing that, while we seek the Lord, it is He who first comes to meet us with His Love"* (Pope Francis, homily, 10-10-2021) and with His Providence that *"has never failed those who hope in her"* (St. G. B. Cottolengo, DP 39).

Onward always in the Lord, Deo gratias!!!

Mother Elda Pezzuto