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## EDITORIAL

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### MARIA, WOMAN OF HOPE AND EXPECTATION

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Dear friends of ADMA,

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We have just completed the liturgical year and we are already immersed in this time of Advent which prepares us to welcome the mystery of God who becomes man, coming to earth not just to save us from what we are, but to be part of our life and our humanity, our joys as well as our sorrows.

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It is a time of waiting for the coming of Jesus, the light of the world. We do not want to live distracted or caught up in the things of the world, nor sad or discouraged, but attentive to the things up there, with our eyes turned up to heaven looking for our Star. So, who is better than Mary to help us live this time well? Pope Francis during the Angelus prayer just a year ago invited us to live the Advent season just like Mary after the Angel's announcement.

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Mary is the woman of expectation par excellence; her expectation is unconditional, beyond all human logic; it is a timeless expectation because it is, expecting God and his plan of love. But her waiting is also participatory, it is a waiting full of prayer, listening and discernment. Everything that happens to her, even if extraordinary, never happens without her consent. It is always her **'yes'** that opens up her total trust in God on which the miracle of love of the Saviour's birth is then based.

Mary is also a woman of hope because she opens herself up to God's promise without any human certainty and waiting for the Spirit to work in her and show her the way step by step. Mary is a woman of hope because she allows herself to be transformed amidst difficulties, risks, and fears. As Pope Francis reminds us, *"the Virgin does not stay at home paralysed by worries, mired in problems, she does not sink into self-pity or fear of misunderstandings or severe punishments, such as stoning, to which her unexpected pregnancy exposed her, but sets out to share with her cousin Elizabeth the joy she carried in her heart."*

Fare forward with hope, without agitation or anxiety, waiting for God who always takes the first step. This is Mary's attitude, which we, ADMA associates, also want to imitate this Advent so that the waiting does

not become sterile and passive, but fruitful and full of acts of love, knowing that *"the first act of charity towards one's neighbour is to offer him a serene and smiling face"*, just like the face that Bartolomeo Garelli saw in Don Bosco on the feast of the Immaculate Conception in the oratory of the church of St. Francis of Assisi in Turin: a look full of affection and familiarity, which in the recital of a simple *"Hail Mary"* bridged every distance and allowed Jesus to be born once again in the heart of man.



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## FORMATIVE PATH

### "I LOVE THEM TILL THE END" (JN 13,1)

#### 1. To recognize at the heart of the present

*"Keep on winning well in those little daily contradictions that trouble you, and direct the best of your desires to this. Know that, for now, God wants nothing more from you than this; and therefore, do not waste your time wanting to do anything else. Sow not your desires in another's garden, but take care only to cultivate your own well. Do not desire to be what you are not, but desire to be in the best way what you are. Direct your thoughts to perfect yourself in this and to bear the crosses, great or small, that you will find in the place you have been assigned. And believe me: this is the great secret and the least understood secret of the spiritual life. Everyone loves what is to his taste, and few love what is in accordance with their duty and the taste of our Lord. What is the use of building castles in Spain, if we have to live in France? This is an old lesson of mine, and you understand it well!"* (Letter to President Brulart's wife, June 1607)

Choose a present to love or choose to love the

present? We could summarise in these words the question Francis de Sales addresses to one of his Philalethes in a letter of 1607. In fact, echoing from century to century, the question posed by the saintly bishop of Geneva comes down to us, forcefully addressing our hearts particularly during this Advent season that prepares us for the Lord's Christmas.

The sharp words of Francis de Sales reveal to us at the same time the deepest secret of holiness and help us to unmask one of the most frequent and insidious temptations that often lurks in our path. The saint of loving-kindness, with a tone that is at once delicate and decisive, lets us clearly understand that the only garden in which the seed of holiness, sown by God's grace and guarded by our freedom, can grow, blossom and mature is one and only that of our present, of the here and now.

It is the here and now of our time and space, of our living conditions and health, of our ties and affections, of our work and the thousand circumstances of daily life, of our smallness and our faith always on the

## Formative path

move. It is a present that sometimes seems cramped and at other times reveals incredible surprises, a present that is always imperfect and undermined by the passing of the days, a present that is, however, the only true, concrete and real time of our life, the time in which our life is at stake. **It is not always immediately evident, recognisable and visible on the surface that the presence of God represents the true and authentic wealth that our present holds. It is, in fact, a wealth that is both profound and precious. It does not impose itself and does not seek spaces of prominence, but in a discreet and concrete manner, tenaciously chooses not to withdraw but to continue to inhabit and bless this time, not transforming it into another time but transfiguring it, for what it is, into a time of grace.**

Francis de Sales knows this very well. He knows very well that if we do not recognise God's visitation in today's events, we will hardly recognise it in tomorrow's events because tomorrow when it arrives, will also be called today. At the same time, the Savoyard saint knows very well the temptation to escape from the present which, in one way or another, knocks at the door of our heart. It is the suggestive temptation not to live in the here and now, to surrender in the face of the apparent monotony, aridity and sterility of everyday life, in order to look elsewhere and otherwise for a more promising garden, more suitable to host and welcome our journey of holiness. Varied and colourful can be these destinations of our flight elsewhere.

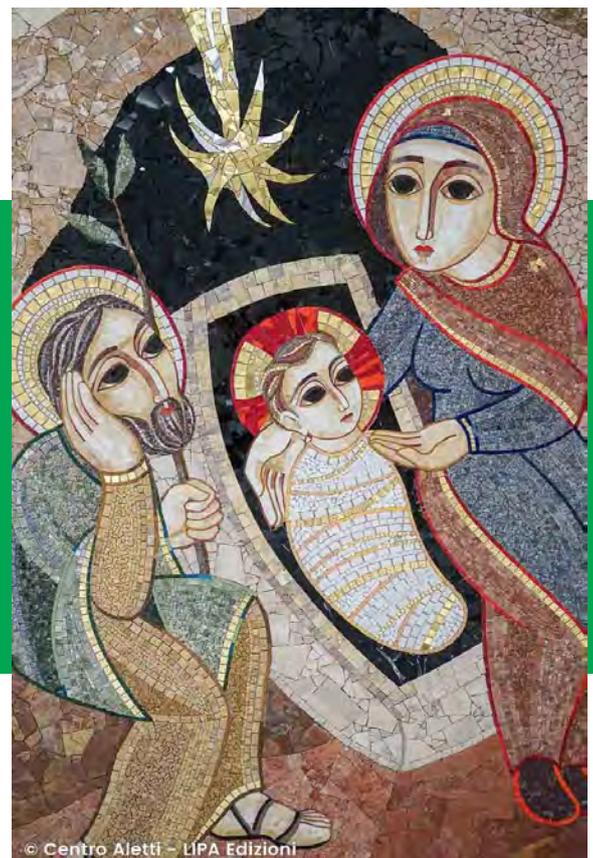
Sometimes we take refuge in the past, idealising and regretting the beauty, often idealised, of a time that is no more. At other times, we lean towards an imagined and imaginary future, dreaming of it without those harshness and imperfections that instead accompany us in the present. At other times still, we long to seek refuge or escape into a different present, real or virtual, where it seems to us that conditions, situations and circumstances are much more conducive to our journey of following the Lord. Faced with these temptations that he knows very well, the Bishop of Geneva points us with mild resolve to our present, lived without discounts or loopholes, as the only real and concrete space in which it is possible to meet the Lord, the only place that the Lord chooses and in which he does not cease to visit and bless our lives.

Being in the present is certainly not easy, and recognising the present as the place where the Lord

comes to meet us obviously does not mean petrifying existing reality into a cold and glacial stillness, in which nothing changes and nothing mutates. The secret that the holy bishop delivers to us is much deeper and more precious.

Francis de Sales suggests that it will never be possible for us to meet the Lord elsewhere that may be perfect but is certainly abstract and unreal but it is possible only in this present, as it is, in its lights and shadows, in its chiaroscuro and even in its contradictions. It will never be possible to meet the Lord if we do not recognise Him in the folds and wounds of reality, in the garden of our life and our history, in that France which, while seeing the thousand advantages and merits of a hypothetical Spain, is the only true ground of our life.

Only in this way will it be possible to experience that the Lord does not come to meet us because we inhabit a present made perfect by our own efforts, but meets us, where we are, because He infinitely and simply loves our life. **The Lord does not ask us to be other than what we are or to go elsewhere than where we are but rather asks us for the humility to welcome His coming in the poverty of this present which, like the manger of Bethlehem, is the only place where God asks us to be housed.** And it is precisely from this experience, from having recognised in the Lord the



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guest, often unnoticed in our daily life that we receive the strength to walk and grow in holiness.

Holiness therefore is not, as we often think, to replace this present with our life and our history, with another present, radically new and totally different, which erases in an instant, as if with a stroke of a sponge, what we are and what we have been, to make room for a new beginning that presages better possibilities of success by starting again from scratch. Holiness is not even, by dint of our will and our efforts, trying to make progress, to grow and to improve, as if God, after having given us a path to follow, were waiting for us at the finishing line, interested and intrigued to assess the effectiveness of our efforts and the resilience of our perseverance, as if somehow, we had to deserve and earn His love by dint of our efforts and achievements.

The secret of holiness that Francis de Sales reveals to us is actually something infinitely more beautiful and greater, something infinitely more divine and immensely more human. Holiness is not attempting, by force of will, not to be what we are and to be other than what we are, denying what God has willed, blessed and loved our unrepeatable uniqueness. **Holiness, on the other hand, is precisely living this present. It is, striving to be what we are in a perfect way, not as the goal of our efforts, but in the light of discovering and recognising ourselves, with infinite and never exhausted wonder, privileged recipients of God's eternal, infinite and faithful Love that knows no hesitations or second thoughts, to the point of giving His very life for us.** It is precisely this knowing that we are gratuitously and infinitely loved by God, called to respond and not to chase after His Love, that allows our life to flourish in true and authentic holiness, in reflecting, in a unique and unrepeatable way, in a way that is and will be ours alone, in the features of our face the features of the Lord's face. The Love of God, His presence beside us, His dwelling in this very daily life, does not magically transfer us to a different present, but radically transforms and transfigures this present, renewing it, making it flourish and bear fruit in all its potential and possibilities for goodness, light and joy.

In our lives and in our present, as Francis de Sales clearly shows us, if we have the courage to inhabit it and dig it out, we will discover that God does not discard but redeems, does not condemn but purifies,

does not give suggestions but loves. And this is precisely the secret of holiness. Not having to make an effort to blossom in order to be loved but being able to blossom thanks to the fact that we have already been loved infinitely, without ifs and buts, not sent back to the sender because of our faults, often the result of the wrong choices of our freedom, but



redeemed and radically renewed by the greater Love that has loved us to the end, that is, to death and death on a cross. Holiness is not to be other than ourselves, but to become, through the daily weaving of grace and freedom, fully ourselves, what we are called to be, that is, not as we dream ourselves, but as from eternity God has dreamed and does not stop dreaming of us. All this cannot be experienced elsewhere but only at the centre and heart of this present, inhabited, animated and loved by God.

## 2. ...the loving presence of God...

From the Gospel of John (John 13: 1-17):

*Before the feast of Easter Jesus, knowing that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During the supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given him everything in his hands and that he had come from God and was returning to God, got up from the table, laid down his clothes, took a towel and wrapped it around his waist. Then he poured water into the basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to dry them with the towel with which he had girded himself. Then he came to Simon Peter and the latter said to*

*him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "What I do, you do not understand now; you will understand later." Peter said to him, "You will not wash my feet for ever!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you will have no part with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head!" Jesus added: "He who has bathed, has no need to wash except his feet and is all pure; and you are pure, but not all. For he knew who would betray him; therefore he said, 'Not all of you are pure.' When he had washed their feet, he took his garments, sat down again, and said to them, "Do you understand what I have done for you? You call me the Master and the Lord and you are right, for I am. If therefore I, the Lord and the Master, have washed your feet, you also must wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done unto you. Truly, truly, I say unto you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor one who is sent greater than he who sent him. Knowing these things, you are blessed if you put them into practice.*

It is the presence of God at the heart of our present that makes our present, even in its inevitable and unpredictable imperfections, the place where our holiness is called to flourish. God's presence at the heart of our present gives us the grace and strength to be present to our present, living it in the presence of the One who, eternally present, loves us and constantly accompanies us with His Love in our daily lives. It is God's choice to inhabit our time that makes our time habitable, a place where it is possible to receive, recognise and give back His Love. In this journey of ours which, by leading us to inhabit our present, helps us to escape the ever-lurking temptation to seek refuge elsewhere, a privileged time is certainly that of Advent.

Advent is the liturgical season that the Church offers us every year to prepare ourselves, walking in communion and community, for the mystery of the Lord's holy Christmas. Advent is an absolutely special time of grace, a time that is given to us so that we can renew our awe and reawaken our wonder at the most shocking and unpredictable event of all time, an event that has changed history forever.

A philosopher of antiquity stated with unshakeable certainty: *"One thing is certain. No other god ever came down here!"* Faced with this affirmation

that categorically excludes that God can in any way come close and make Himself present to the present of mankind, there arises the unexpected and unprecedented mystery of Bethlehem that the evangelist John condenses in these words that from age to age never cease to echo in history: *"the Word became flesh and pitched His tent among us"* (Jn 1:14).

In the cave of Bethlehem, God, by His free choice of Love, does not remain far and distant. He does not send man a messenger or a code of behaviour but becomes man by being born of the blessed and ever virgin Mary. At Christmas, God the Father sends His only-begotten Son into the world by the power of the Holy Spirit, not to condemn the world but to save the world in His Love. This is the mystery of the Incarnation that we are preparing to celebrate at Christmas, the mystery of the Love of God who, in order to save mankind. He does not hesitate to involve Himself personally in human history, crossing the boundaries of the eternal and coming to dwell in the heart of time, of history, of the present of every man. It is in Christmas that the Son of God, of the same substance as the Father, comes to dwell in the heart of our present, so that every man, at the heart of his present, may encounter the wide-open heart of God. **In Christmas, God, by becoming man, does not decide to recreate from nothing "another present"; but chooses to renew and recreate our present with His Love, which overcomes all distance, loneliness and abandonment.**

**With the Incarnation, the Eternal for Love of man becomes 'nomadic', accepting to come and dwell among us, pitching His tent in our time, so that each one of us along our own path can discover and experience that we are constantly and daily accompanied by Emmanuel, the God-with-us.**

It is this same Love that brings God to become man in Christmas, that is manifested and fulfilled definitively in the Easter of the Lord's death and resurrection, in His giving His life 'for us and for all', for the salvation of every man. In the mystery of Christmas and Easter, events that perhaps seem so different and distant to us at first sight, the same logic of Love pulsates and the same infinite and boundless Love of God for man lives.

It is precisely on the cross that God's Love is unveiled

and revealed in all its incredible and infinite depth. It is a Love that loves to the end, without discount and without second thoughts. It is the Love that chooses to inhabit the last place, the place of the one abandoned by God, so that no man, even the most distant, far and desperate, will find himself excluded from this embrace of salvation that is forever wide open to the heart of the world. After Easter, there has never been and never will be, until the end of time and history, a present in which God is not present, a present in which, if we accept to welcome the gift of Love that is always offered to us, we cannot touch with our own hands that God loves us and saves us. It is precisely for this reason that God's Love might also be present at the heart of our present to the end, that the Lord, on the night when He was betrayed, gave us and handed over the Eucharist, the perennial sacrament of His Love for us.

It is precisely for this reason that the Eucharist is the greatest treasure God has entrusted to His Church, the source and beating heart of the life of the Christian community and the journey of every child of God. **In the Eucharist, the gift of Love experienced by the Lord on the cross does not remain a memory locked in an ever distant past but in the power of the Holy Spirit, it becomes present at the heart of our present, reaching out to our lives in the here and now of our time. In the 'daily bread' of the Eucharist, broken day after day for our salvation, the Lord's cross, the sacrifice of God who sacrificed himself for our salvation, crosses and breaks the boundaries of time, becoming a living source of Love that we can draw upon in our present.**

The Eucharist is the place where we discover who we are in God's eyes, beloved children for whom the Father did not hesitate to sacrifice His only Son, so that no one might be lost and all might be saved.

The same sacrifice, the same cross, the same infinite Love in the Eucharist is made present in this time and in this space so that, to the ends of the world and of time, every man can experience and receive God's salvation. It is the Eucharist that, by making present the cross of the Lord and planting it at the heart of our present, gives us the grace to be able to inhabit and live this present of ours, without shying away to elsewhere, as a time of grace, in which to recognise and encounter the face of God. Then we understand the words of a Church father who, comparing Christ to the beloved of whom the Song of Songs speaks, saw

in the Incarnation, the Cross and the Eucharist the three 'leaps of Love' with which God in His Son chose to make Himself present in the present of every man. It is the words of the evangelist John that allow us then to gather, even in our poverty, four sparks of this infinite Love that we are called to receive every day in the Eucharist. As we know, John, unlike the synoptics, in recounting the Lord's Last Supper does not narrate the institution of the Eucharist, but gives us the scene of the washing of the feet in which the Master and the Lord, on the night in which He was betrayed, loved His own to the end, stooping to wash their feet. It is this gesture, forever impressed in the pages of John and in the heart of history, that reveals to us the profound meaning of the Eucharist, of which the washing of the feet constitutes the 'explanation' that the Lord Himself offered us.

**a. The gift of presence:** In the Eucharist, the Lord today, here and now, makes himself present at the heart of our present, not elsewhere. In it, God does not give us advice or directions but chooses to show us His Love in the most radical and profound way there is, that is, with the language of presence. To love is to become present and to be present and it is precisely here that Salesian spirit is rooted. God is not content to tell us or give us something but in the Eucharist, he chooses to come, with all of himself, to inhabit this present time, not another time. Presence, the sharing of time, is the basis and foundation of all Love. With the Eucharist, God does not choose to inhabit our past or our future but makes the here and now, at times so harsh and arid, the privileged time in which He meets, loves and saves our lives.

**b. Sacrifice:** God's presence in our present is not a distracted, indifferent, curious present. It is not a touch-and-go. In the Eucharist, God does not come to take a look at our present. He does not appear at the window of my history for a quick inspection of the building site of my life but bursts into my life with all the charge and empowering force of His Love that did not hesitate to sacrifice Himself for me, to the end, to my last breath. The presence of God that the Eucharist unleashes at the heart of our lives is not a lukewarm, timid and inert presence. It is not a sleepy and distracted presence. It is a burning fire of Love. It is God Himself who, to save my life, does not hesitate to sacrifice Himself. In the Eucharist, our present is not reached by vague promises or generic reassurances, but is reached by God's gift of infinite Love, of a God

who has involved himself in my story to the end. God loves me and chooses to pay the highest cost, the sacrifice of Himself. He chooses today to surrender and give Himself so that in this present, man may have life and have life in abundance.

**c. Communion:** Too often we, Christians, think that walking with God is a private matter, a matter for each one taken individually, a private affair, not something that opens up the horizon of a walk in the community. Yet the beauty, often overlooked and forgotten, of being a Christian is precisely that of belonging to the Church, to a community of brothers and sisters in communion and on a journey as a people, as the family of God. It is precisely this gift that today springs from the Eucharist. It is from the Eucharist that the Church is born and lives. The communion of those who, discovering themselves loved by the same Love, walk in love as the Lord has loved us.

The Eucharist is not something that is given to me and for me, independently of others. This is not and cannot under any circumstance be the logic of Love, much less God's Love! Love does not divide but creates and recreates unity, weaving relationships and reknitting even those bonds that for so many reasons may have been loosened or even broken. By receiving the Eucharist, the Body of Christ, given for us and for all, we receive at the same time the grace of being members of the Body of Christ, the Church of which Christ himself is the Head. It is not possible to belong to Christ and not find oneself belonging to His Body. It is precisely in the Eucharist that we are given a community of brothers and sisters to love and to be loved. Beyond all sympathy and opinion, we enter into communion with those next to us who have received the same gift of Love, even if they are strangers. It is, discovering that we are loved by the same Love and called to love one another with the same Love that we have received that makes us touch with our own hands that the Eucharist makes us one Church, entrusting us with brothers and sisters to love.

**d. Witness:** The Eucharist, as we repeat in every celebration, is not only given for the 'you' of the disciples and the Church, but it is given 'for all', to gather in one Love the children of God who are still dispersed. The Eucharist, the cross of Christ that engages and renews my life today, does not enclose me in my ego and does not enclose us in an elite group, in an exclusive club. The Eucharist, which

makes us discover ourselves loved and makes us Church, inserts us into the same movement of Love that pulses in the heart of God. It is the Love that has no peace until someone, even if far away, distant and alone, has experienced the beauty of knowing and experiencing oneself loved as a child.

The Eucharist does not lock us up but launches and relaunches us into the world, as a community, to 'tell' those who have not yet encountered that Love that we have received. It is the Eucharist therefore that makes us witnesses of what we have seen with our eyes and touched with our hands. It makes us witnesses capable of praying, giving ourselves, precisely because we have become one with Jesus, to speak to the Father with the same intimacy and confidence as His Son. It makes us witnesses capable of building and rebuilding fraternity precisely because we have become one with the Church, to build and rebuild relationships in which we welcome and accompany one another as brothers and sisters. He makes us witnesses capable of becoming living service precisely because we have become one with the heart of the Son, to roll up our sleeves and get our hands dirty, often with small gestures rather than big speeches, to fill our daily life at home as at work, with the sweet and delicate fragrance of Christ.

It is precisely for this reason that Don Bosco placed the Eucharist, the Love of God that makes itself present at the heart of my present, as one of the fundamental and indispensable pillars of the Preventive System. For Don Bosco it was a profound conviction, experienced on his skin. It is in the Eucharist that the orphans of Valdocco, the abandoned and perilous young people of yesterday and today, were able, can and will experience the infinite Love of a God who, even when we no longer have anything or anyone, loves us like a Father, because He is a Father who gives everything for us, to the end, to the last breath of His life. It is this profound conviction that emerges strongly in the dream of the two pillars that summarises the cornerstones of Salesian spirituality. The Eucharist is a presence that emerges, as a free gift of God, right at the heart of this stormy and tempestuous present, not elsewhere. God makes himself present today, here and now, not elsewhere, allowing us to anchor our ship to the pillar of His Love given for us on the cross and given again every day for us in the Eucharist, the only safe harbour of our present.

It is not just a pillar to which not so many small solitary ships, led by isolated helmsmen, dock and anchor, but more at the Eucharist, the great ship of the Church, led by the successor of Peter, finds its berth. Finally, it is not a luxury ship, reserved for a privileged few, that finds safe harbour! It is rather, as emerges from so many other dreams of Don Bosco, a raft, a lifeboat, like those that ply our seas and seek our shores and our cities in search of hope and salvation. At the column of the Eucharist, there are no luxury ships docked but rafts that, perhaps at risk of sinking due to the raging storms and are about to reach their end, sinking and drowning, seek open and welcoming places, outstretched and solicitude that cannot stop. Thus it takes aboard those who, due to the infinite circumstances of life, risk sinking and drowning.

Don Bosco writes:

*“In the middle of the immense expanse of the sea, two sturdy columns rise from the waves, very tall, not far from each other. Above one of them is the statue of the Immaculate Virgin, at the foot of which hangs a large sign with this inscription: ‘AUXILIUM CHRISTIANORUM’; on the other which is much taller and larger, there is a HOST of a size proportionate to the column and below another sign with the words: ‘SALUS CREDENTIUM’.* (MB VII).

### For personal prayer and meditation

1. In my daily life, do I love the ‘present’ I have or do I choose and desire a different one?
2. Do I seek progress and improvement through my own efforts or do I entrust each day to the Lord, letting Him accompany me in my choices, actions, difficulties and joys?
3. Do I live the Eucharist as an infinite gift of love and does my heart feel touched when I receive Jesus?
4. Does the Eucharist make me a witness to communion and able to fill my daily life ‘with the sweet and delicate fragrance of Christ’?

### Monthly Commitment

Every morning when I get up, I will make as my first gesture a sign of the cross, asking Jesus to help me live that day well and in his company. During the week, while receiving the Eucharist, I will ask the Lord to stir my heart so that it may become aware of His presence.

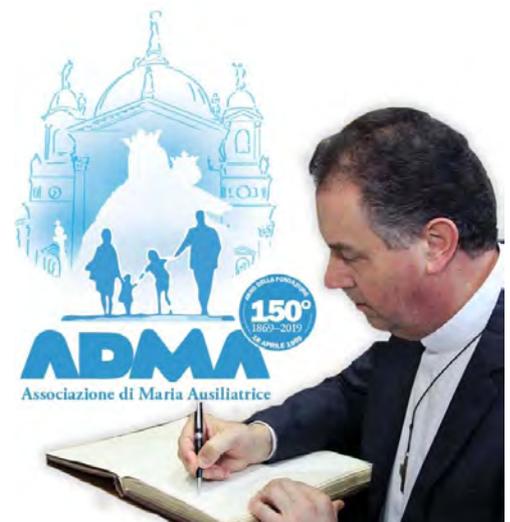
## ENTRUST - TRUST - SMILE

### LETTER OF RECTOR MAJOR, FR. ÁNGEL FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME IN PILGRIMAGE TOWARDS HEAVEN

St. Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort, in his “Treatise on True Devotion”, writes that Mary’s special mediation in the lives of her children is possible because she, of all creatures, is the one most ‘conformed’ to Jesus Christ, that is, the one most like Him and closest to Him.

To be true devotees, it is important to renew one’s baptismal promises which entail the renunciation of evil and sin and total adherence to Christ.

In all this, let us love Mary and let us be loved by her



who guides every step of ours to lead us to Jesus her loving Son.

A further passage of the Rector Major states:  
**“Mary is Mother and Teacher and she supports us, so that we can ‘fly’ on the path of holiness.”**

It is a simple call, accessible to all, which distinguishes the popular dimension of our Association. However, it is proposed to us to live the *‘true devotion’*, an exchange of love with Mary which enhances our relationship with God and with our neighbour.

ADMA members are invited to bring this gift to all the environments in which they work, living their Christian vocation with intensity.

Don Bosco comes to our aid, as Fr. Pietro Brocardo recalls:

*“Don Bosco, a saint full of God, is at the same time a saint full of Mary. His whole life, in fact, revolves, after God and in dependence on God, around the Virgin”*

In Don Bosco’s experience, love for Mary and love for the Eucharist always go together. They are the two pillars that support the life and mission of the Church. The ‘devotees’ of Mary Help of Christians, in the

same way, are invited to be protagonists of the Eucharistic celebration, offering their own lives, joys and labours, so that communion may grow in the family, in the working environment and in the ecclesial communities.

Mary is a teacher of wisdom. She is a prophet and she is also a concrete woman of the people, active and made wise by the experiences of everyday life.

The figure of Mamma Margaret is very reminiscent of Don Bosco’s Marian imagery and reminds us once again that the ‘devotees’ of Mary Help of Christians must be prophets in their lives and courageous witnesses capable of accompanying others.

Fr. Ángel concludes this chapter by presenting us with the beautiful painting of Mary Help of Christians in the basilica of Valdocco, where Mary is portrayed majestically, surrounded by the heavenly court, with the crown on her head and the sceptre in her hand: a powerful Queen in the fight against evil.

**Mary intervenes in our lives and even in the most difficult moments, keeps our light of hope burning.**

*Andrea and Maria Adele Damiani*

## 4TH CENTENARY OF THE DEATH OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

### ST. FRANCIS DE SALES AND THE EUCHARIST

The surest way which the Church’s millenary tradition gives us and entrusts to us, to welcome the inestimable and inexhaustible gift of the Eucharist, the life of God that pours into the heart of our lives, is to humbly place ourselves in the school of the saints, listening to the words and following the example of those who in their lives, step by step, made the Eucharist the beating heart and gushing spring of their journey of faith, life and service. We therefore wish, exactly 400 years after his death, to set out briefly with St. Francis de Sales, asking the holy bishop of Geneva to help us recognise how truly **in the Eucharist the Lord comes to dwell at the heart of our lives, and how to make the Eucharist the heart of our lives.** While still a young

student in Padua, Francis, in his early twenties, wrote:

*“I will receive communion as often as possible [...] at least I will not let Sunday pass without eating this bread [...]; for how could Sunday be for me a ‘day of Sabbath and rest’ if I remained deprived of receiving the author of my eternal rest?”* (OA XXII, 43)

Leaving the floor to the holy Doctor of Charity, we are led by his writings through five simple steps that can accompany us during this Advent season to recognise that the Lord, born for us in Bethlehem, in the gift of the Eucharist makes Himself present today,

at the heart of our present, giving us His Love that saves us and makes us one with Him and with our brothers and sisters.

### In the Eucharist:

#### a. God comes to meet us and encounters our life in this present:

*“I have not yet spoken to you about the sun of the spiritual exercises: the most holy and supreme Sacrifice and Sacrament of the Mass, the centre of the Christian religion, the heart of devotion, the soul of piety, the ineffable mystery that manifests the abyss of divine charity; through it God truly unites Himself to us and communicates His graces and gifts to us in a wonderful way. Prayer raised in union with this divine Sacrifice possesses a power that cannot be expressed in words, O Philothea. Through it, the soul abounds with heavenly gifts, because it embraces the Beloved who fills it so full of perfumes and spiritual sweetness that it resembles a column of smoke from aromatic woods, myrrh, frankincense and all the essences used by the perfumer, according to what the Canticle says. Arrange to attend Holy Mass every day, to offer, together with the priest, to God the Father, the sacrifice of the Redeemer, for your good and that of the whole Church” (Philothea, II, ch. 14).*

#### b. To reveal His infinite Love for us:

*“I know of no other thing in the world of which we have such absolute possession and dominion as we have over food which we consume to preserve ourselves. And our Lord has gone to this excess of Love, to the point of making Himself food for us. And what else shall we do so that He may possess us, handle us as He wills, take us and do with us whatever He wills?” (Letter to Mother Angelica Arnould, 25 June 1619)*

#### c. And to help us grow in Love day by day:

*“Your first intention in communion must be to progress, strengthen and stabilise yourself in the Love of God; for what is given to you out of Love, you must receive with love. It is not possible to imagine the Saviour engaged in an action more full of Love and more tender than this, in which he can be said to sacrifice Himself by reducing Himself to food in order to enter our souls and unite Himself intimately with the hearts and bodies of the faithful.*



*If they ask you why you receive Communion so often, answer that it is to learn to love God, to purify you from imperfections, to free you from miseries, to console you in afflictions, to find support in weaknesses. Answer that there are two categories of people who must take communion often: the perfect, because, being well disposed, they would do much to approach the spring of perfection; and the imperfect so that they may walk towards perfection; the strong so as not to risk becoming weak, and the weak to become strong; the sick to heal and the healthy not to become sick; you then, an imperfect, weak and sick creature, need to commune often with perfection and strength. Answer that those who do not have many occupations, must receive Communion because they have the time; those, on the other hand, who are very busy, must receive Communion because they need it, for those who work a lot and are laden with worries must eat hearty food and eat often” (Philothea II, ch. 21).*

#### d. Becoming a reflection and light of Christ for the brethren:

*“But how do you think the spiritual integration of Jesus Christ takes place? Those who have a good bodily digestion feel an invigoration in the whole body, because of the energy of the food to all its parts. In the same way, my daughter, those who have good spiritual digestion feel that Jesus Christ, who is their food, expands and communicates Himself to their soul and to all parts of their body. They have Jesus Christ in their brain, heart, chest, eyes, hands, tongue, ears and feet. And what does this Saviour do in all these places? He mortifies*

*everything, corrects everything, purifies everything and vivifies everything. He loves in the heart, intends in the brain, encourages in the breast, sees in the eyes, speaks in the tongue and so all the rest. He does everything and so it is no longer we who live but it is Jesus Christ who lives in us”* (Letter to the Baroness of Chantal, 24 January 1608)

### **e. In the ordinary and concrete workings of daily life:**

*“On the day you receive Communion, you run no danger by doing all kinds of works and chores; you would run greater dangers by doing nothing. In the early Church, when everyone received Communion every day, do you think they stood idle? And St. Paul, who celebrated Mass every day, earned his bread by the work of his hands.*

*In the days of Communion, only two things should be carefully avoided: sin and the satisfactions and pleasures sought for oneself”* (Letter to President Brulart’s wife, February-March 1606).

To conclude our brief journey, let us once again leave the floor to the holy bishop of Geneva, allowing the most spiritual wish for our Advent journey to flow from his heart inflamed with Love for God and our brothers and sisters:

*“Hares, here among us, in our mountains, turn white in winter because they see and eat nothing but snow; you too, by dint of adoring and nourishing yourself with beauty, goodness and the very purity of this Divine Sacrament, will become beautiful, holy and pure”* (Philothea II, ch. 21).

## FOR GRACES RECEIVED

### BEATRICE, OUR MIRACLE BABY

The testimony of two young married couples, Elisa and Alessandro, new members of the Primary ADMA, Valdocco.

**Alessandro:** Our journey in the ADMA started 5 years ago with the invitation of Fr. Roby to take part in the First Steps in the meetings for families in the first years of marriage and, like us, for engaged couples who were preparing to get married.

**Elisa:** I knew ADMA through the experience and stories of my parents who had been members for a few years.

**A:** For me it was a new dimension, even though I had grown up in a Salesian environment during my high school years, and I was intrigued by this proposal.

**E:** The decision to continue the journey through the monthly meetings of ADMA and the celebration of the 24th of the month was in a certain sense quite natural, normal without second thought but in some way a response to a proposal of fidelity in which we saw a great opportunity for us and for our family.

**A:** Thinking about our story today, we realise that from the very beginning of our marriage Mary knew how to take us by the hand and lead us to her so that we would not feel alone at the moment of our first big storm; when together with the joy of knowing that we were expecting another child after Alice, we had to face the fear of knowing that perhaps that child was not for us because it suffered from a very serious cerebral malformation, perhaps not compatible with life and almost certainly not with a ‘normal’ life as we understand it.

I still remember Elisa’s face when she explained to me the outcome of the ultrasound scan. The first feeling was one of total abandonment, but shortly afterwards, with my wife’s typical delicacy, firmness and trust in Mother Mary, she added that the Lord was entrusting this child to us because He was sure we would take care of her. These simple but challenging words were for me like a glimmer of light in the darkness. I was not alone. I had my wife and especially Mother Mary at my side. What I had to do was clear. I had to accept this seemingly desperate situation, confident that Mother Mary would not leave us alone.



“...Through her we have opened our hearts...”

**E:** So many maybes, human ones though, that frightened us; we kept staring at the ultrasound scans, but we were not alone. Mother Mary was standing by us as she stood by the Cross. In entrusting ourselves to Mary during those months, we savoured the sweetness of prayer made with the heart and relieved soul of one who knows that his/her requests granted. Through her we opened our hearts to the people we were close to. In the ADMA family, new friendships were born strengthening us because they rested on the common ground of Faith and trust in Mary and Jesus.

**A:** As if to teach us that prayer and total trust in them can do anything, almost inexplicably for the doctors, with each check-up Beatrice’s brain took an increasingly normal shape, and in April a year ago, we embraced our little miracle for the first time. Everything that had worried us earlier is proving to be harmless over time.

**E:** On the contrary, we had to face something we did not expect, namely, the need for surgery for a heart malformation that had never surfaced during all the pregnancy checks. We thus learnt that our anxieties often turn out to be nothing, and that everything we are and that happens to us is and remains a mystery in the hands of Providence. Even today, we are full of gratitude and amazement when we think back of the delicacy with which Mother Mary made herself concretely present in our home through the Capelita,

in the days of Beatrice’s operation and her stay in the ICU, or when I would later start a new job. **We recognise Her motherly presence in our history, caring but discreet, in guiding even the small and big choices of every day.**

**A:** It really fills us with gratitude and amazement to look back today and remember that when Father Roby had asked us what imprint we would like to give to our marriage, we had identified Mother Mary and Providence as our tracks. In the ADMA, we touched with our own hands how all this can be lived out in daily life in a truly fruitful way for oneself and for others.

As Don Bosco used to say, **“Mary is our guide, our teacher, our mother, and she does not do things by halves.”** Here we are, then, to renew our entrustment to Her, certain that we are covered by Grace and can touch other miracles with our own hands.

*If you have received a grace, send a short testimony accompanied by a photo to [adma@admadonbosco.org](mailto:adma@admadonbosco.org)*

## FAMILY EVENTS

### Argentina: Recollection of October with St. Francis de Sales



Buenos Aires, Argentina - On Saturday 22 October, at the meeting of ADMA in Buenos Aires Argentina, we meditated on the life and spirituality of St. Francis de Sales, led by Fr. Néstor Zubeldia. The meeting continued with adoration, the rosary and Holy Mass celebrated by Fr. Vincenzo Ricchetti.

### Thailand: Pilgrimage of the statue of Mary Help of Christians in the families

On the occasion of the *150th anniversary of the foundation of the Institute*, in our Thai Province, the initiative of the Pilgrimage of the statue of Mary Help of Christians to the families of the members of the Educande Community and the families of the pupils was taken.

On the 21st of October 2022, Sr. Kuanruan Onakul, animator of the ADMA Association, together with the members of the ADMA group and the neighbours, took the statue of the Virgin Mary on pilgrimage to the home of Vina Klaithong, an ADMA member, on the occasion of her birthday. We invoked special blessings for her and entrusted the family to Our Lady to protect them from all dangers.



On the following 24th October, the commemoration day of Mary Help of Christians, the members of the ADMA group, the sisters and a few collaborators went to pray the Holy Rosary at the home of the teacher Kornuch Charoenphol. Before finishing the Rosary, we prayed the prayer of entrustment of the family to Our Lady. Mrs Kornuch Charoenphol gave thanks and shared: ***“Today, I touched the love of the Lord Jesus and Our Lady with my own hands. I felt they were sitting beside us as we prayed the Rosary. Thank you for bringing Mary Help of Christians to this house”***

**WE ARE ASKING EVERYONE TO SEND US AN ARTICLE, A PHOTO OF A FORMATION MEETING, THE COMMEMORATION OF THE 24TH OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS, A VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY BEING CARRIED OUT.** The article (.doc format, max. 1200 characters without counting spaces) and a maximum of 2 photos (.jpg digital format and no less than 1000px wide), with a title and/or brief description, must be sent to [adma@admadosbosco.org](mailto:adma@admadosbosco.org). It is necessary to indicate in the subject line of the e-mail **“Family Events”** and in the text the author’s data (name, surname, place of the shot, affiliation Adma, city, country).

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