SOCIETY OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

29th General Chapter, 2025

**PASSIONATE ABOUT JESUS CHRIST, DEDICATED TO YOUNG PEOPLE**

**Message to Chapter members**

**THE DISCIPLES OF EMMAUS: Lk 24:13 -35**

*13Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven mile from Jerusalem, , 14and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17And he said to them, ‘**What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?’ . They stood still, looking sad. 18Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, ‘Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?’. 19He asked them, ‘What things?’ They replied, ‘The things about Jesus of Nazareth,[c] who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place 22Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 24Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.’ 25Then he said to them, ‘Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’. 27Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.
28As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29But they urged him strongly, saying, ‘**Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.’ So he went in to stay with them. 30When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’ 33hat same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34 They were saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!’ 35Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.*

Dear Brothers, dear Sisters,

At the opening of the 29th General Chapter of the Salesians of Don Bosco I suggest we allow ourselves to be enlightened by the biblical icon of the Disciples of Emmaus (Lk 24:13 -35), and allow it introduce us to the art of discernment which can transform our lifestyle in an increasingly evangelical sense and which is expressed in a more evident and important way in moments and paths of particular importance for a family of consecrated persons, such as that of a General Chapter.

Before being indicated as a paradigm of the process of Conversation in the Spirit, a fruitful methodological tool used by the Synod on Synodality 2021-2024[[1]](#footnote-2) for common discernment, the passage from Luke’s Gospel was a source of inspiration and enlightenment for the Synod on “Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment”, which took place in 2018. The example of the Disciples of Emmaus, according to *Christus Vivit*, can also be a model of what happens in youth ministry, as a “slow, respectful, patient, trusting, tireless, compassionate process”.[[2]](#footnote-3)

The scene presents us with a journey together. In fact, two kinds of journey together on that first day after the Sabbath.[[3]](#footnote-4) There is a journey together along the road that leads away from Jerusalem, away from the community, away from the painful and tiring experience of Friday and Saturday, away from the Cross. It is a journey of geographical and inner descent, legs and hearts heavy with disappointment, mourning, bitterness, defeat, the pace punctuated by a myopic conversation that leaves them looking sad: “We had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel...”

And there is another journey together, one of return, late at night, towards Jerusalem, towards the community, towards life. Darkness all around, uphill road but legs flying, joyous sparkling eyes and hearts inflamed by an encounter that frees the inner senses, opens them to the Light and arouses an uncontrollable urge to communicate it to others.

And between these two journeys, in fact, there is an encounter. The two travellers become three. The third approaches the two, in their daytime progress on the road that leads away from life. He does not impose a change of course but comes up close, goes down with them and in them, listens, until the relational space opens up to a question: “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?”

It is the possibility of freeing the heart from the pain that weighs it down, which prevents sight despite it being daytime. The road now flows quickly under their feet, the journey away from Jerusalem reaches its destination, but their hearts, now inflamed, release their desire in a warm, insistent invitation: ‘Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.’ God enters, and remains there. He stays right there, with them, away from Jerusalem. In that very place, far away, the two disciples realise they have been reached, sought after, comforted, nourished, and healed by Jesus who went down with them in their suffering, in their affliction, a ta time they were running away. Restored by the Broken Bread, freed from the darkness of the heart, they no longer fear the night outside: Jesus is now within them, an inner presence, and the mission urges them on! Urges them to return to Jerusalem immediately, to the community of disciples. Urges communion, to gather, meet, find each other again, to journey together and to let everyone know that the night is now bright.

There is a journeying together that is far from God, introverted, self-referential, closed to the light, mulling over our burdens, our labours and our illnesses together, prisoners of desolation. It is a journeying together that extinguishes the inner senses, that makes the heart unable to recognise the good, oppressed by a pain that degenerates into evil, a contagious, infectious evil. Yes, there is a journeying together, an alliance, a solidarity in evil, a ‘sick synodality’, folded in on itself, which produces a regressive movement, far from life, from Love, from God.

And there is a journey together towards God, a missionary journey, an outgoing one, “hearts on fire, feet on the move”, [[4]](#footnote-5) which can be tiring, at night, but is driven by the joy of an encounter that puts wings on our feet and heart, that frees, heals, captivates, sets alight our desire to be with Jesus, to welcome him within ourselves, to be his, to also become broken bread, to share it with others, with everyone. This is Christian synodality, which is missionary.

“Jesus walks with two disciples who did not grasp the meaning of all that happened to him, and are leaving Jerusalem and the community behind. Wanting to accompany them, he joins them on the way. He asks them questions and listens patiently to their version of events, and in this way he helps them recognize what they were experiencing. Then, with affection and power, he proclaims the word to them, leading them to interpret the events they had experienced in the light of the Scriptures. He accepts their invitation to stay with them as evening falls; he enters into their night. As they listen to him speak, their hearts burn within them and their minds are opened; they then recognize him in the breaking of the bread. They themselves choose to resume their journey at once in the opposite direction, to return to the community and to share the experience of their encounter with the risen Lord.”[[5]](#footnote-6)

The verbs stressed by Pope Francis identify the main steps of a process of discernment. ‘Discernment commits those who participate in it at a personal level and all participating together at a community level to cultivate dispositions of inner freedom, being open to newness and trusting surrender to God’s will in order to listen to one another so as to hear “what the Spirit is saying to the Churches” (Rev. 2:7). [[6]](#footnote-7)

In light of the icon of Emmaus, I ask with you in prayer for the grace of a true, deep, active listening that leads you to recognise the movement of the Spirit in your heart, in the Confreres, in the Assembly. In the Chapter, let the flame of the charism shine brightly and ardently! Let this flame warm your hearts so that you can revisit your vocational life in creative fidelity to the gift received through St John Bosco, and may it make you increasingly passionate about Jesus Christ, dedicated to young people.

*Sr Simona Brambilla, MC*

Turin, 16 February 2025

1. Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS*, For a Synodal Church: communion, participation, mission. Instrumentum Laboris* for the first session, Rome October 2023, no. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. FRANCIS, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*, Loreto 25 March 2019, no. 236. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Cf. FRANCIS, *Regina Caeli*, 26 April 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Cf. FRANCIS, *Cuori ardenti, piedi in cammino*, Message for the 97th World Mission Day 2023, Rome 6 January 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. FRANCIS, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*, Loreto 25 March 2019, no. 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *How to be a Synodal missionary Church*. *Instrumentum Laboris* for the second session (October 2024), 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)