



**Congregazione dei Missionari di N.S. de La Salette**  
**Piazza Madonna della Salette, 3**  
**00152 Roma - Italia**

Tel. 39-06-532-701-01 – Fax. 39-06-532-73516  
E-mail: msgenadmin@gmail.com

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**19 September 2020**

**Opening of the Marian Year**

**«Mary, the way of hope and peace among cultures»**

(theme of the year)

**Dear Confreres,**

175 is the number of the years that separate us from the Apparition of the “Beautiful Lady” to Maximin and Melanie in the mountains of La Salette (France), which happened in 1846.

It seems to be a long period of time, and one even would say that the message from this event is getting old as it is affected by the weight and rust that time brings with it. If this is true for many things that happen in the course of history, it is not true, however, for what happened on September 19, 1846. The echo of this historical prophetic and spiritual event with particular ecclesial relevance did not end in the second half of the nineteenth century. But has come down to us with all its original load of novelty and challenges for the Church and for the world. It is an anniversary that we are all called to experience firsthand with constant commitment, joy and enthusiasm as it has to do with our life and our vocation as religious and as La Salette missionaries.

For each of us to appropriate as much as possible of the spiritual and charismatic treasure that emanates from it, I think it is useful, if not necessary, to make our own the attitudes that have characterized the life of the people of Israel on their journey to the promised land and summarized here in these three verbs: remember, celebrate and scrutinize.

### **1. Remember**

The duty of remembrance induces us not to let what happened in the past fall into oblivion and which had a very strong impact of significant and emotional importance in our personal life as well as in the life of the society and the Church. It invites us, not to say obliges us, to return to the roots of what we are today and to restore luster and depth to our human, religious and La Salette identity. The apparition, as such, in fact, is the inspiring event of our presence in the Church as “a religious apostolic Congregation dedicated to the ministry of Reconciliation” (Rule of Life, 1).

Furthermore, looking to the past does not mean “worshiping the ashes” of a certain experience, but rather rediscovering and claiming that religious and missionary zeal, that strength and those profound motivations that characterized its beginning. If today our Congregation is what it is, we owe it above all to the grace and mercy of God but also to the full dedication, unflinching tenacity and faithful witness of those who preceded us in religious life.

## **2. Celebrate**

Without remembrance there can be no true celebration worthy of the name. In fact, it motivates us to see the stated event as a time of grace through which God wanted to enter in contact and dialogue with each of us, to make history with us, and tell us all of his love and closeness. Celebrating means, as already mentioned in the Bible, “remembering”, that is, making present today and reviving in signs what God has accomplished for the good of his people by showing them the path to follow in order to follow him.

Celebrating, moreover, means acknowledging that what we have received from the beginning is simply a gift, unexpected and undeserved, for which we are sincerely grateful. For us, Missionaries of La Salette, this extraordinary gift is identified with the apparition of the Beautiful Lady and with her message to be received, to be lived personally, and as a religious community, and to be faithfully transmitted to all his people.

Celebrating, again, means affirming that Christ was, is and will forever be the “Rule of our Life” (Rule of Life, 7). In fact, since, hanging on the cross on the chest of the Beautiful Lady, wasn't he at the center of the apparition and of the message proclaimed on the Holy Mountain?

## **3. Scrutinize**

This jubilee must not be reduced to a pure and simple “self-celebration”, an end in itself and with the risk of making all the spiritual and charismatic heritage handed down to us sterile and vain, but rather transform itself into a real laboratory of ideas and a springboard not only of new strategies of religious and community life but also of possible renewed pastoral paths in keeping with the sensitivities and needs of the present time. It carries within itself a singular charge of personal and community renewal and a great challenge that pushes us to scrutinize new horizons for a new evangelization.

This is perhaps the time to ask ourselves what image we would like our Congregation to take on in the near future and what useful service it can render to the Church and to the world today. Furthermore, on which aspect of the spiritual, ecclesial or social life we should put more emphasis so that our charism becomes the promoter and leaven of a renewed and reconciled Church as well as of a new world where the great expectations of justice, peace and brotherhood find acceptance and adequate and shared solutions.

### **Why a “Marian Year” in the Congregation?**

In 2021, the 175th anniversary of the Apparition is to be solemnly celebrated everywhere in the world where the Missionaries and Sisters of La Salette work as well as the numerous La Salette laity and friends of the Beautiful Weeping Mother. This is the hope and basic orientation set out by the General Chapter of the Congregation held in Las Termas (Argentina) in 2018 in view of the celebration of this important anniversary.

In order that this celebration does not go unnoticed or is simply improvised and so that it bears the hoped-for fruits, it was asked that it be prepared at every level (personal, community, Province/Region and of the Congregation) to make it become a true source of grace and spiritual renewal, charismatic, pastoral and vocational for each La Salette missionary and for the people of God he serves.

In order for all of this to be assimilated in the best possible way, a special Marian Year dedicated to reflection and prayer (2020 – September 19 – 2021) has been proclaimed throughout the Congregation, lived in communities and places where the missionaries of La Salette are carrying out their ministry, commemorating - in the most true sense of this word - the riches of this miraculous event, which already in 1846 was accepted and recognized as a generous gift for the Church and for the whole people of God.

So that the desired spiritual and community renewal is not limited to an arid, complacent self-celebration which would ultimately humiliate us, it was requested that it lead to concrete actions, aimed at confronting and mitigating certain problematic situations of marginalization, critical situations encountered in pastoral and missionary service (General Chapter 2018, decision n. 1h), with particular attention, of course, to the harmful effects of the pandemic which puts the whole world to the test, especially the less fortunate and the most fragile and vulnerable, the sick and the elderly. Each Province has the task of studying and preparing, as far as possible, programs and projects suitable to meet these needs of the present moment.

In order to better assimilate all this, a special “Marian Year” of reflection and prayer (2020 – 19 September – 2021) has been proclaimed throughout the Congregation to be lived in the communities and places where the Missionaries of La Salette exercise their ministry by remembering, in the truest sense of the word, the richness of this prodigious event which since 1846 has been accepted and recognized as a gracious gift for the Church and for all God's people.

For a whole year, therefore, starting from 19 September 2020, every La Salette Missionary is invited to return with his mind and heart to the roots of his religious vocation in order to give a new impetus to the spirituality that animates his life as a Christian first and then as a religious and to assume his mission in the Church and in the world today with renewed enthusiasm and motivated commitment.

It is not a simple and nostalgic return to the past but an expression of a strong desire to highlight the founding values of our identity as a La Salette and to verify their relevance and their implementation today with a particular eye to the future.

### **Rediscovery of Mary in the history of salvation**

The celebration of this anniversary also has the purpose of allowing each of us to rediscover the fundamental role that Mary had in the history of salvation and also the important meaning of her “becoming a pilgrim” alongside the Church of all times.

Mary presents herself at La Salette as a mother who truly cares about the material and spiritual good of her children and the abundant tears that streak down her face attest to this in an irrefutable way and she is aware that right under the cross, a few moments before expiring, Jesus entrusted us to her in the person of the apostle John: “Woman, behold your son..., son behold your mother” (Jn 19, 25-27). And from that moment she took on the mission entrusted to her by her Son with a profound sense of maternal responsibility and absolute fidelity. Her primary task is to introduce us to Jesus who, out of love accepts to die on the cross for us.

### ...And of our life as La Salette

Since the Congregation of the Missionaries of La Salette was born as a response to the invitation addressed by the Beautiful Lady to the two little shepherds Maximin and Melanie at the end of her apparition “Well, my children, make this known to all my people”, it is certain that Mary holds a particularly important and respectable place in our spirituality, as can be seen also from the various references present in our Rule of life.

“Faithful to our origins, we profess a deep love for Mary, Mother of Christ and of the Church. In our apostolate, we follow the example of the handmaid of the Lord who was made Reconciler particularly at the foot of the cross” (Rule of Life, 5).


“Our life of religious consecration finds its inspiration in Mary, – whose life is a model for all – and whose unceasing intercession supports our efforts. Conscious of the challenge which the Apparition of the Lord’s Handmaid continues to put before us, we resolve to devote ourselves entirely, as she herself did, to the person and work of her Son” (Rule of Life, 13).

For us Missionaries of La Salette Mary is therefore: **mother** in that her appearance and her message are at the origin of our existence as a Congregation in the Church; **model of disciple** because she invites us to “do what her Son tells us” (Jn 2,5) and to place him at the center of our life (Rule of Life, 7); **example and rule of conduct** for our religious and apostolic life, inviting us to put all our strength at the service of the proclamation of the Gospel for the realization of the mystery of Reconciliation in the Church and in the world (Rule of Life, 4).

May the Beautiful Lady continue to make the heartfelt invitation to Maximin and Melanie resound in our hearts and minds at the end of her Apparition: “Well, my children, make this known to all my people” so that we become more and more those missionaries who are ready to profess and to bear witness by our religious life before anyone and everywhere a deep, passionate and total love for Christ who loved them to the end (Rule of Life, 10cp).

On behalf of the General Council, I wish everyone, religious, young people in formation and lay people to live intensely in the company of Mary this year of preparation for the celebration of the 175th anniversary of the Apparition as a true time of grace and spiritual and pastoral renewal that the Lord grants us in his goodness and mercy.

**Fraternally yours**



Fr. Silvano Marisa MS  
*General Superior*