

OPENING EVEN OF THE YEAR OF THE MISSIONARY CENTENARY SMR

"The courage to love the mission"

Presentation: With this Vigil we begin the prayerful-reflective journey that we will make around this event that one day marked our Congregation: the missionary sending ad-gentes. Today we are in communion with the entire Congregation, ready to allow ourselves to be embraced by God through the memory and testimony that the Missionaries have left us in these 99 years. With joy we open this centenary year singing ...

Setting ... (Let's put in the center of our place of prayer:)

- A world map or a terrestrial globe
 - A Bible and a small candle for each
 - A pair of sandals
 - 5 candles of different colors, representing each of the continents, which will be lit in due course)
 - Newspaper and photos (to be put at the time of the penitential act)
 - Some footprints (prepared, these will be placed during the prayer)
- (And all you want to put ...)



Guide: With the certainty that Jesus is among us, we embrace him and let ourselves be embraced by him, saying together: **in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

If the consecrated life wants to keep its prophetic mission and its charm alive, and also wants to continue to be a school of fidelity for those near and far, it must maintain the freshness and novelty of the centrality of Jesus and his Kingdom. The strength of the mission is found in the depths of our being, where our conscience experiences the joy of being missionary disciples of Jesus, in our journey of following his Person and radiating life and hope.

Reader: It is urgent for us, for our Consacrated Life, to courageously review the concept we have of mission. A concept that must be reviewed and updated continuously and with courage, in order to be consistent with our prophetic vocation, in fidelity to Jesus, to his Kingdom, to the charism inherited from our Foundress and to the reality we live with, with its constantly changing paradigms.

Guide: Every religious family within the Church tries to live like Jesus of Nazareth, who lived his life doing good, who came not to be served but to serve. Because service is one of the attitudes that define our consecrated life. For us, consecrated SMR, **to serve is to love and to love is to serve.**

Reader: We are Servants, **we are at the service of God and of others;** this is our identity card. There he has given a mission and a task and wishes us to unconditionally love those around us. With joy we offer our life, gifts and skills to help those in need, so that the Kingdom that Jesus of Nazareth came to establish is present in our world today. We live for others, our life is a gift for others. And Jesus at the Last Supper explained to us well how to carry out this service: washing the feet of our brothers and sisters, **bowing before his presence, kissing their wounds, loving without limits ...** This is what our first Sisters did!

Guide: We want to enter the heart of our Vigil, asking God for forgiveness. There are many things we want to leave in that Heart of God so that you can forgive and transform. We will put only a few...

(At each request for forgiveness, one of the sisters places on the ground, in front of the altar, a sign, a newspaper headline, some photos, etc ... something that represents our selfishness and indifference to the situation of so many brothers, in mission).

Guide: The true disciple listens to the Master because he loves him, listens to his Word every day, listens the cry of so many brothers who need help, is interested in what is happening in the world and he knows how to discover the "seeds of the Word" that God has sown also in our world today.

Reader 1: For not knowing how to listen to your Word which opens new and unprecedented horizons for our life and for a true universal brotherhood, let us ask for forgiveness, singing ... *(Antiphon chosen by each reality)*

Guide: The authentic disciple of Jesus learns from life, learns from God and learns from humanity. Learn by keeping and recording in his heart what he has seen and heard, the Word heard becomes life and in life testifies to the love of God.

Leader 2: In order not to learn to live as real children, always in search of the truth consistent with your proposals and in solidarity with those who need us, we ask your forgiveness, singing ...

Guide: A disciple cannot stop announcing what he has seen and heard, he cannot keep silent about fire of the Spirit that burns in his heart, the true disciple is the missionary he wants to share with all the love he has experienced.

Leader 3: In order not to be witnesses and heralds of your love. For the lack of interest in front of so many brothers who do not yet know you. In order not to listen, learn and announce the Good News of Jesus to the whole world, we ask for forgiveness, singing ...

Guide: *In Silence we ask forgiveness for all omissions in these 99 years of missionary life ...*

(Silence ... background music)

"DISCIPLES AND MISSIONARIES OF THE LORD"

Guide: For every believer it is important to fully live the two dimensions of faith: following the Lord and the missionary announcement. We renew the choice to follow Jesus with a clear commitment personal and communitary, overcoming all fear.

(The spontaneous stanzas follow ...)

* I have been looking for God all my life; I've always needed authenticity and radicality and the Lord enlightened me. From the darkness of uncertainty and doubt, from the swamps of indifference and criticism, it brought me to the light of a personal encounter, to the solid ground of an operating trust.

* It was an experience of conversion for which I thank God every day, a progressive and sweet falling in love that filled my heart with joy and profoundly changed my life. It is exciting and fruitful to go on this journey of faith, sharing difficulties and insights, with some brothers and friends who are trying to find the true face of God.

* How many signs you have given me, Lord, of your caring presence; how many brothers have me encouraged with their courageous and painful choices, with words that were themselves testimonies. It is a long story of people, encounters, readings and moments of personal reflection, true gifts of light and grace, which you have placed on my path.

* You ask and want your disciple to listen to the Word daily, contemplate and praise your presence in daily life and love to serve the brothers. Above all, you ask me for a choice, a personal and definitive commitment, in response to the gifts you have given me, to the call I have always felt towards authentic and concrete fidelity.

* So now I need to tell you, as the goal of a long search and in the spirit of true love: "Here I am, I am your servant, your friend, I want to be your disciple forever." Follow you more from close, knowing you and making you known to others will be my constant commitment, my greatest desire and my joy.

* In this way I will fully live my Baptism Lord, your gift and my choice have given more strength and greater credibility to the announcement of the Good News, which is the mission and undeniable commitment of all those who declare themselves believers: I want to make you known, Lord, to show your tender love, especially to those you love most, to the poor, to those who suffer and to those who still do not know you.

* For me it is a joy and a feast to announce forgiveness and trust in group and personal meetings, in work and in free time. I want to do it with spontaneous delicacy and profound respect for every person and every situation, of those who give because their hearts overflow, without asking for anything in return.

* Continue, Lord, to take care of me, poor woman and last of your disciples, who wants to live simplicity and fraternity in trusting abandonment to your grace and in the ministry of service to brothers. Christ Jesus, Word of the living God, my one and only Master, I will follow you until the last day.

**Pause of silence and resonance of the Psalm ...*

Guide: It is time to ask Jesus Christ to turn our hearts into missionary hearts. For this reason we want, in the first place, to present to you what most prevents us in our life from launching into the mission.

While we sing (Missionary song) we will deposit on the altar, each person, a lighted candle, entrusting to the Lord those miseries and difficulties that prevent us from being missionaries (*we can mention them in one word*).

And then we will collect a missionary phrase from Holy Scripture (which will be in a basket) to welcome it and bring it to our personal prayer.

(These phrases can be: Ex. 4,11-12; Jer. 1,7-9; Mt 10,16; Mk 3,13-14; Mk 6,7; Mk 16,15; Acts 4,19-20 ; Rom. 10,14-15; 1 Cor. 1, 17-18 (You have to print them first and leave them in a basket, next to a sign that says: "Jesus wants to tell you something today").

There is a moment of silence, and then if you can share a phrase or some resonance ...

Song

Reader: *(A Sister will carry red and black ribbons, and as she puts them in the center of the map she says:)*

Lord, we present to you a world destroyed by hatred, war, hunger, injustice. Screams of pain and death. A world dyed red by blood spilled in all places on earth, as indicated by these red ribbons. A world dressed in mourning, like black ribbons, for so many unjust deaths or for Covid 19 ... In the midst of this reality, there were our first Sisters and we want to be ourselves.

Silence...

Reader: *(Another sister takes some footprints and places them in the center on the ground, around the globe or on the map, and says :)*

Lord, what would we do to leave our selfish, comfortable, easy heart and exchange it for a heart like yours? We present these footprints to you, they are the footprints that our Missionary Sisters have left in these 99 years, and that we too want to leave in this world. A world that is discovering a living Jesus, present among everyone and who loves us. Thank you you have missionaries and this is starting to be a reality. Thanks to them all, Jesus begins to be known and loved.

Guide: We echo the words of a great Missionary:

- Mission is to leave,
walk, leave everything,
come out of ourselves, break the crust of selfishness
that encloses us in our ego.
- Mission is to stop revolving around ourselves
as if we were the center
of the world and of life.
Mission is not to let yourself be blocked
in the problems of the small world we belong to:
- Humanity is bigger.
Mission is always leaving,
but not to devour miles. It is above all opening up
to others as brothers, discovering them
and meet them.
- And, if to discover and love them
it is necessary to cross the seas
and fly through the skies,
then mission is to leave
to the ends of the world. (*Monsignor Helder Camara*)



Silence to reflect ...

Word of God: *1Cor. 9.16-19. 22-23*

(Some comments and / or shared reflection follow ... The key may be: The missionary sending of the first Sisters to Acre, in the name of M. Elisa).

Song...

Guide: We raise our prayers to God, spontaneously, asking for the Gift of his Spirit:

1. We ask you for the **gift of believing** every day that it is possible to rebuild humanity from the keys of dignity, equality and respect for human rights. And act accordingly.
2. We ask you for the **gift of living in our center**, in that area of our deepest being that belongs only to you and through which we discover ourselves, your beloved sons and daughters.
3. We ask you for the **gift of explaining the Gospel** not verbally, but what is born in the guts and is expressed through the language of the body and an eloquent, courageous and daring word.
4. We ask you for the **gift of being mercy**, which converts us into icons of your Abba and this is much more than doing works of charity.

5. We ask you for the **gift of living the present moment intensely**, with its lights and shadows, its joy and its pain, and to welcome it as a blessing.
6. We ask you for the **gift of overcoming our fears** with confidence so as not to be paralyzed by them.
7. We ask you for the **gift of recognizing that birth and death are two sides of the same coin: life**. One that arises in space and time and the other that transcends and is eternal.

PRAYER FOR THE CONTINENTS (*while the continents are named, the colored candles placed in the prayer frame are being lit*)

Guide: We all repeat after each reader: **"Father, may we all be a missionary presence"**.

Reader 1: Let us pray **FOR EUROPE**, so that the New Evangelization, new in its ardor, new in its methods and new in its expressions, will inspire us to return to the roots of evangelizing Missionaries and thus end with a reigning secularization.

Let us pray that, where we are present: **Italy, Portugal and Albania**, we are moved by the spirit of dedication, enthusiasm and prophecy that animated the first group of missionary Sisters.

Reader 2: We pray **FOR AMERICA**, where several nations have great natural wealth, but their population is poorer. And besides being poor, she is a deeply believer. It is the continent of hope, with a generous people, grateful, with hopes, with a desire to live.

Let us pray, because where we are present: **Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Peru and Mexico**, we can be moved by faith, by the capacity for renunciation and donation like those of our first Missionary Sisters and we continue to risk our lives for the good of the Kingdom.

Reader 3: We pray **FOR AFRICA**, where HIV and malaria are the leading cause of death; but also so that the experience of the young African Church does not decline in its journey of life and life in abundance, thanks to the joyful and decisive commitment of its Missionaries.

Let us pray, because where we are present: **Ivory Coast and Togo** we can be moved by the testimony of our first Missionary Sisters, and we are urged to recreate the mission in new cultures, seeking answers to the challenges that are presented to us.

Reader 4: We pray **FOR ASIA**, where in most countries, the Christian presence is minimal, so that evangelization becomes the most important priority in that continent.

Let us pray that where we are present: **Philippines**, (the only Asian nation with a Catholic majority) we are urged to radiate the light of faith, to spread the strength of the Gospel and to extend ourselves to other Asian countries, just as the first 100-year-old Missionary Sisters did does.



Reader 5: We pray **FOR THE OCEANIA**, which is covered with a great mystery. He dreams of thousands of islands, he dreams of the forest and the immense sea that zircons, they give a glimpse of a world enchanted, exotic and fascinating. So that the great potential of the world is not seen, it feeds on a nuclear waste deposit, infecting many natural resources and an immense fishing area. So that his people live peace and hope.

Let us pray that one day the SMR may also be a fraternal, Marian, useful and restorative presence. A mission open to the future.

Let's sing the Our Father ... the prayer of universal brotherhood.

Guide: May Mary, the first Missionary, support us in our mission and together with her we want to celebrate this commemorative year towards the first missionary centenary. Let's pray the **HELLO QUEEN** together ...

Blessing and sending: *(To each prayer we answer Amen and it can be read spontaneously by each Sister)*

- Sisters, **go** all over the world repeating my words, multiplying my gestures, actualizing my dedication, celebrating my Easter. Be a little image of me, a little living Jesus. **Amen**
- Sisters, **go**. All sent. All missionaries. With all my powers. But not with political or economic powers. With the strength of faith, peace, detachment. With the power of love and brotherhood. With the power of the Gospel. **Amen**
- Sisters, **go**. Do not be afraid. I will precede you and I will wait for you in the heart of every person, especially of every poor person. And I will also go inside of you. Your voice will be my word, I will walk with your feet and touch with your hands. **Amen**
- Sisters, **go**. The world needs you. Don't keep my good news to yourself. Listen. Don't stop. Always look ahead. Never look back. **Amen**
- Sisters, **go**. With the same passion as M. Elisa. With the dreams she had for her daughters. Willing to embody the charism and multiply it in the different realities in which we find ourselves. **Amen**

Guide: Lord Jesus, you have called us to collaborate in the work of extending your Kingdom, so that we could be messengers of your love and living witnesses of your charity, among your people, grant us the grace to be tireless disciples in the service of your kingdom. For Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Final song ...



M. Elisa e le prime missionarie: M. Costantina, M. Mercedes, M. Margherita, M. Rosaria, M. Ester e la postulante Augusta Franceschi

**Con gratitudine,
oggi ricordiamo voi, sorelle,
che mosse dalla passione
per il Regno di Dio,
avete accolto l'invito del Signore
e "senza indugio" siete partite
per annunciare Cristo
e il suo vangelo aprendo a tutte noi
un nuovo cammino
di servizio ai fratelli e sorelle.**