

Little Work of Divine Providence

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Dearest,

We have come here from many parts of the Orionine world, from diverse countries and realities, bringing with us stories, experiences, sensitivities, and different ways of living the mission. Geographical, cultural, and linguistic distances separate us, but something much deeper unites us: belonging to the same Charismatic Family and the passion for charity that Don Orione has passed on to us.

It's wonderful to be together again! To each of you, I extend fraternal greetings and a warm welcome, also on behalf of the General Council. We are here to rediscover and deepen the very reason for our existence and our mission.

Our Father Saint Luigi Orione left us words that can illuminate the work of this Conference: “ *The Little Work of Divine Providence could also be called the Congregation of Charity*”¹.

This is a very strong statement. Don Orione doesn't present charity simply as one of the Congregation's activities, nor even as the most important. Charity is our reason for being, our distinctive mark, and our mission. It's not something we do alongside other things: it's what we are called to be.

In this regard, I would like to share with you a personal episode that came to mind as I read Don Orione's words to prepare this greeting.

Some time ago, during a visit to the Generalate of the Missionaries of Charity, the Sisters of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, in India, I had the opportunity to meet their Superior General. I asked her a question that was particularly close to my heart: “ *Mother, why did you choose our Congregation to take on a charitable work that you were leaving behind in Cameroon?* ”

His answer was immediate, simple and surprising: “ *Because you are a Congregation of charity, like us.* ”

I confess that those words struck me deeply. The Superior General of the Sisters of Mother Teresa was repeating almost verbatim what Don Orione had said about the Little Work. What the Founder had described as our identity was also recognized externally, by a Congregation that has made service to the poorest the heart of its mission.

It's a wonderful recognition, but also a responsibility. It's not enough to simply refer to our history or the work we've done. This identity must continue to express itself in our lives and everyday choices.

To better understand the meaning of this vocation, I would like to recall another text by Don Orione : the article “ *Catechism and Charity!* ”, which he wanted to publish in the bulletin of the Little Work at three different moments in his life: in 1898, when he was just 26 years old; in 1907, at 35 years old;

¹ *Parola* IX, 327 (August 1938).

and finally in 1933, when he was 61 years old ².

This is a significant detail. After so many years, Don Orione felt the need to repeat those same words and recommend: “*Put on the charity of Jesus Christ!*” Evidently, he recognized something essential in them, one that had not lost its force with the passing of time: the way his Work was born and, above all, the way he understood the apostolate and charity.

The article begins with a recollection of the origins. Writing in 1898, Don Orione recounts that it all began seven years earlier, with “*a little catechism*” given to a boy who had run away from church in tears.

Let’s pause for a moment on this detail. At the origin of the Little Work, we don’t find a large educational project, an organization, or a program of welfare activities. We find a boy crying and a young cleric who notices him.

It’s a beginning that recalls the parable of the Good Samaritan. Charity is born when someone stops, allows themselves to be touched by another’s suffering, and decides to do something. As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in *Deus Caritas Est*, the Christian’s program is to have “*a heart that sees*”: a heart capable of recognizing where love is needed and acting accordingly.

It seems to me that this is one of the most profound insights of Orionine charity. Before works comes the encounter; before structures comes the person; before organization comes a heart that knows how to see.

This conference can help us rediscover that original perspective (“*In the beginning*”). Today we have many works, often complex and well-organized. But do we retain the ability to notice those who weep? Do we still know how to allow ourselves to be challenged by a poverty that doesn’t fit into our plans? *Ubi amor ibi oculus!* (Where there is love, there is the ability to see!).

Don Orione, however, did not limit himself to seeing suffering and being moved. He knew how to involve others, inspire generosity, mobilize people and resources. And it is here that he offers us another image, simple and extraordinarily timely: that of the Congregation as the rope of a well, with a bucket that draws abundant water from the hearts of good people to carry it where there is no bread, a home, human warmth, or consolation ³.

It is an image that teaches us two lessons.

The first is that charity does not come from within. Its source is the love of Christ, which awakens generosity and the desire to do good in people’s hearts. The Congregation is not the owner of this water: it is called to draw it and bring it where it is most needed.

The second is that it’s not enough to draw water: we must take it to where there is thirst. Owning works, facilities, and resources isn’t enough. Our service must concretely reach people, especially those at risk of being left on the margins, without care, dignity, and hope.

This image challenges us: do our works continue to be instruments through which Christ’s charity reaches the poor? Are we able to recognize new forms of suffering and involve others in responding? Is the heart of Don Orione still recognizable in our communities and activities?

2 1898: Bulletin “The Work of Divine Providence”, Year 1, no. 4; 1907: Bulletin “The Work of Divine Providence”, Year 5, no. 4; 1933: Bulletin “The Little Work of Divine Providence”, Year 28, no. 9.

3 Cf. *Parola* IX, 327.

There is one last expression worth remembering. Don Orione defines charity as “*the inalienable vocation*” of the Sons of Divine Providence ⁴. *Inalienable* means that we cannot renounce it without renouncing something essential to ourselves. We can change the forms of our works, revise structures, rethink style, find new frontiers to meet the needs of the times, but we cannot lose charity, because we would lose our very identity.

This is why I would like this Conference to be not only an opportunity to discuss Don Orione charity, but above all an opportunity to allow ourselves to be challenged by it and understand how to live it today with greater authenticity, creativity, and fidelity to the Gospel. This requires humility, mutual listening, and a willingness to learn from one another. The charism does not belong to any one of us in particular: it is a gift entrusted to all, to be safeguarded and nurtured together, in a synodal manner. We are here not to assert ourselves, but to be guided by that charity of Christ that Don Orione placed at the center of everything.

Everything, according to him, springs from an inner strength: “*Caritas Christi urget nos*,” the charity of Christ impels us. It is this love that must continue to move our Congregation, so that our works do not simply become functioning institutions, but remain living signs of God’s tenderness and providence.

A heart that sees and a hand that sets to work: perhaps this is how we can sum up Don Orionine charity. A heart capable of recognizing suffering and hands ready to seek concrete answers, also involving the generosity of many others.

Finally, I would like to return to the words of the Superior General of the Missionaries of Charity: “*You are a Congregation of charity, like us.*”

How wonderful it would be if this recognition didn’t just concern who we were, but continued to express who we are and, above all, what we want to become!

I hope that we can emerge from this meeting not only with a greater understanding of Don Orione’s charity, but with a greater desire to live it. Because Orionine charity is not just a beautiful legacy to be preserved: it is a vocation to be renewed and a mission to be carried forward.

Happy Conference everyone!

P. Tarcisio Vieira

⁴ “Charity is the inalienable and, we might say, fatal vocation of the Children of Divine Providence.” In: *Parola* IX, 327.