

## **“Our Mission is alive today”**

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of April 2018 we begin the third part of our reflection which we started two years ago on St. M. Euphrasia so as to deepen our relationship with her. During the first year we reflected on our personal journey and our commitments linking them with the early years of the life of Rose Virginie. Last year we reflected on the theme of going “beyond the frontiers” inspired by what Mary Euphrasia did in her lifetime. This year we wish to invite you to meditate on the theme “Our Mission is alive today.”

We recall with gratitude the heritage left to us by St. M. Euphrasia at her death on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April 1868. She, who was a faithful daughter of St. Jean Eudes desired ardently that the whole world benefits from the work of salvation begun by him who said “the loving Heart of Jesus is a furnace of love, He gave us His own heart so that we could love one another.” The burning and dynamic zeal which was alive in her heart remained with her until her last breath. This was the driving force that motivated her to send her daughters to the whole world to tell God’s inconceivable love for every person; especially for women who were in difficulty.

This heritage which we received as a congregation has been passed on from generation to generation. Thanks to the vision and the initiatives of our Sisters and mission partners who during these hundred and fifty years, the mission has stayed alive by adapting to changing needs and reading the signs of the times. The congregation present in so many countries was called to respond to the cries of women and girls in many different ways but always in fidelity to the mission.

St. Mary Euphrasia was called “Madam Hope” by the Countess of Andigne because she had the passion of the possible for today and always believed that there was always something that could be done to respond to the needs of persons. We remember with admiration her audacity in establishing the Generelete and even constructing the tunnel when she believed that these new endeavours were necessary for the mission which had been entrusted to her..

We remember with gratitude that the day of her death she calls the Sisters who will leave for India, two Irish Sisters, 21 and 24 years of age: Sisters Mary of St. Ambrose O’Connor and Mary of St. Pauline Mullen. . Hundred and fifty years later our Congregation has grown in India and our Sisters are responding to new needs and challenges urged on by the desire to work for Justice and Peace. Their efforts were seen in the recent documentary “Mahila” where the mission of the sisters was to help women and their families to overcome poverty and discrimination.

In 1868 we were present in the African continent in Algeria and in Egypt and just before her death Marie Euphrasia missioned three Sisters to Aden. Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Congregation has spread in Africa and in each country in which we are present the Sisters have tried to answer to the cries of women, girls and children. The zeal which is alive in our Sisters has helped them to respond to needs in very creative

ways. In our very recent foundation in the Democratic Republic of Congo, our Sisters have worked with women and children working in the mines. The Sisters did not turn back in front of obstacles but persevered in their mission of bringing peace and justice to an exploited population.

New needs have brought about news responses. In all the countries that we are present the congregation has responded to poverty by working on development projects which help people to take their future into their hands. New forms of modern slavery like human trafficking have found responses in the hearts of our Sisters so as to be a presence to these exploited women and children and to militate for their rights. Migrants and refugees have been welcomed and helped to adjust to their new surroundings. Concerning Gender inequality and violence with regard to women and children our Sisters have come to the aid of the victims and at the same time tried to change structures that propagate these evils. Religious and ethnic intolerance in some countries have been challenges that we have had to face and to respond by searching non-violent solutions. That the cries of those with whom we work can be heard on an international level our Congregation has an NGO status in the United Nations since 1996.

To ensure that our mission continues to be a reconciling presence of Jesus the Good Shepherd by empowering lives, restoring rights and upholding dignity it was necessary that our Sisters be assisted with professional skills to work in our fast changing world. With this in mind the Congregational leadership in January 2007 created the mission development office based in Rome at the Generalate.

Another aspect of our mission being alive today is the dynamism of our mission partners. It is true that from the beginnings of the congregation mission partners were precious to Mary Euphrasia. We remember with gratitude Mr de Neuville and Madam d'Andigne. It is touching to remember that on the morning of her death she welcomes two lay partners into her room. She gave them each a small cross and then turning towards the Sisters said, "my dear daughters here are your biggest benefactors; we owe them so much gratitude!" Mission partners are so vital for our mission today.

Mary Euphrasia knew right from the beginning that the Mission which the Lord entrusted to her needed the support of prayer and silence and for this she was inspired to begin our contemplative sisters. She held them in great esteem and appreciated their powerful participation in the apostolates of the Congregation.

Another important factor that our mission is alive today is the missionary dimension that we have inherited from Mary Euphrasia. She said to her daughters: "one town, one foundation cannot satisfy your zeal, it must embrace the whole world." . With very little means of communication, without airplanes, without computers, without mobile phones, without WhatsApp, without Facebook but only with her quill she maintained contact well beyond the borders. Always looking ahead, her boldness made her cross the seas, oceans, and continents. The missionary dimension is alive in the congregation today and our mission is helped to stay alive in some places by the

generosity of our sisters who answer the call to serve “ad gentes” for the sake of mission.

Our last congregational chapter called us “to recognise our interconnectedness with the whole of creation which obliges us to “protect our common home” (Laudato si) This has become also an important aspect of our mission today and in many ways we are becoming more and more conscious of our engagement for the protection of all that is weak and to live an integral ecology in joy and truth.

Another proof that our mission is alive today is the grace of the reunification of our two congregations on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2014: Our Lady of Charity and Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd. The congregation is enriched with the experiences lived in each one and now united so that the mission expands and lives more fully.

The most important aspect that keeps our mission alive today is our prayer life that keeps us united to God so that “we live in him and act through love of him.” Through our personal prayer life we strive to form Jesus in us so that we can love others with His own Heart and be His presence in the world.

A great hymn of thanksgiving arises in our hearts for all the graces we have received from the great Heart of God so that the mission continues.....***but Mary Euphrasia speaks to us today:” we are in this new work; look....we have a long way to go; vast fields open to us in the horizon.”***<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Letter of St. Mary Euphrasia to Sr. Stanislas Bedouet, letter 268

### **Questions for reflection:**

- St. Mary Euphrasia stayed very close to the needs of her times. Do we have the daring of Mary Euphrasia when we discern in our units how to respond to the needs of today? Do we feel impelled by the Spirit to risk together for the mission with our Sisters and mission partners? Describe and give examples
- Sisters and Mission partners are deeply involved today to respond to the cries of our world: poverty, human trafficking, migrants, refugees, ecology, and gender inequality, violence with regard to women and children and religious intolerance. These are the options taken by the Congregation. In which one of these is your unit most engaged in?
- Since the time of St. Mary Euphrasia there has been an evolution in the life of our Contemplative Sisters and they are now called Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd. How do we live our mission together in the spirit of our foundress.
- For you today what are the new ways to show forth the mercy and the kindness of God? Do you recognize the changing faces in the margins of society today? What is the courage we need? What are our challenges?

***“Each of us stands at the gate of tomorrow facing the future. At times we have walked in wonder and awe; at other times we have moved along in the flood of fears [...] Always, in both our knowing and our unknowing we are escorted into tomorrow, by One who will give us all that we need.”<sup>2</sup>***

***“What are we doing in this world and why are we here, if not to contribute to the salvation of persons” S.M.E.***

