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Holy Christmas 2021
Happy New Year 2022

"Let us go to Bethlehem and see this event that the Lord has made known to us"

(Lk 2, 15).

"While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself came and walked with them"

(Lk 24,15)

Dear Confreres,

First of all a heartfelt and fraternal wish for a Happy and Holy Christmas to each and every one from the Eternal City.

Also this year the memory of the birth of Jesus is marked by the resurgence of the pandemic and by the restrictions imposed by governments and health authorities in order to limit the spread of the infection. It seems to relive the scene of a film whose end is impossible to imagine. Everyone, more or less, has been touched in body and spirit by this unpredictable and tragic event that has upset the life of the whole world.

The Christmas we are about to celebrate, with its charge of newness and life, must make those seeds of hope that only welcoming the Word of God can offer germinate in us. The word "hope", with all that it entails of expectation and certainty, is no problem for us missionaries of La Salette because it has been part of our DNA since our foundation following the apparition of the Beautiful Lady to Maximin and Melanie. Our hope has reasons for being only because it is based on the certainty that, thanks to the coming of Christ among us, nothing is irreversible anymore and that a new world, as "dreamed of by" Isaiah "(Is 65, 17ff) is possible and achievable.

1. The La Salette Jubilee

We have just celebrated the 175th anniversary of the apparition to crown the Marian year of La Salette during which the whole Congregation was urged to return with renewed interest and apostolic enthusiasm to its founding event and to the charismatic reasons for its presence in the Church. I hope it was a strong time of grace and human and spiritual renewal for everyone, made up of attentive and fruitful listening to the Word, of intense prayer, reflection and sharing on the message of the Beautiful Lady but also of personal and community conversion. It was not intended to be a point of arrival but a stage for a new departure, a springboard towards a future to be lived seriously both from the point of view of religious commitment as well as that of apostolic and missionary zeal. It is this testimony of life that the Church and the world of today expect from us the La Salette religious at this time.

2. The Synodal path: gift and task

Pope Francis has summoned the whole Church to a Synod. «The path entitled "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission" solemnly opened on the 9th – 10th of October 2021 in Rome and on the following 17th of October in each particular Church. [...] With this convocation, Pope Francis invites the entire Church to reflect on a theme that is

decisive for its life and mission: "It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium." This journey, which follows in the wake of the Church's "renewal" proposed by the Second Vatican Council, is both a gift and a task: by journeying together and reflecting together on the journey that has been made, the Church will be able to learn through Her experience which processes can help Her to live communion, to achieve participation, to open Herself to mission. Our "journeying together" is, in fact, what most effectively enacts and manifests the nature of the Church as the pilgrim and missionary People of God» (Preparatory Document, 1).

Of course the Religious Life is also called to follow the same path and to offer its precious contribution of community and pastoral experience and consequently to benefit from the grace that will emanate from it.

3. Walk with the Church listening to the Spirit

I warmly invite every single La Salette religious, every community and every Province / Region to make their own journey of the universal Church which is made up of listening to the Spirit and discerning the steps to be taken to grow as a synodal Church and allow it to proclaim the Gospel, in accordance with the mission entrusted to it.

The synodal journey, conceived and wanted by Pope Francis, starting from the bottom, wants to involve all the realities in which the people of God express themselves, not forgetting those who are far from the faith and those who are relegated to the margins of society. Its purpose is not to be a simple and occasional tool for making church but to become a constitutive element and therefore a stable way of being and acting of the Church over time and in the world together with the idea of co-responsibility aimed at missionary action.

4. Church in dialogue and missionary

Furthermore, this journey helps to become aware of the various gifts of the Spirit present in abundance in the Christian community and to value them by putting them to good use; to live the Church as the "People of God", as a people of pilgrim missionaries; to make the transition from selfish "I" to the more participatory and inclusive "WE"; and again to consider the presence of the Church as a missionary service to rethink the world in the light of the Gospel. Hence the great challenge that involves the whole Church of today and tomorrow and also of Religious Life: to convert to synodality taking Jesus as a model on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24: 13-35; cf. Acts 10). This path evoked by St. Luke, with a purely Easter flavor as it speaks of new life and missionary zeal, is well summarized in the three verbs present in the Gospel text: to meet, listen and discern. They express a movement that equally involves body and spirit but also an opening to new perspectives and horizons, a particular attention to the signs of the times in view of a joyful and shared missionary commitment.

5. Christmas: shared journey

The mystery of Christmas, which this year too we are about to welcome and celebrate as a Church and as a religious community expresses in an excellent and unequivocal way the nature and profound meaning of that "synodality" of which Pope Francis insistently speaks. By becoming incarnate, Jesus made himself similar to us in everything except sin and shared our human nature, fragile and limited in time and space. He became a pilgrim with us and among us, sharing our joys and anxieties, calling us to conversion and opening our hearts to hope. If this was Jesus' style of action, it must necessarily be adopted by the Church in order to better shape and orient his missionary action in today's world and consequently also from our communities.

