"Mary of La Salette invites us to celebrate the Lord's Day"

At the end of this year commemorating the 180th anniversary of the apparition of Our Lady of La Salette (September 19, 1846), we continue our reflection on the spirituality of La Salette. Our founder, the Venerable Father Jean Berthier, grasped, in the maternal cry of the Virgin, an absolute pastoral urgency: to reawaken faith in families, to sanctify domestic life and, in the heart of a secularized world, to awaken ardent vocations to the consecrated life.

In the accounts of the apparition on the mountain of La Salette, Mary makes a direct and pressing appeal regarding the sanctification of Sunday. Addressing the two young shepherd children, Maximin and Mélanie, she expresses, through tears, the divine lament: "I have given you six days to work, I have reserved the seventh for myself and you do not want to give it to me. This is what weighs so heavily on my Son's arm." She deplores the fact that the profanation of the Lord's Day and blasphemies are among the main causes of the misfortunes that befall the people. She observes, in particular, that many neglect Holy Mass in order to devote themselves to Sunday work, relegating God to a secondary role in their lives.

However, this Marian appeal goes far beyond a simple religious observance. It invites believers to rediscover the centrality of God in their lives, to renew their covenant with the Risen Christ and to make Sunday a day dedicated to prayer, fraternal communion, sanctified rest and the service of charity. For us, Missionaries of the Holy Family, spiritual heirs of Father Jean Berthier and deeply linked to the message of La Salette, this appeal takes on a very special meaning. In a society marked by activism, dispersion and increasing secularization, remaining faithful to the Lord's Day appears as a prophetic sign of consecration and a privileged means of nourishing spiritual, community and missionary life.

Consequently, a question arises: what impact does the message of Our Lady of La Salette, concerning the sanctification of the Lord's Day, have today on the spiritual, communal and missionary life of the Missionaries of the Holy Family? In answering this question, we will try to show how Mary's call constitutes not only a reminder of the fundamental demands of Christian life, but also an invitation to renew fidelity to our charisms, through a life centered on the Eucharist, fraternal communion, contemplation and missionary commitment to the service of families and the Church.

1- The message of La Salette: a call to the conversion of time

The message of Our Lady of La Salette (1846) launches a vibrant call to conversion through a right sanctification of time. At the center of the apparition, the Virgin Mary denounces the profanation of Sunday, a sign of a growing distancing from God in daily life. She deplores in particular the Sunday

work carried out unnecessarily, the negligence in attending Mass, the loss of the sense of prayer, as well as the fracture between the faith professed and concrete life. Sunday rest is not a simple interruption: following the example of the Creator, who rested on the seventh day after six days of creation, man and woman are invited to catch his breath and give thanks for his work, as God's collaborator (Exodus 20:8-11). In the face of fatigue that risks turning into slavery, this holy day becomes a space of authentic liberation, destined to restore human dignity and to gather a people after God's heart (Gen 2:1; Ex 23:12; Deut 5:12).

Our Lady's invitation is very clear: to return to God by restoring to the Lord's Day its central place in human existence. This is not a mere disciplinary norm or a simple moral obligation, but an authentic journey of spiritual healing. By sanctifying time, and in particular Sunday, the believer reconnects with the source of his life, rediscovers harmony between his relationship with God and daily activities, and rediscovers the profound meaning of his existence. Thus, the message of La Salette proposes respect for Sunday as a privileged means of restoring communion with God and renewing Christian life.

2- The Call to Sanctification on Sunday: A Prophetic Message for Religious Life Today

For contemporary religious life, the message of La Salette resonates with a particularly prophetic force. In our day, religious communities are not immune to certain drifts that also characterize today's society: excessive activism, inner dispersion, the loss of the sense of sacred rest, the weakening of liturgical life and the progressive separation between missionary commitment and contemplation.

Mary's call aims to unify the interior life and the apostolic life, so that religious may be credible witnesses of the Gospel. In a world often exhausted by the search for performance and the acceleration of the rhythms of life, they are called to become true prophets of the meaning of Sunday, manifesting by their own lives that rest in God, fraternal communion and the celebration of the Paschal Mystery lead to freedom and fullness. Therefore, La Salette does not offer a simple moral appeal; it is a true and proper school of spiritual life, particularly suited to the contemporary challenges of religious life.

In this context, the message of the Virgin Mary appears as a true and proper program of ongoing formation. It reminds us that mission can bear lasting fruit only if it is rooted in deep communion with God. The sanctification of time, fidelity to prayer, active participation in the liturgy and the acceptance of rest as a place of encounter with the Lord are essential aspects of spiritual and apostolic maturity. Therefore, the fruitfulness of religious life does not derive simply from the intensity of our actions, but from the quality of our relationship with God, nourished by liturgical life and respect for

the sacred rhythm. As Jesus said: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5).

3- Three guidelines for religious formation inspired by the apparition of the Virgin at La Salette

a) Rediscovering Theology of Sunday

Among the teachings of La Salette, the rediscovery of an authentic theology of Sunday occupies a central place. For religious and priests, Sunday cannot be reduced to a simple day of rest or free time in the weekly agenda; it is first and foremost a gift of God, consecrated to the encounter with the Risen Christ and to the celebration of ecclesial communion. As a living memorial of the Resurrection, Sunday is the sacrament of new time, which gives shape and direction to the interior life, fraternity and missionary commitment.

With a view to ongoing formation, it is essential to help consecrated persons to deepen their understanding of the theological, spiritual and pastoral significance of the Lord's Day. This journey can make use of the study of the Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini* of Saint John Paul II, moments of community re-reading of Sunday practices and a rediscovery of rest, understood not as a simple interruption of activities, but as an act of faith, abandonment and trust in God. In this way, fidelity to the Lord's Day becomes a school of permanent conversion, which unifies prayer, fraternal life and the apostolate in the light of the Paschal Mystery.

b) Forming a liturgy lived as source and summit

From the point of view of religious formation, La Salette strongly recalls that Sunday Mass is not a mere duty, but a living encounter with the Risen Christ, the source and summit of all consecrated life. This conviction invites communities and priests to take care of the liturgy and to watch over the quality of the celebrations. Ongoing formation must place emphasis *on the art of celebrating*, so that the beauty, dignity and authenticity of the rites can reawaken the interior participation of each one. It also recalls the importance of careful Sunday preaching, capable of illuminating daily life in the light of the Gospel. The message of La Salette invites, moreover, to cultivate a real coherence between the liturgy celebrated, contemplative silence, daily work and apostolic commitment, in order to avoid any fragmentation of religious existence. Thus, the acquisition of a stable community rhythm – articulated around prayer, fraternity, rest and mission – makes it possible to make the Sunday Eucharist the living heart that unites and nourishes the whole of consecrated life.

c) Educating to the conversion of the lifestyle

A third area of formation, inspired by the message of La Salette, concerns the learning of a true asceticism of time. In recalling the importance of keeping Sunday holy, the Virgin teaches us the art of stopping: knowing how to set limits to apostolic activism, cultivating gratuitousness in relationships and giving priority to community fraternity. In a context in which efficiency and productivity threaten to invade every area of consecrated life, this spiritual discipline becomes a school of interior freedom and fidelity to the primacy of God. Ongoing formation can therefore offer workshops on time management, moments of community discernment regarding excess activity and the risks of apostolic overload, as well as spiritual accompaniment that favors the unification of the person. By harmonizing prayer, work, mission and rest, this journey orients our lives according to the very rhythm of the Gospel. From this point of view, Sunday is not only a time of rest, but a space of spiritual and fraternal regeneration that renews the relationship with God, with the confreres and with the mission.

4- a. The Spirit of Nazareth at the service of the Sabbath Day

How will we, as Missionaries of the Holy Family, respond to this lament of the Mother of God? Let us draw on the apostolic wisdom of our founder, Venerable Father Jean Berthier, who offers us the divine key: **the spirit of Nazareth**. Let us look at the Holy Family: in Nazareth, Jesus, Mary and Joseph lived in an atmosphere of continuous prayer, joyful obedience, sanctified work and peace. The house of Nazareth is the perfect model of a domestic Church, where the Name of God is continually blessed and where the Lord's Day is celebrated with fervor.

Today, Christian families face formidable challenges: galloping secularization, the weakening of family ties, hectic pace of life and a profound Sunday weariness, in which Sunday is devoured by commercial activities, profane entertainment or digital isolation. In the face of this exhaustion, the spirit of Nazareth becomes a healing balm: it allows the family to rediscover that the sanctification of Sunday is not a suffocating legalistic bond, but an oasis of freedom, a blessed pause in which the family unit draws from the sources of divine grace. As Father Jean Berthier wrote in his work *Le Jeune homme comme il faut* ("The young man as he should be"), the sanctification of the Lord's Day gives health to the body, preserves the spirit from materialization, revives charity in the family and spreads the divine blessing on work and on families throughout the week.

b) The pastoral care of the family and the sanctification of home

The Christian family is called to become the sanctuary in which one learns anew to honor God. It is in the family that children must hear for the first time the name of Jesus pronounced with reverence,

in contrast to the blasphemies of the world. It is within the walls of the home, in the intimacy of the home, that the beauty of the mystery of Sunday Mass is transmitted from an early age.

The four pillars of Sunday sanctification, which we Missionaries of the Holy Family are called to promote in the families we accompany, come together in an integral Christian vision of Sunday. This holy day finds its roots first of all **in the Eucharistic assembly**, the culmination of the week, in which the whole family gathers to listen to the Word of God and participate in the Bread of Life, in order to encounter the Risen Christ. It is also a time of **rest for body and spirit**, characterized by a break with professional concerns, the rush to consume and the many activities that hinder meeting and listening to one another.

Thirdly, Sunday must also encourage **family prayer**, re-establishing true spiritual communion within the home through moments of shared prayer, especially through the recitation of the *Our Father* and *the Hail Mary*. Finally, it must become a privileged day for **charity and reconciliation**, in which each one is committed to living forgiveness, to strengthening family bonds and to opening himself fraternally to the lonely, the poor and the sick. Lived in this way, Sunday truly becomes the Lord's Day, an inexhaustible source of spiritual renewal for families and a living witness to the Gospel.

c) Religious communitarian life as Witness

In order to be able to preach these pillars credibly to families, we must first embody them within our MSF communities. Our religious houses must become mirrors of the spirit of Nazareth. By living a fervent Eucharist, sanctified rest, shared prayer and fraternal charity, we become authentic witnesses, capable of attracting and inspiring the families around us.

In the face of the spiritual emptiness of the world, our communities must embody the radiant joy of the Lord's Day. May our community Sundays not be mere days of passive rest or withdrawal into ourselves: rather, they may be true feasts of fraternity, lived through the fervently celebrated Liturgy of the Hours, a radiant community Eucharist, a table shared in fraternal joy, and renewed charity. It is through the holiness and joy of our community life that we will become credible witnesses of the reconciliation announced at La Salette.

Conclusion

At the end of this reflection, the message of Our Lady of La Salette remains an ever-timely appeal: to put God back at the center of personal, community and family life through the sanctification of the Lord's Day. Mary's tears are not a simple lament in the face of the indifference of the world, but a hopeful invitation to return to the path of conversion, reconciliation and communion with her Son.

For us, the Missionaries of the Holy Family, this appeal is linked to the spiritual and apostolic insight of Venerable Father Jean Berthier, our founder. Contemplating the Holy Family of Nazareth, we discover that Sunday goes beyond the simple notion of a day of rest: it is the day of the risen Christ, the day of the family, the day of fraternity and the day of mission. It is in fidelity to the Eucharist, in community prayer, in sanctified rest and in fraternal charity that we draw the strength of our consecration and the fruitfulness of our apostolic commitment.

We are also called to become educators and witnesses of the Christian meaning of Sunday for the families we accompany. By promoting the Eucharistic assembly, family prayer, rest lived in God, reconciliation and service to the poorest, we contribute to making homes true "Nazareth of today", where God's presence illuminates daily life and strengthens family bonds.

In an age marked by secularization, activism and the loss of the sense of the sacred, our MSF communities are called to become prophetic signs. By living the Lord's Day with joy and authenticity, they bear witness that true missionary fruitfulness is born of communion with God and that rest in Him is not a waste of time, but a source of life, freedom and peace. Thus, faithful to the spirit of Nazareth and the message of La Salette, we can continue to remind families and the world that Sunday is a gift from God, a treasure for the Church and a privileged path to sanctification.

May Our Lady of La Salette and the Holy Family of Nazareth obtain for us the grace to live the Lord's Day to the full, so that our religious communities, our families and our missions may become places where God is loved, celebrated and glorified.

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