

MARY INVITES US TO LIVE THE NEW LIFE WITH JESUS

Mary, risen to new life with Christ, forms us for the new life of the Gospel. With Jesus all things are new. He calls us to live every day as if it were the first and last. We must also live the **new life** in our day, witnessing to Jesus and his resurrection. This is difficult at the present time because the world tells us that there is no God. Mary Help of Christians calls us to new life, to a life of witness, of fidelity, of perseverance in prayer, a life of new hope and of joy. Our Lady teaches us to jump from the diving board into the pool of grace. People who have met Jesus and Mary have peace, they have hope, they live in joy and they bear witness to it.

Article I of our regulations reminds us: **"This maternal and active presence of Mary is the foundation of the Association and the inspiration of the members' commitment to service in the Kingdom of God"**. The Association and our membership of it are based on the experience of Mary's motherhood and her help. This motherhood which we have seen, touched and experienced, animates and sustains us in every commitment, resolution and good action. Mary is with us; she loves us and protects us. This is the source of the gospel sense of service that comes from the joy of feeling that we are saved and zealously engaging in proclaiming and building the Kingdom of God. We follow Mary's example and enjoy the help of the one who magnifies the Lord and declared herself his humble handmaid. We experience Mary's motherhood so that we can be her hands reaching out to every creature, so that everyone can approach the God of love.

On 18 April we recalled the 149th anniversary of the foundation of the Association of Mary Help of Christians, founded by Don Bosco as a sign of gratitude to Mary for her motherly presence in his life and work, to promote devotion to Mary and to the Blessed Sacrament, and for the defence of the faith among the ordinary people. Even today, after so many years, being part of ADMA really means choosing a simple programme of Christian life, imitating Mary, entrusting ourselves to her and in that way discovering that grace is at work in us, in our lives and in our families. This anniversary is particularly important, because this year **we begin the journey that will take us in 2019 to celebrate the**



150th anniversary of the foundation of our Association! We want to live this journey together in harmony with the whole Salesian Family and the Church, here at Valdocco and throughout the world, making us interpreters of the challenges of our times and once again asking Our Lady Help of Christians to guide our steps.

Happy feast of Mary Help of Christians to all our members and to all the ADMA groups in the world.



Renato Valera, President

Fr Pierluigi Cameroni SDB, Spiritual Animator

Formation Programme 2017-2018: Introduction to Devout Life by St. Francis of Sales

8. I CALL YOU FRIENDS!

Fr Gianni Ghiglione

Taking a look at the index of the third part of the Introduction to the Devout Life (the part where Francis talks about the virtues to be cultivated) one may be surprised to see that the theme of **friendship** occupies 6 chapters! No other virtue is treated to such an extent! This shows that the Saint considers it very important, indeed indispensable, to reach that high measure of the Christian life to which he wants to lead those who entrust themselves to his guidance.



The same thing happens in the Gospel: it is moving to reread it from this point of view, because friendship is the most beautiful and frequent feature of the man Jesus of Nazareth. His encounters are all marked by friendship. He chooses the Apostles "to be with him!" He no longer calls them servants, but "friends". Even Judas is called "friend"! Zacchaeus, the Samaritan woman, Lazarus, Martha and Mary, all his many disciples, even sinners and prostitutes ... were all captured by this heart without any barriers, open to the most generous welcome.

This theme of friendship is closely linked to that of chastity: "Love holds the first rank among the emotions of the soul. It is the king of all the movements of the heart. Love changes all the rest to itself and makes us such as what is loved." Love makes lovers resemble one another! (III, 17).

Friendship is the most dangerous love because it is essentially based on communication. It will be precisely the positive or negative quality of communication that defines the kind of friendship one experiences.

It must be clear from the beginning: some friendships are not worthy of the name because they are founded:

- * on the exchange of pleasures of the senses and end in sin; they steal love (*they are gross*);
- * on the ephemeral, on the exterior (*they are frivolous, transient*);
- * on flirtation: they are bad, vain, crazy. *They are the plaything of the courts, but the plague of hearts.*

Is it better then not to have friendships? No! *Perfection does not consist in having no friendship at all but in having only that which is good, holy and sacred.* (III, 19). There is great wisdom in admitting that "we have so little love in our hearts that we have to spend it on loving God!"

TRUE friendship exists where there is communication and sharing of virtuous things (science, virtue, charity, devotion, Christian perfection). It comes from God and leads to God.

Francis then gives **two infallible criteria** to judge whether a friendship is true or of bad quality:

- * if it gives joy, does not provoke disturbances or disorientations of spirit, and does not leave a bad taste in the mouth (III, 20)
- * if it makes people better and helps to free us from imperfections (III, 22).

*What are we to do in the face of a **bad** friendship?* (III, 21)

Do not come to terms with it; you must be uncompromising!

Remember whom you consecrated your heart to. Renew your offering.

Physically move away from the person and also from the place (if you can!).

Cut, truncate, break without hesitation. We must not have regard for a love that is contrary to the love of God.

Did Francis have friends?

Francis de Sales had a rich personality. He was a cultured, intelligent man, capable of real and deep friendships with the men and women he met. In his letters to them, he developed relationships that manifest a sensitive heart, and a great capacity for empathy and tenderness. This was a rarity, given the times!

It is precisely this wealth of humanity that makes the Bishop of Geneva so relevant to today's world. In particular, his exquisite sense of friendship never ceases to amaze and fascinate.

There is an episode, little known but illuminating, on the topic we are discussing. It shows how deep Francis's relationships with his fellow students were in the ten years spent in Paris as a student of the Jesuit College of Clermont. When the time came to say goodbye, they went home, thinking perhaps that they would never see each other again. Some friends, bound to Francis by esteem and affection, decided to accompany him to the city of Lyon, travelling more than 300 kilometres on foot, by carriage or on horseback!

Some friends of Francis



His first great friend is his countryman Antoine Favre, defined by the Parliament of Paris "the greatest magistrate in the world". Francis wrote something to him that sounds almost like a vow: "The ardent desire to cultivate all friendships diligently will always live on in my heart!". And he was to remain faithful forever to this 'ardent desire', which grew into confidence and trust:

Before the birth of his youngest sister Jane, Francis sent word to his friend: "I have just learned that my dear mother, who is in her forty-second year, will soon give birth to her thirteenth child."

Just a few days before his priestly ordination, Francis confides his own feelings with his friend: "You are the only man I believe capable of fully comprehending the disturbance of my spirit. It is indeed tremendous to preside over the celebration of Mass and it is very difficult to celebrate it with due dignity."

Being friends means praying for each other! To his friend Antonio des Hayes he confides: "The great God to whom I offer every day the divine Host of propitiation, knows well that, at that moment, I always remember your name, recommending it humbly."

A few days after his episcopal consecration he wrote to another friend, **Peter de Bérulle**: *"I have been a consecrated bishop from the 8th of this month, the feast of Our Lady. This leads me to implore you to help me all the more cordially with your prayers. There is no other way: we will always need to wash our feet, because we walk in the dust. May the good God grant us the grace to live and die in his service."*

And then there is **Vincent de Paul**. The two met in Paris and a friendship developed between them that continued beyond the death of Francis, as Vincent took to heart the Order of Visitation and became the point of reference until the end of his days (1660). Speaking of Francis de Sales he did not hesitate to define him *"the person who more than any other represented the living image of the Saviour"*.

What impresses when reading the correspondence is the tone with which Francis communicates, always marked by cordiality, patience and tenderness. The recipient senses that Francis is a good and welcoming father, who offers advice with kindness and understanding, suggests ways to go, encourages them to do good and urges constant prayer. His letters constitute a treatise on friendship, not because they talk about friendship, but because the writer is a real friend.

"I must confidently tell you these few words: there is no one in the world who has a heart that is more tender and more thirsty for friendship than mine, or that feels the pain of separation more."

What has just been said applies also to the correspondence with his Daughters, the Visitation Sisters. Since the birth of this new religious family, Francis dedicated himself fully to it. New Monasteries were opened and there was a need for particular care for the Mother Superiors who had to face unprecedented tasks and difficulties for the first time. His friendship takes on the form of closeness, support, affectionate care and attention. Salesian spirituality is based on a great love for God and neighbour, on profound humility and on exquisite kindness towards all. Here is what Francis wrote to his daughters in the Visitation Order: *"The weakness and sickness of the child distress the mother and yet she does not cease to love him when he is weak and sick. Rather, she loves him with tenderness and compassion. Similarly, although God does not love our imperfections and venial sins, he does not cease to love us when we commit them. Live in joy: Our Lord looks at you with love and the weaker you are, the greater that love is."*

Among the various Mother Superiors, a particular place belongs to the Foundress, Jane Frances de Chantal. Francis wrote to her: *"Believe firmly that I have a living and extraordinary desire to serve your spirit with all my strength. Put my love for you to good use and use all that God has given me for the service of your spirit. I am all yours."*

The spiritual friendship between Francis and Jane was extraordinary, of a sublime beauty and with certain inimitable traits. Grace builds on nature! Journeying towards God through a spiritual life of detachment and total abandonment, Francis not only loves people, but loves them intensely with the richness of his extraordinary sensitivity. He makes them feel that he loves them. He speaks of his love as the most beautiful and normal thing in the world. His heart becomes a passageway through which Jesus passes into the hearts of those who meet him or receive his letters.

I am convinced that Francis wants to become a friend also of those who read these pages. Here is the starting point that we discover in one of his very first letters, written to his Daughters and addressed to Giacomina Favre: *"How is the poor heart that is so much loved? Are you always courageous and vigilant to avoid the surprises of sadness? I beg you: do not torment your heart, not even when it has played some nasty little trick but take it gently back and lead it back to its path. This poor little heart of my great daughter is good."*

We should allow ourselves to be asked about the state of health of our heart, which coincides with the quality and vitality of our friendship for people and for God.

For your reflection:

- What do you mean by friendship? What does it involve?
- Do you have any friendships or do you live in "solitude"? What kind are they? How do you cultivate them?
- How much sharing is there in your community, family, or group of friends?
- How do you experience your friendship with God? do you cultivate it?
- How do you educate others (pupils, children ...) to friendship?

FAMILY CHRONICLE

ADMA SICILY - MARIAN DAY

The 13th ADMA Marian Day took place on 21 April 2018 in Palermo, at the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Arenella, in a joyful and deeply Salesian atmosphere. The central theme of the meeting was the living and life-giving presence of Mary Help of Christians. The first talk was given by professor Nicola Filippone, President of the Salesian Institute of Don Bosco in Ranchibile, Palermo. The theme of his talk was 'With Mary and like Mary, we cultivate the art of listening and accompanying.' He focused attention on the concept of art and demonstrated that Jesus is the work of art of Mary, who knew how to listen to the Word of God, to the extent that, through the power of the Holy Spirit the Word became flesh in fulfilment of the Scriptures. Listening to the Revelation of God accomplished in Christ is what makes us brothers and sisters of Jesus (cf. Luke chapter 8). This is the attitude of Jesus himself who became close to man with his kenosis.

The day continued with the touching testimony of the Adamo family, a married couple who are Salesian Cooperators. They spoke about the extraordinary nature of family foster care. By sharing their experience of a family open in love to others, following the example of the family of Nazareth, they passed on to others their profound devotion to Mary, Mother of love, Mother of every human person and every child born in Christ's image.

Finally, 'Together with Mary': all the participants accompanied a wooden statue of Mary Help of Christians along the road from the Sisters' Institute to the parish Church of Arenella, where Archbishop Corrado Lorefice of Palermo presided at the Eucharistic celebration in an atmosphere of recollection and solemn joy for the great gift of Mary, our Mother and Help.



GENOA - ADMA MEETING



On Sunday 22 April 2018, at the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Genoa, there was a meeting of ADMA to present the identity and mission of ADMA, with special attention to the situation of families. It was attended by families from La Spezia, Genoa, several Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and a representative group of ADMA members from Sampierdarena, Genoa with their animator Fr Daniel Coronel. The president and the animator of the Primary ADMA Mr Renato Valera and Fr Pierluigi Cameroni led the meeting. It was a day of intense fraternity and joy lived under the gaze of Mary with the will to share with others the gift received. In particular, there was discussion on the possibility of starting two new groups of the Association in Genoa and La Spezia.

VALDOCCO, TURIN - A MEETING OF SALESIANS

Some Salesians from Piedmont-Valle d'Aosta met in Valdocco on Monday 23 April 2018 in Turin-Valdocco to share their experience of contact and support of ADMA. Fr Pierluigi Cameroni coordinated the meeting. Others present included Fr Roberto Carelli, Professor of Theology at Crocetta, who has been accompanying the ADMA Family group for several years; Fr Matteo Mura and Fr Thierry Dourland, Spiritual Animators of ADMA in Valle d'Aosta and Venaria (Turin); Fr Cristian Besso, Rector of the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians; Fr Guido Errico, Director of the Community of the Motherhouse; Fr Enrico Lupano, Delegate of the Salesian Family; Fr Stefano Mondin and Fr Fabiano Gheller from the Youth Ministry Department and Fr Aleh Karaliou, a Salesian from Belarus.

During the sharing of experiences and in some of the talks, there was mention of growth in numbers and quality of ADMA in the Province and the need to start groups in some areas to encourage the presence of the Salesian charism in the area. There was also a call for respect for the Association's identity while avoiding forms of exploitation.

Among the points emphasized were: dynamism of the Spirit and of the maternal presence of Mary Help of Christians, which characterized the renewal of the Association starting precisely from its origin in Valdocco; the columns of the Eucharist and Mary as a source of grace and holiness for the people of God in the struggles and trials of life; the popular dimension of the Salesian charism expressed today in the accompaniment and care of the family, a privileged place for relations and education in the faith; the vital relationship between generations in the processes of education and transmission of the faith; the formative paths linked to the Magisterium of the Church and to the Strenna of the Rector Major; the role of inspiration and orientation of Primary ADMA in relation to the groups all over the world.

ADMA was urged to play its part in relaunching devotion to Mary Help of Christians in the Salesian Family and especially at her Shrine of Turin. ADMA should also be involved in promoting among young

people the maternal role of Mary in the life of faith and of church membership. Attention was drawn to the value and the specific role of Youth ADMA within the Salesian Youth Movement.

The meeting was seen as a seed that must lead to growth among Salesians in the sense of belonging to the Salesian Family and in the task of accompanying individual groups while respecting their identity and specific role.



VALDOCCO: MEETING on 24 APRIL

For Primary ADMA, the monthly commemoration of Mary Help of Christians, which marks the beginning of the month for the Salesian Family in preparation for the great solemnity of Mary Help of Christians, was enriched for by the presence of several people, including families and young people, who joined in Evening Prayer in the Church of St Francis de Sales. Among those who joined in this Eucharistic-Marian celebration were the community of post-novices of Nave (Brescia), led by the Rector Fr Erino Leoni; a group of Salesians from Spain with Fr Alejandro Guevara; members of the Salesian Family who are spending a few days visiting the Salesian sites. It was a beautiful sign of communion and belonging to the Salesian Family in a shared love of Mary Help of Christians.

The paper can be read at the following site:

www.admadonbosco.org

For every communication you can contact

the following email adress: pcameroni@sdb.org

EAST TIMOR - MONTHLY COMMEMORATION OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS



ADMA is one of the best organized groups of the Salesian Family in East Timor. More than 2000 members from all six parishes attend the National Shrine of Mary Help of Christians in Fatumaca for the monthly celebrations on the 24th. For example, all the students of Catholic schools meet for a well-animated Eucharistic celebration.

The prodigious growth of the Catholic Church and of the Salesian charism have profound Marian roots. This was affirmed in 2015 by Fr Pierluigi Cameroni, World Spiritual Animator, and by the Rector Major, during his recent visit (February

2018).

ADMA members are active in the mission stations and in parish liturgical celebrations, in door to door visits to families with the statue of Mary, and in ministering to the poor. Furthermore, the teacher-members are among the most active catechists and animators of the Youth Movement. Each ADMA centre is trying to rejuvenate and increase its membership, and the traditional pilgrimage to the National Shrine of Mary Help of Christians in Fatumaca is well prepared.

We hope that many Provinces of the EAO Region (East Asia-Oceania) will try this simple but profound and stimulating experience of the family celebration of Mary Help of Christians on the 24th of the month. "Through the motherly intervention of Mary, the holy Spirit raised up St John Bosco to contribute to the salvation of youth, that part of society which is so exposed and yet so rich in promise. (SDB Constitutions art.1). The solemn blessing of Mary Help of Christians is an integral part of this day when ADMA members renew their commitment to follow Jesus with the help of Mary. (Br. Manuel Ximenes da Silva - National Spiritual Animator of East Timor).